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# Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady

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*Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady* (Leipzig: Institut für Buchkunst, 2022) is a 72-page hard-cover graphic novel, and is an adaptation of Vernon Lee's short story 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady', first published in volume 10 of *The Yellow Book* (July 1896).<sup>1</sup> This short story was Lee's only contribution to the magazine and utilizes gothic and decadent themes, such as possession, mythology, and the femme fatale in order to explore societal pressures, marginalization, and gender politics.

I first encountered Vernon Lee's work while researching ghost stories in my fifth semester at art school. What makes 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' especially suitable for a graphic novel is the centrality of the tapestry to the plot – the pictorial world of the tapestry is introduced in the first part of the fairy-tale and then fully explored as the tragic story unfolds. 'Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady' tells the story of an isolated prince who grows up in his grandfather's castle. He falls in love with a medieval tapestry, and through studying the detailed wall hanging, he learns about plants and animals – it is his window onto the world. One day, when some furniture is shifted, he discovers a captivating image of a snake-woman on it. The fairy-tale takes a strange turn when the prince is sent into exile and he recognizes his new surroundings from the tapestry.

When I was reading the fairy-tale, I was moved by its sensitivity and rich descriptive language. This inspired my full-page acrylic paintings which depict both the fantastical world of the story and the emotional intensity of Lee's narrative. My graphic novel is best understood as a free adaptation of the original short story. Since the fairy-tale is quite long, I gave myself the freedom to focus on aspects that would work well in a visual medium, shortening the story and cutting some of the characters. To me the central element of Lee's narrative is the tapestry and during my design process I looked at many tapestries from the nineteenth century and earlier. In



particular, the colour palette and floral imagery are inspired by the mille-fleur style of the late Middle Ages. Many of my paintings have a characteristic dark blue background. My use of hierarchical proportion is also based on medieval art. The scale of the figures often reflects their relative importance in the pictures, and the statues in the background mirror the main characters' emotions and sometimes even their actions.

I have kept the written text short in order to retain focus on the images, and the sentences are a part of my composition – they follow the movement in the paintings and sometimes disappear into them. To contrast with the experimental placement of the typography, I choose the traditional book font, Garamond.

The graphic novel is available via Institut für Buchkunst Leipzig, which is part of the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig. Contact [oestringer@hgb-leipzig.de](mailto:oestringer@hgb-leipzig.de) or the artist on Instagram [@onlymay](https://www.instagram.com/onlymay).

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<sup>1</sup> Vernon Lee's short story can be read at [https://1890s.ca/wp-content/uploads/YBV10\\_lee\\_prince.pdf](https://1890s.ca/wp-content/uploads/YBV10_lee_prince.pdf) [accessed 22 November 2022].

# Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady

Selected Images by the Artist



The tapestry is explored in detail.



Prince Alberic discovers the people on the tapestry.





Prince Alberic falls in love.



The Duke disapproves of the tapestry.





Oriana!

The Snake Lady transforms for the first time.



When the royal treasury was discovered to be empty, the bankrupt duke put his hope into finding a princess from

a wealthy family for Alberic to marry.

Alberic sternly declined.

Prince Alberic meets his suitors.