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The Power of Familial Relationships in Melusine

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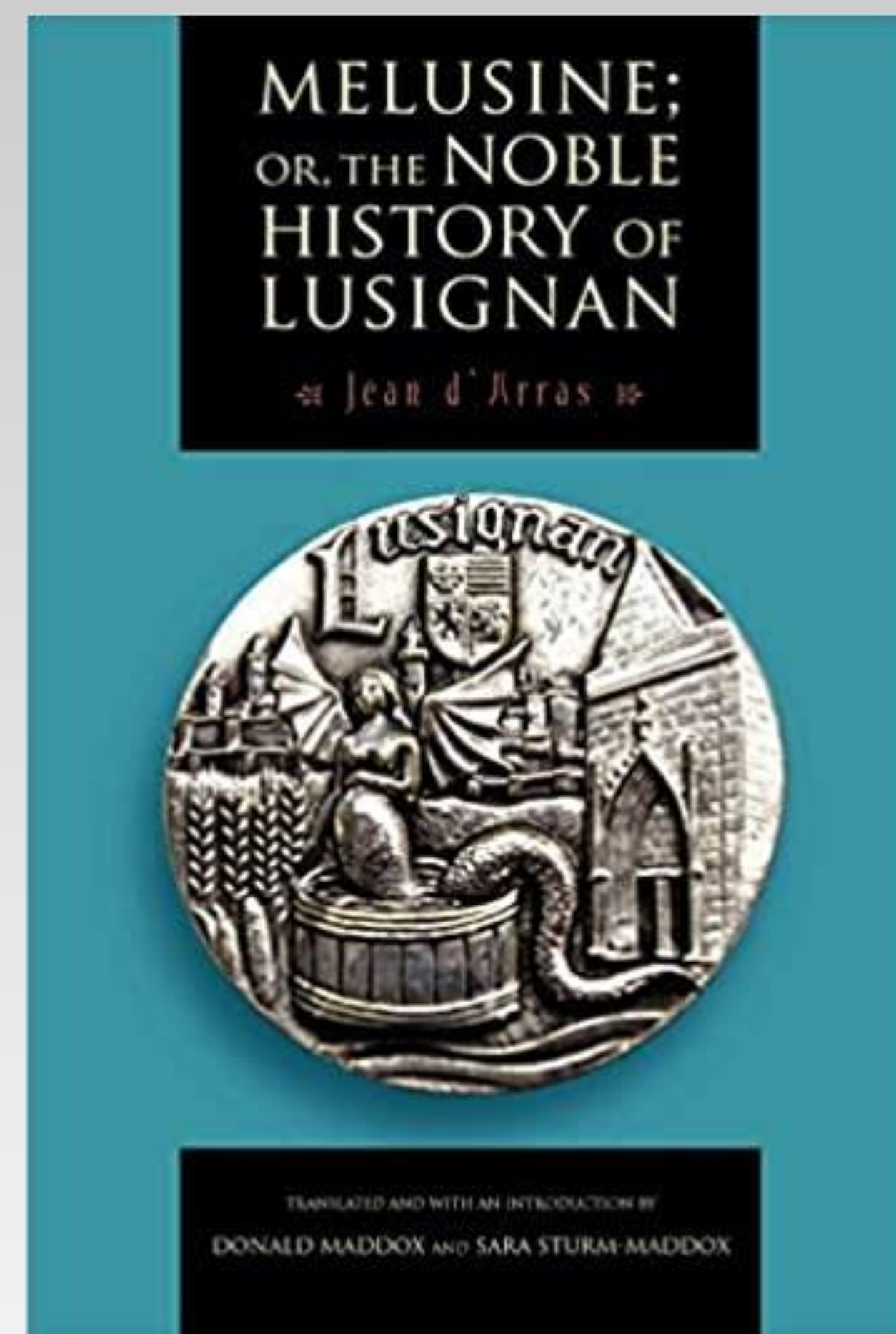
The Power of Familial Relationships in Melusine

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Abstract

In modern times, the term *family* has many different viewpoints. A lot of people today prefer “found” families as opposed to biological families, for many people view biological relationships as an obligation rather than a choice. Indeed, we see familial topics and patterns in modern texts such as *Frozen* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* where siblings fight a common enemy together. Stories about familial relationships, however, are nothing new; lasting from the 5th century to the 15th century, the medieval period grapples with many literary texts that cover a wide variety of familial stories. The late 14th-century medieval French romance, *Melusine; or, the Noble History of Lusignan*, explores the importance of family, in particular the importance of brotherly relationships. *Melusine* starts with a supernaturally gifted woman, Melusine, who mothers sovereign sons who fight in battles together throughout the land. *Melusine* encourages readers to recognize the significance of brotherly bonds, making us wonder if siblings defend each other because of their own choosing or as an obligation. Indeed, several pairs of brothers in *Melusine* fight in battles together, demonstrating that the siblings both willingly risk their lives together. In *Melusine*, many powerful brotherly relationships form, leading the brothers to work together to achieve certain goals. While we do not know if the brothers in *Melusine* stick together due to duty or desire, we know that siblings share strong bonds, making readers wonder why family bonds seem to have such an impact on us.



The Problem

In the late 14th-century medieval French romance, *Melusine*, author Jean d’Arras includes several references of brotherly relationships; many brothers defend their brothers and go into battle with one another. Here are some quotes that demonstrate the pervasiveness of brotherhood in *Melusine*:

- ““Raise those sails, men, and catch up with my brother; if I lose him I shall never smile again”” (165).
- “[Geoffrey] asked Raymond and Melusine to finance his mission to help his brothers against the Saracens and they granted his request” (160).
- “The two brothers fought more fiercely than anyone there had ever seen” (124).
- Characters say the word, *brother*, countless times in the text when referencing one another.

My main goal is to analyze brotherly relationships in *Melusine* and familial relationships in modern times. Do physical similarities connect siblings? Do siblings feel obligated to love and defend their siblings? I also want to see if non-biological relationships are as powerful as biological relationships.

What Others Have Said

Out of all the relationships found in medieval literature, brotherly relationships evoke some of the strongest senses of loyalty and unity. According to Carolyn Larrington in *Brothers and Sisters In Medieval European Literature*, “the fraternal relationship is the most profoundly experienced bond in medieval literature” (73).



BROTHERS AND SISTERS
IN MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN
LITERATURE
CAROLYNE LARRINGTON

Methodology

Close reading of *Melusine; or, the Noble History of Lusignan* by Jean d’Arras, with heightened attention to brotherly relationships.

Examination of brotherly and brotherly-like relationships in medieval literature in *Brothers and Sisters In Medieval European Literature* by Carolyn Larrington.

Examination of friendships formed when family security is not strong in “The Concurrent Association Between Friendship Security and Friendship Satisfaction Is Moderated by Experience Within the Family Context” by Ryan J. Persram, Emily Schwartzman, and William M. Bukowski.

Results

- Within *Brothers and Sisters In Medieval European Literature*, Larrington notes that “complementarity, rather than complete polarization, is what profits the brotherly collective” (73).

This coincides with *Melusine* because many of the brothers complement each other. Most of the brothers fight well in battle, and all of the brothers have some physical oddity. By sharing common physical characteristics, the brothers in *Melusine* identify with one another. Throughout the novel, characters note the unfortunateness of the brothers’ physical abnormalities. Many of the characters even overlook the physical abnormalities due to how strong and powerful the brothers are.

- Larrington also writes, “even when separated, brothers are consistently imagined as cognizant of their obligation to avenge one another, whatever the social cost” (74).

I paid special attention to this quote because of the word, *obligation*. Indeed, brothers in medieval texts understand that they are expected to defend their brothers, oftentimes through violence. In fact, some brothers relish violence such as Geoffrey Big Tooth, arguably the most violent brother in *Melusine*. Geoffrey did not like that his brothers were fighting the Saracens (a medieval Christian term for Muslims) on their own, so he felt that he had a duty to help his brothers. While Geoffrey is not avenging his brothers, he still demonstrates this idea of protecting family as an obligation.



But what about non-biological siblings? In *Brothers and Sisters In Medieval European Literature*, Larrington writes:

“foster-brothers are just as capable—because quasi-sibling ambivalences generated through their shared childhoods—as full or half-brothers, of astonishing rivalry and hatred, as well as powerful loyalty, imitating the extremes of siblinghood in their behavioral and emotional interaction” (233).

This quote demonstrates the idea that relationships do not need to be biological to be strong. Foster brothers can mimic real siblings through shared traits such as rivalry and loyalty. Larrington uses the word, *loyalty*, a lot throughout her text. Indeed, when we feel familial love for someone—whether biological or not—we feel that we have to stay loyal to that person no matter what.

Results, cont.

- In a more modern article, researchers found that “friendship security is more strongly associated with friendship satisfaction when security-based experiences within the family are weak rather than strong” (Persram et al.)

This article demonstrates the importance of having a strong family bond. When kids do not experience security within the family, they seek out other ways to find refuge such as friendships. Indeed, kids feel closer to their friends when the family does not provide what kids may need, implying that we all seek family-like bonds when faced with other relationships. The term, *family*, connotes so much more than biology. Family connotes feeling welcome, secure, and loved.

Conclusion

In modern days, we more easily recognize that family does not have to be biological. We find sanctuary with all sorts of relationships—not just biological ties. Indeed, we may trace back the relationship between family and biology in medieval texts such as *Melusine*. The book implies that biological brothers form stronger bonds than any other sibling relationship. The novel also mentions that the brothers share common physical abnormalities, making it easier for characters to identify the brothers as a unit as opposed to individuals. *Melusine* also implies that biological brothers have a duty to defend each other—even to the death. Today, we recognize that physical appearances do not determine bonds, and yet we also assume that siblings are automatically close, demonstrating society’s belief that all families are close and bonded by blood. Today, I argue that families have to earn love, and we should no longer see blood as a determiner for sacrifice and love.

