

Towards a Byzantine ecocriticism: witches and nature control in the medieval Greek romance

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Since its rise in the mid-1990s, ecocriticism, the study of the depiction of the built and natural environments in literature, has been deeply engaged with contemporary political and social issues surrounding anthropogenic ecological degradation and climate change. Such an ideological outlook, however, limits the application of the discourse in the case of medieval literature, which lacks such contemporary resonance. Ecocritical and ecofeminist analyses of the three witches with power over the environment in the Byzantine romances and their western analogues will nevertheless demonstrate the connection between nature control, femininity and patriarchal oppression and, as importantly, offer a theoretical framework for the application of an apolitical ecocriticism to Byzantine (and medieval) literature.

Though ecocriticism¹ has by now become entrenched enough in academic and intellectual circles that it requires neither a general introduction nor a broad defense, some

1 In her 1996 introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryl Glotfelty asserts that ‘the taxonomic name of this green branch of literary study is still being negotiated’, C. Glotfelty and H. Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens and London, 1996) xix, and offers as possible synonyms ‘*ecopoetics, environmental literary criticism, and green cultural studies*’ (*op. cit.* xviii, xx, italics in original). Glotfelty further notes that each of these names comes with its own advantages and problems, and that, in fact, ‘Many critics write environmentally conscious criticism without needing or wanting a specific name for it’ (*op. cit.* xx). In his 2002 reappraisal of the discipline, Lawrence Buell, among the most prominent theorists of ecocriticism, rejected the term he himself had done so much to popularize; even as he acknowledges that “‘ecocriticism’ may well be here to stay,” he suggests instead the term ‘environmental criticism’, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Oxford 2005) 11. His ‘reason for belaboring the terminological issue is the implicit narrowness of the ‘eco,’ insofar as it connotes the ‘natural’ rather than the ‘built’ environment’ (*op. cit.* 11). In the ten years since *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, however, even as the interaction between the built and natural environments that caused Buell to propose the new term has become increasingly incorporated into ecocritical discourse, Buell’s preferred term for emphasizing that theoretical distinction has neither slowed the increasing hegemony of ‘ecocriticism’ as the disciplinary marker, nor gained traction as an independent term in its own right, and it is both to avoid any such terminological confusion and to place my own work within this larger intellectual movement that I have chosen to use ‘ecocriticism’ in my own title.

questions remain regarding its applicability to medieval studies in general and Byzantine studies in particular, which has yet to be the subject of an ecocritical examination.² As many ecocritics have noted, the roots of ecocriticism are to be found in the environmental movement, as societies across the globe are being forced to grapple with the increasingly unavoidable issues of climate change and environmental degradation. Ecocriticism developed as a literary practice when scholars came to see that their own discipline was slow to make the connection between literary analysis and the events of the outside world. As Cheryl Glotfelty noted in her by now canonical introduction to one of ecocriticism's foundational texts:

If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth's life support systems were under stress ... in contrast, if you were to scan the newspaper headlines of the same period, you would learn of oil spills, lead and asbestos poisoning, toxic waste contamination, extinction of species at an unprecedented rate, battles over public land use, protests over nuclear waste dumps, a growing hole in the ozone layer [...].³

As a discourse developing from and in response to this crisis, then, ecocriticism has been conceived of by its practitioners as a politically oriented activist movement along the lines of feminist, post-colonial or queer theory; in 1995, Jay Parini suggested in *The New York Times* that 'Environmental studies marks a return to activism and social responsibility; it also signals a dismissal of theory's more solipsistic tendencies. From a literary aspect, it marks a re-engagement with realism, with the actual universe of rocks, trees and rivers that lies behind the wilderness of signs.'⁴ For Glotfelty, Parini and many other ecocritics, what separates ecocriticism from other forms of scholarly activity in literary disciplines is that, unlike them, it is more than a detached intellectual pursuit with limited real-world relevance; rather, they see literary analysis and political engagement as two inseparable strands of ecocriticism. Even if one were possible without the other, they seem to suggest, it would not be ecocriticism.

Among the most vocal supporters of this hyper-political strand of ecocriticism are ecofeminists, a subcategory of ecocritics who analyze the interconnectedness of gender

2 For such histories, see, for instance, G. Egan, *Green Shakespeare: From Ecopolitics to Ecocriticism* (New York 2006), S. Estok, *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare: Reading Ecophobia* (New York 2011) 17–44 and esp. Buell, *The Future*, 1–28. For an early account of ecocriticism outside academic publishing, see J. Parini, 'The greening of the humanities', *New York Times*, Oct. 29, 1995, 52–53 and for a brief account of its relevance to medieval ecocriticism, see G. Rudd, *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature* (Manchester 2007) 4–11.

3 Glotfelty and Fromm, *Ecocriticism Reader*, xvi. For a similar response, see Egan, *Green Shakespeare*, 1.

4 Parini, 'The greening of the humanities', 52.

and the environment.⁵ In their introduction to *Ecofeminism and Globalization*, Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen define ecofeminism as ‘an intellectual and activist movement that makes critical connections between the domination of nature and the exploitation of women.’⁶ Such a definition explicitly links scholarly and political practice: it is both ‘intellectual’ and ‘activist’. In her own introduction to a volume on ecofeminism, Greta Gaard makes an even broader claim to political relevance and political activism; ecofeminism, she argues, must account for all forms of oppression:

ecofeminism’s basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature. Ecofeminism calls for an end to all oppressions, arguing that no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature.⁷

While the essential (for Gaard and other ecocritics) connection to contemporary political activism is easy enough to make in studies on modern, post-industrial literature, this argument for contemporary relevance may seem more difficult in early modern and medieval literature written centuries ago in radically different environmental, as well as political, cultural and literary contexts.

Despite this difficulty, ecocritical accounts of other pre-modern literatures have nevertheless sought to maintain the connection to contemporary environmental problems. Thus, authors of book-length ecocritical approaches to Shakespeare can be found saying things like ‘part of the radical appeal of ecocriticism in its embryonic stages was its gestures toward activist possibilities, like other “political” theories before it – feminism, queer theory, postcolonial theory, and versions of cultural materialism’⁸ and ‘this book treats such concerns for animals as a part of a growing coalition that unites socialists and anarchists with environmentalists, anti-capitalists, their cousins the anti-globalizationists and animal rights activists.’⁹ Even if such claims could be sustained for Byzantine literature, it is not at all obvious that they should be. Is, then, a Byzantine ecocriticism possible? Can ecocriticism be divorced from contemporary politics? And, if so, what would such an ecocriticism look like?

5 For a brief outline of an ecofeminist paradigm for reading medieval romances, see Chania Heller’s contribution to C. Heller, ‘For the love of nature: ecology and the cult of the romantic’, in *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature*, ed. G. Gaard (Philadelphia 1993) 219–42.

6 H. Eaton and L. A. Lorentzen (eds.), *Ecofeminism and Globalization: Exploring Culture, Context, and Religion* (Lanham, MD 2003) 1.

7 G. Gaard. ‘Living interconnections with animals and nature’, in G. Gaard (ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (Philadelphia 1993) 1–12, here at 1.

8 Estok, *Ecocriticism and Shakespeare*, 2. Similar assertions concerning Shakespearean analysis are made in B. Strickler, ‘Sex and the city: An ecocritical perspective on the place of gender and race in *Othello*’, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 12.2 (2005) 119–137, while Glotfelty also equates feminism and postcolonialism with ecocriticism (Glotfelty and Fromm, *Ecocriticism Reader*, xviii).

9 Egan, *Green Shakespeare*, 3.

The small but growing bibliography of ecocriticism on western medieval literature points to a possible solution. In 'Ecocriticism and medieval literature' (1998), among the earliest applications of ecocriticism to medieval literature, Rebecca Douglass defines ecocriticism as 'reading with attention to treatments of nature, land, and place, informed by a desire to understand past and present connections between literature and human activities regarding the earth.'¹⁰ In this, she points to a model of ecocriticism which maintains ecocriticism's focus on the connections between past and present and the literary and the real, but does so in a less explicitly political way. Rather, she prioritizes ecocriticism as a literary perspective, a way of reading with an eye for the depiction of the natural world.¹¹ In this, she presages an apolitical branch of ecocriticism best articulated by Jonathan Bate. In his 2002 *Song of the Earth*, Bate argues that

it would be quixotic to suppose that a work of literary criticism might be an appropriate place in which to spell out a practical programme for better environmental management. That is why ecopoetics should begin not as a set of assumptions or proposals about particular environmental issues, but as a way of reflecting upon what it means to dwell with the earth. Ecopoetics must concern itself with consciousness.¹²

For Bate, ecocriticism (or what he calls 'ecopoetics') 'is phenomenological before it is political, and for this reason ecopoetics may be regarded as pre-political'.¹³ That is to say, where Bate differs from other ecocritics is in his beliefs about the nature of ecocriticism's role in contemporary society. Rather than a political movement with a specific policy agenda, Bate argues for something more along the lines of raising awareness through reading literature along ecocritical lines. Ecocriticism, then, is pre-political insofar as one must first be aware of a problem before one can form a policy prescription for solving it.

If there is a political undercurrent to ecocritical studies of medieval literature, it is more in line with the inevitable consciousness raising that comes from reading, especially reading from a particular ideological perspective, than the more overtly political ecocriticism of other scholars. This is the closest Douglass comes to contemporary relevance for ecocritical readings of medieval literature: 'Reading [medieval texts] ecologically provides another step back toward understanding our roots, the sources of the assumptions

10 R. Douglass, 'Ecocriticism and Middle English literature', *Studies in Medievalism* 10 (1998) 136–163, here at 138, quoted also in Rudd, *Greenery*, 4.

11 Though she does add that 'a thoughtful critic might also consider whether the text does in fact set out to do what he or she feels it ought: is a conservationist message the point of the work?' (Douglass, 'Ecocriticism and Middle English literature', 138).

12 J. Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London 2000) 266. In response to this line, Egan argues that 'Bate's claim that ecocriticism should be necessarily non- (or in his phrase pre-) political is as absurd as it would be in the fields of Marxist, feminist, postcolonial and queer criticism' (Egan, *Green Shakespeare*, 44).

13 Bate, *Song*, 266.

that we are only slowly beginning to recognize as devastatingly destructive.’¹⁴ In a similar vein, two major book-length works of ecocriticism on medieval literature, Gillian Rudd’s *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature* (2007) and Alfred Siewer’s *Strange Beauty: Ecocritical Approaches to Early Medieval Landscape* (2009), both place the word in their title, though pay only the barest lip service (in the case of Rudd) to contemporary politics or ignore it entirely (in the case of Siewer).¹⁵ Instead, the authors offer literary analysis from the ecocritical perspective without the political component. Rudd, for instance, suggests that ‘understanding ourselves as constituent parts of a wider whole and further appreciating that this means that our actions have consequences for all other elements of the world is part of the notion of interconnectedness that is central to green thinking.’¹⁶

The separation of the political from the literary can be found even in ecofeminist discourse: in her *Ecofeminist Subjectivities: Chaucer’s Talking Birds* (2011) Lesley Kordecki offers a less ideological definition of ecofeminism: ‘Thinkers concerned with both ecology and feminism recognize the similar forces at work in the parallel diminishment of women and nature.’¹⁷ In contrast to Gaard, who speaks in the political dichotomy of oppression and liberation, Kordecki speaks in the softer literary tone of ‘diminishment;’ in fact, she does not even mention the patriarchal forces that weave this ideology into literary culture. Whereas ecocritics of contemporary literature deal in words like ‘activism’ and ‘practice’, Rudd and other medieval ecocritics use ‘understanding’ and ‘appreciating’, decidedly more contemplative words. This seems more in line with Bate’s pre-political ecocriticism than Gaard’s more engaged branch. Thus, though ecocritical practice has been conceived of not just as a discourse of literary, social and cultural analysis, but also as one of protest, or, in the words of one ecocritic, ‘to think and act ecopolitically and ecocritically’,¹⁸ that is, to find a synthesis between politics and scholarship, the principles of environmental critical theory can still be marshaled for non-political ends.

14 Douglass, ‘Ecocriticism and Middle English literature’, 159.

15 The study of nature in the environment has long been an important area of inquiry in medieval literature; the distinction here is between analyses of nature from a literary perspective and the analysis of literature from a naturalist, or ecocritical, perspective. Works on natural themes without the explicit use of an ecocritical framework include, for example, such work as G. Stone. *The Ethics of Nature in the Middle Ages: On Boccaccio’s Poetaphysics* (New York 1998); B. Hanawalt and L. Kiser (eds.), *Engaging with Nature: Essays on the Natural World in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Notre Dame 2008); J. Howe and M. Wolfe (eds.), *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe* (Gainesville 2002); although the editors themselves do not use the term, one reviewer noted that ‘this volume may likely become a foundational text in medievalist ecocriticism’ (M. Faletta, ‘Rev. of Howe and Wolfe [2002]’, *Arthuriana* 14.1 [2004] 101–2) and the older but still influential collection of D. Pearsall and E. Salter (eds.), *Landscapes and Seasons of the Medieval World* (Toronto 1973).

16 Rudd, *Greenery*, 6.

17 L. Kordecki, *Ecofeminist Subjectivities: Chaucer’s Talking Birds* (New York 2011) 6.

18 Egan, *Green Shakespeare*, 3.

What is left after the removal of the political overtones is a way of reading texts that prioritizes the reading of the natural world, of human interaction with it and the ideology and mechanics of its depiction. A preliminary model for a Byzantine ecocriticism, then, can be gleaned by applying ecocritical principles developed for other literatures to Byzantine literature. Two developments in recent scholarship facilitate just such a comparative analysis. Foremost among these is the development of ecocritical analyses of western medieval literature, much of which has favored the medieval romance as the subject of ecocritical inquiry. Second is the increased interest in east–west literary, cultural and political ties in the Middle Ages, a field that has also profited from the medieval romance as a pan-European (and pan-Mediterranean) literary genre.¹⁹ Thus, a comparative ecocritical examination of the Byzantine romances and their western counterparts may be a useful starting place for examining the applicability of current ecocritical theory and practice to a specifically Byzantine corpus.

Because the number of possible test-cases far exceeds the scope of a single article, I will focus here on only one: women with the power to control nature, that is, witches, in the Palaiologan romances.²⁰ The fundamental premise of ecofeminism is that the same patriarchal forces which oppress and degrade women are the same forces that oppress and degrade the environment, and in what follows, I will test the applicability of this hypothesis by examining the depiction of the three witches who appear in the late Byzantine romantic corpus.²¹ In each of the examples given, the men are happy to use the women's powers so long as it furthers their own ends, but, when the women are no longer useful or become a threat, they are summarily blamed and discarded. Despite the formidable powers they employ to help the higher status men, moreover, the women are unable to use them to protect themselves. Thus, these women and their

19 See, for instance, E. Jeffreys, 'The Comnenian background to the *romans d'antiquité*', *B* 48 (1980) 112–31; K. Ciggaar, "'Encore une fois': Chrétien de Troyes et la "matière byzantine": La révolution des femmes au palais de Constantinople', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale (Xe–XIIe siècles)* 38.3 (1995) 267–74; E. Jeffreys, "'The wild beast from the west": Immediate literary reactions in Byzantium to the Second Crusade', in *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World*, A. Laiou-Thomadakis and R. P. Mottahedeh (eds.), (Washington, D.C. 2001) 110–13.

20 For an analysis of the literary structure and stylistic conventions that create the adventure world of two of the romances discussed below, see R. Beaton, *From Byzantium to Modern Greece: Medieval Literature and its Modern Reception* (Aldershot 2008) chap. 13.

21 Following the definitional parameters of the genre in R. Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (London and New York 1996). A differing set of generic qualifiers can also be found in P. Agapitos et al., 'SO debate: Genre, structure and poetics in the Byzantine vernacular romances of love', *Symbolae Osloenses* 79 (2004) 7–101, which remains one of the most important discussions of the romances. For the works included in (and excluded from) the genre, their dates, a rationale for the generic taxonomy, see Agapitos, 'SO debate', 12–26, esp. 12–14. Agapitos excludes *The War of Troy*, discussed below, on the grounds that 'no erotic material proper is included' (Agapitos, 'SO debate', 14). In her response to Agapitos' report, Elizabeth Jeffreys argues for the work's inclusion on the grounds that it 'represents one of the first attempts to explore the psychology of erotic love in narrative form in medieval literature' (Agapitos, 'SO debate', 62).

control over nature are only useful as long as they are beneficial to powerful men; otherwise, they are a threat.

The earliest of the Palaiologan romances, the Byzantine *War of Troy*, is an anonymous fourteenth-century Greek translation of Benoît de Sainte-Maure's twelfth-century Old French *Roman de Troie*. In an early section of the work, the translator describes the love affair between Jason and that most famous witch of Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Medea. In her monograph *The Medieval Medea*, Ruth Morse analyzes Medea's depiction in a variety of texts from a variety of periods, in a variety of languages and a variety of genres.²² Morse also looks at the depictions of Medea from a variety of theoretical discourses, though not ecocriticism or ecofeminism; if one were to paraphrase the lines from Glotfelty's introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, quoted above, one would quickly discern that race (as a non-Greek), class (as royalty) and gender (as a woman) all play into Morse's treatment of Medea, but Medea's magic powers, particularly as they relate to environmental modification, which are in many ways her defining feature, go unremarked. Written in 1996, *The Medieval Medea* reflects the kinds of concerns to which *The Ecocriticism Reader* was meant as a corrective. Morse analyzes from the feminist perspective, writing, for example: 'The multiplication of "Medeas" (which assume a Medea) influenced depictions of "Woman" which went well beyond genre categories to create an essentialist definition by which women were judged.'²³ But Medea's femininity is powerfully linked to her power over the environment, and a comparative ecofeminist reading of Medea in the Greek *War of Troy* and its sources and analogues suggests the ideologies underlying her depiction across Europe, thus also proving the efficacy of ecofeminism for Byzantine literature.

Medea's power over nature is the central facet of her characterization in the medieval romance tradition. In the Greek *War of Troy*, for instance, she is introduced as follows:

Ἦτον ἡ κορη φρόνιμη, πολλὰ γραμματισμένη·
ἤξευρε τέχνας φοβερὰς τῆς λεκανομαντείας,
ἀστρονομίας ὑψηλῆς, πάσης μαγείας <εἰς> ἄκρον·
τόσα τὰς ἤξευρε πολλὰ, τόσα τὰς ἐπαιδεύθη,
ἡμέραν νύκταν νὰ ἔποισεν ἂν ἤθελε καὶ μόνον ...
Μηδεΐα ὠνομάζετον τὸ ὄνομα τῆς κόρης.²⁴

The girl was intelligent, very well learned;
she knew the fearsome art of dish-divining,
advanced astronomy, the acme of all magic;

22 R. Morse, *Medieval Medea* (Cambridge 1996). The Greek *War of Troy* is omitted from her analysis, an omission excusable, perhaps, in light of the fact that the first proper edition, E. Jeffreys and M. Papathomopoulos (eds.), *Ἄ Πόλεμος τῆς Τρωάδος / The War of Troy* (Athens 1996), came out the same year as Morse's own book.

23 Morse, *Medieval Medea*, xv. Similar readings concerned with gender can be found throughout.

24 Jeffreys and Papathomopoulos, *Ἄ Πόλεμος*, 13, l. 273.

she knew such things well, in such things was she learned,
 she could make day into night if only she wanted ...
 The name of this girl was Medea.²⁵

Her introduction in the poem emphasizes her knowledge of the occult and its relation to natural laws. More than simply an observer and interpreter of these natural phenomena as a typical dish-diviner or astronomer, Medea actually has control over them: she can turn day into night at will. This scene is considerably condensed from the Old French source, particularly in its description of Medea's powers as a magician with control over the natural environment:

Trop ert cele de grant saveir:
 Mout sot d'engin e de maistrie,
 De conjure et de sorcerie;
 Es arz ot tant s'entente mise
 Que trop par ert sage e aprise;
 Astronomie e nigromance
 Sot tote par cuer dès enfance;
 D'arz saveit tant e de conjure,
 De cler jor feïst nuit obscure;
 S'ele vousist, ço fust viaire
 Que volisseiz par mi cel aire;
 Les eves faiseit corre ariere:
 Scientose ert de grant maniere.²⁶

She had this great knowledge:
 She had much skill and mastery
 In conjuring and sorcery;
 She had paid such attention to these arts
 That she became wise and learned;
 Astronomy and necromancy
 She had in her heart since infancy;
 She knew so well that art of conjuring,
 That she could turn clear day into dark night;
 If she wanted, it would seem as if
 You were flying through the air;
 She could make the rivers run backwards:
 Her knowledge was of such great kind.²⁷

25 Translation author's own.

26 Benoît de Sainte-Maure. *Le Roman de Troie*, ed. L. Constans (Paris 1904) 62, l. 1216.

27 Translation author's own.

In the penultimate line of the Greek quoted above, the editors include an ellipsis at the end of the line, and in a gloss on the line in the apparatus, write: 'lacunam post μόνov notavit Pap'.²⁸ This suggestion of a lacuna which might contain the elaboration of Medea's powers as an environmental modifier in the French source elides the differing interests the authors may have had in addressing ecology and ecological forces. Such a reading also opens up possibilities for ecofeminist readings of the texts, since it is only a woman who has such control over nature, and an author's interest in such issues might differ from translator to translator.

An ecocritical reading of this passage becomes even more compelling when put in a comparative context. In the thirteenth century, Benoît's work was translated into Latin by Guido delle Colonne (also referred to as Guido del Columnis) in his *Historia Destructionis Troiae*. Guido, unlike his Greek counterpart a century later, does not uncritically accept Benoît's depiction of Medea's powers.²⁹ Rather, he devotes significant time to describing the types of environmental modification of which Medea is capable and then refuting the truth of those statements on both scientific and theological grounds:

Set eius margarite scientia ex qua potius prepollebat erat illa ars mathematica, que per uires et modos exorcizationum nigromanticos lucem uertebat in tenebras, subito uentos inducebat et pluuias, corruscationes et grandines, et timidos terremotus. Fluuorum autem decursus per decliuiua loca labentes ad superiores partes influere et redundare cogebat. <H>yemali etiam impugnatione frondibus arbores spoliatas compellebat in ipsa turbinis tempestate florescere, iuunes faciendo senescere et senes ad iuuentutis gloriam prouocando. Hanc credere uoluit antiqua gentilitas luminaria magna, scilicet solem et lunam, sepius coegisse contra naturalium ordinem eclipsari.³⁰

But the knowledge of that jewel by reason of which she was the more distinguished was the art of magic, through powers and necromantic means and incantations, turned light into dark, suddenly raised up winds and storms, lightning and hail, and fearful earthquakes. She forced the course of rivers gliding through lower places to pour into higher parts and overflow. She also made trees, despoiled of their branches by the onslaught of winter, bloom even in the season of storms, making the young grow old and recalling the aged to the glory of youth. The pagans of antiquity were willing to believe that she could very often force the great planets, that is, the sun and the moon, to go into eclipse against the order of nature.³¹

It is significant from an ecocritical and ecofeminist perspective that all of her powers relate explicitly to her control over the natural world and its processes, thus establishing the close relationship between nature and the feminine, the cultural/ethnic and religious

28 Jeffreys and Papathomopoulos, *Ὁ Πόλεμος*, 13.

29 See R. Morse, *Medieval Medea*, 188–191, for a reading of Guido's Medea.

30 Guido delle Colonne, *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, ed. N. Griffin (Cambridge, MA 1936) 15.

31 Guido delle Colonnè, *Historia Destructionis Troiae*, trans. M. E. Meek (Bloomington 1974) 14.

other. Indeed, it is on these very grounds that Guido objects to his source material's depiction of her power.

In his description of the Byzantine attitude towards magic, Richard Greenfield writes:

For doctrinalists, magic was nothing but a delusion induced by evil spiritual powers; it was necessarily false for, to assume that an individual spirit or person possessed power to act in or by itself, as magic did in its notion of automatic control, was to challenge or deny the unique position of God as the ultimate and sole originator and controller of everything that happened and was done in the world.³²

In this, Guido's attitude matches Byzantine attitudes towards magic (though not those held by Benoît or his Greek translator); when refuting her ability to cause eclipses, Guido writes:

Sed ille fabularis Sulmonensis Ouidius sic de Medea, Oetis regis filia, de ipsa fabulose commentans, tradidit esse credendum (quod absit a catholicis Cristi fidelibus credi debere nisi quatenus ab Ouidio fabulose narratur). Nam ille summus et eternus Deus, qui in sapientia, id est in Filio, cuncta creauit, celestia corpora planetarum propria sub lege disposuit, et ea statuens in eternum preceptum imposuit eis quod non preteribunt.³³

But that storytelling Ovid of Sulmo, writing fictitiously about Medea, daughter of Aeëtes, thus proposed it should be believed of her (which it is not fitting that Catholics faithful to Christ should believe, except to the extent that it was told as a story by Ovid). For the high and eternal God, Who in His Wisdom, that is, in the Son, created all things, placed the heavenly bodies of the planets according to His own law, and placing them, He imposed on them for all eternity an injunction that they will not disregard.³⁴

The one exception to this rule, however, is when Christ was crucified, an event so powerful that only the Christian God could accomplish it:

Hic est uerus et eternus Deus, cuius est posse naturalia queque dissoluere et cogere in lege nature peccare, qui sola unius sui fidelis prece cursum solis mundanum contra naturalem institutionem ipsius ad Sabaoth figi et stari mandauit. Hoc autem de Medea secundum fabulas ideo ponitur quoniam sic de ea fabulose fuisse presens ystoria non obmittit, cum et ipsam fuisse in astronomia et nigromantia peritissimam non negetur.³⁵

This is the true and eternal God, Who has power to destroy every element of nature and to force each of them to transgress against the law of nature, Who by a single prayer of a faithful one ordered the earthly course of the sun against its natural

32 H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Magic* (Washington, D.C. 1995) 118.

33 Guido, *Historia* (1936) 16.

34 Guido, *Historia* (1974) 14.

35 Guido, *Historia* (1936) 17.

law to be fixed and stand still at Sabaoth. However, all this about Medea is therefore set forth according to the legends, although the present history does not omit the fact that this material about her was legendary, since it is not to be denied that she was extremely skilled in astrology and witchcraft.³⁶

Guido marks environmental control as a pagan belief which should be disregarded. Moreover, it is only the male Christian God, not a female pagan, who has such environmental control. The power that controls nature, in this reading, thus also excludes the agency of women and pagans.

The marginalization of women and nature by the patriarchy is made even more explicit later in the text. Guido moves on to an indictment of women generally, a moralizing excursus which is found neither in his French source nor the medieval Greek analogue:

Numquid est sapientis se credere constancie puellari aut sexui muliebri, qui nullis annorum circulis nouit captare constantiam? Cuius animus semper consistit in motu et precipue inter pubescentes uacillationes antequam mulier viro facta uiripotens misceatur. Scimus enim mulieris animum semper virum appetere, sicut appetit materia semper formam.³⁷

Is it wise to trust to feminine constancy or the female sex, which has never been able, through all the ages, to remain constant? Her mind always remains in motion and is especially changeable in girlhood, before the woman, being of a marriageable age, is joined to her husband. For we know the heart of a woman always seeks a husband, just as matter always seeks form.³⁸

For Guido, unfettered female power is a thing to be feared. Just as he fears female access to supernatural powers of environmental modification reserved only for the masculine deity, so too does he fear female sexuality unconstrained by masculine power in the form of a husband. In Guido's thinking there is a link between female control of the environment and female control of sexuality: both are to be feared and both are to be brought under the power of male control. The story of Jason and Medea, then, can be seen as an example of how marriage and other forms of male control can, if temporarily, constrain these wild powers and channel them in ways that will benefit the powerful males: it is only through Medea, after all, that Jason is able to win the Golden Fleece, even if their marriage and family ultimately disintegrates when Jason leaves Medea.

In the early fifteenth century John Lydgate began his own translation of Guido.³⁹ Lydgate expands significantly on Medea's powers over the environment and on the faults of women, attributing to her a variety of powers not in the previous sources. Lydgate then, however, reverses himself, claiming that he himself does not believe all

36 Guido, *Historia* (1974) 15.

37 Guido, *Historia* (1936) 17.

38 Guido, *Historia* (1974) 15.

39 For Lydgate's treatment of Medea, see Morse, *Medieval Medea*, 195–98.

the terrible things he has just written about women, saying that he was simply faithfully translating his source:

Pus liketh Guydo of wommen for tendite.
 Allas, whi wolde he so cursedly write
 Ageyn[e]s hem, or with hem debate!
 I am riȝt sory in englische to translate
 Reprefe of hem, or any euel to saye;
 Leuer me wer for her loue deye.
 Where-fore I preye hem to take in pacience;
 My purpos is nat hem to done offence;
 Pei ben so gode and parfyte euerechon.⁴⁰

Thus Guido likes to indict women.
 Alas, why would he so cursedly write
 Against them, or debate with them!
 I am right sorry in English to translate
 Reproof of them, or any evil to say;
 It would have been better for her love to die.
 Wherefore I pray them to be patient;
 My pupose is not to offend them;
 They have been so good and perfect every which one.⁴¹

This rhetorical move allows Lydgate to include this misogynistic discourse in his narrative while – *ex post facto* – disavowing his own belief in it.

The swelling excurses on environmental control and female inconstancy in the western translations of Benoît stand in sharp contrast to the condensed account in the Greek version. Thus, a comparative reading of this scene imbues the ellipsis marking Papatomopoulos' purported lacuna with significance from an ecocritical/ecofeminist perspective, as well as from a philological one. From the latter perspective such a reading demonstrates that medieval authors opted for a variety of different translations of the passage in the French source, and that the exclusion of a line in the Greek is most likely to be a reflection of the translator's limited interest in the subject matter of the passage rather than a manuscript problem.

From the ecocritical/ecofeminist perspective, the Greek translator's uncritical and condensed translation of the passage suggests an author who is not animated by the same concerns (or, at least, to the same degree) as Guido and Lydgate: he seems not bothered by the destabilizing force of female magic; he seems, moreover, not even to have considered the broader social and cultural ideologies underlying such a depiction. The story of Jason and Medea is the first love affair in a story with many successive iterations – it thus also has programmatic force, offering a paradigm of male–female relations against

40 J. Lydgate, *Troy Book*, 4 vols, ed. Henry Bergen (London 1906) vol. 1, p. 74, l. I.2097, and again, with a different formulation at l.2116.

41 Translation author's own.

which subsequent romances can be read. While Guido and John Lydgate (his recantation notwithstanding) are explicit in their linking of the female power over nature with female sexual inconstancy and destructiveness, the difference between them and Benoît and the anonymous Greek translator is only one of degree, not of kind. The latter authors still tell a story, simply without the explicit moralizing excurses or the ekphrastic emphasis on the dangers of female sexuality and magic.

Medea in the Greek *War of Troy* can be compared with the two other practitioners of astrology, magic and the occult in the Byzantine romances. Like Medea, both are women.⁴² Further, like Medea, both the witches are non-Greeks. At least one of the witches is racially marked; indeed, the witches may be the only black characters in all of the romances.⁴³ Klitovon in *Livistros and Rodamni* describes her as ‘γροῖα ταλαίπωρος, μαύρη ὡς Σαρακῆνα, γυμνή καὶ ὀλοασκέπαστος.’⁴⁴ (‘A miserable old woman, black as a Saracen, naked, completely without clothes.’)⁴⁵

42 There are, in fact, no male magicians in the Palaiologan romances. In *Livistros and Rodamni* the magician seems at first to be a male merchant (G. Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances: Velthandros and Chrysandza, Kallimachos and Chrysorroï, Livistros and Rodamni* [New York and London 1995] 147; s1393 in the Greek edition (J. A. Lambert, *Le Roman de Libistros et Rhodammé* [Amsterdam 1935]), henceforth *L&R*, though we find out later that he was actually just following the orders of the witch (Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances* 154; *L&R* e2848). The type of astrologer/magician described in the romances goes unmentioned in the major work on the subject, P. Magdalino and M. Mavroudi (eds.), *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium* (Geneva 2006), which focuses mostly on more learned practitioners of the occult. R. Greenfield, ‘A contribution to the study of Palaeologan magic’, in H. Maguire (ed.), *Byzantine Magic* (Washington, D.C. 1995) 117–53, 125).

43 By contrast, see E. Jeffreys, *Digenis Akritis: The Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions* (Cambridge 1998), where Digenes’ father the emir, though an Arab, is depicted as white, thus marking his suitability (1.32). For the intersection of race, religion and marriage in Byzantine and Western medieval romances, see also A. Goldwyn, ‘Interfaith marriage in medieval romance’, *Diesis* 2.1 (2012) 66–78.

44 *L&R*, s1612. Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, is a translation drawn from the four manuscripts published in Lambert, *Le roman de Libistros*; thus, I have followed him in putting the letter before the line number to refer to the manuscript in citations. Though the myriad textual problems with the manuscripts of the romances are beyond the scope of the current investigation, a few words on my choice of editions might also be included. A new edition of Kallimachos has been published in *Romanzi cavallereschi bizantini: Callimaco e Crisorroe, Beltandro e Crisanza, Storia di Achille, Florio e Plaziafiore, Storia di Apollonio di Tiro, Favola consolatoria sulla Cattiva e la Buona Sorte*, a cura di Carolina Cupane. *Classici Greci: Autori della tarda antichità e dell’età bizantina* (Torino: Classici UTET, 1995). Two scholarly editions of *Livistros* have also been published: *Αφήγησις Λιβίστρου καὶ Ροδάμνης. Κριτική ἔκδοσις τῆς διασκευῆς α’, με εἰσαγωγή, παραρτήματα καὶ ἔρεπτήριο λέξεων*, ed. P. A. Agapitos, Βυζαντινὴ καὶ Νεοελληνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη 9 (Athens: Cultural Foundation of the National Bank [MIET], 2006) and *Livistros and Rodamne. The Vatican Version. Critical Edition with Introduction, Commentary and Index-Glossary*, ed. T. Lendari, (Athens: Βυζαντινὴ καὶ Νεοελληνικὴ Βιβλιοθήκη, 2007). Though Beaton argues that ‘these will not fully supersede’ the Lambert edition (Beaton, *From Byzantium to Modern Greece*, ch. 13, note 3), a more detailed treatment of the variant manuscript tradition comparing MS V with MS S (part of the ‘A’ tradition published by Agapitos) might allow for an interesting analysis of the variation in these scenes in different versions of the same poem. Because Lambert’s and Pichard’s editions offer good readings of the passages in question, and to make for easier comparison with the English translation in Betts (who also used Lambert and Pichard), I have opted to use these editions here.

45 Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 152.

The other witch, in *Kallimachos and Chryssorroï*, is described at first only as ‘Γυνή γάρ τις πολύπειρος καὶ δαιμονώδης φύσις, στοιχειοκρατοῦσα μαγικῶς, ἀστρολογοσκοποῦσα.’⁴⁶ (‘a certain sly old woman, a demonic creature who controlled spirits by magic and was versed in astrology.’)⁴⁷ Though she shares both age and poverty with her counterpart in *Livistros*, her race is not mentioned. It may, however, be alluded to at the end of the romance, when the king curses her saying: ‘μυσαρά, σκεῦος μελανωμένον, ἡσβολωμένη καὶ κακὴ καὶ τῶν δαιμόνων μήτηρ’ (‘You foul, black baggage, you accursed mother of devils.’)⁴⁸

This accusation of blackness may be a reference to her evil character rather than her race, though it is still a marked usage. On account of gender, race, religion and age, the women are thus marginal figures; it is not surprising, then, given an ecofeminist reading of the intersection of these othering characteristics, that these women have occult powers and access to demonic spirits.

The description of the witch in *Livistros* is far more detailed than that in *Kallimachos*. In the former, she offers a summary of her life story:

Ἐγώ, παιδία μου, γέγονα τῆς χώρας τῆς Αἰγύπτου,
οὐκ ἀπὸ γένους εὐγενοῦς, οὐδὲ ἐκ τῆς κάτω τύχης·
ἔμαθα τὸ ὕψος νὰ κρατῶ, τὰ ἄστρα νὰ τὰ βλέπω,
καὶ νὰ προλέγω μαντικῶς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὰς πασχῆσεις·
καὶ κατ’ ὀλίγον ὀλιγὸν ἐπέιρασέ με ὁ χρόνος
καὶ δοκιμὸν μὲ ἀπέδειξειν εἰς τῆς μαγίας τὴν τέχνην,
νὰ συντυχαίνω δαίμονας εἰς νύκτας ἀσελήνους,
τριόδια νὰ τρέχω μόνη μου νὰ δαιμονογυρεύω.
καὶ εἶχα τοιοῦτην δύναμιν ὅτι ὅταν ἠβουλήθην
ἤφερνα εἰς γῆν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἤλμεγα τοὺς ἀστέρας.⁴⁹

My children, I was born in the land of Egypt, neither of a noble family nor of the lowest class. I learnt to control the heavens, to observe the stars and to foretell the misfortunes of humans by prophecy. Little by little, Time made trial of me and showed me proficient in the art of magic. I used to talk with demons on moonless nights, I used to frequent crossroads by myself to summon them. I had such power that, when I wished, I brought the heavens down to earth and milked the stars.⁵⁰

Like the Medea depicted in the western medieval romances, this witch also has power over the skies. Also like Medea in the western romances, both of these witches violate

46 M. Pichard, *Le roman de Callimaque et de Chryssorrohoé* (Paris 1956), henceforth *K&C*, 1066.

47 Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 58.

48 *K&C*, 2578; Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 87.

49 *L&R*, s1633.

50 Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 152.

the laws of nature to help powerful male characters achieve their goals, only to be thrown aside later at the arbitrary bidding of the same men. The witch in *Livistros* tells the heroes how, after having used her magic to empower Verderichos the king of Egypt to steal Rodamni, he abandoned her:

Πλὴν ὅταν ἀπεσώσαμεν εἰς τὸν αἰγιαλὸν ἐτοῦτον,
ἐπαίρει τὸ καμήλιν μου, πεζεύει με ἀπ' ἐκεῖνο
καὶ μὲ τὴν κόρην μόνος του περνᾷ εἰς γῆν Αἴγυπτου,
νὰ μὴν μνηθῆ δουλείαν μου, μηδὲ συνέργησίν μου!
καὶ χρόνον ἔχω ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν, παιδιά μου, καὶ χρόνους ἔξ,
νὰ μυριοτζίγαρίζωμαι, νὰ κάθωμαι εἰς τὰ βράχη.⁵¹

But when we reached this coast he took my camel, made me dismount and continued on alone with the lady to Egypt. He forgot what I had done and how I had helped him. For a year and six months now, my children, I have been sitting on these rocks, suffering countless torments.⁵²

When *Livistros* reveals himself, moreover, the witch

ἀποτάττεται καὶ ἤρξατο ἀπὸ τότε
νὰ πίπτη εἰς τὰ ποδάρια μας, νὰ κλαίη καὶ νὰ μᾶς λέγη·
“Μή, μὴ ἀποθάνω ἢ δυστυχῆς, νὰ ποιήσω τὸ ποθεῖτε.”⁵³

was thrown into confusion and then began to grovel at our feet. She said in her tears, ‘Do not kill me, no, wretch that I am. I shall do what you want.’⁵⁴

The witch, who has just described her meetings with demons and her easy access to occult powers, the witch who will soon give the heroes magic horses who can cross water, is, however, unable to defend herself against two men in her home. Indeed, some few lines later, she consults the stars for the benefit of the aristocratic couple who are threatening her life, but she does not consult the stars to protect her own.⁵⁵ An ecofeminist reading of this passage suggests that female power over nature is only effective when used to further male ends; it is powerless, however, when used in self-defense against those same men. The witch has no problem using her magic to help the king of Egypt steal Rodamni, nor when she uses it to help *Livistros* get Rodamni back, but she is powerless to protect herself.

This inability to use magic for her own benefit is evident in an even more striking scene toward the end of the romance. After their reunion, *Livistros* and Rodamni return to the witch’s hut as they retrace their journey on the way home, and Rodamni, recalling her past suffering at the hands of the witch, says to *Livistros*:

51 *L&R*, s1732.

52 Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 154.

53 *L&R*, s1760.

54 Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 155.

55 *L&R*, s1765; Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 155.

„Ὀρκίζω σε εἰς τὰς συμφορὰς τὰς ἔπαθες δι’ ἐμένα,
ὀμνύω σε εἰς τὴν ἀγάπην μου καὶ εἰς τὴν ἀσχόλησίν μου,
σκότωσε τὴν κακομίᾳρον· ἢ μαγικὴν τῆς τέχνη
ἐμὲν ἐσὲν ἐξένωσεν καὶ σὲ νεκρὸν ἐποίησεν.”
Καὶ τὸ σπαθὶν ὁ Λίβιστρος ἔσυρεν κατ’ ἐκείνην
καὶ τὸ κεφάλιν ἔκοψεν τῆς κακομάγου γραΐας·
“Λυτρώσω,” λέγει, “σήμερον μέγαν κακὸν ὁ κόσμος”
καὶ θανατώσω δαίμονα ψυχοσωματωμένον!”
Ἐφώναξεν ὁ Λίβιστρος, ἐσκότωσεν τὴν γραΐαν.⁵⁶

‘I conjure you by the misfortunes you have suffered for me, I conjure you by my love and my passion – kill this foul and evil woman. Her magic art exiled me from you and rendered you lifeless.’ Livistros drew his sword and cut off the evil witch’s head. ‘Today,’ he said, ‘I free the world of a great evil and I kill a demon in human form.’ With this cry Livistros killed the old woman.⁵⁷

The lovers’ rage at the witch seems harsh and unjustified. It was not, after all, the witch’s idea to steal her away; rather, she was summoned by the king and did what was required of her. Her help to reunite Livistros and Rodamni apparently does not mitigate her initial crime against them either, since Livistros still cuts off her head despite her having given them crucial information and resources. To add to the injustice, of course, is the fact that they make no effort to punish the king of Egypt; only marginalized and defenseless old women are subject to summary execution, it seems. The wrongs of the rich, powerful and male go unavenged. And, in her moment of need, the witch was unable to use her magic to save her own life; she is killed by Livistros, who had only recently benefited from the use of that same magic.

A similar, though even worse and more unjust fate, befalls the witch in *Kallimachos*. In that romance there is also a king in love with the hero’s beloved. This king is so distraught with lovesickness that he will do anything to capture Chrysorroï. Upon finding out that the witch is at his door with a cure, the king says: ‘Καὶ πῶνα; φέρε την. Τί στέκεις, τί πομένεις, Τί καρτερεῖς; Εἰπέ με το. Δράμε, συντόμως φθάσε.’⁵⁸ (‘Where is she? Fetch her! Why stand there? Why wait? Why delay? Answer me! Move! Be quick!’)⁵⁹ When the witch says she can help him, moreover, the king is even more invested:

Γραῦς μου, κἄν ποιῆς τίποτε καὶ τὸ ποθῶ κερδίσω,
μάνναν νά λέγουσιν ἐσέ, ἐμέναν δὲ παιδὶν σου·

⁵⁶ *L&R*, s2761.

⁵⁷ Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 175.

⁵⁸ *K&C*, 1110.

⁵⁹ Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 58.

ὀλόχρυσον τὴν στήλην σου στήσουν εἰς τὸ παλάτιν,
μεγάλας εὐρύης χάριτας, πρᾶγμαν πολὺν κερδίσεις.⁶⁰

My good woman, do something to make me gain what I desire, and you will be called my mother and I your son. A golden statue of you will be set up in the palace. You will receive great favors and gain enormous wealth.⁶¹

The king, then, in full knowledge of the witch's plan, in full knowledge that he is setting off to steal another man's beloved, has no qualms at this point in the story about the morality of his actions. Indeed, he is eager to move things forward and promises her great rewards. It is inexplicably strange and cruel, then, that at the end of the story when Kallimachos and Chryssorroï are reunited and brought before the king to explain their situation to him – for him to say:

τίνος, ὑπέρ, τῆς ἀφορμῆς καὶ τίνος ἐξ αἰτίας
διπλοῦν τὸ μῆλον ἔποικες, ζῆν τε καὶ θανατώνειν;
Μή τις ποσῶς ἠνέγκασεν, κατεδυνάστευσέν σε,
μὴ θέλουσιν παρέσυρεν, κάκ τῆς αἰτίας ταύτης
ἐποῖκες ὅσον ἔποικες, δαῖμον σατανωμένη;
Τίνα δέ; σήμερον ἐγὼ σωματωμένον ἄλλον
δαίμονα κακομήχανον, ψυχώλεθρον στοιχεῖον
λυτρώσω πρὸς ὑπόμνησιν τοῦ γένους τῶν ἀνθρώπων;⁶²

Tell me the reason why you gave the apple its double power of death and life? Did someone compel you? Did someone apply force and make you act against your will? Was it because of this that you did what you did, you devil incarnate? You are the evil devil in human form, the baneful spirit that today I am going to wipe from the memory of the race.⁶³

It is odd that the king would ask such questions, since he, the witch and the readers know that although no one compelled her and no one applied force, it was the king himself who set the events in motion and made her great promises. The only explanation for the king's anger besides a hypocritical change of heart would be that his anger is not at the witch for participating in the scheme, but in giving the apple 'its double power' that is to say, he is not upset that she gave the apple the power to kill Kallimachos, but that she gave it the power to revive him as well. This, however, seems unlikely since the king appears to be repenting of the entirety of his action and is merely using the witch as a scapegoat.

After his accusations and threat against the witch, he says,

“Καμίνου φλόγαν δυνατὴν ἀνάψαντες, μεγάλην,

60 *K&C*, 1170.

61 Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 60.

62 *K&C*, 2580.

63 Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 87.

ταύτης τὸ σῶμα καύσατε, κἄν τὴν ψυχὴν οὐδόλως·
 δαίμων γὰρ οὕσα τῆς φλογὸς συντόμως ἀποφύγη.”
 Ὁ λόγος ἔργον γέγονεν, οὐδὲ στιγμή παρήλθεν.⁶⁴

Light up a great blazing fire! Burn her body even if you cannot destroy her soul! She is a devil and will quickly escape from the flames.’ Before a moment had passed the order was carried out.⁶⁵

As in the example from *Livistros*, the witch in *Kallimachos* was able to use her magic to help the king steal away the women he loved and leave her lover for dead, but when her own life is at stake, her magical powers are useless. Her marginalized status is further emphasized in her summary execution; unlike *Kallimachos*, who, when brought before the king, is allowed a long speech which ultimately exonerates him, the witch is not allowed any defense at all. Thus, though it seems that only old, poor, dark-skinned women have access to magic and occult powers that allow them to alter and defy natural laws, those powers can only be used effectively when furthering the ends of young, high-class white men. Indeed, the similar phrasing of the executions suggest an idiomatic or even generic formula for such scenes; in *Livistros*, the executioner says: “Λυτρώσω,” λέγει, “σήμερον μέγαν κακὸν ὁ κόσμος/καὶ θανατώσω δαίμοναν ψυχοσωματωμένον!”⁶⁶ (“Today,” he said, “I free the world of a great evil and I kill a demon in human form.”)⁶⁷ The executioner in *Kallimachos* uses a similar phrase: “Τίνα δὲ; σήμερον ἐγὼ σωματωμένον ἄλλον/δαίμονα, κακομήχανον, ψυχώλεθρον στοιχεῖον/λυτρώσω πρὸς ὑπόμνησιν τοῦ γένους τῶν ἀνθρώπων;”⁶⁸ (‘You are the evil devil in human form, the baneful spirit that today I am going to wipe from the memory of the race.’)⁶⁹

As the world that produced them, the world of the medieval romance was a highly restrictive patriarchy, reserving agency for this particular segment of society. Women (and particularly unnamed women like two of the three witches considered here), non-Christians, poor and other similarly marginalized figures are made to conform to the will of this privileged class and, when they are no longer necessary, are discarded. Eco-feminism offers a theoretical framework for thinking about these types of power dynamics; it argues that those structures that arouse fear of women and thus oppress them are the same as those that fear and oppress nature. An analysis of nature control and environmental modification in the Byzantine romances bears out this hypothesis.

64 *K&C*, 2588.

65 Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 87.

66 *L&R*, s.2767.

67 Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 175.

68 *K&C*, 2585.

69 Betts, *Three Medieval Greek Romances*, 87. The irony of this diction is further enhanced when, five lines later, *Kallimachos* is ‘τὰ σίδηρα λυτρώσας,’ which Betts translates as ‘freed [...] from his chains,’ a very different meaning than when applied to the witch, who is freed from life through immolation with the same verb.

Women and nature are fearsome, wild and unpredictable, but can, if brought under patriarchal control, be beneficial to the men who control them. Indeed, the romances have just such a mechanism of control: the cultivated garden, where both women and nature are fully under male control.⁷⁰

As there have yet to be any studies of ecocriticism on Byzantine literature, there must necessarily be a limit to the utility of current ecocritical theory when applied to this new subject matter. The present study, I hope, may be seen as a starting point for further investigation of the depiction of the built and natural environments, their interaction with one another, and the human relationship to both in Byzantine literature.

70 Barber comes to much the same conclusion, although without using the discourse of ecofeminism, arguing, for instance, that the depiction of the gardens 'emphasizes the control of man over nature, best represented in man's control over artistry' (C. Barber, 'Reading the garden in Byzantium: nature and sexuality', *BMGS* 16 [1992] 1–19). A more detailed reading through the prism of ecocriticism may yield yet more insights about the mechanisms of such control.