

2015 James Randall Leader Prize for Best 2014 Essay on an Arthurian Topic in an Academic Journal, International Arthurian Society, North American Branch

Eve Salisbury, '*Lybeaus Desconus*: Transformation, Adaptation, and the Monstrous-Feminine'

The level of competition for the 2015 James Randall Leader prize was of the highest caliber. The range of Arthurian articles published in 2014 included a striking number of high quality essays, offering both innovative scholarship and conceptually novel readings to engage the attention and admiration of scholars. The judges agreed, however, on the outstanding nature of Eve Salisbury's essay '*Lybeaus Desconus*: Transformation, Adaptation, and the Monstrous-Feminine' (*Arthuriana* 24.1: 66 – 85).

Salisbury starts from what she calls the 'signature mise-en-scène of the fearsome kiss' in *Lybeaus Desconus* and explores the gender conflict the text realizes in terms of the exposition of 'monstrous feminism' by the film scholar Barbara Creed. Taking as an introduction what many might have been happy with as a complete essay, Salisbury moves on through three discrete stages using a range of critics from Brundage to Bynum. First, she unpacks three parallel representations of the monstrous and maternal female: Mandeville's story of the dragon-lady of the isle of Lango, the tale of Morgan le Fay's daughter Ponzela Gaia, and the widely-recorded narrative of Melusine. The second section considers a range of Gawain-related stories focused on 'the indecorous woman' including a telling diversion into his adventures with the Green Knight's lady and, once again, Morgan le Fay. Finally, in the third movement, Salisbury adds a discussion of time and place to her analysis by showing how the six English versions of *Lybeaus Desconus* rework this potent medieval *mytheme* of monstrous maternity for their own spatio-temporal and ideological purposes.

Salisbury yokes together this far-reaching survey of the trope and the microscopic look at the *Lybeaus Desconus* tradition—a task rarely achieved in such an elegant fashion. It is testament to Salisbury's skill as reader, critic, and writer that she is able to do so both fluidly and eloquently. This essay is a joy to read and stands to have a lasting impact not only among those studying the texts at hand, but also in the wider fields of Arthurian and medieval gender studies. Salisbury's essay clears a path future work, and while doing so sets a high bar for those who will take it up, for hers is an essay of prize-winning mastery.