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Prelim Exam 2

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2. In an Aristotelian framework, distinction defines humans with respect to animals according to definitions that run along familiar lines: man is the animal who thinks, who laughs, who is political, etc. How do the human-animal interactions in your texts explore different, more capacious strategies for defining the human?

Animals abound in medieval European literature and textual culture. Their skins were used to produce manuscripts, their likenesses were drawn in the margins by scribes, and writers detailed their lives across a broad array of literary genres. In the latter, animal behaviors were moralized and categorized in bestiaries, they were allegorized in beast fables, and they were used, extolled, befriended and transformed in romances, *lais*, and saints' lives. The representations of animals in medieval narratives are often entangled with those of human characters, whose interactions reveal much about both groups, as well as the material worlds they inhabit. It is in these textual encounters that one can identify the myriad differences and similarities between humans and animals, and how these characteristics may serve as defining qualities for either or both. In Old French narrative, the wide variety of represented human-animal interactions allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how medieval writers viewed the categories of human and animal, and how these classifications are interdependent and intertwined.

### Defining Human

Perhaps one of the most intriguing texts to explore the category of the human is Pierre de Beauvais's bestiary. Broadly, a bestiary is a collection of brief entries, often influenced by much earlier writings such as the *Physiologus*, detailing the various "natural" characteristics of animals that are usually contextualized and rationalized through a Christian moralization. Pierre de Beauvais's long-version bestiary contains seventy-two entries, beginning with the Lion and

ending with the Orphan Bird. In addition to the descriptions of animals in de Beauvais's bestiary, the text includes a discussion of the human, which is located between the "Centaur and Wild Man" (Sagetaire et Salvage home) and the "Vulture and the Worm," (Voltoir et Liens).<sup>1</sup> While the entry does not establish a relationship between people and animals, its presence within the bestiary draws implicit connections between categories. Instead, the text defines humans in their material and elemental relationship with the world:

And you, human, whatever you may be—Christian, Jewish, or Pagan—you are made of four elements and the world of four elements, too. And it comprises for parts: East, West, South, and North. And the physical constitution of humans is of the four elements: skin is in place of earth, blood instead of water, breath comes from air, and bile takes the place of fire.

Et tu, hom, quels que tu es, cretiens, Juis ou paiens, tu es fais de .IIII. elements, et li mondes des .IIII. elements. Et si a .IIII. parties: Orient, Miedis, Occident et Septemtrion ; et la complexions de l'homme est des .IIII. elemens : la char d'ome est en lieu de terre, li sans en lieu d'aighe, li alaine li vient de l'air, la cole de lui est en liu de fu.<sup>2</sup>

At the core of human composition—the material, corporeal formation of the human—lies an elemental foundation shared with the earth.<sup>3</sup> Pierre's universalizing definition disregards religious and social boundaries, "quels que tu es," and categorizes all humans as sharing the same compositional traits. Humanity, as expressed by this text, is defined by the embodiment of the four elements—earth, air, water, and fire—and parallels the world in this way. Such an

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire: Version Longue*, edited by Craig Baker (Paris: Champion, 2010). All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> l. 56-62.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the importance of the elements in ecocriticism, see *Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire*, edited by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

elemental description is unique to humans in Pierre's *Bestiaire*, and is lacking from the rest of the animal entries. Indeed, the majority of Old French bestiaries appear not to contain explicit entries on humans, but rather relate nonhuman animal behavior to humans through the use of Christian moralization and justification. As mentioned above, the inclusion of a human entry within the bestiary creates a space for thinking through the category of the human and placing it in conversation with the animals within the same text. As with animals, medieval writers explored the various meanings of the natural characteristics inherent in humans, and these investigations manifested themselves in the texts they wrote. Yet, these textual explorations of human definition were not often as explicit as Pierre de Beauvais's entry in the *Bestiaire*.<sup>4</sup> Instead, Old French narratives represent human-nonhuman interactions to interrogate what it means to be human.

### Critical Background

For the past twenty years—and in the past decade particularly—there has been an incredible and rapidly-developing animal turn in medieval studies, seeing the confluence of medieval literature and critical animal studies. Often engaging with posthumanist, poststructuralist, and feminist literary theory, many scholars have interrogated the role of human-animal relationships and have questioned the mutability of the boundary that separates the two categories. Joyce Salisbury, for example, argues that the *longue durée* of the Middle Ages (c. 400- c. 1400) saw a marked shift in attitude about the human-nonhuman animal boundary, with the early Middle Ages viewing the categories as largely separate and the late Middle Ages seeing

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<sup>4</sup> A helpful text for thinking through the prescribed roles of the human in the “natural” world, would be Alain de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae*, however, my concern in this exam is with French vernacular texts. And while Alain's work likely influenced vernacular writers, I have decided to leave a discussion of *De Planctu Naturae* for another time.

the boundary largely collapsed.<sup>5</sup> Karl Steel, on the other hand, views the perceived human domination over nonhuman animals as the difference between the two categories. More specifically, Steel argues that human violence toward and upon animal bodies is the method by which humans ensure nonhuman animal subjugation, which further reinforces the structural human-animal boundaries in the European Middle Ages.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Steel, who insists upon violence as the defining characteristic of human dominion, Susan Crane interrogates moments of animal-human contact in an attempt to demonstrate the lack of fixity in such encounters, and argues that the diverse representation of human and animal relationships resists paradigm shift.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, in rejecting a traceable change in attitude toward human-animal difference, Crane's claim differs greatly from Salisbury's. Finally, Peggy McCracken, explores encounters between humans and animals in medieval French texts, and argues that such representations question the various forms of human dominion over animals, as well as over other humans.<sup>8</sup> McCracken does not focus on how the texts highlight human-animal difference through acts of violence, like Steel, but treats the various uses of animals as sites for understanding sovereignty in the Medieval France.

Although not an exhaustive list, these scholars have created inroads in medieval animal studies, and in particular, have created an open dialogue for thinking through how human-animal encounters are represented in medieval texts, as well as the variety of meanings behind

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<sup>5</sup> Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Susan Crane, *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Peggy McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

these interactions. Violence, cohabitation, domestication, and sovereignty are some results of human and nonhuman animal relationships, but the underlying cause of these encounters is the tension that lies in the division between humans and animals. This exam does not necessarily seek to contradict the claims of the scholars above. Rather, it uses their arguments as a starting block in order to examine the various figurations that animal-human encounters take in medieval French narrative, and it seeks to identify moments where the boundary between human and nonhuman is blurred.

### Animality in *le Chevalier au Lion*

Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century Arthurian romance, *le Chevalier au Lion* (or *Yvain*) depicts several animal-human relationships that shed light on medieval conceptions of the human. Yvain seeks a magic fountain guarded by a seemingly Otherworldly knight, Esclados the Red, within the Brocéliande forest after hearing of its location from his cousin, Calogrenant. Yvain defeats Esclados and swears himself to the vanquished knight's wife, Laudine. Shortly thereafter, Gawain persuades Yvain to seek adventure with him but he does not return within a year's time, so Laudine forsakes him. Driven wild by grief, Yvain lives in the woods, receiving sustenance from a hermit, until he is eventually nursed back to his former state by passersby. Determined to win back Laudine, Yvain sets out and comes upon a lion and dragon ensnared in battle. Yvain rescues the lion, who becomes his companion for the remainder of the romance, assisting Yvain in combat whenever possible. Ultimately, Yvain is reunited with Laudine after rescuing her lady in waiting, Lunete.

Of course, Yvain's rescue of, and subsequent companionship with, the lion is the most obvious human and nonhuman animal interaction in Chrétien's romance. In the lines leading up to the rescue, the narrator reveals Yvain's attitude toward both the lion and the dragon. Yvain,

after hearing a cry of pain, comes upon the two animals locked in battle, with the dragon biting down on the lion's tail and burning its lower back with. The narrator informs us:

My Lord Yvain did not spend much time looking at this marvelous scene: He thought to himself and considered which of the two to help. He said to himself that he will help the lion since one can only do harm to a cruel and terrible being. And the dragon is terrible, and full of such cruelty, that fire spouts from its mouth. My Lord Yvain decided that he will kill it first.

N'ala mie mout regardant  
Mesire Yvains chele merveille :  
A lui meïsmes se conseille  
Auquel des deuz il aidera.  
Lors dist c'au lyon secorra,  
Qu'a enuious et a felon  
Ne doit on faire se mal non.  
Et li serpens est enuious,  
Si li saut par la goule fus,  
Tant est de felonnie plains.  
Che se pense Mesire Yvains  
Qu'il l'ochirra premierement.<sup>9</sup>

The first striking aspect of this scene is an overwhelming interiority as the knight deliberates with himself in order to make sense of the fighting lion and dragon before him. The narrator emphasizes this by indicating Yvain's self-reflection about the animals three times: "he thought to himself" ("A lui meïsmes se conseille"), "he said to himself" ("Lors dist"), and "he decided" ("Che se pense Mesire Yvains"). Weighing the traits of the animals against each other, Yvain's decision making further places the lion and the dragon into combat. His moral evaluations of the dragon

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<sup>9</sup> l. 3352-63, Chrétien de Troyes, *Chevalier au Lion*, edited and translated by David F. Hult (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1994).

in particular, as terrible (“enuious”) and cruel (“felon”), leads the reader to reach the same conclusion, especially as the narrator repeats the dragon’s negative characteristics twice. Yvain decides nearly immediately to help the lion through platitudinizing, claiming that the dragon deserves to be killed because of its inherent cruelty.

Yvain’s choice is made with almost no active consideration of the lion’s traits. The overwhelming emphasis on the dragon’s cruelty and subsequent ability to breathe fire are what lead the knight to choose to protect the lion. In fact, none of the lion’s traits are mentioned until a dozen lines later when the narrator describes the animal as a “brave and noble beast” (“la beste gentil et franche”).<sup>10</sup> Yvain, not unaware that the lion could attack him after being saved from the dragon, is prepared for further battle. Yet it seems almost unfair that the dragon should be portrayed in such a negative light and that Yvain should base his decision on the its fire-breathing capabilities. While these abilities are a physical manifestation of the dragon’s innate cruelty, the only evidence the text provides for this vicious quality is the dragon biting and burning the lion’s tail. Furthermore, the audience does not know how the conflict between the animals began, since Yvain happened upon the fight *in medias res* after hearing the lion’s pained cry. From the beginning of the scene, then, the audience’s and Yvain’s sympathy—since the text seems to call for an affective response to the animal’s pain—lies with the lion.

It is possible that a medieval audience could have been aware of the various characteristics the lion possesses, which may explain why a more thorough description is lacking from the text. As mentioned above, bestiaries provided descriptions of the various “natures” of animals and served to contextualize these characteristics within a Christian moral paradigm. The lion was a particularly important animal featured in the bestiaries, and appears as the first entry

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<sup>10</sup> l. 3375.

in both of the bestiaries attributed to Pierre de Beauvais, the one of Guillaume le Clerc, and that of Philippe de Thaon.<sup>11</sup> The lion appears first in *Physiologus*, which could justify its position in the Old French bestiaries, calling attention to the influence that the *Physiologus* had on its literary descendants.<sup>12</sup> Aside from this textual similarity, however, the content of the lion entries reinforce the animal as a noble animal, king of the rest.<sup>13</sup> Together the bestiaries and *Chevalier au Lion* prioritize the lion over other animals: the bestiaries through the placement of the lion at the beginning, and *Yvain* by emphasizing the negative characteristics of the dragon, thereby allowing the lion to assume a morally superior position, one worthy of saving.

After Yvain chooses to ally with the lion, he proceeds to destroy the dragon, and the violence enacted upon the dragon is the ultimate consequence of Yvain's moral judgment against it. Our knight drives his sword through the dragon until he strikes the ground. After successfully bisecting the dragon, he strikes the animal again and again until it has been hacked into pieces.<sup>14</sup> It is not enough to kill the dragon, rather, Yvain must ensure that the animal and its negative qualities are completely eviscerated, prevented from causing further harm to the lion. In the course of killing the dragon, however, Yvain slices off a small portion of the lion's tail, where the dragon had been biting, although the narrator insists that it would not have been possible to cut a

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<sup>11</sup> In addition to the long-version bestiary cited above, Pierre wrote a short version. *Le Bestiaire de Pierre de Beauvais: Version Courte*, edited by Guy R. Mermier (Paris: Nizet, 1977); Guillaume le Clerc, *Le Bestiaire Divin*, edited by Célestin Hippeau (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970); *Le Bestiaire de Philippe de Thaon*, edited by Emanuel Walberg (Lund: Möller, 1900).

<sup>12</sup> Despite the lion appearing as the first entry in all of the bestiaries, the other entries vary greatly from each other and from *Physiologus*. Even Pierre de Beauvais's two versions have a remarkably different order in which the animals are organized.

<sup>13</sup> Pierre de Beauvais ends his prologue with, "So first I speak here and begin with the lion, for it is the king of all beasts" ("Si parole ci premierement et commence du lion, por coi il est rois de totes les bestes"), *Bestiaire: Version Longue*, l. 15-16.

<sup>14</sup> l. 3376-81, "Si le trenche jusques en terre / Et les .ii. moitez retronchonne; / Fiert et refiert et tant l'en donne / Que tout l'amenuse et depieche."

smaller portion.<sup>15</sup> Thus, by intervening in the combat, the knight leaves a physical mark on both animals: one lethal, and one negligible but emancipatory. The lion's wound seems a small price to pay for Yvain's assistance, but it nevertheless indicates that the well-intentioned, logical knight is able to cause inadvertent harm.

Despite the wound, however, the lion does not attack Yvain. Instead, it appears to show gratitude toward the knight who came to its aid:

The lion acted nobly and in good nature, and began to seem that it would surrender to Yvain. Then, it extended to Yvain its front paws joined together. Then, it pushed into the ground and stood on its rear two paws. The lion then took a knee, its face all wet from tears of humility. My Lord Yvain knew well that the lion thanked him and humbled itself before him for the dragon that Yvain had killed, and for saving it from certain death.

Il fist que frans et deboinaire,  
Quë il li commencha a faire  
Samblant quë a lui se rendroit ;  
Et ses piés joins li estendoit,  
Puis se va vers tere fichier,  
Si s'estuet seur .ii. piés derrier,  
Et puis si se ragenouloit  
Et toute se faiche mouloit  
De lermes, par humilité.  
Mesire Yvains per verité  
Set que li leons l'en merchie  
Et que devant lui s'umilie  
Pour le serpent qu'il avoit mort

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<sup>15</sup> l. 3386-7, "Tant com trenchier en covenoit / L'en trencha, c'onques mains n'en pot."

Et lui delivré de la mort;<sup>16</sup>

The lion's comportment is once again described as noble, echoing its status as king of the animals. Yet, this position is changed when the lion genuflects and exhibits submissiveness toward Yvain. Of course this shift comes to the audience as *descriptio*, since communication between the lion and Yvain is completely physical and visual. The narrator notes that the body language of the lion expresses its desire to surrender, "se rendroit," to the knight who killed the dragon. When the lion offers two paws joined together, it is both a sign of "feudal homage" signifying its submission to Yvain, as well as a visual cue of its refrain from violence.<sup>17</sup> The lion demonstrates further submission when it stands on its hind paws for the express purpose of kneeling, "se ragenouilloit," in front of Yvain. The lion raises itself up to an unnatural, standing position only to make itself vulnerable again. While this gesture may be perceived as excess, it serves to solidify through physical representation the lion's agency, its choice to show gratitude and humility. Furthermore, the lion's tears are another physical marker of its submissive performance, and such a performance is necessary for Yvain to understand the animal's attitude.

Yvain recognizes the nonverbal gratitude communicated by the lion's gestures. The knight continues down the path he was traveling before he heard the lion's cry, this time accompanied by the animal he had saved from the dragon's grips. Wanting to protect and serve Yvain, the lion chooses to remain by his side.<sup>18</sup> And indeed, the lion goes on to fight alongside Yvain as a loyal companion for the remainder of the romance. Yet, the lion's behavior and the

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<sup>16</sup> l. 3393-3406.

<sup>17</sup> The paws placed together seem to render the lion disarmed and unable to act aggressively toward Yvain. Peggy McCracken identifies this gesture as one of homage and fealty, *In the Skin of a Beast*, 75.

<sup>18</sup> l. 3412-15, "Et li leons les lui costoie, / Que jammais ne s'en partira. / Tous jours mais avec li sera, / Que servir et garder veut."

struggle between the lion and the dragon says as much about the knight as it does the animals. Yvain makes a choice based on judgment and logic; the lion's lack of negative characteristics render it the obvious choice for protection against the evil dragon. Convinced of the logic in his identification, Yvain enacts violence upon the dragon, completely destroying the animal and harming the lion in the process. Thus, in this episode, the human character is seen as moral, capable of enforcing his judgments through force. This violence results in the animals' submission and recognition of human dominion; and while the sovereignty of humans is not always visible or argued for in medieval narratives, Yvain's rescue of the lion—and the lion's subsequent allegiance—demonstrates how logic figures into human intervention and alteration of animal affairs.

The distinction between human and animal that is so clear in the lion-dragon episode is obfuscated at other points in the romance. During Calogrenant's adventure near the beginning of the narrative, for example, the knight comes across bulls fighting in a clearing near the Brocéliande forest.<sup>19</sup> Calogrenant then sees a peasant, or cattleman, sitting on a nearby tree stump:

A peasant who resembled a Moor, as big and hideous as can be—truly, such an ugly creature that one cannot put it into words—was seated there on a stump with a large mace in his hand.

Un vilains qui resambloit mor,  
Grans et hideus a desmesure,  
Issi tres laide creature  
Qu'en ne porroit dire de bouche,

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<sup>19</sup> l. 276-9, "L'ostel gaires eslongié n'oi / Quant je trouvai en .i. essars / Tors sauvages et esperars / Qui s'entrecombatoient tuit." The fighting bulls seem to foreshadow the fighting dragon and lion and Yvain encounters on his search for adventure.

Illuec seoit seur une çouche,  
Une grant machue en se main.<sup>20</sup>

Immediately, the description of the peasant draws attention to animality, race, and socio-economic status. Calogrenant is not saying that the peasant was a Moor, but rather that he looks like one, thereby placing his seemingly foreign qualities in direct juxtaposition with the knight's. Due to his skin color and his social rank, the peasant is doubly different from Calogrenant. Both of these characteristics, then, are emphasized by the further embodied difference of the peasant: he is extremely ugly. Calogrenant describes the cattleman as "hideus" and as a "tres laide creature," separating him into an animal category based on his physical appearance. The peasant is so ugly and seemingly different from other humans, in fact, that the knight's vocabulary fails him and he cannot properly explain the cattleman to his audience. Yet, beyond the use of hyperbole, Calogrenant's inability to accurately describe the cattleman's appearance also seems to stem from the difference in social position. Indeed, the knight has great difficulty determining whether the peasant is a man or beast.

When Calogrenant finally moves closer to the cattleman, the description of his body becomes increasingly animal-like:

I made my way toward the peasant and saw that he had a head larger than a packhorse or any other beast. He had tangled hair and his bare forehead measured two hand-widths in length. His ears were hairy and as big as an elephant's, and his eyebrows were bushy and his face was flat. He had eyes like an owl and a nose like a cat, his mouth was twisted like a wolf's and has teeth like a boar: pointed and red.

Je m'apochay vers le vilain,

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<sup>20</sup> l. 286-91.

Et vi qu'il eut grosse la teste  
Plus que ronchin nē autre beste,  
Chevez mellés et front pelé,  
S'ot bien .ii. espanes de lé,  
Oreilles moussues et grans  
Aussi com a .i. oliffans,  
Les courchis grans et le vis plat,  
Iols de çüette et nes de chat,  
Bouche fendue comme lous,  
Dens de sengler agus et rous.<sup>21</sup>

Calogrenant's highly detailed description renders the peasant as an amalgam of human and animal parts through the similes to animal bodies. Similar comparisons are employed elsewhere in the narrative, describing bravery, quickness, and courage of knights through image of stags and goshawks, but Calogrenant's similes paint an immensely negative picture of the cattleman. The use of six different animal comparisons emphasizes how bizarre the knight finds the peasant's physical qualities, creating a caricature of a man: his excess hair acts as a type of fur, his ears, eyes, forehead, and head are larger than life, and his mouth—malformed and seemingly carnivorous—presents him as a possible threat to the knight. Indeed, Calogrenant recounts that when the peasant rose from his stump as the knight approached, he was unsure of his intentions and prepared to defend himself in the event of combat.<sup>22</sup> This cautious attitude echoes Yvain's in the moments after he saves the lion, and the potential violence of both the lion and cattleman emphasizes their animality and difference from the knights.

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<sup>21</sup> l. 292-302.

<sup>22</sup> l. 312-16, "Em piés sali li vilains lués / Qu'il me vit vers lui aprochier. / Je ne soi s'il me vaut touchier. / Ne ne soi qu'i voloit emprendre / Mais je me garni de deffendre."

While the animal comparisons make the peasant appear not fully human, he is neither fully animal. Based on the peasant's beast-like appearance, Calogrenant is unable to determine whether the cattleman is able to speak or if he possesses reason.<sup>23</sup> Since the peasant seemingly falls between human and animal categories, Calogrenant demands that he tell him "if he is a good thing or not."<sup>24</sup> That the knight uses "thing," "chose," to classify the peasant reveals the ambiguity with which he views the latter. The cattleman responds to Calogrenant saying, "I am a man."<sup>25</sup> It is with the verbal cue the knight learns of the peasant's humanity, in spite of his othered animal appearance. Unpersuaded by this response, however, Calogrenant asks the cattleman what type of human he is, to which the reply is, "That which you see and I am never anything else."<sup>26</sup> With this response, the peasant challenges the knight's assumptions about his animality, or rather, the doubts about his humanity. While his body is read as animal-like by Calogrenant, the cattleman is and will always be human.<sup>27</sup>

Eventually, when the cattleman reveals to Calogrenant that he is the one who watches over the bulls, the knight becomes doubtful and claims that no wild animals can be cared for unless they are tied up or enclosed.<sup>28</sup> Calogrenant's incredulity underscores another difference between the two men: that he is a knight and does not have the training nor knowledge of animal

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<sup>23</sup> l. 321-4, "Si m'egarda et mot ne dist, / Nient plus c'une beste feïst ; / Et je qui quidai quë il n'eüst / Raison, ne parler ne seüst."

<sup>24</sup> l. 326-7, "Que je li dis: 'Va, cor me di / Se tu es boine cho

<sup>25</sup> l. 328, "Et il me dist : 'Je sui uns hom.'"

<sup>26</sup> l. 329-30, "— Ques hom es tu ? — Tes com tu vois. / Je ne sui autres nule fois."

<sup>27</sup> That the cattleman is never named, or that Calogrenant never asks his name, seems to further blur his animal-human boundary. A lot of characters in medieval narratives remain unnamed, of course, but here is emphasizes how the narrative devalues the peasant's humanity.

<sup>28</sup> l. 335-38, "Je ne cuit qu'en plain n'en boscage / Puisse an garder beste sauvage, / N'en autre liu, pour nule cose, / S'elle n'est loïie u enclose."

husbandry that the cattleman possesses. The peasant clarifies how he manages his animals, and how he controls them by squeezing their horns together. When the other bulls see this violent act, they become afraid and learn to obey the cattleman: he is the lord of his beasts.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the animal-like peasant is more able to control his cattle because of his physical strength, but also, possibly, because of his animal characteristics. Ultimately, the peasant asks Calogrenant what type of man he is, and the knight admits that he is searching for adventure and asks the cattleman to point him in the right direction.<sup>30</sup> The peasant explains to Calogrenant the nearby magic spring and stone, and the knight sets off on his adventure.

Both men identify themselves by how they look and what they do. The peasant is and looks like a herder who is master of his bulls, and Calogrenant is and appears as a knight on search of adventure, although neither character can appropriately decipher the other's role without verbal confirmation. And while the cattleman appears animal-like to Calogrenant, he is able to convince the knight of his superiority and strength over the bulls in his care. Therefore, the peasant represents the ambiguity of the human form, especially as it is regarded across socio-economic positions. Ultimately, however, the two characters hold a successful interaction and the narrative continues forward.<sup>31</sup> At the end of this episode, the difference between human and

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<sup>29</sup> l. 344-53, “Car quant j’en puis l’une tenir, / Si le destraing par mi le cors, / Ad poins que j’ai et durs et fors, / Que les autres de paour trambent. / Et tout en viron moi s’asambent, Aussi com pour merchi crïer ; / Ne nus ne s’i porroit fier, / Fors moi, s’entr’eles s’estoit mis, / Que maintenant ne fust ochis/ Ainsi sui de mes bestes sire.”

<sup>30</sup> l. 354-64, “Et tu me redevroies dire / Ques hom tu es et que tu quiers. / — Je sui, çou vois, uns chevaliers / Qui quier che que trouver ne puis ; / Assés ai quis et riens ne truis. / — Et que vaurroies tu trouver ? / — Aventures, pour esprouver / Ma proeche et mon hardement. / Or te pri et quier et demant, / Se tu ses, que tu me conseilles / Ou d’eventure ou de merveilles.”

<sup>31</sup> Karl Steel suggests that the reason Calogrenant asks the peasant to show him where to seek adventure is because he ceases to view the peasant as a “marvel,” and simply as a fellow human because of his dominance over animals, *How to Make a Human*, 162. I disagree that Calogrenant

nonhuman animals lies in appearance, as well as in the human ability to control animals, whether it be through physical force or enclosure. Both the cattleman and Calogrenant believe animals ought to be tended to and commanded, which helps define them as human, but the peasant's animality demonstrates the heterogeneousness of humanity, and how room exists for the animal within the human category.

### Animal Transformations

In *Chevalier au Lion*, the cattleman exemplifies a character who embodies human and nonhuman animal characteristics, while ultimately falling within the human category. There are, however, many characters in medieval French narratives who further blur the animal-human distinction. These characters are able to transform easily between human and animal form, sometimes in a way that prevents categorization as either. Such changing bodies reveal more of the various human-animal interactions and relationships these narratives value such as romance and adventure. The anonymous *lai de Tyolet*, for example, depicts a deer that transforms into a knight in order to spur the eponymous character toward becoming a knight.

Tyolet, a young man who lives with his mother in the forest, can summon animals by whistling. He learned this skill from a fairy and uses it in order to provide food for himself and his mother. One day while hunting, Tyolet encounters a stag, but the animal does not respond to his whistle and wanders away. The young man follows the stag to a river, but instead comes upon a roe deer, which he kills instead of his initial prey. The stag suddenly transforms into an armed

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stops seeing the cattleman as a marvel and animal-human amalgam, but I agree that the cattleman's claim to be lord, "sire," renders him more human.

knight, mounted on a horse and he addresses Tyolet and asks him who he is and what he searches for.<sup>32</sup> After the young man tells the knight his name and where he's from, he demands:

Now tell me, if you know, who you are and what your name is. He who was mounted on the bank of the river responded that his name was "Knight." And Tyolet asked what kind of beast a knight was, where he dwelt, and where he came from.

Or me dites, se vos savez,  
qui vos estes, quel non avez.  
E cil li respondi errant  
qui seur la rive fu estant,  
que chevalier ert apelé.  
E Tyolet a demandé  
quel beste chevalier estoit,  
ou conversoit e dont venoit.<sup>33</sup>

This episode, remarkably similar to the encounter between Calogrenant and the cattleman, reveals the effects of the isolation in which Tyolet has lived for his life. Of course, seeing the transformation of a deer into the knight is fascinating and the young man had never seen such a transformation before,<sup>34</sup> but more than marvel, however, Tyolet is completely unfamiliar with what a knight is. In a taxonomical move, the deer-knight identifies himself only as "Knight," which fashions him as a seemingly flat, archetypal character, and like the peasant in *Chevalier au*

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<sup>32</sup> *Les Lais Anonymes des 12e et 13e Siècles : Édition Critique de Quelques Lais Bretons*, edited and translated by Prudence Mary O'Hara Tobin (Geneva: Droz, 1976), l. 120-28, "Le chevalier l'aresonna, / a lui parla premierement, / molt bel e amiablement ; / demande li qui il estoit, / q'aloit querant, quel non avoit. / E Tyolet li respondi, / qui molt estoit preuz e hardi, / filz a la veve deame estoit / qui en la grant forez manoit."

<sup>33</sup> l. 131-38.

<sup>34</sup> l. 115-18, "A merveilles l'a esgardé / e longuement l'a avisé ; / de tel chose se merveilloit / car onques mes veü n'avoit."

*Lion*, devoid of a distinct name. Yet this simplistic response aligns with Tyolet's world experience, which has consisted of animal interactions. This animal-centered existence is reflected when he asks what type of animal, "quel beste," a knight is. Thus, Tyolet's encounter with the knight is mediated through his particular skill set: hunting animals.

The deer-knight eventually does reveal what type of creature a knight is. He explains the nature of a knight to Tyolet:

It is a greatly feared animal that attacks and eats other beasts, and it often lives in the forest and on the plains, too.

C'est une beste molt cremue,  
autres bestes prent e menjue,  
el bois converse molt souvent,  
e a plainne terre ensement,<sup>35</sup>

Strikingly, the deer-knight's definition does not contradict Tyolet's assumptions that a knight is an animal. He explains what he is in terms that the young man will understand by describing knights as fearsome predators. The audience of the lai will almost certainly recognize that knights do not eat their opponents after they are defeated, but the metaphor serves Tyolet in understanding the violence of combat and the fierceness of knights. Similarly, the deer-knight explains that knights live in the woods and in fields, which emphasizes the dissonance at the heart of the encounter, that is, the fact that Tyolet had never before met a knight despite their apparent ubiquity and proximity. Nevertheless, the young man shares his disbelief:

For ever since I could walk and began to wander through the woods, I have never come across such an animal. I know bears and lions and all other game. There is

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<sup>35</sup> l. 141-44.

not any animal in these woods I do not know and that I do not take without pain,  
but I do not know you. You appear a very bold animal.

Car onques, puis que aler soi  
e que par bois pris a aler,  
ainz tel beste ne poi trover.  
Si connois je ors e lions,  
e totes autres venoisons ;  
n'a beste el bois que ne connoisse,  
e que ne preigne sanz angoisse,  
ne mes vos que ne connois mie.  
Molt reseemblez beste hardie.<sup>36</sup>

Tyolet continues only to be able to understand the knight through animal contextualization and through rationalizing his familiarity with the landscape. He has explored the woods ever since he could walk and he is intimately familiar with other fearsome predators, “ors” and “lions,” and other animals he has hunted, but the knight remains a marvel. Yet, Tyolet’s speech reveals more about the affective relationship formed with the animals he hunts. When he claims that there is no animal in the forest that he does not take without pain, “angoisse,” Tyolet demonstrates the compassion and empathy he feels in killing them. Tyolet’s pain in hunting indicates a relationship that is absent from other hunting scenarios, and it removes him from the noble hunting rituals elsewhere in medieval narratives.<sup>37</sup> It seems to be this compassion that drives Tyolet’s curiosity about the knight and his desire to learn more about him.

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<sup>36</sup> l. 146-54.

<sup>37</sup> For more on hunting and nobility, see “The Noble Hunt as a Ritual Practice” in Susan Crane’s *Animal Encounters*, 101-119. See also, Susan Crane, “Ritual Aspects of the Hunt à Force” in *Engaging with Nature: Essays on the Natural World in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* edited by Barbara A. Hanawalt and Lisa J. Kiser (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 63-84.

Tyolet's claim that the deer-knight appears to be a bold animal, "beste hardie," guides the conversation toward a discussion of physical characteristics. From this moment, the young man begins calling the deer knight, "chevalier beste," or beast-knight.<sup>38</sup> This taxonomy reveals that, like the peasant in *Chevalier au Lion*, the best-knight is an amalgam, seemingly neither fully human nor animal. Yet in an attempt to understand the beast-knight, Tyolet asks about the knight's various pieces of equipment and armor that are unfamiliar to him. Over the next twenty-five lines, the knight explains the function and fabrication of his helmet, clasp, hauberk, shoes, belt, sword and lance.<sup>39</sup> After the beast-knight responds to all the questions Tyolet asks regarding his armor, the young man wonders if there are many other knights as beautiful as he.<sup>40</sup> Tyolet has become so fascinated by this new type of animal that he wishes to see as many as he can. The beast-knight invites Tyolet to cross the river and shows him two hundred other knights who have gathered in a nearby clearing. Upon seeing this, the young man exclaims that he wants to be a beast-knight, which expands the possibilities of transformation.<sup>41</sup> At this stage, the difference between the beast-knight and Tyolet is the starting point of each's transformation: the beast-knight changes from a deer, and Tyolet will shift from his human form to a knight.

Of course, Tyolet's transformation is not necessarily the same marvel that the beast-knight's is since the young man does not physically morph into a different species. It is, however, a change that modifies his identity and drives the narrative forward. The beast-knight instructs Tyolet to return to his mother and inform her of his wish become an animal like the one he saw

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<sup>38</sup> l. 156-57, "Or me dites, chevalier beste, / que est ice sor vostre teste ?"

<sup>39</sup> l. 160-84.

<sup>40</sup> l. 189-92, "Or me dites, chevalier beste, / por Deu, e por la seue feste, / se il est auques de tiex bestes / ne de si beles con vos estes."

<sup>41</sup> l. 217-19, "Car pleüst Dor Dieu a sa feste / que je fusse chevalier beste !"

in the woods.<sup>42</sup> Tyolet does as the beast-knight suggests, and his mother—although worried at first—provides her son with the equipment that was his late father’s. All the while, however, Tyolet refers the knights he has seen as “bestes,” and his mother does not correct him. Thus, through this taxonomy, the narrative continues to blur the distinction between human knight and beast-knight.<sup>43</sup> Even after Tyolet arrives at Arthur’s court, and undertakes an adventure, he remains to identify as a beast-knight, resisting categorization and realizing his transformation.

Shortly after his debut in King Arthur’s circle, the daughter of the king of Logres arrives with a challenge: Any knight who accepts must follow her hound to a nearby forest where a white stag remains guarded by seven lions. The knight must defeat the seven lions and bring back the stag’s foot; anyone who is successful will be married to the lady. Tyolet hastily accepts the challenge and makes his way to the forest. He whistles and beckons the stag to him, and proceeds to cut off its foot. The wound causes the stag to cry, however, and Tyolet is quickly overpowered by the lions; although he succeeds in defeating them, he is too injured to make the return journey. A passerby comes across Tyolet and the young beast-knight tells him to take the stag’s foot, return to court, and tell the lady what has happened. The stranger takes the foot, but also takes Tyolet’s armor and, upon returning to Arthur’s court, attempts to pass as Tyolet. Eventually he is found out and Gauvin comes to Tyolet’s aid. Ultimately, Tyolet and the lady marry and the beast-knight pardons the stranger who deceived everyone.

The remainder of the lai reveals that Tyolet’s transformation into a beast-knight is incompatible with his previous lifestyle. His instincts to whistle and summon the white stag prove

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<sup>42</sup> l. 223-55.

<sup>43</sup> The visual distinction may also be difficult for Tyolet given the beast-knight is mounted on horseback. For more on the assemblage and entanglement of human and non-human animal bodies regarding knights, see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) 35-77.

to be a fatal move as another knight would likely have defeated the seven lions before retrieving the stag's foot. By reversing the order, Tyolet demonstrates his unfamiliarity with "chivalric" convention, which results in his near death and rescue by a more skilled knight.<sup>44</sup> At the end of the narrative, Tyolet's transformation from a young man in the forest to a beast-knight is complete as he marries the lady and moves to Logres with her. Yet, unlike the stag that transforms into a beast-knight, Tyolet's metamorphosis seems unnatural as he fails the challenge he prematurely accepts; indeed, a beast-knight requires more training than simply being "hardie." In *Lai de Tyolet*, human-animal interaction serves to emphasize the empathy and compassion of the main human character. The beast-knight, on the other hand, serves to underscore Tyolet's curiosity, which incites his desire for transformation, thus blurring the distinction between human and animal as the young man seeks to become an animal he knows nothing about.

Whereas human-animal interaction and human metamorphosis in *Lai de Tyolet* moves the narrative toward courtly adventure, such transformation advances romantic plots in other texts. Marie de France's lai, *Yonec*, for example, features a relationship between a lady and a hawkman, Muldumarec. In Caerwent, the noble woman is kept locked in a tower by her jealous husband. Over the course of seven years, of being locked in the tower and watched by her husband's older sister, the lady and lord have no children.<sup>45</sup> One day, upon remembering the

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<sup>44</sup> Another reason that Tyolet refrains from attacking the lions first is the compassion he holds toward animals. By summoning the deer, he tries to avoid inflicting pain on the lions.

<sup>45</sup> The *mal-mariée* is a common trope in medieval texts, which often leads to an affair that drives the narrative forward.

great adventures that would could find in her country long ago, the lady asks God to allow her to experience a romantic adventure.<sup>46</sup> Her wish is instantly fulfilled:

When she had finished her lament, she saw the shadow of a large bird through a narrow window. She did not know what it could be. It flew in and entered the room. It had jesses on its feet and looked like a goshawk of five or six molts. It sat in front of the lady. When it stayed there for a little and she had examined at it well, it became a handsome and noble knight. The lady marveled at it.

Quant ele ot fait sa plainte issi,  
l'umbre d'un grant oisel choisi  
parmi une estreite fenestre.  
Ele ne set que ceo peut estre.  
En la chambre volant entra.  
Giez ot es piez, ostur sembla ;  
de cinc mues fu u de sis.  
Il s'est devant la dame asis.  
Quant il i ot un poi esté  
e ele l'ot bien esguardé,  
chevaliers bels e genz devint.  
La dame a merveille le tint ;<sup>47</sup>

Similarly to the beast-knight in *Lai de Tyolet*, and even before its arrival, the hawk takes the lady by surprise as the narrator indicates, “Ele ne set que ceo peut estre.” An obscure figure of a bird is undoubtedly unexpected by the lady since she has just finished praying for a romantic adventure, and the suddenness of the hawk’s arrival echoes the incongruity of its presence in

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<sup>46</sup> l. 105-9, “Se ceo peut estre ne ceo fu, / se unc a nul est avenu, / Deus, ki de tut a poësté, / il en face ma volenté !” Marie de France, *Lais*, edited and translated by Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1990).

<sup>47</sup> 109-20.

front of the lady, who has been locked away from seven years. Thus, this animal encounter is simultaneously awkward and marvelous as both hawk and lady sit in silence for a while looking at one another before the transformation. Interestingly, the hawk is wearing jesses, “giez,” around its legs, which indicates some sort of training or domestication prior to its flight through the window;<sup>48</sup> indeed, the jesses reveal that this human-animal interaction is not the first for the hawk, and even allude to the hawk’s human connection.

The initial animal encounter does not last very long as the goshawk transforms into the noble, “genz,” knight. Despite the marvel of the transformation, however, the lady becomes terrified. The knight, seeing the lady cover her head in fear, assures her that she has nothing to be afraid of because the goshawk is a noble bird.<sup>49</sup> In a syllogistic explanation, Muldumarec uses the noble characteristics of his animal form to contextualize his nobility human form. Thus, given their similar social positions, after he has assured the lady of his gentility, and after he swears a credo demonstrating his devotion to God, the knight becomes a suitable romantic partner.<sup>50</sup> After the knight and lady become lovers, the lady’s husband grows suspicious of his wife’s behavior. His older sister spies on the lady and witnesses the knight’s coming and going,

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<sup>48</sup> Jesses, or leather straps, are essential to falconry and the taming of birds of prey. The Cambridge treatise on falconry instructs that these are one of the first objects used in training, “First one must kindly hold and hood the falcon, and then attach the jesses and trim the talons and beak a little . . .” (Primes covendra debonement le falcon manier e ciller, e puis mettre les gez e recoper li les ungles e le bec un petit . . .) *Three Anglo-Norman Treatises on Falconry*, edited by Tony Hunt (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2009) 19.

<sup>49</sup> l. 122-27, “li sans li remut e fremi, / grant poür ot, sun chief covri. / Mult fu curteis li chevaliers, / il l’en araisuna primiers. / ‘Dame,’ fet il, ‘n’aiez poür, / gentil oisel a en ostur . . .” For more on the importance of this scene to the lai, see Peggy McCracken, “Translation and Animals in Marie de France’s Lais” *Australian Journal of French Studies* 46 no. 3 (2009): 206-218.

<sup>50</sup> l. 149-68. This credo collapses the religious ambiguity associated with the Otherworld in the Breton lai. By expressing his belief in God the Creator, the knight fully reassures the lady of his suitability.

and his transformation from human to hawk.<sup>51</sup> When she reports back to the lord what she has seen, he prepares traps with pointed iron spikes in order to kill the knight.

The following day, the jealous husband leaves for a hunt and the lady summons her lover. When the hawk-knight flies up to the window however, he is fatally wounded by the spikes. He removes himself from the trap and enters the lady's chamber for the last time, where he learns that she is pregnant with their child, Yonec. He returns to his home to die, but the lady follows the trail of blood he leaves behind. She walks through the marvelous landscape and enters a palace where she comes upon her wounded lover lying on a bed of gold. Muldumarc tells her that she must leave or that his people will blame her for his loss, and he gives her a magic ring that will cause her husband to forget everything that has transpired between them. The knight also gives her a sword and prophesies that when their son, Yonec, is old enough, she will give the sword to him and he will avenge his father's death by killing the jealous lord.<sup>52</sup>

Years later, Muldumarec's prophesy comes true and his death is avenged by Yonec. The knight's ability to transform into a goshawk does not appear to have passed to his son, but it nevertheless plays a key role in the progression of the narrative. The marvelous human-animal relationship established between Muldumarec and the lady is first mediated through a religious lens in order to assuage the lady's fears. Then, the knight's transformations only serve to allow access to the lady's towers. By the end of the narrative, Muldumarec's hawk form leads to his death. Human-animal difference is emphasized through the lai's progression, despite Yonec's attempt to rationalize his non-human characteristics. Ultimately, *Yonec* exhibits the animal

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<sup>51</sup> l. 267-82, "Dunc s'esteit la vieille levee, / trier une cortine est alee ; / . . . / Cele le vit, si l'esquarda, / coment il vint e il ala. / De ceo ot ele grant poür / qu'ume le vit e puis ostur."

<sup>52</sup> l. 418-45.

transformation of Muldumarec as a negative aspect that must be justified, Christianized, and eradicated. The narrative values the human form, and like the texts above, depicts violence against the animal body, which in *Yonac* represents a threat to Christian morality.

### Holy Helpers: Saints and Animals

Many of the medieval narratives analyzed so far depict various acts of human violence toward animals. Such violence, according to Karl Steel, results from the human subjugation of all nonhuman entities, and constitutes the boundary between animals and humans.<sup>53</sup> The characters in these texts, however, demonstrate complex motivations behind these violent acts, which allow for a more thorough investigation of the human category. Humans—and those in between human and animal categories—demonstrate their abilities to reason, judge, love, desire transformation, and resist various constructions of social-based human identity throughout medieval narratives. What remains to be examined more closely, then, is the agency animals possess to interact with, assist, or protect humans. The twelfth-century *Voyage de Saint Brendan*, attributed to Benedeit, provides several examples of human-animal contact in which animals act on and for human bodies.

Saint Brendan sets sail from Ireland with a group of fourteen monks in search of terrestrial Paradise. The crew crafts a *curragh*, or small boat made from wood and ox hides, and heads West. They sail to various islands including the Isle of Sheep, Whale-Island, the Paradise of Birds, and the Isle of Ailbe, eventually establishing an annual route between these places. Brendan and the monks travel their circuit for a total of seven years, sailing past the smelly entrance of Hell, a congealed sea, and Judas stranded on a rock before they arrive at Paradise.

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<sup>53</sup> Steel, *How to Make a Human*, 13-17.

After a tour of their destination, the crew returns home with paradisiacal stones as souvenirs and Brendan ultimately becomes a revered abbot and saint.

The Isle of Sheep and the Paradise of Birds are populated exclusively by the animals mentioned in their names, and while the human-animal interactions that take place on these islands are important to the progression of the narrative, an in-depth analysis is not necessary here. The sheep provide sustenance for the seafaring monks, and the birds offer spiritual comfort through their hymns, but also instruct the monks that they must follow the same archipelagic route for seven years. This type of animal-human communication is reminiscent of the speaking, antlered doe in Marie de France's *Guigemar*, but differs from the other nonverbal communication depicted in the narratives examined thus far.<sup>54</sup> More important to understanding the agency of animal in *Voyage de Saint Brendan*, however, are the nonverbal encounters the monks have with animals, as well as contact between nonhuman animal. The first of these interactions occurs after Brendan and the crew spend Easter on Whale Island for the second time.<sup>55</sup>

After sailing for forty-five days straight, the sea becomes turbulent, tossing the *curragh* about on dangerous swells. Suddenly, a sea serpent appears and begins to chase the ship; the fire-breathing animal is exceptionally large, bellowing with the power of fifteen bulls, and instills great fear in the monks as it creates terrible waves on the sea's surface.<sup>56</sup> Brendan tells his companions

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<sup>54</sup> In *Guigemar*, the titular character is hunting in the woods when he shoots an arrow at an antlered doe. The arrow rebounds and strikes Guigemar, and the deer tells him that his wound can only be healed by someone who will suffer for the love of him. The similarity in speaking animals in these two texts possibly lies in the Breton and Irish influences.

<sup>55</sup> The birds instructed Brendan and his crew to spend every Easter on Whale Island. I have examined the role of the Whale Island elsewhere, but, despite its interesting contribution to animal-human relationships in the narrative, I have favored several other examples.

<sup>56</sup> l. 905-12, "Vers eals veint uns marins serpens / . . . / Li fus de lui si enbraise / Cume buche de fornaise : / La flamme est grant, escalfed fort, / Pur quei icil cremet la mort. / Sanz mesure grant as le cors ; / Plus halt braiet que quinze tors." Benedeit, *Le Voyage de Saint Brendan*, edited

not to fear, for no one under God's protection should be afraid of a roaring animal.<sup>57</sup> Suddenly, a second sea serpent arrives to combat the first:

They struck each other with both their fins, which they used as shields, and their feet. They gnashed at each other with their pointed teeth that were as sharp as spears. . . . Then, the second beast prevailed and brought death to the first. With its strong teeth it snapped at the first and tore it into three pieces.

Colps se dunent de lur noës,  
Tels cum escuz, e des podes.  
A denz mordanz se nafrent,  
Qui cum espiez trenchant erent.  
. . .  
E puis venquit la dereine ;  
Morte rent la primereine :  
A denz tant fort le detirat  
Que en tres meitez le descirat.<sup>58</sup>

The two animals seem evenly matched at first, and the battle between them is described with terms associated with human combat: “escuz” and “espiez,” items that the sea serpents do not possess, rather connects human and animal behavior in battle. These weapons are also juxtaposed with the animal body parts, “noës,” “podes,” and “denz.” Through these similes, the narrative collapses the distinction between human and animal in a way that justifies the serpents’ motivation: one to attack and one to protect. Therefore, the audience is able to believe that the

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and translated by Ian Short and Brian Merrilees (Paris: Champion, 2006). I have translated “serpens” as serpent rather than as “dragon” in *Chevalier au Lion*.

<sup>57</sup> l. 921-24, “Gardez que pur fole poür / Deu ne perdez ne bon oür, / Quar que Deus prent en sun conduit . Ne deit cremer beste qui mui.”

<sup>58</sup> l. 937-50.

second serpent has chosen to protect the monks from its opponent, acting under the aegis of God.<sup>59</sup> What the narrative does not make clear about this episode is the motivation behind the first sea serpent's attack. The audience is left to consider the animal's *natures*, the characteristics that might have driven it to pursue the monks.

The violence of the battle, however, echoes Yvain's slaughter of the dragon in *Chevalier au Lion*. Again, with the first serpent deemed a threat to the monks' safety, it is not enough to kill. Rather, the animal is torn apart into multiple pieces in a display of total defeat and protection of the Brendan and his monks. The violent battle between the two serpents does not demonstrate the human subjugation of animals, but rather indicates that animals may protect humans if they put their faith in God. This protection does not uniquely appear in saints' lives, but a narrative about the search for terrestrial Paradise acts as a perfect home for this type of interaction.<sup>60</sup> Incidentally, the violent dismemberment of the sea serpent serves the monks shortly after the conflict, when they arrive on land the next day; one third of the serpent's body washes ashore, which they collect, store, and ration as food for three months.<sup>61</sup> Despite the battle being solely between the two serpents, the human characters nevertheless benefit from the violence.

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<sup>59</sup> Like the lady's lament for adventure in *Yonec*, the text is not entirely clear as to whether the second serpent was a product of divine intervention or coincidence. Likely the former, it would be interesting to find and analyze examples of God intervening on behalf of nonhuman animals.

<sup>60</sup> God's intervention on behalf of the monks also echoes the episode in *Vie seine Audree*, when the sea rises to protect Audrey and her sisters from her husband. For more on the role of animals in hagiography, see Sally Shockro, "Saints and Holy Beasts: Pious Animals in Early-Medieval Insular Saints' *Vitae*" in *Animal Languages in the Middle Ages: Representations of Interspecies Communication*, edited by Alison Langdon (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) 51-68.

<sup>61</sup> l. 981-94.

After the monks set sail once more, they are attacked again by an animal. This time, a flaming griffin swoops down in an attempt to seize the monks, but soon a dragon intercepts the attack and the two animals fight each other in the sky above the ship:

The griffin is large, the dragon is lean; the griffin is stronger, the dragon is fiercer.  
The griffin is killed and falls into the sea. Those who were horrified by it were avenged.

Li grips est granz, draguns maigres;  
Cil est plus fort, cil plus aigres.  
Morz est li grips, en mer chaït :  
Vengét en sunt ki l'unt haït.<sup>62</sup>

Unlike in the previous battle, the animals are physically and temperamentally different. The two appear ill matched as the griffin is large, “granz,” while the dragon is much smaller, “maigres.” Despite their size, however, the dragon is able to defeat the griffin because of its fierceness. Similar to the sea serpents, the narrator does not clarify the motivation of the griffin;<sup>63</sup> the final line, “Vengét en sunt ki l'unt haït,” reveals that many humans, including the monks, fear the animal. In turning once more to Pierre de Beauvais, the answer is revealed in the entry for the griffin. Pierre writes that the griffin is capable of carrying away an entire live cow, and that in this allegory, the griffin represents the Devil, and the cow represents man and his mortal sin.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, in extending this metaphor to the Brendan legend, the griffin is an embodied reminder of the monks’ humanity and sins as they continue on their voyage, and the dragon

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<sup>62</sup> l. 1023-26.

<sup>63</sup> The monks praise God for his miracle after they are rescued by the dragon, so this intervention may also be attributed to God’s protection of Brendan and his crew.

<sup>64</sup> Pierre de Beauvais, *Le Bestiaire: Version Longue*, XXXVIII, l. 5-10.

serves as God's protection.<sup>65</sup> The animal battles in *Voyage de Saint Brendan* are unique in that human interaction is extremely limited. Humans are intended targets of the sea serpent and griffin, but the second serpent and dragon demonstrate that humans are to be safeguarded.

Finally, in addition protection, *Voyage de Saint Brendan* depicts an encounter in which an animal provides assistance and service for a human character for over thirty years. Near the end of the narrative, Brendan and the monks land on a mountainous island where they meet Paul the Hermit. Paul tells the party that he has been on the island for ninety years and that he will remain there until Judgment Day.<sup>66</sup> The hermit tells Brendan of the help he has received for thirty years:

For a full thirty years I had a servant who provided for me. A sea otter regularly brought me and fed me three fish a week. . . . Around its neck was a satchel filled with dried seaweed with which I could cook my fish.

Un sergant oi trent' anz pleiners,  
De mei servir suveners :  
Uns lutres fud qui m'aportout  
Suven peisun dun il me pout  
Tuz dis tres jurs en la semaine ;  
. . . .  
Al col pendud marin werrec  
Plein un savel portout tut sec  
Dun mes peisuns pouse quire.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> When Brendan and the monks arrive at Paradise, they find that dragons guard the entrance, l. 1704-5, "Mais l'entree mult ert forte : / Draguns i at qui la guardent."

<sup>66</sup> l. 1553-55, "Nunante anz ad qu'ai ci éstét. / Beal tens i ad, tuz dis éstét. / Ici atent le juise."

<sup>67</sup> l. 1563-73

The language of this excerpt, “sergant” and “servir,” reveals the subservience of the otter in its work to provide Paul with sustenance.<sup>68</sup> Rather, it demonstrates the hermit’s view of the animal, as one that serves rather than assists or saves. Here the difference between animal and human is stark, since the text gives no indication that this relationship is symbiotic. The otter serves Paul in a model that echoes human dominion over all animals in Genesis. Yet, the only textual evidence that the otter’s servitude is intentional is the satchel it wears around its neck. Like the jesses found on Muldumarec in his hawk form, the satchel is an object of domestication, and one that hints at prior human interaction. Paul nevertheless attributes the otter’s actions to God, which echoes God’s intervention in sending animals to protect the monks from attacks earlier in the narrative. Thus, throughout *Voyage de Saint Brendan*, human and nonhuman animal encounters are always mediated by God in ways that favor human characters. To that end, violence and subjugation are not the defining characteristic of humanity in this text, but rather, the human ability of faith in God is what distinguishes animals and humans.

### Conclusion

Tracing human and nonhuman animal interactions in medieval narrative is an adventurous task given the rich variety of relationships these texts present. Even more exciting is identifying how these narratives define humanity based on these encounters.<sup>69</sup> In Old French narratives, textual interactions with animals depict humans as compassionate, elemental, violent, dominant, mutable, vulnerable, and faithful, in addition to many other qualities. Furthermore, in

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<sup>68</sup> The otter is reminiscent of the two otters that dry St. Cuthbert’s feet in Bede’s *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*.

<sup>69</sup> Steel’s and Crane’s monographs approach these encounters from a wider, European perspective, instead of focusing on one geographic or linguistic corpus. McCracken focuses on French and Latin texts, but also extends her scope to include some Old Norse and German material.

describing relationships between humans and animals, these narratives are also defining what it means to be an animal, as well as questioning the many boundaries between the human and animal categories. In presenting humans and animals that defy categorization, and those that can move freely between forms, these Old French narratives often demonstrate a resistance to strict categorization. Indeed, considering what constitutes a human in the French Middle Ages also requires an investigation of race, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status. And while violence often plays a role in depicting human rule over animals, it is not necessarily the case that this violence is the only model for human-animal interaction or difference. Perhaps the key to defining the human in Old French narratives lies in reading humans and animals as part of a larger, singular category, rather than in enforcing a distinction between the two: the human is animal.

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