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### From the Middle Ages to Modernity: The Intersecting Supernatural Worlds of Melusine and Today's Popular Culture

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# SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL

This Honors thesis entitled

**“From the Middle Ages to Modernity: The Intersecting  
Supernatural Worlds of *Mélusine* and Today’s Popular Culture”**

written by

**Sarah Stark**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for completion of the  
Carl Goodson Honors Program  
meets the criteria for acceptance  
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Dr. Mary Beth Long, Thesis Director

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April 15, 2011

## From the Middle Ages to Modernity: The Intersecting Supernatural Worlds of *Méhusine* and Today's Popular Culture

While some may scoff at fairy tales as juvenile, primitive, or superstitious, they have always held a special fascination for me, and I am not alone in this—stories about magicians, monsters, and mythical creatures have captivated their audiences' imaginations for thousands of years. Feeling myself consistently drawn toward this type of story, I began several months ago to study supernatural tales from the medieval era as well as those popular today, and I have since discovered numerous worlds in which the natural and supernatural coexist. Creatures seemingly human are, in fact, sometimes more—or less, depending on one's perspective. Families are cursed, friendships and romances spring up among mortals and fairies, vampires, and other fantastic ilk, and things are rarely as they seem.

Among these stories, my research has focused on *Le Roman de Méhusine* or *L'Histoire de Lusignan*, a fourteenth-century Middle French tale composed by Jean D'Arras. This work contains many elements common to supernatural tales of its time—shape-shifting, magic fountains and marriages between humans and fairies—yet it is also surprisingly relevant to our own age, whose popular culture is saturated with modern myths and vampire love-stories. Intrigued by the similarities between this medieval tale and the books, movies, and television shows currently prominent in our own culture, I began to look more closely at the parallels that exist between the two and to wonder how and why these same types of stories have continued to hold their audiences spellbound across the centuries. Before I enter into more detailed discussions of these questions, however, I must recognize that many in my own audience are unfamiliar with the tale of *Méhusine* as well as with the twenty-first century supernatural tales included in this paper; consequently, I am including short summaries of each major work I have

studied so at the end of this paper, in hopes that these appendices will acquaint my readers with the tales and make my insights into their parallels and appeal more apparent.

### Setting the Scene

Mélusine's story—like other medieval tales and, indeed, like many supernatural stories today—takes place in a land which is, at once, part of a very real medieval Europe and part of an otherworldly realm in which supernatural beings mingle with ordinary humans. We are introduced to this liminal land when Presine and Mélusine meet their husbands-to-be beside fountains, places which are often connected with magic in medieval romances; beside these magic fountains, the foundations of the tale are established: Elinas, held spellbound by Presine's song, finally comes out of his reverie near the fountain. He is very thirsty and, forgetting his previous desire to remain hidden, he comes down to the spring to take a drink. This act calls him to Presine's attention, after which the two begin talking and eventually agree to marry. The magical properties and bewitching beauty of the *Fontaine de Soif*, by which Raymondin encounters Mélusine and her attendants, are described more explicitly:

[S]ome called it the Enchanted Fountain, because there had happened there in olden times—at times even on a daily basis—many a wondrous adventure. The water came forth in a spot of most striking appearance; here was a wild, precipitous slope with great boulders above, giving onto a beautiful prairie skirting a valley; then rose the high timbered forest. The moon glowed brightly, and Raymondin's horse carried him...wherever it wanted, for Raymondin, plunged into his great despair, had no more direction in mind than if he'd been sound asleep. (D'Arras 91)

Raymondin, then, never consciously decides to come to the fountain; just as the spell of Presine's song draws Elinas to her fountain, Raymondin's horse—led, perhaps, by the lovely scenery lit by the glowing moon or perhaps by the Enchanted Fountain itself—brings him to Mélusine unawares. It seems clear, then, that both the fountains by which Presine and Elinas, then Mélusine and Raymondin, meet and the meetings themselves belong to the supernatural realm which is both separate from and included in the historical locale of medieval Europe.

Yet the forest-surrounded fountains we should “recognize as sites of exchange between the world of humans and creatures of the uncertain realms that lie beyond mortal ken” (Spiegel 100) are not the only liminal places present in the tale. After Elinas breaks his promise to Presine, she flees with her daughters to the “Isle of Avalon, also called the Lost Isle, because none could ever find their way back to it, no matter how many times they'd been there, except by chance” (D'Arras 67). The enchanted island of Avalon is present in many medieval romances, and it certainly adds to the liminal settings established in *Mélusine*. Kevin Brownlee points out another instance in which the story's liminal location highlights Mélusine's supernatural character:

The end of the reciprocal farewell scene between Mélusine and Raymondin is signaled as she changes her physical location, moving to a windowsill—an intermediate space that isolates her both from Raymondin and from the assembled courtly multitude. It is from this liminal space that Mélusine will deliver the last (and quantitatively different) part of her final speech, already, as it were, halfway between her human and her serpentine form, as she is (within the stylized spatial configuration of the scene) halfway between the floor and the sky. (90)

The interaction between Mélusine's character and her physical location that Brownlee emphasizes in this quotation helps confirm the interrelatedness between subject and setting which characterizes *Le Roman de Mélusine*.

The tradition of connecting supernatural characters and stories within liminal settings continues in late twentieth and early twenty-first century fantasy tales. For example, the small Washington town of Forks, the setting of the *Twilight* novels and films, is the perfect home for both vampires and werewolves: its persistently cold, damp weather enables the sunlight-sensitive vampires to come out during the day without attracting unwanted attention, and the nearby Quileute reservation provides an ideal setting for certain members of the tribe to pass on the genetic and cultural heritage that enables their descendants to become shape-shifters. Similarly, the Louisiana town of Bon Temps, the setting of the *True Blood* series, is steeped in history; its connections with Civil War battles and hoodoo witchcraft, among other things, contribute to its evolution into a center of vampiric and other supernatural activity. Melissa Ames highlights two additional examples of fantasy-story locales which connect with their supernatural characters: she describes the fictional town of Fell's Church, in which L. J. Smith's series *The Vampire Diaries* takes place, as a "center of paranormal activity" (47) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s setting of Sunnydale as a "city prone to supernatural monstrosities" (49). Even in the *Supernatural* television series, which takes place not in one city but across all of the continental United States, brothers Sam and Dean Winchester frequently return to fight supernatural forces in Lawrence, Kansas, the city where they were born and where the yellow-eyed demon killed their mother, beginning their life-long quests to fight evil. Thus, liminal settings act as critical elements in both the medieval and the modern supernatural tales, reflecting the tension between ordinary and extraordinary which is woven throughout each of the stories.

## Powers, Curses, and Creatures of the Supernatural World

Liminal settings lay the foundations for tales of the supernatural and initiate us into the alternate worlds in which these stories take place. In the supernatural worlds these tales create, we encounter a variety of characters and creatures with singular abilities and become subject to the systems of law that govern them. It is not our place to question these tropes but to accept them; for example, though few details are given concerning Presine's fairy nature—we are never told who her parents are, whence she came, or why she is singing at the fountain—we discern, almost immediately, that she is more than human. Because she is more than mortal, her melodious voice enchants Elinas so that he knows not "*s'il est jour ou nuit, ou s'il dort ou veille*" (D'Arras 58), and the richly-ornamented harness belonging to Presine's attendant further confirms her status as a fairy, for the fairies of medieval lays generally possess great wealth.

As a fairy, Presine lives under supernatural law, and her half-human daughters soon come under its influence as well. When Mélusine, Melior, and Palestine imprison Elinas in the enchanted mountain of Brumborenlion—which seems to be already enchanted when the girls hatch their plan, though they still must use their "*faee condicion*", to imprison him inside it (D'Arras 68)—Presine is so infuriated that she curses them. She reveals that her daughters "would have been subject to supernatural law—that of nymphs and fairies—for only a short time, never to return to it" if they had not committed the wicked act of imprisoning Elinas in the mountain (D'Arras 71). This idea of supernatural law is an intriguing one for, though Presine claims that it was from Elinas that she "took all pleasures in the world of mortals," she blames her daughters' misdeed on the human nature they inherited from her beloved husband (D'Arras 71). This seems to imply that, though Presine still loves Elinas deeply, she acknowledges that he is partially to blame for what has happened; after all, he did break his promise to her, and he



passed his human weakness on to his daughters. It also seems to indicate that the law, rather than Presine's anger, is the reason behind the girls' curses, yet Presine uses the first person when naming the origin of their punishments: she says, "*Mais desormais je te donne le don*" (D'Arras 71, emphasis added). As in Marie de France's *Lanval*, fairies seem to be able, in some circumstances, to break the supernatural law which governs them: Lanval's beloved returns to him although he breaks the condition of their relationship, and Presine decides to eternally subject her daughters to the fairy laws although they should have eventually become exempt from them. Ironically, though Presine is powerful enough to bend supernatural law to punish her daughters, she is unable to break Elinas free from the mountain where their daughters have imprisoned him.

The curses by which Presine subjects her daughters to supernatural law are also critical among the fantastic elements in the story. Presine reprimands Mélusine because, as the eldest daughter, she "should have been the wisest" but instead encourages her sisters to join her in her wicked scheme against Elinas (D'Arras 71). Consequently, Presine punishes Mélusine first, cursing her to become a serpent from the waist down every Saturday, though allowing her to marry and give birth to a noble line and even giving her the chance to live a normal, mortal life (aside from her serpent tail) if her husband meets the conditions placed on their marriage. It seems significant that Presine places this curse on Mélusine—at whom she is most angry—since, of the three punishments she assigns her daughters, this one most resembles her own fate. Presine and Mélusine both love their human husbands dearly, though both husbands break the conditions placed on their marriages and, as a result, throw mother and daughter into the greatest despair. Presine and Mélusine also give birth to children who possess a mixture of human and supernatural qualities and who, both directly and indirectly, bring about their separation from



their husbands. Possibly Presine chooses this punishment for Mélusine because, having undergone similar trials herself, she knows just how bitter this fate may be, yet we could also argue that Mélusine's curse is less severe than those placed on her sisters: Melior must stand watch over a sparrow-hawk for the rest of her days, granting material gifts to worthy knights, while Palestine must remain locked inside a mountain, guarding her father's treasure, until a knight of her lineage arrives to free her. Thus the younger sisters escape the heartbreak Mélusine suffers, but in exchange must live lonely lives; if the old adage "It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all" holds any truth, then Melior and Palestine actually suffer worse punishments than their older sister endures.

Among the myriad characteristics that mark Mélusine as a supernatural character is her gift of prophecy; she has intimate knowledge of both past and future events which no other character in the tale possesses. For instance, when Raymondin excuses himself for being too preoccupied to notice Mélusine and her attendants on the grounds that he is tired from his long ride, she chides him for not telling her the truth, revealing that she already knows all about him. She calls Raymondin by name—though he has not introduced himself—and says, "*Je sçay bien comment il vous va*" (D'Arras 94). Mélusine goes on to reveal her power, as well as her knowledge, saying

In Heaven's name, Raymondin, I am second only to God in being able to advance your interests in this world of mortals; indeed 'tis I who can help you out of your adversity and transform your evil deed into good. What's the use of pretending? I know very well that you killed your lord in error. For although it might look as though you had meant to do it, at that moment you had not dreamed of doing such

a thing. And I know, as well, all the words that he had said to you, with his knowledge of the stars. (D'Arras 95)

Raymondin marvels that Mélusine knows all about him and wonders why she seems so eager to help rectify his situation; after she assures him that she is “part of God’s scheme and...believe[s] everything that a good Catholic should believe”—and after he remembers his uncle’s promise that he will prosper—Raymondin accepts Mélusine’s supernaturalism and agrees to marry her (D’Arras 97). Thus Raymondin helps bring Mélusine more fully into the human world, where she may fulfill the prophecy—namely that she will give birth to a noble line—included in her curse. Mélusine later demonstrates her supernatural abilities by prophesying how Raymondin will regain the inheritance and the reputation of his father, Hervé de Leon, from the hands of Josselin de Pont de Leon: she tells Raymondin exactly how Josselin framed Hervé many years before, and gives Raymondin precise information about who will help him and who will fight against him on this quest. Raymondin respectfully promises to follow his wife’s instructions exactly, saying “*Madame, je feray mon povoir d’acomplir vostre commandement*” (D’Arras 152) and, because he does as she says, he triumphs over his foes.

Raymondin soon sees more proof of Mélusine’s supernatural powers: like her fairy mother, Mélusine possesses great wealth. When Mélusine and Raymondin marry at the *Fontaine de Soif* soon after their first meeting there, Mélusine and her entourage prepare splendid tents for and give costly gifts and jewels to their guests. They also manage to decorate the chapel with priceless tapestries, censers, Gospel books, and the like, and they serve an amazingly sumptuous wedding feast, despite the fact that no one in the land has ever seen or heard of Mélusine before her marriage to Raymondin. The fact that Mélusine and her attendants manage all of this without outside help strongly suggests that Mélusine organizes the wedding celebration by

means of the magical powers she formerly employed to imprison her father. Similarly, Mélusine's construction of the fortress of Lusignan reveals her supernatural gifts: her workers build the walls and towers so quickly and so well that all who pass by are "dumbfounded"—*"tous ceulx qui par la passoient en estoient esbahiz"* (D'Arras 142-143). In fact, the very name of the city she establishes reveals her supernatural gifts, as the count of Poitiers points out when Mélusine christens the city "Lusignan." He says: "This name suits it, for two reasons. For you are called Mélusine of Albanie, or Scotland, and Albanie, in Greek, means 'that which never fails,' and Mélusine means 'wonder' or 'wondrous.' This fortress was founded in a wondrous way, and I believe that as long as it lasts...wondrous events will take place here" (D'Arras 145). Mélusine, then, demonstrates her supernatural abilities in both deed and name.

The wealth and splendor comprised in the supernatural world of *Mélusine* are also apparent in several contemporary tales. In the *Twilight* series, the Cullens seem to have limitless wealth and own the best of everything: a beautiful home, designer clothes, a fleet of very expensive cars, and even their own tiny island off the coast of Brazil. The Volturi are even richer: they possess their own city, complete with an ancient castle, and an impressive collection of wealth and jewels, from which they send Bella a wedding gift: a necklace set with "a white diamond the size of a golf ball" (*Breaking Dawn* 532). To be sure, the werewolves—who are also part of the supernatural world—do not share this wealth; in fact, their tendency to destroy clothing and shoes when they transform before undressing forces them to dress rather shabbily most of the time, and the reservation on which they live is hardly noted for its affluence. Yet the werewolves—unlike the fairies in medieval tales or the *Twilight* breed of vampires—are also mortal, so perhaps they simply do not have time to accumulate the riches possessed by their counterparts.

In *True Blood*, vampire sheriffs Eric and Godric enjoy similar wealth: Eric's vampire bar, "Fangtasia," seems to do a lucrative business (and his wealth is presumably boosted still higher with his criminal activities and his ability to glamour humans and exact tribute from vampires within his jurisdiction), and Godric resides in a mansion decked out in sleek, expensive furniture. Sophie-Anne, the vampire queen of Louisiana, lives in an even more magnificent mansion, dresses in opulent clothing during leisure activities, and pays well to keep a seemingly endless supply of attractive humans who are willing to share their blood with the queen and her vampire guests.

Though the television series *Supernatural* does not necessarily highlight the wealth of its supernatural characters, it does provide an interesting twist on some of the supernatural elements portrayed in *Mélusine*, *Twilight* and *True Blood*. Like the other works, it operates on the premise that fairy tales are real, this fact does not seem to foreshadow the happy ending generally associated with fantasy stories. Rather than generous fairies who help advance their husbands' interests or "vegetarian" vampires and "Protector" werewolves concerned with keeping nearby humans safe, the supernatural characters that Sam and Dean Winchester encounter are blood-thirsty monsters, vengeful witches, and evil demons. Unlike benevolent shape-shifters *Mélusine*, Sam Merlotte, and the Quileute werewolves or moral vampires like Bill Compton and the Cullens—who generally endeavor to use their supernatural abilities for good—the fantastic creatures in *Supernatural* are almost always evil, feeling contempt for the humans they meet and rarely hesitating to maim or kill them. Of course, there is at least one exception to the evil norm of supernatural beings—Castiel, the angel who befriends the Winchester boys and aids them in their fight against Lucifer—but he seems to be the exception that proves the rule in *Supernatural*.

In addition to the series' overwhelming majority of evil supernatural creatures, it differs from the other stories in that both of its main characters, Sam and Dean Winchester, are fully human (though they are, to be sure, possessed, intoxicated with demon blood, or infected with ghost diseases from time to time), whereas the main characters in *Mélusine*, *Twilight*, and *True Blood* are (or at least become) supernatural beings. Despite being human, however, the Winchester brothers are very much a part of the supernatural world. In fact, they seem almost more at home there than they do among ordinary humans: the brothers live in their car while they fight monsters, insuring that they never settle down and have few deep relationships with other humans; they befriend, by turns, angels and demons, and are well known as hunters by a variety of supernatural creatures; they journey to both Heaven and Hell and are raised from the dead on several occasions; and their family is cursed by the interference of the yellow-eyed demon and by the part it's destined to play in the Apocalypse. Their involvement with the supernatural world may not change their humanity, but it does, arguably, raise them to somewhat superhuman status; just as Batman becomes a superhero using the resources he has at hand—rather than innate abilities to fly or become invisible, for example—so Sam and Dean Winchester use their supernatural-hunting expertise to transform themselves into sorts of demigods capable of opposing the monsters they encounter. Because of their close connections with the supernatural world, the main characters in *Supernatural* remain a valuable part of this study, despite the differences between their story and the supernatural romances *Mélusine*, *Twilight*, and *True Blood*.

### **Supernatural Bodies**

Within all of the aforementioned tales, the conception of supernatural characters as

monsters is also a common (and commonly debated) theme among fantasy tales. The title character of *Mélusine*, for example, is cursed to transform into a half-serpent each Saturday and, after Raymondin denounces her in front of the court, she adopts a fully serpent body “some fifteen feet in length” (D’Arras 609). Mélusine’s hybrid body is the source of a great deal of tension in the tale, for it invites debate over whether she is truly good or evil, superhuman or subhuman. Stephen G. Nichols identifies several points which seem to confirm Mélusine as a monster, from her name to her attributes; he writes that

Jean [D’Arras] brilliantly succeeds in co-opting under the particular name, “Mélusine,” associated with the Lusignan family by parochial and largely unrecorded legend, an anonymous category, the “lamia,” a species of female monster, of which there exists a long and voluminous tradition from the late classical period down to Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and John Keat’s striking poem, “Lamia” (1819). (140)

Nichols also finds in Mélusine four characteristics associated with demons that seem to confirm her status as a monster: she possesses an “irresolvable duality” for we can never be certain of her true nature; she (and her romance with Raymondin) seem to fit into a pattern of “compulsive repetition” consistent with her dual nature; she compels a “distorting perception” by making Raymondin promise not to look at her on Saturdays or to tell anyone if he does see her, “thereby suggesting that there is ‘something dirty’ or discreditable to see”; and her appearance is one of “illusion,” for when Raymondin peers at her body through the door he sees, “[i]n place of the anticipated erotogenic body...the monstrous hybrid: a female torso terminating in a lithe and outsize phallus displaced as a fish’s tale” (142-143). He also cites three illuminations of scenes from *Mélusine* which depict the “dual representation of Mélusine in her human form as beautiful



woman and as a rampant, miniature dragon” and concludes that Mélusine is “technically a monster, that is a hybrid, born of mixing the demonic and human categories represented respectively by Presine and Elinas” (Nichols 151-152). Other scholars have shared the belief that Mélusine is a monster: Gabrielle M. Spiegel, in reference to Mélusine’s decision to imprison Elinas in the enchanted mountain, writes that in this “contest between humanity and animality, it is animality that triumphs” (Spiegel 108). She also highlights the various physical flaws with which Mélusine’s sons are born, identifying them as “physical testimony to the monstrous (if not actually demonic) maternity that gave them life” (Spiegel 109). In the conclusion of her essay, she writes

Written toward the end of the Hundred Years’ War, the *Roman de Mélusine* confronts the crisis of legitimacy and the bestiality that lie at the heart of that age. In tracing the descent of the Lusignan into animality, Jean articulates the belief that there is nothing more monstrous than *l’homme animalisé*.... Yet the very ambiguity with which he sets forth this critique makes even this statement problematical. (Spiegel 118)

As these scholars point out, it is conceivable that Mélusine’s character should be considered a monstrous or even demonic one, yet the doubt conveyed in Spiegel’s conclusion—that, despite Mélusine’s assumption of a serpent body, categorizing her as a monstrous animal is “problematical”—also reminds us that there are other ways of interpreting Mélusine.

While Mélusine’s hybrid body is undoubtedly a cause of tension in the tale, some have seen this tension, rather than the portrayal of Mélusine as a monster, as the author’s true design. According to this view, it is her “hybrid status—both inside and outside history—that allows the figure of Mélusine to lend prestige and authority to the Lusignan lineage, while at the same time



legitimizing the appropriation...of the fortress of Lusignan by Jean de Berry, Jean d'Arras's patron" (Brownlee 76). For example, when Raymondin spies on the bathing Mélusine and discovers her serpent tail, we are meant to sense the tension between the erotic image of a bathing woman and the more ominous sight of a woman who is part snake. In other words, the "spectacle of Mélusine's monstrous body is juxtaposed to Raymondin's construction of her in poignantly human terms, by means of courtly discursive conventions. At the same time, Mélusine as female fairy monster is de-eroticized, while Mélusine as courtly human is re-eroticized" (Brownlee 83-84). Though Raymondin witnesses his wife's transformed body, he walks away desiring not to shame her by revealing her curse but rather to protect her secret so he may remain with her. Later in the tale, when he blames Mélusine for giving birth to monstrous offspring—in this instance, Geoffroy, who has killed Fromont and the monks at Maillezais—the tension is present once again; though Mélusine's sons do bear marks that could prove their monstrous maternal lineage, the fact that Raymondin mourns the loss of Fromont *because of his innocence* reveals that Mélusine's sons have not uniformly inherited an evil nature, as Raymondin claims (Brownlee 87). Thus Raymondin's condemnation of his wife is "a literally correct but spiritually inadequate description of Mélusine" (Brownlee 87). The scene of betrayal seems to cast Raymondin as the transgressor and Mélusine as the one wronged; rather than presenting her as an evil monster, she appears strangely human, and is only forced to assume a fully serpent body because of Raymondin's unfaithfulness. Brownlee points out that "Mélusine's final speech in her human body—from the liminal space of the windowsill—involves a series of increasingly intense and explicit affirmations of the different aspects of her human identity," including her Christian piety and her human ancestry (Brownlee 91). Even when she flies from the window and leaves Lusignan after Raymondin's betrayal, Mélusine

retains her human love and grief, letting out “such a strange and mournful cry that all [weep] for pity” as she circles the castle, showing that she is not a monster but rather a “lady, in the form of a serpent” (D’Arras 609). Mélusine’s final transformation, then, is “not definitive but open-ended. And as such, it serves to illustrate (to ‘embody’) a particularly fourteenth-century poetics—and politics—of hybridization” (Brownlee 96). We cannot separate her monstrosity from her humanity in order to condemn her, for the two are too intimately connected; we may, at times, recoil from the marks of her non-humanness, but we ultimately relate to her humanity.

This balance between two natures—one monster, one human—is also present in contemporary supernatural tales. Like Mélusine, the *Twilight* werewolves shift from a human form to a bestial one, though they have some control over when their bodies transform and, whereas Mélusine becomes a serpent only from the waist down at first, they always change completely. In the final book of the series, one of the Volturi reveals the true nature of the shape-shifting Quileute pack:

Though the creatures think of themselves as werewolves, they are not. The more accurate name for them would be shape-shifters. The choice of a wolf form was purely chance. It could have been a bear or a hawk or a panther when the first change was made. These creatures truly have nothing to do with the Children of the Moon. They have merely inherited this skill from their fathers. It’s genetic—they do not continue their species by infecting others the way true werewolves do....They are creatures of our supernatural world. (*Breaking Dawn* 704-705)

Mélusine’s shape-shifting is a curse rather than a genetic inheritance, but Mélusine and the *Twilight* wolves may both trace their shape-shifting capabilities back to their parents. In fact, most of the wolves, at one time or another, would likely refer to their abilities as a “curse,” too:

their transformations cause strains in their relationships with ordinary humans, their tendency to transform when angry sometimes ends in them injuring the ones they love, and, when in wolf form, they are forced to share all their thoughts with the pack and to follow unconditionally the orders of their leader. When Jacob reveals his secret to Bella, for example, he tells her that the pack's shared mind "really helps when we hunt [vampires], but it's a big pain otherwise. It's embarrassing—having no secrets like that" (*New Moon* 317). Although they take wolf forms, can hunt based on instinct, and experience increased aggression, the wolves retain their human abilities to reason and their human emotions; thus they, like Mélusine, possess a dual nature which causes tension in the series but does not actually strip them of their humanity.

This theme continues in the *True Blood* series, where shape-shifters Sam Merlotte and Daphne Landry also shift from human forms into animal ones. We are never told how they inherit their abilities but what little we know of Sam's childhood seems to indicate that he, like the *Twilight* wolves, inherited his abilities from his biological parents and discovered them during puberty. It is clear, though, that Sam and Daphne have more freedom than the *Twilight* wolves or Mélusine: they can not only transform whenever they want to, but also can assume any animal form they choose, so long as they have looked closely at the animal beforehand. Despite the animality of their transformations, they paradoxically remain human, for they, too, retain their human thoughts and personalities when they transform.

The good vampires in these two contemporary series also manage to retain elements of their humanity, and these elements both contribute to the conflict in the stories and add to their appeal. The Cullen family, for instance, is distinguished from other vampires by their decision to abstain from drinking human blood, a choice which enables them to assimilate in the world of ordinary humans. They drink animal blood not to preserve their own safety but to save the

people living around them; their abstinence becomes a “marker of morality” in the series (Platt 79). Their moral decision to spare human lives is based on a human idea, not a vampire one; other vampires—even relatively civil vampires like those whom the Cullens assemble as witnesses in the final book of the series—are not bothered by the thought of killing humans; it is merely something they must do to survive. All vampires possess superhuman instincts and abilities: they are fast and strong, are nearly impossible to kill, and are the ultimate predators. Despite sharing these characteristics, the Cullens’ comparative humanity throws them into sharp contrast with their peers; even their eyes—golden instead of red because of their alternative diets—are different from those of other vampires. “These eyes,” according to Kathryn Kane, “represent Edward and the Cullens’ triumph in terms of rationality and morality. When Bella first meets vampires outside of the Cullen family, she is struck by their animalistic qualities, their ‘catlike’ gait, and their ‘hair filled with leaves and debris,’ but what most frightens Bella is their eyes” (108).

Like the Cullens, vampire Bill Compton has qualms about killing humans. Though he occasionally drinks from humans without killing them, he prefers to drink only Sookie’s blood (because it adds to their intimacy) or the manufactured True Blood beverages which satisfy the nutritional needs of vampires and enable them to “come out of the coffin” and mix openly in human society. Bill decides to “go mainstream,” or live among humans, and reestablishes a residence in Bon Temps, where he lived before he was made a vampire during the Civil War. Bill’s decision to assimilate and his monogamous relationship with Sookie distinguish him from other vampires and prove that he has retained parts of his humanity. Even vampire sheriff Eric Northman, who became one of the undead over a thousand years ago, shows human love (though

he refuses to call it that) and loyalty to his maker, Godric, proving that at least some vestiges of his humanity remain after centuries of living at odds with human civilization.

Castiel, in the *Supernatural* series, is an angel and has thus never been human. As he develops a relationship with the Winchesters, however, he comes to doubt his orders from above—especially those that put little value on human lives—and he develops a growing compassion for humans. Castiel becomes increasingly human as he works with Sam and Dean to prevent Lucifer from escaping Hell's gates and beginning the Apocalypse; because he sides with the humans, he is cast out of heaven and loses some of his supernatural powers. Like the supernatural characters in the previously-mentioned tales, Castiel limits his own supernatural strength by allying himself with humans, by accepting their morals, and by valuing their lives. In each of these stories, then, the supernatural characters are bodily distinct from humans, yet retain elements of humanity, and it is this dualistic balance which supplies the necessary conflict in their plots and allows the audience to connect with their characters.

### **The Bonds of Love**

Audiences feel still more connected with the supernatural characters in the tales as a result of the romantic relationships these characters develop with humans: for example, romances spring up between the fairy Presine and the human king Elinas, as well as between human waitress Sookie Stackhouse and vampire Bill Compton. There are, of course, different story-telling conventions between the medieval and contemporary tales, yet the overarching romances between mortals and immortals, humans and non-humans connect the tales from these distant time periods.

Unique to the medieval tales is the focus on conditional marriages between supernatural characters and mortals. This trope appears, for example, in Marie de France's *Lanval*, in which a

beautiful fairy grants a poor knight both her wealth and her love on the condition that he never reveal his relationship with her. The trope is also present in the agreements into which both Presine and Mélusine force their husbands-to-be in *Le Roman de Mélusine*. These medieval romances hinge not only on the conditions they form but also on the promises which the human lovers invariably break: Lanval speaks of his beloved, Elinas walks in on his wife and daughters, and Raymondin publicly denounces his wife as a serpent.

These broken promises serve, in my opinion, as further proof that Jean D'Arras, like other medieval authors, intentionally imbues his supernatural characters with redeeming qualities that prevent them from becoming mere monsters, for these medieval authors depict the human characters, rather than the supernatural ones, as blameworthy in their marital conflicts. When Elinas enters the forbidden room where Presine is bathing her three daughters, Presine is horrified and cries out, "*Faulx roys, tu m'as faille de convenant, dont il te mesavenra, et m'as perdue a tousjours mais*" (D'Arras 64). Elinas is the "faulx roys," or false king, and because he has broken his promise, they must be separated forevermore. Similarly, Raymondin is portrayed as the wrong-doer when he denounces Mélusine; his "verbal transgression...[is] a literally correct but spiritually inadequate description of Mélusine" (Brownlee 87). Raymondin and Geoffroy Great Tooth later atone for their crimes against Mélusine by following the penances outlined for them by the pope and other religious authorities, further confirming the idea that the shape-shifter Mélusine, rather than her human husband and son, is in the right: even the Catholic church affirms her character by acknowledging that Raymondin's outburst against her is unjust. The medieval trope of broken promises in contractual romances between humans and supernatural figures is critical to the series of events which eventually occur in *Mélusine* and similar tales, providing a main source of conflict which drives these stories forward.



Contemporary supernatural tales like *Twilight*, *True Blood* and *Supernatural* lack this particular element of medieval romance, and also seem to differ in terms of the genders of supernatural characters: female figures are generally the supernatural characters in medieval works like *Mélusine*, whereas the contemporary supernatural characters who develop romances with humans are generally male, such as the vampires Edward Cullen and Bill Compton or the shape-shifters Jacob Black and Sam Merlotte. It seems to me that this shift can be explained by the audiences the respective authors have in mind when composing their stories: while male fairies are certainly present in medieval tales (*Sir Orfeo*, for example, features a fairy king), supernatural characters are generally beautiful young women in possession of great wealth and power. This can presumably be explained by the fact that men were the predominant readers and writers of literature in the Middle Ages and, consequently, were more interested in reading about lovely female fairies than about male immortals. The opposite seems true for the contemporary tales: though their audiences include individuals outside these categories, the target market for the *Twilight* series is teenage girls. Given its audience, then, it is no surprise that the gender roles have flipped in the *Twilight* series, the assumption being that its readers will enjoy reading about and seeing a handsome, superhuman boy fall in love with an ordinary human girl precisely because they are themselves ordinary human girls. *True Blood* and *Supernatural* may have slightly broader target audiences, but nevertheless seem to be marketed toward women—especially as they frequently feature male actors posing shirtless—and both Stephenie Meyer and Charlaine Harris, the authors of the *Twilight* series and the Sookie Stackhouse books, respectively, are themselves women.

Ironically, given their largely feminine audiences, the contemporary tales of the supernatural seem more confined by stereotypical gender roles than do their medieval



counterparts. In *Twilight*, for example, the female lead character, Bella Swan, is presented as weak, vulnerable, and childlike (Platt 74-76), and her human body is “represented as clumsy, flawed, and inherently insufficient” compared to those of her vampire and werewolf friends (McGeough 87). In sharp contrast to *Le Roman de Mélusine*—in which the female fairy Presine defends Elinas from their angry daughters and the half-human, half-fairy woman Mélusine continually works to protect her husband and sons from misfortune—*Twilight*’s Bella is frequently portrayed as a damsel-in-distress who must be saved by her supernatural love interests, Edward Cullen and Jacob Black. At least one author has noted an additional stereotype exhibited in Meyer’s portrayals of Edward and Jacob as saviors and protectors for the feeble Bella, claiming that the “contrasting depiction of Bella’s suitors, with the white vampire as gentleman-hero and the native werewolf as an aggressive cad, accords to racialized stereotypes of white versus non-white behavior” (Wilson 68). While there are no deep, over-arching romances in *Supernatural*, the Winchester boys arguably play into some of the same traditional, chivalric stereotypes in their behavior toward fellow (female) hunters Ellen and Jo. Similarly, Sookie Stackhouse of the *True Blood* series—though far less helpless than Bella Swan (she reads human minds, radiates a mysterious electric current from her fingertips, and continually shows great courage against both human and non-human enemies)—must frequently be saved from danger by supernatural characters including Bill Compton, Sam Merlotte, Eric Northman, and Godric.

In spite of the differences which exist between the medieval and contemporary conventions in these supernatural romances, however, I have consistently been struck by the similarities between the tales: centuries after *Mélusine* was written, we are still telling stories about romances between mortals and immortals, and these stories contain many of the same

themes. In her essay “Taking a Bite Out of Love: The Myth of Romantic Love in the Twilight Series,” Tricia Clasen highlights four characteristics of romance between human and supernatural characters in this series which, I believe, also come to play in other supernatural tales discussed in this paper. The first “romantic myth” she discusses is that of love at first sight, stating that “instant attraction is the foundation of *Twilight*” and pointing out the powerful—if not quite romantic—connection between Bella and Edward from their first meeting, as well as the fact that “all of the Cullens formed instant connections with their mates” (Clasen 122). She also discusses the werewolf practice of “imprinting,” an instant and involuntary attraction to the individual’s soul mate (Clasen 122-123). This immediate romantic bond is also evident in *Mélusine*: Elinas is “so love-stricken that he [can] barely maintain his calm” when he speaks to Presine, and she consents to marry him on the spot, so long as he agrees to the condition she proposes (D’Arras 63-65). Likewise, Raymondin is “overwhelmed by [Mélusine’s] beauty” when they meet and, as soon as she assures him of her piety, he agrees to marry her and uphold the conditions she outlines (D’Arras 93-99). In the *True Blood* series, Sookie Stackhouse is immediately attracted to Bill Compton—the first vampire she has ever encountered—based on his combined novelty, good looks, and impenetrable thoughts. Bill, in turn, is interested in Sookie because she proves, from the first episode, to be remarkable in her compassion and beauty as well as in her ability to read human minds.

The second romantic myth Clasen highlights is the idea that love is eternal: in *Twilight*, “vampires mate for life...[and] for the wolves, imprinting suggests the same level of permanence” (Clasen 124). The conclusion of *Breaking Dawn* certainly implies that, having neutralized the Volturi threat, Bella and Edward, Jacob and Renesmee, and the other couples united instantly in the series will remain together forever. Although neither Presine nor

Mélusine may remain with their husbands after the men break the conditions on which their marriages are founded, both husbands and wives greatly mourn their separations: Elinas and Raymondin miss their wives until they die, and Presine and Mélusine will, presumably, continue to miss their husbands as long as they remain on earth. The *True Blood* series is still in progress, preventing us from knowing for certain whether or not Sookie and Bill will remain together forever, but their relationship has continued to withstand every obstacle—no matter how great—that it has yet encountered, giving the impression that they, too, will remain united in love as long as they exist.

Clasen's third romantic myth is the idea that romance is the most important relationship.

In the *Twilight* series,

Edward states that he has no desire to live if Bella die[s]. Upon her death, he plans to seek out a group of vampires called the Volturi...to destroy him. In *New Moon*, Bella's reaction to Edward breaking up with her also reveal[s] that loss of love is life-altering....The Cullens move away, leaving Bella so depressed that she is essentially nonfunctioning. Life holds little value for Bella without Edward. (Clasen 126)

Bella and Edward are so dependent on each other and on their relationship that separation, for them, is akin to death. This link between separation and death is also present in *Mélusine*; when Elinas breaks his promise to Presine and she leaves with their daughters, he is so brokenhearted that “[f]or a period of some eight years, he did nothing except grieve, moan, and sigh, greatly lamenting his loss of Presine whom he loved with true and faithful heart” (D’Arras 67). Presine, too, grieves ceaselessly for her lost love, mourning their separation so much that she curses her

own daughters for mistreating him. After Raymondin betrays Mélusine, she mourns the tragic effects their separation will inflict upon her, saying to her husband

Hadst thou not betrayed me, I'd have been spared from suffering and torment; I'd have lived out the course of my life like a normal woman, I'd have died a natural death, receiving all the sacraments. I'd have been entombed and buried in the church of Notre-Dame de Lusignan, and subsequently, rites marking the anniversary of my death would have been celebrated. But now thou hast cast me back into that dark penance into which I had been plunged for such a long time because of my misdeed. Now, because of thy betrayal, I shall have to endure that penance in suffering until Judgment Day. (D'Arras 599-601)

Though she, because of her curse, cannot literally die, she suffers greatly as a result of her separation from Raymondin and from the life she has built with him in Lusignan. Jean D'Arras makes it clear that Raymondin also suffers from this separation, writing that “even though [Raymondin] held out hope of seeing her again, the intensity of the pain in his heart was indescribable. And from that day forward, he was never again seen to laugh or show any sign of joy” (613). Raymondin's *joie de vivre* is henceforth absent in the tale—some part of him has seemingly died—and he soon isolates himself in Montserrat, where he remains until his literal death. Likewise, John and Mary Winchester—father and mother of Sam and Dean in the *Supernatural* series—are bonded by a love so great that, after the yellow-eyed demon kills Mary, John abandons his previous way of life and takes to the road. From her murder onward, he flirts constantly with death as he fights monsters and ghosts, recklessly heedless of his own safety and, at times, even the safety of his sons because the grief of his lost love is so great.

The fourth and final romantic myth Clasen finds in the *Twilight* series is the idea that “love requires mind reading,” or that one’s lover should know what they are thinking and feeling without having to be told (Clasen 128). She holds up the Cullen family as prime examples of this, linking the happiness of its couples—such as Jasper and Alice—to their ability to communicate nonverbally. Conversely, Bella and Edward struggle with this form of communication so much that the “primary conflict in their relationship stems from their misperceptions of each other’s intentions. Because Bella’s is the only mind Edward cannot read, their miscommunication stands out” (Clasen 129). Since their inability to sense their partner’s thoughts and emotions is problematic for Edward and Bella and since, when Bella learns to lift the shield that excludes Edward from her thoughts, he is overcome with joy and love, it seems clear that nonverbal knowledge of one’s romantic partner is prized in this series. Mélusine also demonstrates this type of knowledge about Raymondin; she knows his name and his grief about accidentally killing his uncle although he does not tell her, and it is because of this knowledge (and Raymondin’s faith that her knowledge does not spring from any malevolence) that the two eventually marry. In the *True Blood* series, this myth might at first seem to be disproven: Sookie, a Louisiana waitress who can read the minds of everyone in her town, is attracted to vampire Bill Compton precisely because she cannot read his mind, for she is tired of knowing what everyone thinks all the time; he, in turn, is intrigued by her insusceptibility to his vampire “glamouring.” Yet despite these obvious obstacles to their nonverbal communication, the two form critical mental links in other ways: when Bill saves Sookie by letting her drink his blood—which has healing properties—then drinks some of her blood to regain his strength, the couple forges a powerful connection. From this point onward, Bill can sense both Sookie’s whereabouts and her emotions and Sookie temporarily experiences the emotions and sensory perceptions of a

vampire. Though Sookie eventually returns to her former state of consciousness, Bill's permanent connection to her mind enables him to save her life as well as their relationship many a time.

### Family Ties

Unsurprisingly, these supernatural tales also highlight the significance of family ties among their characters, an element closely related to the romantic bonds integral to their plots. In *Le Roman de Mélusine*, for example, Mélusine's character and situation can only be understood in relation to her lineage: she inherits the fairy nature of her mother, Presine, an inheritance which gives her powers beyond those of mere mortals, yet she also inherits the human nature of her father, Elinas. Because Mélusine and her sisters wrongly imprison their father in Brumborenlion—a transgression which their mother blames on the human weakness they have inherited from their father, telling Mélusine that “*La vertu du germe de ton pere, toy et les autres, eust attrait a sa nature humaine*” (D'Arras 70)—Presine forces her daughters to remain subject to supernatural law thereafter, a curse which is only possible because Presine herself is a fairy. It is, arguably, because family connections are so important in this tale that Mélusine and her sisters are punished so harshly for sinning against their father; though he has broken his promise and brought great misery to Presine, he is still family.

Just as Mélusine, Melior, and Palestine simultaneously inherit the different natures of their parents, Mélusine's children also bear the marks of their mixed human and fairy descent. All of Mélusine's and Raymondin's sons except the youngest two are born with slight deformities documenting their not-entirely-human lineage: lion paw-shaped birthmarks, hairy moles, protruding teeth, and atypical numbers of eyes, among other oddities, give testament to the fact that the boys' mother is not a human. The sons are handsome in spite of their flaws, but



are certainly far from perfect; Geoffroy, like his mother and aunts before him, commits a great sin against the monks at Maillezais which is magnified because he commits it against his own family: his brother, Fromont, is among the monks' number. When Raymondin learns what Geoffroy has done, he grieves for Fromont and blames Mélusine for Geoffroy's crime, crying

Oh Geoffroy!... You had the finest beginnings in valor and chivalry—the greatest promise for attaining honor—of any prince's son living. And now you are completely undone because of your cruelty. By the faith I owe to God, I believe that that woman [Mélusine] is only an evil spirit. No fruit that she has borne will ever come to any good! Every child she has brought into the world bears some strange mark. (D'Arras 593)

Shortly thereafter, Raymondin denounces Mélusine as a “*tres faulse serpente*” (D'Arras 596), thus breaking the condition of their marriage and bringing about their permanent separation. The two interlocking rings Mélusine gives Raymondin for protection in battle and her promise to return to Lusignan three days before the fortress changes lords or one of her descendants dies demonstrate still further the critical importance of family ties within this work, as do Raymondin's quest to regain the honor stolen from his father, Hervé de Leon, and Raymondin's and Mélusine's sons' fraternal loyalties which enable them to defeat the Saracens and other enemies they encounter during their adventures together. Whether purely human or mixed human-supernatural figures, the characters in *Mélusine* undeniably form close family ties.

These bonds are echoed in contemporary supernatural tales like *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *Supernatural*. For example, the *Twilight* werewolves inherit their ability to change shapes from their fathers, and they refer to their fellow pack-members as their “brothers.” Similarly, the vampires in the Cullen family, though not biologically related, draw their identity from their



family unit: Carlisle, the eldest as well as the one responsible for turning his “son” Edward and wife Esme into vampires, is recognized as the father. The family’s strong bonds lie in strict contrast to the typical relationships between vampires, which are easily broken, leading one character to hypothesize that “abstaining from human blood makes us stronger—lets us form true bonds of love” (*Breaking Dawn* 603). Renesmee, like *Mélusine*’s children, shows clear physical evidence of her mixed heritage: she is immortal like her vampire father, Edward, while at the same time possessing a human heart like her mortal mother, Bella. In fact, her very name reveals the close bonds she has with her family: Renesmee is a combination of the names of her human grandmother, Renee, and her vampire grandmother, Esme, while her middle name, Carlie, is formed from the names of Carlisle, her vampire grandfather, and Charlie, her human grandfather.

Family ties are also critical to the plot of the *True Blood* series: vampires like Bill, Eric, and Jessica are closely connected with their makers, the vampires who turned them. When Godric—the vampire sheriff in charge of the Dallas area—goes missing, Eric enlists Sookie’s help to find him. Curious about why Eric is so eager to find Godric, Bill and Sookie eventually discover that Godric is Eric’s maker; he turned the former Viking, Eric, into a vampire over 1,000 years ago, and the two have a very close bond. While Bill is less fond of his own maker, the beautiful but heartless Lorena, he remains undeniably connected to her: when Lorena tries to sabotage Bill’s relationship with Sookie, he is unable to overpower her because of the bond between them. Bill is furious with Lorena but is powerless to break their connection and, because he resents their relationship so much, he resolves to be a better maker for his own young vampire charge, Jessica. Yet, as in *Mélusine*, supernatural characters are not the only ones linked by close bonds: Sookie and her brother Jason acknowledge that, though they often

frustrate one another, they must stick together and help each other in the midst of their trials. Both grieve deeply at their grandmother's death, and this grief helps them grow still closer. Sookie's best friend, Tara, is also closely connected with her mother, Lettie Mae, and her cousin, Lafayette; though all three get involved in various kinds of trouble, they continue to help each other out of difficult and dangerous predicaments, proving their convictions that families should stick together.

In the *Supernatural* series, too, family bonds play a critical role in driving the plot: John Winchester's quest to destroy evil supernatural beings, including the yellow-eyed demon, begins because the demon murders his wife, Mary. Sam and Dean, too, are drawn into the world of supernatural hunters as a result of their mother's murder, and their strong fraternal bond quite literally keeps them alive during their encounters with ghosts, werewolves, and other evil figures. Though Sam and Dean, like all siblings, have their differences, no disagreement is strong enough to separate them for long: the brothers even cheat death to be together. Their fraternal bond is echoed by that between the arch-angel Michael and the fallen angel Lucifer; in fact, Sam and Dean are chosen as Lucifer's and Michael's ideal vessels, respectively, precisely because of their close brotherly relationship.

### **The Fairy Tale Appeal**

So what is it about these supernatural tales—with their liminal settings, mythical characters, inter-species romances, and close family connections—that continues to captivate audiences across centuries, continents, and gender lines? The theories seem to be as varied as the scholars and thinkers who devise them, but several key philosophies consistently emerge. Part of the reason we read books (or watch films and television shows) from any genre is to escape from reality, if only for a moment. This desire to escape is especially present in

supernatural tales (whether they're termed "myths," "fairy tales," "romances," or something else altogether) because their worlds exist simultaneously within and outside of the so-called real world. For some, the desire to engage with these tales arises because they long to "escape from a mundane existence" (Clasen 119), while others sense that these supernatural stories represent a "challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told" (Campbell 1). People wish to move beyond their own immediate physical realities so they may ascertain truths outside of their limited experiences, and these tales make this possible by enabling audiences to love, laugh with, learn from, and live through their characters.

I have come to believe that we also love fairy tales and stories about the supernatural because they stretch our imaginations, allowing us to temporarily suspend the laws of science and the tenets of reason in order to regain a sense of mystery and wonder about our world. Bruno Bettelheim seems to have this sentiment in mind when he writes that "nothing can be as enriching and satisfying to child and adult alike as the...fairy tale" (5). Audiences, it seems, do not want everything to be predictable or explainable because we grow bored with always knowing what comes next; we want to dream about falling in love with beautiful fairies or handsome vampires, conquering monstrous foes, or exercising magical abilities, as the case may be. We become absorbed in these stories because we "sense that they can help us reach our destiny....[F]airy tales present a challenge, for within the tales lies the hope of self-transformation and a better world" (Zipes ix). These supernatural stories "carry the human spirit forward" (Campbell 7) and "create a vision of what 'ought' to be rather than what 'is'" (Clasen 120). One scholar goes so far as to say that this imagination-stretching is not merely a motivation for us to interact with these stories, but rather the essence of their existence, claiming

that “[a]s a romancer, [Mélusine] seeks to impose otherworld dimensions of seeing, seeing not what is really here but what desire foists on everyday reality, what desire wishes the world were like, for that’s what phantasm really means” (Nichols 149). Whether or not this aspect of supernatural tales forms their essence, it seems to be an unmistakable part of their allure.

Yet, paradoxically, I believe that these tales also fascinate us because they tell *our* stories, because we recognize that, despite their appearances, the characters in these tales are more like us than they are different. Though some argue that “[t]he figures in fairy tales are not ambivalent—not good and bad at the same time, as we all are in reality” (Bettelheim 9), I find the opposite to be true in the tales I’ve studied as part of this project. The fairies, vampires, shape-shifters, and other characters in *Le Roman de Mélusine*, *Twilight*, *True Blood*, and *Supernatural* battle the same dualities we face daily: good and evil, morality and immorality, love and hate, life and death. We sympathize with them because we, too, know what it means to have a dual nature: we possess reason, yet often act according to our emotions; we try to love others, but are often our most churlish around our closest family and friends; we, as the apostle Paul confesses, do not do the good we want to do, but instead do the very things we want most to avoid. Thus we can sympathize with the plights of those “monsters” who choose to fight their fates, though they may lose their battles in the end. We cheer for the vampires who choose not to kill humans, for the angels who question orders that don’t seem to reflect God’s goodness and love, and for fairies and magical half-serpents who decide to live with the humans they love though doing so puts them at risk for eternally broken hearts. Humanity, I believe, serves as the basis for the supernatural in these fantastic works: supernatural beings are deemed “good” or “bad” based on human standards of morality and conscience and, because these characters are held to the same standards we possess, we can recognize their humanity and relate to them in a

way we could not if they remained wholly separate and other. It is, then, a combination of the otherworldly and the ordinary, the supernatural and the human that seems to draw us to these tales about magic, monsters, and mythical beings; the duality of the settings and characters in these tales draws us because we also see duality in our own lives and that, in my opinion, is the true fairy tale appeal.

## Appendix A: Overview of *Le Roman de Mélusine*

Long ago, a noble king of Scotland, Elinas, went hunting in a forest near the sea. There he heard an enchanting song and, following the sound, came upon a beautiful woman. The king was so taken by her beauty and her song that he stood, rooted to the spot for a long while; when he finally moved again, the woman took notice of him and began to converse with him. King Elinas soon confessed his love to the woman, whose name was Presine, and she agreed to marry him on one condition: namely that, should they have children, he would never try to see her during her lying-in. He agreed, and Presine eventually gave birth to three daughters: Mélusine, Melior, and Palestine. Unfortunately, Elinas forgot his promise in his excitement to see his wife with their new children and entered her room unannounced. Because Elinas broke his promise, Presine took her three daughters and vanished, fleeing to Avalon.

Years later, when her daughters reach the age of fifteen, Presine takes them to a mountaintop from which they can see Scotland, revealing to them the inheritance they would have had had their father not broken his promise. Angered by this story, the sisters—led by the eldest, Mélusine—decide to imprison their father in an enchanted mountain in Northumberland known as Brumborenlion. The daughters use magic to carry out their misguided plan, then tell their mother what they have done to avenge her for Elinas's broken promise. Furious at their wicked deed—for she still loves Elinas very much—Presine curses her daughters: Mélusine is to become a serpent from the waist down every Saturday. She is permitted to marry, if her husband agrees never to see her on the days when she shifts forms or, if he does see her, agrees not to tell anyone. So long as he keeps this promise, she will live a normal, mortal life, and even if he doesn't, she will give birth to a powerful line. Melior, Presine's second daughter, is to be imprisoned in a castle in Greater Armenia to keep eternal watch over a sparrow-hawk. She may



grant to any knight who comes and keeps watch, on a certain night of the year, the material gift of his choosing. She can not marry, however, and should any knight request her hand, he will be cursed. Palestine, the youngest daughter, is to be enclosed in Mount Canigou with her father's treasure, remaining there until a knight of her own lineage arrives, uses the treasure to conquer the Holy Land, and sets her free. King Elinas remains imprisoned in Brumborenlion until his death, when Presine encloses him in a magnificent tomb guarded by a fierce giant.

The tale then shifts to the story of Raymondin, a noble young Breton who wins the love and respect of his good and powerful uncle, Count Aymeri. The count is very fond of hunting, and one day engages the help of his nephew and many other men to track a ferocious boar through the forest. The boar mauls several of the company's hunting dogs, putting up such a fight that some of the men become dismayed by its ferocity. Raymondin, however, becomes angry at the boar and, anxious that it should not disgrace the company by escaping, he turns his horse and gives chase. Count Aymeri, concerned for his nephew's safety, calls out to stop him; when Raymondin continues his pursuit, the count follows him and the two become separated from the rest of the men as the day turns to night. As darkness falls, Count Aymeri and Raymondin begin to set up camp. While Raymondin builds a fire, the count looks up into the sky and reads his fate in the stars: that very night, Raymondin will accidentally kill him and inherit his fortune and prestige. Aymeri tells his nephew what he has discovered, but Raymondin chides him and tells him he has many years left to live. Soon, however, the men hear the boar rustling in the woods and Raymondin leaps upon it, killing the boar but also inadvertently killing his uncle with his spear.

Appalled by what he has done, the grieving Raymondin flees through the forest, so blinded by his despair that he neither knows nor cares where he goes. In this state, he comes



upon three ladies bathing at the *Fontaine de Soif* but does not notice them. One of the ladies comes up to him and speaks to him, shaking him from his reverie. He is so taken aback by her beauty that he jumps off his horse and apologizes for his rude behavior, explaining that his present circumstances are very grave. The lady nods, for she knows of his difficulties, and tells him not to worry because she will help him. Astonished that she knows so much about him but taken in by her beauty, Raymondin agrees to let her help him as long as her motives are good. The lady—who is none other than Mélusine, daughter of Presine—assures him of her piety and goodness, and agrees to marry him and advance all his interests if he'll agree never to see her on Saturdays. He consents, and she tells him exactly what to do; he follows her instructions, and the two eventually wed and construct the noble fortress of Lusignan.

After they are married, Mélusine helps Raymondin reclaim the land and honor of his father, Hervé de Leon, from the vile Josselin de Pont de Leon. While he is engaged on this adventure, she finishes constructing the strong and lovely city of Lusignan. The two give birth, over the years, to ten handsome sons, most of whom are born with distinguishing marks: Urien, the eldest, has a short, wide face, large ears, one red eye and one greenish-blue; Eudes, the second son, has one ear that is larger than the other; Guy, the third, has one eye higher than the other; Antoine, the fourth, has a hairy, lion paw-shaped birthmark on one cheek; Renaud, the fifth, is born with only one eye; Geoffroy, the sixth, is known as "Great Tooth" because he has one tooth that sticks out nearly an inch; Fromont, the seventh son, has a hairy mole on one side of his nose; and Horrible, the eighth, has three eyes, is incredibly tall, and is so wicked that he kills two nurses before his fourth birthday. The last two sons, Raymonnet and Thierry, are not said to have blemishes or marks of any kind.

Mélusine and Raymondin love and raise their children as well as they can, and the young men have many adventures. Urien and Guy, for example, set out together to fight in a Crusade, eventually becoming the kings of Cyprus and Armenia, respectively. Antoine and Renaud, also seeking knightly honors, undertake a quest to save a maiden in peril, and come to inherit the dukedom of Luxembourg and the kingdom of Bohemia. Geoffroy Great Tooth—huge, brave, and cruel—conquers the wicked lords of Sion in Ireland to avenge their effrontery against his father, and aids his brothers Urien and Guy in another Crusade against the Saracens. Meanwhile, Raymondin is persuaded by his brother, the count of Forez, to spy on Mélusine one Saturday. He sees that, from the waist down, she has the body of a serpent, and he is greatly saddened because he feels he has betrayed his beloved by spying on her. Raymondin angrily bids his brother leave and, grief-stricken, awaits the return of his wife. Though she knows he has seen her, she does nothing, for Raymondin has not told anyone about her curse, and the two remain happy together.

The tale then returns to Geoffroy Great Tooth, who heroically defeats a cruel giant but then becomes so infuriated by the news that his younger brother, Fromont, has become a monk at Maillezais that he sets out for the abbey in great haste. When he arrives, he sets fire to the abbey, killing all the monks—including his brother—who are inside. Geoffroy then laments his wicked deed, and, when his father hears what has happened, his grief is so great that he becomes maddened and denounces his wife as a “*tres faulse serpente*” (596). With this remark, Raymondin breaks his promise to Mélusine, so she is overtaken with grief and is forced to leave forever, living in penance until Judgment Day for sinning against her father. She leaves final instructions—including the order that their wicked son, Horrible, be quietly killed to prevent great destruction—then she gives Raymondin two protective, magical rings and tells him the

story of her curse. When she finishes, she flies out of the window, turns into an enormous serpent, and departs, wailing in despair, for she still loves Raymondin with all her heart.

Haunted by his deed, Geoffroy Great Tooth embarks on another adventure, this time hoping to kill a giant at Brumborenlion who has been terrorizing those who live nearby. While Geoffroy pursues the giant, he comes across the glorious tomb of King Elinas and sees his mother's name there. He reads the story of her curse and discovers that the giant had been stationed there to guard the place until one of Mélusine's descendents comes to drive him away. Geoffroy defeats the giant, then learns of the tragic parting of his parents. Rather than blaming himself for all that has occurred, he feels that his uncle, the count of Forez, is at fault for encouraging Raymondin to spy on Mélusine. So Geoffroy confronts his uncle, and the count, afraid for his life, tries to flee from Geoffroy; in so doing, he falls from the roof and dies on the rocks below. Raymondin, greatly saddened by this news, seeks reconciliation with Geoffroy to prevent further catastrophe. Then Raymondin—bequeathing Lusignan to his youngest son, Thierry, as Mélusine had instructed him to do—leaves to live the life of a saintly hermit at Montserrat in Aragon. He remains there until his death, and is fully reconciled with his son Geoffroy, who continues to defend his father's honor.

The tale concludes with the story of one of King Guy's descendents in Armenia. This young king hears tell of a beautiful lady, imprisoned in a tower, who stands guard over a sparrow-hawk and will grant any material gift to a knight who holds vigil there for three days and three nights without falling asleep. Though he knows it is not permitted, the knight intends to ask for the lady's hand in marriage, and accordingly sets out for the castle and completes the trial. When the lady asks him what he wants, he asks for her love; though she warns him to reconsider his request, he persists, and consequently a curse falls upon the king and his

descendants which remains even until the day when the author of the tale pens the account recorded in the "true chronicles" (717).

## Appendix B: Overview of the *Twilight* Series

The *Twilight* series focuses on Isabella, called Bella, Swan, a high school student who moves from sunny Phoenix, Arizona to the small, drizzly town of Forks, Washington to live with her father, Charlie. Charlie, the police chief, is good friends with Billy Black, a wheelchair-bound man of the Quileute tribe, and Bella has vague memories of playing with Billy's daughters and younger son, Jacob. However, the Blacks live on the nearby reservation, so Bella begins school without knowing a soul. That soon changes, of course, and she eventually comes in contact with the Cullen family. Dr. Carlisle Cullen and his wife, Esme, are young, wealthy, and extraordinarily beautiful, as are their five adopted children, Emmet, Rosalie, Jasper, Alice, and Edward. The Cullens are not very popular, however, especially among the Quileutes, and Bella can't help but notice their strangeness.

She becomes increasingly attracted to the youngest son, Edward, from whom she gets very mixed signals. Eventually, he saves her from a scary situation and she learns that he can read minds—all except hers, that is, an astonishing discovery which is soon eclipsed by the still more astonishing discovery that the Cullens are vampires who possess superhuman strength and live forever, unless they are killed (much like Tolkien's elves), a task which is very hard to perform. She also learns that Edward is particularly attracted to her scent; his strange behavior has been the result of his struggle not to harm her, for he is as interested in her as she is in him. Instead of being frightened by these discoveries, Bella is intrigued, for the Cullens are "vegetarian" vampires who survive on animal blood to avoid killing humans, and she firmly believes that Edward will never harm her. Her faith in Edward and his family is strengthened when they save her from a vicious (non-vegetarian) vampire named James, who tries to kill her to get to Edward.

Edward, on the other hand, is so alarmed by the danger he has put her in—from James, from James’s living mate, Victoria, and even from his own family—that he decides to leave Bella in order to keep her safe. Bella, who had hoped Edward would turn her into a vampire so they could be together always, is heartbroken when Edward leaves; during his absence, her friendship with Jacob Black is the only thing keeping her sane—until she discovers the reason the Quileutes hate Edward’s family so much: they’re werewolves, mortal enemies of vampires. Torn between Jacob and Edward—and faced, in the meantime, with death at the hands of the vengeful Victoria—Bella becomes increasingly desperate and takes up reckless behavior including motorcycle-riding and cliff-diving. Edward, mistakenly believing that Bella has died in one of these reckless acts, travels to Italy, where the vampire law-keepers, known as the Volturi, live, hoping to persuade them to kill him. When Bella learns about this, she risks permanent estrangement from Jacob to save Edward; though she successfully prevents his death, the Volturi learn about Bella. Intrigued by her ability to thwart their special gifts—like Edward’s mind-reading—they spare her life on the condition that the Cullens agree to change Bella into a vampire in the near future. Edward grudgingly consents, for he wants Bella to retain her humanity, and they return to Forks.

Back at home, Bella and Jacob try to save their precarious friendship, for Jacob confesses his love for Bella and she, though in love with Edward, can’t break off her friendship with Jacob because he has stuck with her through some rough times. The werewolves and vampires briefly put aside their differences to fight Victoria, who reemerges with a pack of about twenty newborn—and thus, especially bloodthirsty—vampires intent on killing Bella to avenge James’s death. The Cullens suspect that the Volturi are also somehow involved in this vampire attack, for they seem to fear the Cullen family; this suspicion is confirmed when the Volturi show up



just after the fight, and marvel that the Cullens have made it through unscathed, for they are unaware of the part played by the werewolves. The brief alliance between vampires and werewolves is broken, however, when Edward agrees to turn Bella into a vampire if she promises to marry him first, for Bella's transformation will break the pact between the Quileutes and the Cullens, essentially beginning a war between them.

Bella and Edward marry but, before Edward can turn Bella into a vampire, they discover that she is pregnant with a rapidly-growing, half-human and half-vampire child. About a month after conceiving, Bella gives birth to Renesmee, an extraordinary little girl who seems to embody the best characteristics of each of her parents; afterward, Edward turns Bella into a vampire to save her from her arduous delivery (for vampires are much stronger than humans). The werewolves are intent on killing the child until Jacob bonds with her through the mysterious process of "imprinting," after which his pack will no longer consider harming her. They soon face bigger problems when the Volturi—falsely assuming that Renesmee is dangerous and vowing to wipe out the Cullen family for bringing her into the world—journey to Forks with an army of "witnesses." Their plan backfires, however, when they learn that Renesmee is not dangerous and their witnesses discover that the Volturi have lied to them; ultimately the Cullens, the werewolves, and the many vampires who have decided to side with them pose such a threat to the Volturi that they leave without fighting, and the Cullens and the Quileutes remain, now safe and happy.

### Appendix C: Overview of *True Blood*

The HBO television series *True Blood*, based on *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* novels by Charlaine Harris, takes place in the Louisiana town of Bon Temps. Sookie Stackhouse, the main protagonist in the series, is a human waitress at Merlot's restaurant and bar. She can also, as it happens, read the minds of all her family, friends, coworkers, and customers—until the night Bill Compton, Bon Temps' first vampire, walks in, that is. Because Japanese scientists have developed a blood substitute—called True Blood—that satisfies the nutritional needs of vampires without requiring them to kill humans, this formerly-hidden group has now “come out of the coffin” to mix openly with humans. Though vampires are still markedly different from people—they cannot come out during the day, they're powerless against silver, they are remarkably strong and fast, they possess heightened senses, and they can “glamour” humans into thinking and acting differently—the vampires have begun to enter into mainstream business and politics, causing some humans to fear their growing influence.

Sookie is not one of these humans; she welcomes Bill immediately, waiting graciously on him and protecting him from two of her human customers who attempt to steal his blood (which can be sold on the black market as the powerful drug “V”). She becomes still more attracted to Bill when she learns that she can't read his mind, and he is equally intrigued to learn that he cannot glamour her; the two make a date to meet again and get to know one another better. Before they can, the humans who previously captured Bill corner Sookie and beat her to within an inch of her life as revenge for her preventing them from stealing Bill's blood. Bill arrives just in time to save Sookie and gives her some of his blood to help her heal, thus forming an intimate bond between them that enables Bill to know where Sookie is at all times and to sense her emotions. Sookie's boss, Sam Merlotte, supports vampire rights but is uneasy about the growing

romance between Sookie and Bill, for he has wanted to date Sookie for a long time. In fact, almost all of Sookie's friends, coworkers, and family members disapprove of her relationship with Bill; only her Gran encourages it, because she believes it makes Sookie happy.

Bill Compton's arrival in Bon Temps is not the only strange activity which takes place in the show's first season, however; a series of violent murders shocks the small town, and the police find evidence of vampire bites on each of the young, female victims. Bill Compton, the new vampire in town, is initially a suspect but when the police determine that the vampire bites did not cause their victims' deaths, Sookie's brother Jason—who is known throughout the town as a womanizer who's been involved in relationships with each of the dead women—becomes the chief suspect. In an attempt to clear her brother's name and find out who the real killer is, Sookie accompanies Bill to the vampire bar Fangtasia, where she is exposed to the sub-culture of humans who seek sexual relationships with vampires (“fang-bangers”) and learns about the hierarchy of power within the vampire community.

At Fangtasia, Sookie meets Eric Northman, the vampire sheriff of their region, and questions him about the murders in Bon Temps. Intrigued by Sookie's mid-reading abilities, Eric then commissions her to help him uncover a thief among his human employees; when she discovers that another vampire is to blame for the missing money, the culprit tries to kill her, but Bill saves Sookie by killing her attacker first. When Sookie and Bill return to Bon Temps, they find Sookie's Gran, Adele Stackhouse, murdered in her kitchen. Torn between his need to protect Sookie and his summons to appear before the Vampire Magister for his crime of killing a fellow vampire, Bill entrusts Sookie to Sam's protection while he goes to find out his punishment. During Bill's absence, Sookie discovers that there is more to Sam than meets the eye: she awakes during the night to find that the friendly dog she's invited into her house is

actually Sam, a shape-shifter who often adopts a canine form (though he can take others).

Meanwhile, Jason Stackhouse awakes to find his girlfriend, Amy, dead beside him; convinced that he somehow killed her while high on V (though he remembers nothing), he turns himself in. Sookie, greatly shaken up by all that has happened and fearing that she—a vampire sympathizer like all those who've been killed—will be next, embarks on another mission to clear Jason's name and find out who's really behind the murders. With Sam's help, she discovers a clue: the name Drew Marshall. During Sookie's search for the murderer, Bill is forced to change a young human girl, Jessica, into a vampire as punishment for killing another of his kind; after completing his sentence, he entrusts Jessica into Eric's care and speeds back to Bon Temps.

Sookie finally solves the mystery regarding the town's murders when Rene Lanier, one of her brother's closest friends and the fiancé of her coworker Arlene, drives her home from work: Rene forgets for a moment to guard his thoughts, and Sookie reads his mind, discovering that he is Drew Marshall, a fugitive who killed his own sister because he considered her a “fang-banger” and who, despite creating a new name and new life in Bon Temps, never got over his hatred of vampire-sympathizers. Rene/Drew reveals that he never meant to kill Adele Stackhouse; he'd come after Sookie, and her Gran had merely gotten in the way. Before he can kill Sookie, too, she flees. Sam comes to help her but Rene/Drew attacks him first, and Bill, sensing Sookie's danger, braves the sunlight to come to her aid. The sun scorches his skin, however, and renders him helpless; ultimately Sookie kills her attacker with a shovel, and she and Sam cover Bill with dirt to protect him from further sun damage.

In season two, a fully-recovered Bill is forced to accept responsibility for his new “daughter,” Jessica, and Sookie is pulled farther into the world of vampire politics when Eric asks for her help in finding Godric, a powerful vampire sheriff who has gone missing. She goes

with Bill, Eric, and Jessica to Dallas to help search for Godric, whom the vampires believe has been kidnapped by the radical, anti-vampire Fellowship of the Sun Church. Busy helping search for Godric, Bill and Sookie fail to realize the magnitude of events happening back in Bon Temps: Jason is recruited by and eventually joins the Fellowship of the Sun, and a maenad—one of the mythic wild women associated with the god Dionysus—named Maryann comes in search of Sam and causes great chaos in the town.

The action in Dallas comes to a head when Bill discovers Eric's motivation for finding Godric: the missing sheriff is Eric's maker, the one who turned him into a vampire over 1,000 years ago. Bill is reminded only too clearly of the powerful bonds between vampires and their makers when Eric, who longs for a more intimate relationship with Sookie, calls in Bill's maker, Lorena, to imprison Bill in his hotel room, thus preventing Bill from going to Sookie's aid when she is captured by the Fellowship of the Sun. When Eric goes to save her, he also finds Godric and learns that his maker was not captured but turned himself in to the Fellowship in an attempt to reconcile humans and vampires. Now the Fellowship wants to kill Godric, Eric, and Sookie, and the vampire community in Dallas is none too happy about it: they organize a force to destroy the Fellowship of the Sun, and only Godric's influence prevents a war between the two sides. When he learns of Sookie's danger, Jason abandons the Fellowship and comes to help rescue her; however Luke, one of the other Fellowship recruits, finds no similar reasons to sympathize with the vampires and sacrifices himself to the anti-vampire cause when he comes to Godric's home and detonates the silver-filled bomb strapped to his chest, killing several vampires and injuring many others. Eric is among the injured, having thrown himself in front of Sookie to save her; he exploits the situation by convincing her to suck out the silver bullets

which have lodged in his chest, thereby forcing her to drink some of his blood and forming a new connection with her.

Bill and Sookie are both furious with Eric, but soon discover that they have bigger problems: Godric decides to “meet the sun” at dawn, killing himself, and in the meantime, the situation back in Bon Temps escalates to new heights: Maryann is planning to sacrifice Sam to Dionysus as part of a mythical wedding ceremony uniting her to her god, and she enlists the entire town to help her accomplish her evil plan. Bill and Eric both seek the assistance of Sophie-Anne, the Vampire Queen of Louisiana, to learn how to put an end to Maryann’s mischief, and eventually Bill and Sam hatch a winning plan: they allow Maryann to sacrifice Sam but, as Sookie distracts Maryann, Sam drinks some of Bill’s blood—which allows him to heal—then shape-shifts into a large, white bull. Maryann, thinking the bull is Dionysus, runs to it and Sam gores her with his horns, killing her. The second season (which is as far as I’ve watched) ends on a cliff-hanger: Bill proposes to Sookie, who becomes flustered and retreats into the bathroom for a moment to calm down. While she’s in the bathroom, Sookie decides to accept Bill’s offer but, when she returns to tell him, he’s gone: he’s been kidnapped.



## Appendix D: Overview of *Supernatural*

The *Supernatural* television series, which originally aired on the Warner Brothers network in 2005 and now airs on the CW, follows the lives of the Winchester brothers, Sam and Dean. The brothers are “hunters”; after their mother mysteriously dies, young Sam and Dean go on the road with their father, John, an ex-Marine who now hunts monsters. They are raised on the road as their father drives around the nation, looking for cases of supernatural beings—vampires, werewolves, ghosts, demons, ghouls, and a host of other creatures—and, when he finds them, exterminating them. When the show begins, the eldest brother, Dean, is still hunting with his father, but Sam has broken away from the “family business” to attend Stanford, hoping to go to law school. He soon abandons this dream, however; he returns home to find his girlfriend, Jessica, has been killed in the same fashion as his mother, then rejoins his brother to chase evil creatures in their black '67 Impala.

Together, Sam and Dean fight a host of strange and terrifying beings, while John searches for clues that may explain his wife’s death all those years ago, eventually discovering that she was killed by a malicious, yellow-eyed demon. Sam, Dean, and John set out to kill the demon, but the plan is thwarted when Dean is injured, and John forfeits his own life to the demon in order to save his son. Sam begins to have headaches and visions, seeing peoples’ deaths before they happen, so the brothers seek to save these victims before they perish. They discover that Sam’s powers, like their mother’s death, are connected to the yellow-eyed demon, and enlist the help of family friend (and fellow hunter) Bobby Singer in finding and killing this demon. In the process, Sam and others like him—who were visited by the demon as infants and who fit into his plan to free the Devil—are kidnapped, and Sam is killed. Desperate to save Sam, Dean makes a deal with a demon: he trades his soul for Sam’s resurrection, and is left with only one year to

live. Bobby and the Winchester boys ultimately succeed in killing the yellow-eyed demon, but find that they now have bigger problems: not only is Dean running out of time, but the gates of Hell have also opened, and a host of demons escape before the hunters can shut them again.

Among the escapees are Lillith, a particularly evil demon bent on releasing Lucifer from imprisonment in Hell, and Ruby, an unusually civic-minded demon who offers to help the brothers fight Lillith and her army. Though the brothers—particularly Dean—are unwilling to accept aid from a demon given their history with supernatural creatures, Ruby helps them out of several sticky situations and the brothers grudgingly agree to include her in their scheme to overthrow Lillith. Unfortunately, Dean's year soon runs out, and not even Ruby can prevent hellhounds from dragging him into Hell. While Dean is absent from this earth, Sam continues hunting evil without him, and Ruby shows Sam how to kill Lillith: drinking demon blood makes him stronger. Though he knows Dean would have disapproved, the grieving and angry Sam justifies his behavior on the grounds that Dean is dead, and that he must kill Lillith so Dean's death won't have been in vain.

Miraculously, however, Dean comes back from Hell: he's been raised by an angel, Castiel, who tells him that his work on earth is not finished. Dean rejoins Sam, but the latter keeps his growing dependence on Ruby and her demon blood to himself to prevent a fight. Dean has a secret, too: time passes differently in Hell and, while he was only absent from earth for four months, his time in Hell was actually about forty years. Each day for the first thirty years, Dean was mercilessly tortured; during the final ten years, however, he agreed to torture other souls to escape from his own torment, and he became just as ruthless as those who had made him suffer. The brothers can't keep their secrets for long, however, especially after they learn that Dean's decision to torture souls in Hell broke the first of sixty-six seals needed to free Lucifer

from his fiery cage. With help from Castiel, Bobby, and Ruby, the brothers frantically try to prevent the seals from breaking. Sam's dependence on demon blood grows and grows, causing great conflict with Dean. The two ultimately split up, and Sam makes a huge mistake: he finally kills Lillith, only to find out that Ruby has betrayed him, for in killing Lillith, Sam breaks the final seal and releases Lucifer from Hell.

With Lucifer roaming the earth and a full-scale Apocalypse on hand, Sam and Dean assume that things can't get much worse...until they discover that the only way for the war between Heaven and Hell to end is a cosmic battle between Lucifer and the arch-angel Michael, who are destined to inhabit Sam's and Dean's bodies, respectively, when they fight this battle. The brothers spend most of Season 5 trying to escape their destinies, hunting the four horsemen of the Apocalypse in the meantime as part of a desperate plan to send Lucifer back to Hell. Castiel, who develops doubts as to why God hasn't yet stopped the battle and destroyed Lucifer, loses his angelic powers and, in the season finale (which is as far as I've watched, though a sixth season is currently on air) Sam consents to become Lucifer's vessel then leaps into the pit of Hell, hoping to trap him there.

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