'Cherchez Eufeme': The Evil Queen in *Le Roman de Silence*

KATIE KEENE

In *Le Roman de Silence* the evil queen, Eufeme, is often dismissed as yet another example of medieval misogyny, but Eufeme can also be seen as a character who is employed purposefully to explore two of the poem's themes: the debate between Nature and Nurture and the question of the integrity of King Ebain's rule. (KK)

If the unforgiving portrayal of the adulterous queen in *Le Roman de Silence* is merely another stock example of medieval misogyny, why does the narrator, Heldris, take such care to surround the character with tantalizing controversy?[1] I argue here that the alarming twists and disconcerting gaps that inflect Eufeme's tale are designed to capture the reader's attention and direct it toward further consideration of some of the broader themes within the narrative.[2] Heldris begins Eufeme's story by offering provocative information that encourages the reader to consider how, when, and why her mutation from the perfect princess into the perfectly evil queen occurs. She is introduced to the narrative using language that recalls the description of other romantic heroines, but what is left unsaid or understated alerts the reader to some possible incongruence between her appearance and her character. Heldris encourages the reader to wonder if perhaps Eufeme is degenerate because she is from Norway, a country that still subscribed to unorthodox inheritance practices and was suspected of latent paganism. Additionally, in 1286 when the manuscript was transcribed in Laval, an association with Norway would compromise Eufeme's moral standing because it would identify her with the Maid of Norway at a moment when the French royal house was taking a dim view of a possible marriage between young Margaret of Norway and Edward Caernarfon, the future Edward II of England. Was Eufeme's eventual depravity simply an unavoidable consequence of her Norwegian nature, or was her behavior learned after reaching the court of King Ebain, thereby echoing and amplifying the Nature vs. Nurture debate that remains centered on Silence?

At the end of the story Eufeme is rapidly accused, convicted, and brutally executed for adultery. The horrifying manner in which she is dismembered requires that her execution be perceived as a metaphorical remedy for the fractured kingdom, a conclusion that is bolstered by allusions to other considerations of dismemberment and integrity to be found in romance literature. Thus, while Ebain's marriage with Silence is acknowledged as a symbolic unification of the country, Eufeme's death and more particularly the manner of her execution, is no less relevant. Rather than being a one-dimensional, stock character, Eufeme plays a significant supporting role in Heldris's tale, offering a rich reward to readers who explore and 'cherchez Eufeme.'

Eufeme's sudden transformation from a romantic heroine into a lascivious wanton is remarkable in that it is both unprecedented and unexplained. The character of the adulterous queen, a common motif in twelfth- and thirteenth-century literature, had evolved into two distinct types performing two equally distinct functions within the story. The first type is the ideal of feminine beauty and love, and condemnation of her adulterous behavior is somewhat mitigated by the fact that her love is flawless, monogamous, and reciprocated in full measure by the most worthy knight of the realm. As such, her behavior is an indictment of the king's ability to rule: disorder within his private household mirrors misrule of his kingdom. Indeed the queen is depicted more as the victim of her pure passion rather than a pleasure-seeking seductress. Guenevere of the Prose *Lancelot* and Isode of Beroul's *Tristan and Isode*, both described as the standards of femininity against which all other women are measured, serve as contemporaneous examples of this type of character. [3] In contrast, the adulterous queen in *Le roman des sept sages* is motivated by nothing more than base lust. In this case, the queen's advances are not reciprocated, and she then attempts to destroy the king's most respected vassal, and by extension, undermine his rule. Her adultery is a threat to the integrity of the kingdom rather than a comment on its governance.[4]

The character of Queen Eufeme is unique in that she embodies both these traditions.[5] Guenevere and Isode, for example, are consistently depicted as models of beauty and love throughout their stories. The malevolent character of the adulterous queen in *Le roman des sept sages* is immediately evident and remains so throughout the tale. [6] Only Eufeme is introduced as the perfect consort and later devolves into the irredeemable seductress. Such inconsistency prompts the reader to search for an explanation and Heldris obligingly provides the textual and contextual clues to facilitate such consideration.

First, Heldris proffers an early indication that Eufeme is not the demure young bride that she initially appears to be by introducing her in a manner deceptively close to, but not congruent with, that by which other romantic, but no less adulterous, heroines are described. Like her counterparts, she is depicted as beautiful, but Heldris tellingly refrains from any discussion regarding her virtue. In contrast, the authors of two romances contemporary with *Le Roman de Silence*, the *Prose Lancelot* and Gottfried Von Strassburg's *Tristan and Isolde*, rhapsodize about the virtues of their heroines, which extend beyond outstanding physical beauty to exemplary conduct and deportment. Guenevere, for example, is described as:

> ...the most beautiful woman in all Britain at that time, and she was endowed with a very fine body. On her head she wore a golden coronet with precious stones, her face was clear and so naturally made up with white and red that she needed not more nor less. Her shoulders were straight, and the skin lustrous, and her body was very well put together, for her waist was slender and her hips low, and they suited her wonderfully, Her feet were pale and well arched, her arms were long and rounded, and her hands were white and plump. Why should I go on telling you about the maiden's great beauty? If she was indeed beautiful, then she was endowed with even greater goodness, generosity, courtesy, sense, worthiness, sweetness, and nobility.[7]

Gottfried von Strassburg likewise makes no attempt to restrain his praises for Isolde:

> Lovely Isolde, Love's true signet, with which in days to come his heart was sealed and locked from all the world save her alone...Isolde...is a girl so lovely that all that the world has ever said of beauty is nothing beside hers. Radiant Isolde is a girl of such charm, both in person and in manner, that none was born, nor ever will be, so enchanting and exquisite...All that people say and discuss in praise of woman is nothing compared with this. Whoever gazes at Isolde, his heart and soul are refined like gold in the white-hot flame; his life becomes a joy to live. Other women are neither eclipsed nor diminished by Isolde in the way many claim for their ladies. Her beauty makes others beautiful, she adorns and sets a crown upon woman and womankind. None needs to be abashed because of her.[8]

These descriptions indicate that physical beauty is perceived as an accurate reflection of moral purity; Heldris's resounding silence regarding Eufeme, therefore, speaks volumes. In contrast to the glowing and lengthy descriptions of Guenevere and Isolde, Heldris's assessment of Eufeme's physical attributes is brutally succinct, while at the same time any observations regarding the quality of her character are entirely omitted. The text simply states that 'the world never held such a beautiful gem' (166). Details regarding her eyes, her

hair, her skin and most notably any assertions regarding her virtue are completely lacking.

Heldris is not typically taciturn and becomes in fact quite loquacious when detailing the qualities of Eufeme's romantic counterpart, Eufemie. This epitome of the romantic heroine is introduced as the obvious object of Cador's affection:

> She was the daughter of Renald of Cornwall.
> Not a woman in the realm was her equal.
> She was the count's only child,
> the crowning glory of his estates,
> the most beautiful girl in the world...
> She was well versed in the seven arts,
> and she was deeply in love with Cador,
> who loved her and did not dare to say it. (397–405)

The depiction of the love between Eufemie and Cador that follows this passage is decidedly drawn from the *fin' amor* tradition.[9] Their mutual affection is accompanied by the secrecy, despair, suffering, and illness typically associated with such passion, the details of which are painstakingly outlined in over 600 lines of verse (549–1154). Eufeme and Ebain's relationship, however, is immediately characterized by a pointed absence of love imagery. King Ebain states tersely, 'I have suffered long for love of her' (185). Instead of worshipping her from afar, he simply desires to 'wed her and bed her properly' (184).

Significantly, no mention is ever made of Eufeme's feelings toward her new lord and husband. The only sentiment attributed to her is that, upon meeting her future husband for the first time and receiving his kiss, 'her heart was a little bitter' (245). Ebain conjectures that she was simply exhausted from her journey, but a closer reading of Heldris's narrative indicates that Eufeme may have been perfectly justified in her feelings. Lorraine Stock notes that 'The text conveys syntactically how Eufeme is awarded by her father as just one of a catalogue of other inducements (horses, bears, fowlers, and lions) to effect a truce...(she) is objectified by her future husband, who desires to have her in his 'saisine' (187) [possession] as a beautiful war trophy (179–85, 190).'[10] She has been traded like so much war booty without any mention of love or insights into her state of mind. It is therefore no surprise that it is her commodified heart, rather than her seasick stomach, which is bitter.

Furthermore, whereas Guenevere, Isolde, and Eufemie are all cherished by their parents, King Begon seems to be almost eager for his daughter to be gone. He meets the English ships at the port and entrusts her to King Ebain's

envoys then and there without any ceremony or preamble or offer of hospitality to the representatives of his new son-in-law (228–30). Such a cool dismissal contrasts starkly to the manner in which Isode's parents and the entire court accompany her to the harbor, where her embarkation is anticipated with great sorrow:

> Her mother and father passed the brief hour with much lamenting. Many eyes began to redden and fill with tears. Isolde brought distress to many hearts, for to many she was a source of secret pain. They wept unceasingly for their eyes' delight, Isolde. There was universal weeping. Many hearts and many eyes wept there together, both openly and in secret.[11]

The suffering that is engendered by her departure acknowledges her value and worthiness, whereas King Begon's total absence of concern for his daughter indicates that the king may have had good reason to be keen to rid himself of her.

Heldris deliberately refrains from openly identifying Eufeme as the evil queen in order to encourage debate regarding the origin of her malevolence; was it always present but hidden, or was it learned? In contrast, the bad nature of the queen in the contemporary tale, *Le roman des sept sages*, is immediately evident.[12] In this case, the widowed emperor is importuned by his advisers to select a new wife 'to get childer ma.' He acquiesces, and the villainy of his new queen soon becomes apparent. Only fifteen lines after the wedding she is plotting against the Emperor's existing heir, the son from his first marriage, through the use of witchcraft.[13] In another version of the same tale, the evil queen is characterized as 'a deceitful woman determined to dominate in the marriage.'[14] Again, her wicked character is obvious and remains consistent throughout the tale.[15]

It is apparent, therefore, that Heldris describes Eufeme in terms that imitate, but do not mirror, the literary tradition of romantic adulterous queens. By providing tantalizing clues in terms of what is revealed and what remains concealed, the narrator alerts the audience to the possibility of Eufeme's devious nature. Her foreign heritage is likewise intended to be revelatory. Exogamy was certainly common, both historically and in the literature of the day. Isolde was an Irish princess married to a Cornish king. The German princess Fenice married a Byzantine emperor.[16] It was also quite common for the foreign queen to be used as a political scapegoat. Sharon Kinoshita cites the contemporary examples of Blanche of Castille, Isabelle of Angoulême, and Eleanor of Provence as cases in which foreign queens served as 'lightning rods for political discontent.'[17] János Bak, noting that 'Queens were apt to be regarded as instigators of evil not only because

of their sex but because they tended to be foreigners and, to boot, usually the highest ranking foreigners in the land,' refers to Gisela of Bavaria, Eufemia of Kiev, and Gertrude of Andechs-Merania as politically denounced queens of Hungary.[18] Pauline Stafford points out that the very nature of the foreign queen's isolation rendered her vulnerable to intrigues and character assassination: 'When women were passed from court to court as formal gifts to seal peace, to act as hostages, they caricatured the positions of all in-marrying women, becoming objects of suspicion for their in-laws, representatives of rival families, personifications of old grievances. They were exposed, far from the best protection of their own kingroup.'[19]

Eufeme, however, is not simply a foreigner; she hails specifically from Norway, a country known to practice aberrant succession customs, which resulted in crowned monarchs of dubious parentage. It wasn't until the middle of the thirteenth century, with the crowning of Magnus during his father Hakon's lifetime, that the principle of legitimate inheritance was established in Norway.[20] Prior to that, the crown could be claimed by any of the king's sons, legitimate and illegitimate, of whom there tended to be quite a few given the culture's approval of a sexually active ruler. Such behavior was considered to be the result of the country's latent paganism and was vehemently condemned by the Church.[21] More significantly, these practices were also evidently known and disapproved of in England. The chronicler Roger of Hoveden, writing in 1194, was particularly 'disconcerted by the low status of the mothers of Norwegian monarchs.'[22] He relates that Swere Birkebain was required to conquer and murder fifteen kings and all their followers before he could claim the crown of Norway, but then feels compelled to discard the relative impartiality of the chronicler and condemn the system of inheritance that bred such brutality.

> Est etiam sciendum, quod consuetudo regni Norweiæ est usque in hodiernum diem, quod omnis qui alicujus regis Norweiæ dinoscitur esse filius, licet sit spurius, et de ancilla genitus, tantum sibi jus vendicat in regnum Norweiæ, quantum filius regis conjugati, et de libera genitus. Et ideo fiunt inter eos prælia indesinenter, donec unus illorum vincatur et interficiatur.'[23]
>
> (It also deserves to be known, that it is the custom of the kingdom of Norway to the present day that every one who is known to be the son of any king of Norway, although illegitimate, and the issue of a bondwoman, has equal right to lay claim to the kingdom of Norway with the son of a king legally married, and being the son of a free woman; the consequence of which is, that there are battles going on between them without ceasing, until one of them is conquered and slain.)[24]

It might not come as a surprise, then, when Eufeme, descended from suspect Norwegian royalty, eventually seeks to undermine legitimate succession practices by committing adultery.

If Heldris had wanted to impute negative character traits to the evil queen, the choice of countries practicing deviant inheritance customs need not have been restricted solely to Norway. England was surrounded by countries such as Scotland, Ireland, and Wales that opted not to conform to the system of primogeniture that was emerging in England and France. Within the text itself, Heldris takes the opportunity to denigrate openly the Scottish and Irish: 'He is no crazy Irishman' (1302); 'he was not inclined to anger, like the Irish' (4222); the king boasts that he is so just and patient that even 'If a Scotsman or Irishman/ were to tell me something, wise or foolish/ he would be entitled/ to have peace in my presence' (6391–5). Surely if the objective had been simply to impugn Eufeme's character, the narrator could have easily achieved this by identifying her as a native of the oft-derided Ireland or Scotland. It seems, then, that Heldris's choice of Norway was deliberate. I believe that Heldris was taking advantage of a specific, late thirteenth-century dynastic dispute to cast Eufeme in an even more disparaging light.

Sharon Kinoshita argues that the entire romance is concerned with issues of dynastic safeguarding, a topic which would have been entirely relevant to Heldris's audience given the vested interest that all levels of society had in establishing a fixed, incontestable means of royal succession at a time when multiple systems of inheritance were contending.[25] While primogeniture was established in principle at the highest level of English feudal politics, it was always subject to periodic and significant challenges that had disastrous effects for the country as a whole. In fact, from 1075–1225, the English Crown passed from father to eldest son only twice: in 1189 Richard I succeeded his father, Henry II; and again when Richard's brother, John left the throne to his infant son, Henry III.[26] All other successions during this period were marred by conflict as competing branches of the royal family vied for the throne. In 1284 the succession again appeared to be in a precarious position. Edward I had already lost two sons, John and Henry in 1271 and 1274 respectively, when his third son, Alphonso, died, leaving four-month old Edward as the sole heir. Given that Edward and Eleanor had already lost eight of their fourteen children, the prospects for the infant, and consequently for a smooth succession, were poor.[27]

At this same time, England's neighbor to the north, Scotland, was experiencing similar dynastic challenges. In 1284, the heir to the Scottish throne died leaving young Margaret of Norway, granddaughter of Alexander

III of Scotland, to inherit the throne, a possibility that was then realized when the king died without further issue in 1286. The idea of a marital union between the young heirs to the Scottish and English thrones may have already been suggested at this early date, and formal negotiations regarding their betrothal were well underway by 1289. Such a dynamic situation involving such high stakes elicited understandably strong responses from those it affected, most notably the French royal house, which had plans of its own that involved a marital alliance with England. The fact that formal negotiations for the betrothal of Isabella of France and Edward Caernarfon were announced almost immediately following the death of Margaret in 1290 suggests that the prospect of such a union had been under consideration for quite some time before the Maid of Norway's demise made it a possibility. French intolerance for any competing alliances with the English throne would be demonstrated clearly a few years later, in 1294, when Philip IV, upon learning of plans to marry young Edward to the daughter of Count Guy of Flanders, summoned the count to court and had his daughter confined in the Louvre.[28] There is every reason to suspect that a proposed alliance between the English and Scottish thrones, between Edward Caernarfon and the Maid of Norway, would have been met with the same hostility. It is possible that Heldris tapped into this predominantly negative view toward a princess from Norway, and by identifying Norway as Eufeme's country of origin encouraged the audience to question her inherited moral standing.

This consideration of the historical context in which Silence was written necessarily hinges on fixing the date of the work. Scholars such as Regina Psaki and Keith Busby prefer to restrict the date of composition to the first half of the thirteenth century, while others, namely Lewis Thorpe, Sharon Kinoshita, and Sarah Roche-Mahdi, contend that it should be placed in the second half. Lewis Thorpe is even more specific, endorsing a date 'nearer the end of the century.'[29] By viewing the tale in its historical context, as Kinoshita has done, for example, it is quite easy to perceive references to early thirteenth-century events, which makes a later date probable.[30] Roche-Mahdi supplies an additional interesting bit of information by remarking that the only extant manuscript was probably copied for a French noble woman on the occasion of her marriage in 1286.[31] Even if the romance had been written earlier in the thirteenth century, this particular manuscript may have been transcribed with a critical view toward events occurring between 1284 and 1286 in Britain. The manuscript itself may argue for the later addition of the detail specifying Eufeme's heritage. Thorpe distinguishes scribal peculiarities that are independent of the original author and indicate that the scribe in question

did engage in a little editorializing.[32] For example, in 'The Ambiguity of Silence,' Peter Allen argues that among other textual inconsistencies and errors, 'the scribe changes "da Norwege" ("from Norway") into the meaningless "danor wege,"' which may indicate a later, editorial inclusion of Norway in the tale.[33]

Though it is not yet possible to assign a firm date to the manuscript, it is possible at least to conclude that the author deliberately chose Norway as the native country for the villain of the tale because of the generally negative perception of its royal line. Perhaps the criticism was more specific, referring to events in the 1280s in which a princess of Norwegian extraction was likely to be viewed by contemporary audiences as a contentious rather than a mollifying character. Certainly, the coincidence of timing and events is too significant to be dismissed out of hand.

By superficially depicting Eufeme as the perfect princess, but underscoring some discrepancies and specifying her Norwegian heritage, Heldris encourages the reader to consider whether she was condemned from the start because of her marred heritage, or whether she in fact had been the model of feminine beauty and love when she arrived in England and later changed as a result of negative influences at the court of King Ebain. Strategically placed between Eufeme's initial characterization as a beautiful princess and her later re-introduction to the narrative as 'this female Satan!' (3699) is a deliberation regarding the relative merits of Nature vs. Nurture in molding a character.

> 'No man has the power, in the long run,
> That he can vanquish and outwit
> Nature, or betray heredity.' (2296–98)
>
> ...'A little bad nurture
> harms a good nature more
> than lengthy instruction in doing good
> can mend a heart intrinsically evil.' (2339–42)

This debate seems to encapsulate neatly the question that Heldris poses regarding Eufeme: was she unable to overcome her inherently flawed nature, or did she suffer from 'a little bad nurture' under Ebain's influence? Later in the narrative Heldris sweeps the audience along at a dizzying pace, racing through Eufeme's rapid accusation and conviction and abruptly ending with her swift, shockingly brutal execution. Again, however, Heldris takes great care to explain the actions of and events surrounding the character of Eufeme, hinting at their narrative purpose.

First, Heldris assures the audience of Eufeme's guilt according to contemporary literary and legal precedents. The denouement begins when Merlin accuses Eufeme of infidelity with a nun who is, in fact, her lover in disguise. He states simply, 'King, this nun is Eufeme's lover; he is deceiving you in woman's dress' (6531–6532). Immediately after the accusation, before any proof is offered, the narrator himself condemns the queen by describing her as:

> ...(one whose) wickedness knew no bounds;
> she was malicious,
> arrogant and perfidious.
> She had always been cruel
> and dishonest.
> She had promised little and given less;
> she was vile and depraved. (6560–67)

In case an element of doubt still exists regarding Eufeme's guilt, Heldris informs his audience that 'The courtiers had no trouble believing the whole thing' (6568). The assessment of her villainy is unanimous.

It is important that Heldris assure his audience of the fact of Eufeme's adultery because, even though the reader is aware of her history of seduction, technically there is insufficient evidence to convict her. Phillippe de Beaumanoir's *Coûtumes de Beauvaisis*, written in 1283, establishes that it was not necessary to catch the lovers *in flagrante delicto* in order to confirm adulterous behavior.[34] Guilt was assumed if the two simply were discovered alone, '*seul à seul en lieu privé*,' as he termed it.[35] According to such guidelines, the assumption of guilt regarding Lancelot and Guenevere, and Tristan and Isolde, is understandable. In the first case, the reader is aware of the fact of Lancelot's affair with Guenevere; he has confessed his infidelity to a hermit[36] and depicted his affair graphically in paintings on a wall.[37] However, it is their eventual entrapment alone together in Guenevere's room that 'proves' their infidelity.[38] In the case of Tristan and Isolde, blood from Tristan's wound stains the floor and the bed of Isolde, providing the evidence necessary to conclude adulterous behavior.[39] The circumstances regarding Eufeme's affair with the 'nun' make the supposition of guilt less obvious. We do not know if the two were ever alone together, and no proof exists of their implied intimacy. Heldris, however, removes all doubt regarding Eufeme's guilt by pronouncing a judgment on her character, one with which the entire court apparently concurs.

After establishing her culpability, Heldris then moves on to the process of conviction. Strictly speaking, King Ebain could be accused of committing

murder by condemning Eufeme and her lover to death without granting an opportunity for a trial or judicial combat. Phillippe de Beaumanoir explicitly states that if a husband discovers the lovers and immediately kills them in the heat of the moment, then he is free from blame. If, however, he should later decide to take justice into his own hands and murder the pair, 'their deaths at his hand would be deemed to be culpable homicide and he would be brought to trial.'[40] Other sources corroborate the principles delineated by Phillipe de Beaumanoir, if not the specifics. The *Leges Henrici Primi* (c. 1196) affirm the right of a man to defend the virtue of his women and to present a defense when being tried. In *De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliae*, written by Henry de Bracton in the mid-thirteenth century, judicial combat is provided as an alternative to trial by jury.[41] Significantly, Beroul was openly critical of King Mark's summary condemnation of Tristan and Isolde. In his version of the tale, the people of the realm claim that the queen should not be executed without due process (v. 884), but King Mark remains determined (v. 888). One courtier argues later for a trial (v. 1097), but Mark persists (v. 1126).[42]

Heldris has already established that Ebain's courtiers are unanimous in their condemnation of Eufeme, but the storyteller proceeds to reassure the audience of her culpability by availing her of a trial of sorts. Even after the courtiers and the audience are convinced of the queen's guilt, 'The king still has his doubts' (6568). He has both the nun and Silence disrobed to prove Merlin's accusations regarding their gender, and he interrogates Silence regarding the queen's advances. Ebain's judgment is then brutally succinct: 'The king despised Eufeme. He had no wish to spare her' (6652–53). Again, he is supported by his court: 'nor did anyone ask him to (spare her)' (6654).

Heldris has taken great care to confirm Eufeme's guilt and insupportable villainy according to all literary and legal conventions of the day in order to justify her punishment, a method of execution that is particularly gruesome and would have been especially disturbing to contemporary audiences. Yet, the very fact that her execution is contrary to all literary and historical precedent indicates that Heldris intends for it to be viewed metaphorically. Committing adultery with the wife of one's liege lord was considered one of the worst forms of treason because it threatened to undermine the entire feudal structure of fealty. Within this context, adultery with the queen was always understood to be treasonous, although it was not officially made law until Edward III's Statute of Treason of 1352.[43] This same statute specifies burning at the stake as the punishment for such an offence,[44] yet it was never employed subsequent to the enactment of the law.[45] The more typical

punishment was repudiation, as in the case of Eudoxia, wife of Count William VIII of Montpellier.[46]

In fact, adulterous ladies were typically treated more gently than their lovers.[47] During the reign of Philip the Fair, two nobles convicted of adultery with the wives of Prince Louis and Prince Charles were 'castrated, dragged behind horses to the gallows and hanged' whereas the adulterous wives were repudiated and locked away.[48] When Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, the ruler of Wales, discovered that his wife Joan/Joanna, the illegitimate daughter of King John of England, was committing adultery, he had her lover, William de Braose, hanged while she was only briefly immured in a convent.[49] In Heldris's tale, in direct contravention of all historical examples in which the woman is shown clemency, Eufeme is executed for her adultery.

While ladies may have been promiscuous on occasion, there are, in fact, a negligible number of instances in which a queen was actually accused, let alone convicted, of adultery. Usually, these accusations were a ruse to effect a more political agenda. Thus, although the coincidentally named Eufemia of Kiev was accused of adultery and, despite her pregnancy, banished by King Koloman, she may have been punished as a 'scapegoat for some mishap.'[50] Similarly, while Eleanor of Aquitaine was posthumously rumored to have committed adultery as part of a more general smear campaign, the actual cause for her divorce from King Louis was the convenient consanguinity excuse. The treatment of disgraced queens in general indicates that the king was able to avail himself of a wide range of graduated responses to a contentious wife, all of which stopped well short of execution. For example, when Eleanor later openly rebelled against her second husband, Henry II, she was effectively silenced by being imprisoned for the remainder of her husband's lifetime.[51] Ingeborg of Denmark was disavowed and imprisoned by her husband, King Philip II of France almost immediately following their wedding.[52] Richard I found time to marry Berengaria of Navarre in Sicily on his way to the Crusades in 1190, but he did not find much time to attend to his bride afterwards, and she never did visit England while she was queen.[53] In this case, simply being ignored efficiently circumscribed the queen. John was wed to Isabella, the heiress of Gloucester, when he was only the marginalized youngest son of Henry II. Once he became king, however, he had no difficulty divorcing one Isabella and marrying another, Isabella of Angoulême, by invoking the grounds of consanguinity, both he and Isabella of Gloucester having a common great-grandfather in Henry I.[54] All of the preceding anecdotes are twelfth- and early thirteenth-century examples of repudiated queens, the individual fates

of whom would have been all too familiar to Heldris. Kings could effectively rid themselves of their consorts by divorcing, imprisoning, or simply ignoring them. In short, there was no need to execute a troublesome queen. Such an act would invite problems when other effective means were available and, in fact, frequently employed.

Even the admittedly adulterous queens of romance literature were not treated as inhumanely as Eufeme. Guenevere and Isolde are both condemned to be burned at the stake, but in both cases disapproval of the sentence is registered by at least one member of the court, and the queens are ultimately rescued from the fire. Gawain warns that burning Guenevere will result in war, a prophecy realized, ironically, when Lancelot slays Gawain's kin during his rescue of the queen.[55] Isolde is also sentenced to be burned at the stake, but the general population and Dinas in particular argue against the sentence as beneath the dignity of a queen. Isolde is instead sent to a leper colony after Tristan, who was to be executed first, manages to escape.[56] The indisputably evil queen of *Les sept sages* is burned,[57] but not brutally drawn and quartered, and the distinction between the two methods of execution would have been important in the thirteenth century.

Drawing and quartering was a specific method of execution only recently introduced in the thirteenth century. It involved dragging the condemned person to the place of execution, hanging him by the neck, cutting him down and disemboweling him while still alive, having the entrails burned before his eyes, before finally decapitating and dividing the body into four parts. The theory behind this procession of tortures was that an individual who committed treason was guilty of a multitude of crimes before God and man and therefore should be compelled to suffer a matching number of deaths. The first recorded instance in which drawing and quartering was used as a method of execution was in 1238 as punishment for an attempt on the king's life. Evisceration and quartering were also employed in the execution of William de Marisco in 1242. In 1282 David of Wales was drawn for treason, hanged for homicide, and disemboweled for sacrilege, before finally being beheaded and quartered for intending to kill the king.[58] William Wallace suffered a similar fate in 1305.[59] While drawing and quartering was a very specific, horrific means of torture and execution that was only selectively employed, Heldris may have been referring to a more familiar means of dismemberment, namely being torn apart by wild horses, which is exactly what a more literal translation of the Old French 'Et la dame a chevals detraite' (6656) would imply. Indeed, earlier in the poem 'a chevals detraire' is translated as 'torn apart by wild horses' (4231). If Heldris is referring specifically

to 'drawing and quartering' then a later date for the composition of the narrative could be argued because, although it was first employed in 1238 and again in 1242, the first truly public and widely recognized use of this type of punishment was the execution of Prince David in 1282.[60]

Nevertheless, whatever the particular details, dismemberment of any kind was a gruesome execution, one that would have been particularly revolting to Heldris's audience given contemporary perceptions and customs. To begin with, traitors to the Crown, the crime for which an adulterous queen would be punished, were typically treated with clemency if they were of noble stock. After the rebellion of 1075, William I showed remarkable restraint in exiling, dispossessing, or imprisoning the noble offenders. Only the leader of the insurrection, Earl Waltheof, was executed.[61] Henry II likewise abstained from punishing 'in life or limb' the traitors who rebelled against him in 1173–4 and 1183, as did Richard in 1193. During the otherwise brutal civil war between Stephen and Mathilda, nobles on both sides were exempt from both mutilation and execution. One notable exception to this 'chivalrous compassion' was John's alleged surreptitious murder of his nephew Arthur in 1202, for which his personal and moral reputation suffered irreparably.[62] In short, even the most treasonous acts of a person of noble blood were not customarily punishable by execution prior to the time of Edward I.[63]

Dismemberment as a method of punishment was particularly onerous given the preoccupation of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with corporeal integrity. Contemporary audiences were concerned with the ramifications that physical dismemberment would have in the after-life as evidenced by the fact that public discussion focused on such specifics as whether or not one's fingernail clippings would be reunited with the body after death.[64] Dismemberment was not only a method of execution, but also a means of dehumanizing the criminal.

Furthermore, the execution of Eufeme appears to be an overreaction when viewed in relation to other events within the text. When Eufeme first accuses Silence of trying to seduce/rape her, the king's most immediate concern is to save his own honor. He reasons that it would be more harmful to his reputation to reveal Silence's alleged crime because in so doing 'he himself would also be dishonored' (4194). He therefore recommends to his queen that they just 'pretend it didn't happen' (4245). Such feigned tolerance is in complete accord with the mores of the era. Daniel of Beccles, writing *The Urbanus* during the reign of Henry II, advises the cuckolded husband to publicly overlook his wife's transgressions because 'it is better to bury your shame as a husband than to disclose the evil that brings a blush to your face

and produces ever renewed grief for your heart.' Interestingly, he also admonishes a vassal who is placed in the awkward position of being propositioned by his lord's wife to pretend, conveniently and diplomatically, to be ill.[65]

The rage that Ebain exhibits at the end of the tale when faced with Eufeme's adultery is not only contrary to his initial ability to overlook any attempted seduction, it is, in fact, a more accurate reflection of Eufeme's own vengeful wrath towards Silence. Earlier in the tale, Eufeme has suggested hanging, burning, or having Silence torn apart by wild horses (4228–31) as retribution for Silence's supposed attempted rape and treasonous behavior. Later, she forges a letter in Ebain's name urging the King of France to behead Silence (4320–26). Such intemperate wrath is used by Heldris to evidence Eufeme's villainy, but it also serves as an indirect condemnation of Ebain's similarly immoderate judgment at the end of the tale. As a further exploration of the Nature vs. Nurture debate, does Heldris perhaps hint that Eufeme may have learned her bad behavior from Ebain's bad example?

Dismemberment as a form of execution for adultery is also treated in analogous tales. Isode, for example, exclaims that if the king even suspected her of infidelity, she 'would be drawn and quartered at once.'[66] This particular form of punishment was intended to convey more than simply a judicial response to a treasonous act. Peggy McCracken notes that in Chrétien's *Cligés*, 'the queen's adulterous body gains meaning through rhetorical constructions of integrity and dismemberment.'[67] Fenice states, 'I'd rather be torn limb from limb than have people in referring to us recall the love of Iseut and Tristan, about whom such nonsense is talked that I'm ashamed to speak of it. I couldn't reconcile my self to the life Iseut led. With her, love was too debased, for her body was made over to two men, whilst her heart belonged entirely to one.'[68] Fenice would prefer to be literally torn apart than to be 'torn between two lovers.'

Such metaphors of dismemberment and integrity are a vital component of typical love rhetoric.[69] McCracken observes that 'the body of the adulterous queen in medieval romance represents a threat to notions of unity; the union of a married couple, the uninterrupted succession of a dynasty, the wholeness of a body restricted to one lover.'[70] For example, Fenice and Cligés each speak stealing the other's heart, separating it from the body.[71] In *Silence*, the metaphor is extended from the romance tradition to the political arena in view of the fact that the adultery of a queen always has political ramifications; it is a judgment on the king's ability to rule and an undermining of his power and authority. Such a transgression is particularly repugnant when,

instead of the otherwise virtuous lady being won by the nobility of a particular knight's character, the queen is shown to be indiscriminate in conferring her favor. Furthermore, in this case, Eufeme disrupts the court and the entire system of justice by seeking to have the king's most worthy and loyal vassal executed on false charges.[72] She has dismembered the political integrity of the king's rule.

Heldris intended the execution of Eufeme to be shocking, so shocking that it would not be taken literally. Instead, the storyteller has opted to apply the metaphor of the dismembered adulterous queen as a remedy for the fractured kingdom. As Sharon Kinoshita points out, the exogamous marriage with Eufeme was necessary to end war with Norway. Now, however, the king must marry Silence to end the internal rebellion lead by the count of Chester that is threatening to splinter his domain.[73] Only by eliminating Eufeme can Ebain unite his kingdom and reassert his rule. By choosing this particular method of execution for the adulterous queen, one without precedent in literature or the historical record, Heldris has pointedly called attention to the correlation between the two events. Just as Eufeme guaranteed peace for the kingdom when her body was given to the king in marriage, so the future unity of the kingdom can only be guaranteed by the dismemberment of the fractious queen.

Throughout the tale, Heldris crafts the character of Eufeme deliberately, providing contextual and literary clues to explain the otherwise incongruent actions of and toward the queen. The manner of Eufeme's introduction and the detail regarding her suspect heritage require the reader to consider whether her malevolent character had been formed at birth or had been cultivated by malignant influences at the court of King Ebain. It is also quite possible, given the coincidental dating of the manuscript and the succession of the Maid of Norway to the throne of Scotland, that contemporary audiences would have been leery of a princess of Norwegian extraction. Toward the end of the tale, the rapid conviction and horrid execution suffered by the evil queen are fitting when considered within the context of the narrative. She, herself, had urged such a fate earlier in the tale for Silence, and Ebain's later advocacy of a similar punishment for Eufeme not only provides a neat parallel but also implies, by this revelation of Ebain's 'true' character, that perhaps his wicked tutelage was the original cause of Eufeme's moral demise. Furthermore, Eufeme's sentence is entirely appropriate when considered metaphorically. Only through the death and physical dismemberment of the divisive queen can Ebain marry Silence and unite his kingdom. By carefully and intentionally providing the information necessary to 'cherchez

Eufeme,' Heldris encourages the reader to understand her purpose and function as a vibrant, supporting character within the tale.

SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY

Katie Keene is a graduate student in Medieval Studies at Southern Methodist University. She is focusing on the study of medieval queens and queenship, especially on the figure of St. Margaret of Scotland.

NOTES

1 All quotations from *Silence* are taken from Heldris de Cornuälle, *Silence: A Thirteenth Century French Romance*, ed. and trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992 and 1999).
2 I have attempted to keep all references to Heldris gender-neutral in deference to the intriguing argument made by Lorraine Kochanske Stock that Heldris could be either male or female. Lorraine Kochanske Stock, 'The Importance of Being Gender "Stable": Masculinity and Feminine Empowerment in *Le Roman de Silence*,' ARTHURIANA 7.2 (Summer 1997): 28–29 [7–34].
3 Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 19.
4 For more discussion on this topic see McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery.*
5 An observation also made by McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery*, pp. 154–55.
6 Mary B. Speer, *Le Roman des Sept Sages de Rome: A Critical Edition of the Two Verse Redactions of a Twelfth-Century Romance* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1989); also observed by McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery,* p. 147.
7 Norris J. Lacy, ed., *Lancelot-Grail: The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation,* 5 vols.(NY and London: Garland, 1993) 1.253.
8 Gottfried Von Strassburg, *Tristan and Isolde*, ed. Francis G. Gentry (NY: Continuum, 1988), pp. 109–110.
9 Kathleen J. Brahney, 'When Silence was Golden: Female personae in the *Roman de Silence*,' *The Spirit of the Court: Selected Proceedings of the Fourth Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society (Toronto 1983)*, ed. Glyn S. Burgess and Robert A. Taylor (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985), p. 55 [52–61].
10 Stock, 'The Importance of Being Gender "Stable,"' 20.
11 Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, p. 151.
12 McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery*, p. 147.
13 *The Seven Sages of Rome,* ed. Killis Campbell (Boston and New York: Ginn & Company, 1907), pp. 9–10.
14 Speer, *Le Roman des Sept Sages de Rome*, p. 75.
15 'Alone with the Prince in her chamber, she attempts to seduce him; she finds him so attractive that she even offers to poison his father so that they can marry and reign together. When he makes no reply, she cries out for help, tearing her

clothes and scratching her face. In the King's presence, she accuses the Prince of rape and she demands vengeance.' Speer, *Le Roman des Sept Sages*, p. 76.

16 Karen Pratt, 'The Image of the Queen in Old French Literature,' *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King's College London, April 1995*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1997), p. 244 [235–59].

17 Sharon Kinoshita, 'Male-Order Brides: Marriage, Patriarchy and Monarchy in the *Roman de Silence*,' ARTHURIANA 12.1 (Spring 2002): 64–75.

18 János Bak, 'Queens as Scapegoats in Medieval Hungary,' *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King's College London, April 1995*, ed. Anne J. Duggan, pp. 223–233.

19 Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London and Washington: Leicester University Press, 1998), p. 46.

20 Jenny Jochens, 'The Politics of Reproduction: Medieval Norwegian Kingship,' *American Historical Review* 92:2 (Apr. 1987), 348 [327–49].

21 Jochens, 'The Politics of Reproduction,' 331–332.

22 Jochens, 'The Politics of Reproduction,' 342.

23 Roger de Hoveden, *Chronica magistri Rogeri de Hovedene*, ed. William Stubbs (Rolls Series III, 1868–71), p. 272.

24 Roger de Hoveden, *The Annals of Roger de Hoveden. Comprising the History of England and of Other Countries of Europe from A.D. 732 to A. D. 1201*, trans. Henry T. Riley, vol. 2 (London: H.G. Bond, 1853), p. 342.

25 For a discussion of *Silence* as a commentary on succession rights see Sharon Kinoshita, 'Heldris de Cornualle's *Roman de Silence* and the Feudal Politics of Lineage,' PMLA 110:3 (May 1995): 397–409.

26 Robert Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 4.

27 Michael Prestwich, *Edward I*, new ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 126.

28 Prestwich, *Edward I*, p. 388.

29 In private correspondence, both Regina Psaki and Keith Busby have supported the earlier date; the later date as argued for by Lewis Thorpe, '*Le Roman de Silence* by Heldris de Cornuälle,' *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies* 5 (1961):41, 47 [31–74]; Kinoshita, 'Male-Order Brides,' 65; Roche-Mahdi, p. xi.

30 Kinoshita, 'Male-Order Brides.'

31 Roche-Mahdi, p. xxiii.

32 Lewis Thorpe, '*Le Roman de Silence* by Heldris de Cornuälle,' *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies* 6 (1962): 27–30 [18–69].

33 Peter L. Allen, 'The Ambiguity of Silence: Gender, Writing, and *Le Roman de Silence*,' *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature*, ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989), p. 103 [98–112].

34 A.H. Diverres, 'Tristan and Iseut's Condemnation to the Stake in Beroul,' *Rewards and Punishments in the Arthurian Romances and Lyric Poetry of Mediaeval France*,

eds. Peter V. Davies and Angus J. Kennedy (Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk: St. Edmundsbury Press, 1987) p. 24 [21–29].

35 R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1977) p. 55.

36 Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail* 4.22.

37 Lacy,*Lancelot-Grail* 3.218–19.

38 Lacy, *Lancelot-Grail* 4.121–22.

39 Diverres, 'Tristan and Iseut's Condemnation,' pp. 24–25.

40 Diverres,'Tristan and Iseut's Condemnation,' p. 25.

41 Diverres, 'Tristan and Iseut's Condemnation,' pp. 24–25.

42 Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law*, p. 56n92.

43 Diverres, 'Tristan and Iseut's Condemnation,' p. 27.

44 Diverres, 'Tristan and Iseut's Condemnation,' p. 27.

45 There is only one historical example of its actual use prior to Heldris's time when, around the year 1000, Count Fulk of Anjou sentenced his wife Elizabeth to burn for her adultery. John F. Benton, 'Clio and Venus: An Historical View of Medieval Love,' *The Meaning of Courtly Love*, ed. F.X. Newman (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1968), p. 26 [19–42].

46 Benton, 'Clio and Venus,' p. 26.

47 Benton, 'Clio and Venus,' p. 26.

48 Benton, 'Clio and Venus,' p. 27.

49 John Gillingham, 'Killing and mutilating political enemies in the British Isles from the late twelfth to the early fourteenth century: a comparative study,' *Britain and Ireland, 900–1300*, ed. Brendan Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), p. 120 [114–34].

50 Bak, 'Queens as Scapegoats in Medieval Hungary,' p. 226.

51 Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, p. 55.

52 George Conklin, 'Ingeborg of Denmark, Queen of France, 1193–1223,' *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Duggan, p. 40 [39–52].

53 Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, pp. 37 and 57. Some scholars contend that she did return once, well after her husband's death, to visit the tomb of St. Thomas Becket. Regardless, the point is still valid; Richard ignored his queen during his lifetime.

54 Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, p. 36 and p. 557.

55 Bloch, *Medieval French Literature and Law*, p. 60.

56 Diverres, 'Tristan and Iseut's Condemnation,' pp. 25–26.

57 *The seven sages of Rome,* ed. Campbell, pp. 144–45.

58 Sir Frederick Pollock and Frederic William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I* (Cambridge: University Press, 1895, 2nd ed. 1923) vol. 2, pp. 500–501.

59 Prestwich, *Edward I*, pp. 502–503.

60 Historians agree that David's execution was the first time this punishment was employed; for the consensus view, see the Encylopaedia Britannica

61 Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, p. 185.

62 Gillingham, p. 119.
63 Gillingham, pp. 133–34.
64 See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).
65 Bartlett, *England Under Norman and Angevin Kings*, p. 587.
66 'Mon cors seret desmenbré tot.' Again, the reference is to dismembering, not drawing and quartering per se. Beroul, *The Romance of Tristan.*, ed. and trans. Norris J. Lacy (New York and London: Garland, 1989), pp. 4–5.
67 McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery,* p. 34.
68 Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, trans. D.D.R. Owen (London: J. M. Dent and Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1993 ed.), p. 135.
69 McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery*, p. 35.
70 Peggy McCracken, 'The Body Politic and the Queen's Adulterous Body,' *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 56 [38–64].
71 Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, pp. 130–31.
72 McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery*, p. 148.
73 Kinoshita, 'Male-Order Brides,' p. 69.