Sharing Flesh.
Carnivorism and Commensality
in Medieval French Literature

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Romance Languages and Literatures: French)
in the University of Michigan
2023

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Dedication

À Nico, pour ces années partagées entre le Midwest et notre perchoir de Montparnasse, les automnes dans le Michigan et la vie de chats d'gouttière sous les toits de Paris, à califourchon sur deux continents, au-dessus du tumulte du monde ; *ástin mín*.

À mes parents et à mes grands-parents maternels, pour m'avoir toujours soutenu dans mes bizarreries et mes choix, même quand ils ne les comprenaient pas, inconditionnellement.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have existed without the network of support I benefitted in the Department of Romance Languages & Literatures and beyond.

First and foremost, I want to thank Peggy McCracken, for encouraging me to apply to RLL, for guiding me through every milestone of academic life, for helping me out of every writer's block and research impasse I'd run into with her terrific insights, and for supporting me unflinchingly in the development of my – sometimes quite peculiar – research interests during all those fruitful and intellectually exciting seven years. Thank you, Peggy, for your generosity and your tremendous mentoring.

My gratitude also goes to David Caron, for (also!) encouraging me to join RLL, for introducing me to Ann Arbor and for helping me navigating the US system, but most importantly for our brainstorming sessions over coffee that would systematically end up in movie recommendations. My special thanks too to George Hoffmann who, in the various roles he played over the years – Graduate Chair, Professor for whom I GSIed, and member of my committee – was constant in his kindness and in sharing good advice, and to Antoine Traisnel, whose seminar on Derrida and engaging conversation had no small influence on this dissertation. I also want to thank Catherine Sanok for her thoughtful feedback on an early version of Chapter 2 and for her inspiring seminar on feminine writing in medieval and early-modern England, as well as Christophe Maneuvrier for setting me on the trail of pursuing a PhD in America.

I am grateful for the institutional support I received throughout my PhD in RLL; I am indebted to our fabulous Desiree Laurencelle who got me out of every administrative difficulty I ever encountered and whose kindness I will miss, and to Kathy Meyer and Ryan Hendrickson, who as coordinators helped me grow as a teacher. I am also grateful for the fellowships received from the Horace H. Rackham Graduate School and from the Institute for the Humanities; the support of the Institute during the past year allowed me to complete this dissertation in the best conditions one can hope for.

Thanks to the Graduate Employees Organization, for its ongoing struggle to make the University of Michigan a better place for everybody, in spite of strong headwinds, and for setting up a beautiful example of solidarity and labor organization in the challenging times we live in.

Last but not least, as intellectually fulfilling as it can be, grad school would have been a lonely journey without the friends made along the way. To Steven Kurtz, David Campbell, Youngkyun Choi, Raquel Vieira Parrine Sant'Ana, Audrey Hansen, Lise Soulier, Blake Gutt, Gala Patenkovic, Luis dos Santos, Mariel Martinez Alvarez, Maria Han Veiga, Alejandro Vela, Matias Larramendi-Salvat, Garima Panwar, Sahil Kumar, Nicholas Holterman, Antonello Mastronardi, Srdjan Cvjeticanin, Janice Feng, Isabelle Gillet, Luiza Duarte Caetano: thank you all for the laughs, the much needed breaks, the conversations at any time of the day and sometimes of the night, the shared niche obsessions, the nights out remaking the world or dancing. You made Ann Arbor a place full of joy.

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Abstract

My dissertation investigates the ways in which medieval fiction imagines the boundaries of the self in relation to the bodies of others, with a focus on representations of eating flesh. Reading Old French narratives from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, I highlight the ways in which the consumption of meat both defines and disrupts human-nonhuman difference as well as social divisions among humans, conceived in terms of gender, class, or race. As other critics have noted, many literary texts point to the porosity of human/nonhuman boundaries, demonstrating that hierarchies defined by such boundaries must be repeatedly reinstated through violence. My research shows that the shared consumption of flesh both conforms to and challenges such violent enactments of hierarchical distinction. Literary representations of carnivorism offer new perspectives on bodily difference; they endorse the hierarchy of eater and eaten even as they question and resist ontological distinction based on who or what may be consumed.

I demonstrate that medieval narratives represent the carnivorous relation to flesh paradoxically as both a recognition of shared corporeality and the production of bodily difference through butchering. In medieval romances carnivorism is simultaneously a habit, a violent act, and a privilege enacting social distinctions. These texts associate meat with virility, and the vocabulary of consumption and flesh links meat eating and heterosexual practices, but gendered divisions also cut across other modes of distinction, such as class and race, as seen in the animalization of peasants and racialized others in chivalric romances, and in representations of "noble" animals who are granted more value than some human beings. Romance narratives

also draw on religious imagery to describe the shared consumption of meat, but my research contributes to a secular rethinking of flesh as a notion capacious enough to encompass distinctions and experiences that do not fit neatly into our modern human/nonhuman divide. I demonstrate that flesh grounds a variety of distinctions and hierarchies, and that a critical interrogation of flesh offers new understandings of social identity in medieval texts.

After a first chapter in which I both define my phenomenological understanding of flesh and contextualize it in the medieval cultural landscape, I read the thirteenth-century *Lai d'Ignaure*: in this story of twelve noble ladies who unwittingly share a cannibalistic meal, the women form a community organized in relation to the flesh of the man they all loved and whose heart and genitals they consume in a meal. I argue that because it stresses physical contact and co-belonging instead of boundaries, flesh seams what bodies divide in this story about patriarchal authority, allowing the women access to a sexual agency that conflicts with noble social structures. In a third chapter about Chrétien de Troyes's *Chevalier au lion*, I show that butchering produces corporeal difference, tearing beings and bodies apart to assert who can eat whom and with whom, with a focus on separating species, class, and race. My fourth chapter investigates the possibility of an embodied animal perspective in the thirteenth century *Guillaume de Palerne* and *Roman de Renart,* as well as several werewolf tales in which I interrogate how different embodiments shape different ways to inhabit the world "in the flesh," beyond one's given body, unveiling ontologies that are neither dualistic or essentialist.

Chapter 1. Introduction:
A Taste for Flesh

In the thirteenth century *Perlesvaus*, the Lord of the Marshes, at war with the Widowed Lady, encounters a cruel death when defeated by her son, Perlesvaus. A follower of the "Old Law" – a catch-all term initially meant for Judaism but here conflated with paganism, Islam, and Christian heresies –the Lord of the Marshes tries to strip the Lady and her son, descendants of a holy family, of their birthright to their land. Since, as the Lady puts it, the Lord of the Marshes wasn't satisfied with the Lady's men's blood, after he defeats him Perlesvaus has twelve of the Lord's knights beheaded and bled into a tank, into which the Lord is plunged and drowned. Perlesvaus justifies the punishment as follows, echoing his mother's recrimination: "Lord of the Marshes, you couldn't get drunk enough with the blood of my mother's knights, so I will make you drunk with your own knights' blood!" ("Sire des Mores, vos ne peustes onques estre saoulez del sanc as chevaliers ma dame ma mere, mais ge vos saolerai del sanc as vostres!" p.614).[1] Perlesvaus frames his vengeance in terms of consumption, feeding his enemy with the latter's own men's blood until he dies. The excessive, deadly consumption of blood responds to the excessive, deadly appetites of the Lord for a land that wasn't his; because he was so intoxicated with human blood in his endless war to conquer the Widowed Lady's land, the Lord of the Marshes's death results from a lethal drunkenness, emphasized by the verb "saouler," to get drunk, and metaphorically, to have too much of something.

[1] Armand Strubel, ed., *Le haut livre du Graal: Perlesvaus*, Lettres gothiques (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2007). All translations are mine.

In this prose continuation of Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal*, the brutality and the cannibalistic overtones of the inflicted punishment are hardly surprising, whilst being at odds with the quest of spiritual elevation offered by Chrétien in what appears to be the text's model. Like the Lord of the Marshes, the *Perlesvaus*'s anonymous writer seems to never have his fill of blood, as demonstrated in the many representations of torn, mutilated, and consumed human flesh. An uncanny blend of Crusading spirit and Celtic motifs, including their respective obsessions with ethnic-religious cleansing and ritual beheading, the *Perlesvaus* stages disabled knights serving cruel ladies, carts full of heads, butchering of rivalrous knights, windows chopping heads like guillotines, slaughters of entire populations of unbelievers, and cannibalism.[2] The readership is invited to consume that excess of flesh as well, because the text claims a mission of educating that cannot be untangled from entertaining, hence the format of a vernacular, action-packed romance; as Margery Kempe and François Rabelais would later write, inspired by John (10:9), a book can also be eaten, and its contents digested.[3]

Medieval French literature displays an obsession with consuming flesh, human and nonhuman. That medieval narratives are haunted by cannibalism may not be so surprising in a society where a very marker of civilization was the consumption of God's flesh at Mass. In one of the *Perlesvaus*'s most (in)famous episodes, a pagan king, Gurgaran, asks a Christian knight, Gauvain, to rescue his son abducted by a giant. Gauvain finds the two of them peacefully playing chess and defies the giant. Mortally wounded by Gauvain, the giant gives a deadly embrace to the king's son, suffocating him before dying himself. Gauvain brings the giant's head and the boy's body back to the devastated father. Gurgaran then decides to boil his son's flesh and to

[2] Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover. Reading the Secular against the Sacred*, The Conway Lectures in Medieval Studies (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 73-74.
[3] Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 1. paperback print, New Cultural Studies Series (Philadelphia, Pa: Univ. of Pennsylvania Pr, 1994), 168.
François Rabelais, *Gargantua*, ed. Guy Demerson and Michel Renaud, Points 287 (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1996), 50.

share it with all his men, "as long as the flesh lasts" ("tant con la char dure," 314), before taking baptism and asking Gauvain to decapitate everybody who refuses to believe in (the Christian) God, just as he did to the giant.

The Eucharistic allegory of the king who converts by sharing his son's flesh with all his men has inspired mixed reactions from modern critics who have expressed perplexity or revulsion, or just rolled their eyes at the clumsily Christianized cannibalistic ritual.[4] But my interest here does not lie in how weirdly this text stands in regard to other Grail narratives or whether its Christian allegories are botched or brilliantly original. Instead, I turn my attention to how these two excerpts exemplify the centrality of *sharing* flesh in constructing social relationships and identities in medieval French narratives. The death of the Lord of the Marshes and the sharing of the boy's flesh point to many of the themes that I unfold throughout this dissertation, such as butchering, commensality, the play between metaphorical and literal appetites, or the sexual consumption of forbidden bodies, as suggested by the giant's abduction and embrace of the boy. These themes are embedded in the narrative tissue of the romance, which stages a reorganization of society along Christian and feudal lines through Perslevaus's own violent Crusade in Britain, and they open important questions about the role of eating flesh – the same flesh that we're all made of – in the social organization and identities in medieval French literature, questions that I will investigate in the coming chapters.

In "Sharing Flesh," I read a selection of narrative poems composed between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries in modern-day France and England, all written in Old French; among them, Renaut's lay of *Ignaure,* Chrétien de Troyes's *Chevalier au lion*, a series of werewolf tales

[4] Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover*, 78.
In a footnote of his edition (p.314), Armand Strubel calls the Eucharistic allegory laborious. He also links it to Gerald of Wales' account of an Irish king bathing in the kettle in which a mare's flesh was boiled and then distributed to the king's men.

– the anonymous *Guillaume de Palerne*, alongside *Melion* and Marie de France's *Bisclavret*– and the corpus of the *Roman de Renart*. Just like the *Perlesvaus*, these vernacular texts stage an aristocratic masculinity closely articulated with the consumption of the other, human and nonhuman, literal and metaphorical, in acts either condemned or sanctified by the community.

Consuming flesh involves more than fulfilling a physiological need. Criteria of what is socially acceptable to eat, and with whom, not only reflect a society's own worldview but, in literary texts, consuming flesh actively produces this worldview, drawing boundaries and ordering hierarchies regarding whose flesh can be consumed and by whom, but also who's invited to the feast and who isn't.[5] Commensality, that is, sharing food in a social setting, represents a fundamental gesture of asserting a group's own cohesiveness. In medieval French culture, the Christian community stages its unity through the Eucharist, by sharing God's flesh, whereas aristocratic ritual hospitality defines class solidarity in chivalric romances by scripting who's allowed at the table and who isn't. Both examples collide in King Gurgaran's sharing of his son's flesh with his men, a ritual of personal conversion to Christianity that forcefully involves all the knights in his service, under the pretext of sharing a meal together, while those who would refuse conversion are sentenced to death.

Gurgaran and his vassals' consumption of the king's son connects multiple bodies: the boy's body, the king's and his vassals', and the political body formed through commensality and religious conversion. "Medieval political theory was obsessed with the metaphorical correspondence between the individual body and the social corpus," highlights Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, who then adds: "When the social hierarchy is readable as a corporeal order, the

[5] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Nous sommes tous des cannibales*, La librairie du XXIe siècle (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 2013), 168-173; 218-230.

imposition of that structuration is, of necessity, a cannibal poetics."[6] The commensal partaking of the boy's flesh implies that the political and religious order of French chivalric romances derives from a cannibal poetics that translates the Eucharist into the feudal order. The dismembering of the boy and partaking of his flesh reorganizes Gurgaran's dominion around conversion and the promise of violence to those who would not share the king's new religious values; what happens to the flesh in medieval narratives reflects the organization of society, not of any "real" historical society but of society as writers from a social elite would conceptualize it and stage it in works of fiction. But if a sharing of food "can be an eloquent statement of shared ideology and as such expresses group affiliation and apparent solidarity," it also grounds affiliation both within and beyond the body, as the commensals become those who take another being's flesh into theirs, across bodily boundaries.[7]

Sharing flesh creates community, but when this happens, the boy's body is not the only one to be affected. Sharing flesh always implies opening one's flesh to someone else's flesh, incorporating the other, which in return transforms its host. Such a process raises theological interrogations regarding human nature. Since digestion turns animal flesh into human flesh, as Thomas Aquinas argues, one may ask: is human flesh, made in God's image, of animal origins?[8] Already in the twelfth century, Peter Lombard addresses the unsettling "change of foodstuff into flesh-stuff" by describing it as an expansion of the self from itself, to preserve a Christian core from being altered by the consumption of the other's flesh.[9] Nonetheless, the transformative

[6] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants. Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, MN : University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 82.
[7] Nick Fiddes, *Meat, a Natural Symbol* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1991), 38.
[8] Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 44.
[9] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York : Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books ; Distributed by the MIT Press, 2001), 89. Regarding theologian debates about meat consumption in the Middle Ages, see also Massimo Montanari, *La chère et l'esprit. Histoire de la culture alimentaire chrétienne*, trans. Jacques Dalarun and Martine Pagan-Dalarun (Paris: Alma, 2017), 59-91.

qualities of ingesting flesh were recognized and illustrated by, again, the Eucharist. In the fourteenth century, Johannes Tauler's teaching stresses that God chose the Eucharist as a privileged way to unite Himself with humankind precisely because food becomes part of the one who ingests it.[10] Here I want to highlight how, in the intellectual landscape of the period, the consumption of flesh sparked debates and anxieties in relation to bodily boundaries and to what makes the human. However, even though romance narratives draw on religious imagery to describe the shared consumption of meat, vernacular literature reflects – and also plays with, sometimes irreverently– the interests of a readership mostly composed of upper-class laypersons whose preoccupations may be quite different from those of the theologians. The flesh of medieval French literature is not quite the same flesh as the one discussed in intellectual circles at the newly founded Sorbonne or by theologians elsewhere.

Defining flesh represents a challenge not only for the long and sometimes contradictory history that the concept has in the Latin Christian West, but also because of the widespread modern critical tendency to assume its meaning without delving into it. The word "flesh" is too often used in academic publications without much definition, as if its meaning was self-evident. Gayle Salamon claims that flesh is "a thing that is thinkable, but not a thing that has been thought," and although this provocative statement might sound exaggerated– especially for Premodernists! – it encapsulates the frustration I often felt toward publications that refer to flesh, sometimes even in their titles, without the slightest conceptualization of what is meant by this term.[11] My research contributes to a secular rethinking of flesh as a notion capacious enough to encompass distinctions and experiences that do not fit neatly into our modern conceptions of the

[10] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, The New Historicism : Studies in Cultural Poetics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 4.
[11] Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 65.

body. In this dissertation, I investigate premodern notions of flesh as they appear in Old French literature, and I do so in dialogue with critical theory; this introduction aims to untangle what I mean by the word "flesh."

To start with, a distinction between flesh and meat grounds my research. Meat is always (made of) flesh, but the notion of flesh encompasses a broader reality and a larger set of discourses than meat does. These two words are constantly prone to confusion – and the fact that the modern English "flesh" originates in a Teutonic word that means "bacon" does nothing to dissipate that confusion – but, in scholarly definitions, both medieval and contemporary, if meat is always flesh, flesh is not always meat.[12] Meat can be defined as an objectification and even a commodification of body parts in order for them to be eaten or sold as food, whereas flesh refers to a common corporeality shared across beings and species, because every living animal is made of flesh. Creating the object "meat" implies material operations, as illustrated by the boiling of Gurgaran's son to make him edible and "shareable," but also discursive operations that justify the consumption of the other and that define a distinction between a devouring subject and a devoured object. In its normalized, socially acceptable forms (that exclude cannibalism), eating meat requires distinguishing human subjects from animals, and making sure that the plate's contents respect this distinction.

Cannibalism is not my primary focus. Instead, I focus on how the shared corporeality of living beings complicates the work of distinguishing human subjects from "edible" animals. Cannibalism is of interest insofar as its shock-value draws attention to carnivorism in its most routine and invisibilized forms, and to the social relationships it stages; it is a "magnifying glass," to quote Florence Burgat, putting the consumption of others' flesh in focus, thereby

[12] Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2002), 27.

inviting a reflection on what makes the eating of some flesh acceptable or not, and how.[13] Every culture experiences some degree of discomfort with eating animals, which requires killing and consuming living creatures made of flesh, but each society draws different conclusions and invents its own ways to share flesh and to justify it.[14] We find examples of this discomfort in contemporary global movements to abolish intensive animal farming as well as in ancient dietary prescriptions, in myths across the world that justify and ritualize hunting, as well as in European medieval prohibitions on eating certain kinds of animals deemed too close to human beings, such as horses and dogs, or carnivores (for reasons not clearly elucidated).[15] Inheriting taxonomies from the ancient world, the European Middle Ages see the elaboration of new taxonomies encompassing ancient knowledge, Biblical and early-Christian legacies, and daily practices and consumption habits related to animals. Vernacular literature reflects this work of negotiating social and cultural norms in, for example, the *Roman de Renart*, a text that extensively addresses the conflict between wild predators and the human exploitation of animals for their flesh. In the *Renart*, this conflict is both illustrated and subverted by a frequently disrupted contrast between human and animal eating practices, that I discuss in Chapter 4.[16]

Particularly estranged from our era of vanishing biodiversity, life engineering, urban concentration, and mass-(re)production of meat in which the animal death is hidden from the public's eye, medieval literature depicts a universe of constant and daily interactions between human and nonhuman animals, involving all strata of society. It is also marked by a strong hierarchy of the living, where "one thing that every person had in common was dominion over

[13] Florence Burgat, *L'humanité carnivore* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2017), 303.
[14] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Nous sommes tous des cannibales*, 218-222.
[15] Salisbury, *The Beast within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 63-64.
[16] Yasmina Foehr-Janssens, "*Animal Studies* et littérature médiévale: fictions politiques de la domestication," *French Studies* 72, no. 4 (October 1, 2018), 582-583.

animals."[17] Violence plays an important role in distinguishing human and nonhuman animals in the Middle Ages, illustrated in hunting, butchering, and of course meat-eating.[18] Medieval culture generally assumes that the human slaughter and consumption of nonhuman animals is a practice defined by a natural and even divinely ordained hierarchy, yet I show that medieval imaginative literature also questions the human-animal distinction defined by eating. If all nonhuman animals are equal in their exclusion from the realm of Christian subjects, some are more equal than others: nonhuman animals can enjoy very different statuses regarding carnivorism in medieval French literature, whereas some human beings are constructed as less than beasts, as the ones to be consumed, even if not literally eaten.

Eating meat not only defines one's belonging to a certain group or one's identity – as a devouring human subject, for example – but also "conjoins us in a network of the edible and the nonedible, the human and the non-human, the animate and the inanimate. In these actions, the individual is constantly connecting, disconnecting and reconnecting with different aspects of individual and social life."[19] If a scene of eating flesh always involves a devouring subject and a devoured object, there's always more at stake than this opposition. Religious prescriptions and prohibitions, social and gendered expectations, affective bondings with some animals, and economic circuits are all at play, but they do not constitute a fixed, unchanged reality throughout the Middle Ages. Between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, eating meat comes to be increasingly associated with the aristocrats who can afford it in a context of demographic growth that puts food resources in tension; as animal proteins plummeted in the diet of the peasants and

[17] Peggy McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France* (Chicago, IL : University of Chicago Press, 2017), 15.
[18] Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), 23.
[19] Elspeth Probyn, *Carnal Appetites: Foodsexidentities* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 17.

the working class, meat became a stronger marker of social and economic status.[20] At the same time, even among the social elite, debates sparked about the ethics of aristocrats feeding their dogs with meat, the same meat that the laborious classes could no longer afford.[21] If the meat consumed by aristocrats came essentially from animal farming, hunting rights also represented an aristocratic privilege, which finds its illustration in medieval romances that depict numerous hunting scenes, some of which will be discussed in this dissertation.[22]

Throughout the period, eating meat increasingly becomes a sign of power, and of male power. Even among the aristocracy, the access to meat was regulated on the basis of gender: besides the calendar periods of abstinence from flesh devised by the Church for everybody, meat was thought to aggravate lust, and therefore a more appropriate food for men than for women.[23] The association of meat with virility is not proper to the Middle Ages, and belongs to the long history of the *carnophallogocentrisme* identified by Jacques Derrida, where "the chief must be an eater of flesh," and where the privileged status of the upper-class meat-eater doubles a phallogocentrism that excludes women from power and speech.[24] Opposite to the consumption of meat, fasting, whilst a practice rooted in early Christianity, becomes more potent during the medieval period as a way to renounce flesh, and it is especially true for women, who faced a stronger cultural association with flesh and with food, and who developed particular gendered religious practices emphasizing fasting.[25] These religious practices link fasting to abstinence and

[20] Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 56-57.
[21] Karl Steel, *How Not to Make a Human: Pets, Feral Children, Worms, Sky Burial, Oysters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 30-34.
[22] An Smets and Baudouin van den Abeele, "Medieval Hunting," in *A Cultural History of Animals*, ed. Brigitte Resl, vol. 2 (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2011), 59.
[23] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 191.
[24] Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida.," in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, by Eduardo Cadava, Peter Connor, and Jean-Luc Nancy (New York: Routledge, 1991), 112-114.
[25] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 74.
Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 4.

chastity; for John Cassian (fifth century), renouncing fornication was a way to leave the flesh while still inhabiting the body.[26] In the Middle Ages, the victory over flesh relies both on taming carnal appetites with chastity and on refraining from eating more than necessary and from drunkenness.[27] Again, the insistence on fasting as a form of abstinence carries more weight for women who were more heavily associated with flesh, than for men. Fasting was a way for medieval women to reclaim a body while leaving behind the flesh, tarnished since Augustine by a negative association to sin.

The relationship between fasting and abstinence – between renouncing meat and renouncing carnality – highlights that there are many ways to consume flesh in medieval texts, and sexual consumption is one of them. In her influential work on the sexual politics of meat, Carol J. Adams has argued that patriarchy relies not only on controlling women's bodies, but on controlling animal bodies as well, aligning sexual violence with animal abuse and rape with butchering (without necessarily equating them).[28] Elspeth Probyn criticizes Adams' "rad-fem analysis of sexual politics" and her attempts "to police the troubling fusion of the flesh eating flesh" in order to maintain "strict and determined boundaries."[29] Probyn praises instead the way flesh "confuses the limits of what we are and what we eat, what or who we want; flesh encapsulates the quandary of whether the body in question is edible, shaggable, or both."[30] The debates about the ambivalent nature of flesh in relation to gender and sexuality have marked feminist and queer scholarship from the 1990s onward, but they echo medieval controversies and intellectual struggles to define the concept itself, which can be traced back to a Christian anxiety

[26] Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité, 4. Les aveux de la chair*, ed. Frédéric Gros, Bibliothèque Des Histoires (Paris: Gallimard, 2018), 239.
[27] Jacques Le Goff, *L'imaginaire médiéval: Essais*, Bibliothèque des Histoires (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 141.
[28] Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat : A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, 20th anniversary ed. (New York ; London: Continuum, 2010), 15-23.
[29] Probyn, *Carnal Appetites*, 73.
[30] Probyn, *Carnal Appetites*, 70-71.

that fashioned European attitudes toward gender, sexuality, but also the mere definition of what it is to be human: what does flesh do, exactly? How to keep its appetites under check, since it appears to exceed the body and the will?[31]

Etymologically, carnality derives from the Latin *caro*, flesh, that gave the Old French *char,* and *la chair* in modern French (the word is feminine). The Christian notion of flesh presents an ambiguous dual meaning from the start, since it names both the envelope of the self through which one experiences the world in all its glory, and the bodily reality where sin and temptation lodge.[32] Following Augustine's influential metaphor that flesh, like one's wife, must be domesticated, the association of flesh and carnality with femininity was pervasive in medieval Christianity.[33] However, feminist scholars such as Mayra Rivera have warned against "the dangers to accept uncritically" this association of flesh with femininity in premodern times.[34] In her own work on flesh in medieval England, Karma Lochrie highlights the risks of operating from the binary system of "flesh/ soul, flesh/ spirit, literal/ figurative readings, all of which are constructed on the female/ male binarism," which ultimately reproduces the very structures of oppression that a critical reading intends to debunk and erases the complexity of ancient and medieval understandings of flesh and the history that concept has had.[35] Instead, she advocates for a definition of flesh as heterogenous, "neither body nor soul, but carnal and spiritual at the same time," underscoring the threat that this heterogeneity of the flesh constitutes for the Christian subject.[36] Similarly, Suzannah Biernoff emphasizes that Paul, by inscribing flesh in an

[31] Obviously, the whole point of queer theory and pro-sex feminism seemed to be to celebrate flesh – carnality – as a site of disruption against Christian and patriarchal traditions, as Probyn enthusiastically does here, but this point deserves some nuance too, since pro-sex politics often entails some kind of politically-motivated sanitization of the sexual practices it represents, alongside the institutionalization (and loss of radicality) of queer studies. Oliver Davis and Tim Dean, *Hatred of Sex*, Provocations (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022), 45-52.
[32] Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 130-136.
[33] Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 19.
[34] Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 57.
[35] Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 14-15.
[36] Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*, 168.

economy of sin, turns flesh into a "matter of orientation [...] rather than the physical condition of being human," which is reflected in the medieval understanding of *caro*, whose polysemy points to the materiality of the human body as much as to the physical world *beyond* one's body, to God's Incarnation to redeem humanity as much as to disruptive carnal passions, a polysemy that I insist we should bear in mind constantly in reading medieval literature.[37]

The idea of flesh as orientation calls on phenomenological understandings of flesh. In Maurice Merleau-Ponty's definition, flesh is neither matter, nor spirit, nor substance, but an element of being, a texture wrapping the visible and the tangible on the body; "the commonness in which both subject and object participate, a single 'thing' folded back on itself," as Elisabeth Grosz sums up.[38] Flesh exceeds the body, and this represents a point at which Merleau-Ponty's writings echo the works of medieval scholars.[39] Despite Merleau-Ponty's dedication to destabilizing binary oppositions, his work has been read as "an account of masculine modes of human being," based on a not-so-implicit perception of flesh as disembodied and feminine, under the cover of a "neutral / universal" conceptualization of flesh that becomes particularly salient when he uses the word "invagination" as an alternative to "fold" to address the flesh.[40] Feminists scholars have nonetheless found useful Merleau-Ponty's challenging of the boundaries between the inside and the outside, and have particularly stressed flesh's relationship to materiality, as when Sara Ahmed defines flesh as "the very sensibility of the seen, and the very sight of the sensible," or in Rivera's notion of flesh that emphasizes "the intertwining of the social and the material" in Merleau-Ponty's thought.[41] My own reading of flesh draws from

[37] Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*, 28.
[38] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible: suivi de Notes de travail*, Tel 36 (Paris: Gallimard, 2016), 181 and 189-190. Elizabeth Grosz, "Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray in the Flesh:," *Thesis Eleven*, 1993,43.
[39] Suzannah Biernoff, "Carnal Relations: Embodied Sight in Merleau-Ponty, Roger Bacon and St Francis," *Journal of Visual Culture* 4, no. 1 (April 2005), 45.
[40] Grosz, "Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray in the Flesh," 37-42.
[41] Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 47.

Merleau-Ponty's definition as "fold" as well, and yet, counter to Merleau-Ponty's rejection of flesh as matter, I focus on flesh's materiality and on the way flesh materializes the interactions and relations that it folds. I understand flesh as weaving the social fabric into the physical world; flesh materializes social and cultural relationships, not in the sense of translating them into matter, but in a dynamic, mutual production that relies on a relationality between the immaterial and the material, with an emphasis on the latter.

Since flesh allows both touch and being touched, Ahmed makes a case for a queer phenomenology: if flesh is a matter of orientation (in the Pauline sense), then the orientation can be twisted (the etymology of "queer"), producing orientations that are not vertical (hierarchical) or shaped as "straight lines."[42] Because flesh trespasses bodily boundaries, a phenomenology of the flesh allows for a repositioning of bodies not along, but against the lines of gender and of other hierarchies. Trans* scholars in particular, have insisted that Merleau-Ponty's "philosophy of ambiguity" regarding sexuality enables not only an understanding of "bodies, lives, and especially *relationality* outside the domains of male and female" by de-genitalizing sexuality and producing the body from its interactions with the world around, but also a re-coding of body image and sexuality outside cisnormativity.[43] Focusing on flesh, on a carnality that exceeds the limits of the body, orients readings toward differently-coded bodies, toward non-normative sexualities that can be unfolded from literary texts when contacts occur among different fleshes; what to say of a boy abducted and killed by a giant's embrace, whose flesh is then devoured by the male companions of his father? Queerness surfaces in Old French texts with inappropriate

Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh*, 134.
[42] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 67.
[43] Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 44 for the quotation, but see also 47-50.
Tamsin Kimoto, "(Be)Coming Undone: Toward a Critical Trans Phenomenology of Sexuality:," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* n° 302, no. 4 (January 6, 2023), 107-113.

objects of desire, forbidden bodies, and consumption of a flesh that should otherwise not be embraced or consumed, such as a king's son, an aristocratic, male subject who should be in the position of the eater of flesh, yet ends up devoured by his own father and the men of his class.

Flesh has been frequently associated not only with femininity, sexual dissidence, and animality, but also with racial others. Flesh thus represents "the province of marginalized subjects"' in the words of Amber Jamila Musser, and has functioned as a critical concept in race and Black studies as well, particularly since the 1980s and Hortense Spillers' work on "black flesh."[44] For Spillers, flesh "carries the marks of a cultural context where inside has been turned outside," and she takes as an example the scars of the slaves who have been whipped; her reading accounts for a black flesh that materializes racial difference and a historical violence inflicted to bodies, offering "a praxis and a theory, a text for living and for dying, and a method for reading both through their diverse mediations."[45] Phenomenological and Black Feminist conceptions of the flesh put into tension two approaches to the flesh, as a surface molded by a cultural context – and its violence – and a means to orient oneself out of binary oppositions and the hierarchies they structure. These two approaches are summarized by Alexander Weheliye: "the flesh thus operates as a vestibular gash in the armor of Man, simultaneously a tool of dehumanization and a relational vestibule to alternate ways of being that do not possess the luxury of eliding phenomenology with biology."[46]

Even though the texts I read predate the construction of blackness as discussed by Spillers and Weheliye, and certainly operate differently in representing the ethnic, cultural, and

[44] Amber Jamilla Musser, *Sensational Flesh: Race, Power, and Masochism*, Sexual Cultures (New York: New York University Press, 2014, 19.
[45] Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe. An American Grammar Book," in *Black, White, and in Color : Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 207.
[46] Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus. Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 44.

religious Other than the racial categories inherited from the Atlantic slave trade and its subsequent history, these texts are not by any means, "innocent" of racial representations as a longstanding tradition in medieval studies once held.[47] As suggested by the extreme violence inflicted to nonbelievers in the *Perlesvaus*, butchering threatens the non-Christian Other of French literature. Religious difference justifies a violence spectacularly inscribed in the flesh – such as beheading – but in the era in which *Perslesvaus* was written, cultural difference is increasingly associated with skin color. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries see the emergence of whiteness and blackness as racial categories in visual arts and writing productions in Western Europe, in a context of increasing contacts between Europe and Africa; for the first time, Europeans see themselves, and represent themselves, as "white," their flesh newly figured by colorlessness, as in transparent glass in stained glass windows, for example.[48] As I will show in Chapter 3, in twelfth-century vernacular literature, skin color plays a role in determining whose life can be subjected to dismemberment and reduced to a brown-colored, disembodied flesh that can symbolically be consumed by the Christian community as meat.

At the center of the production of the human, flesh also carries the potency to undo hierarchies and boundaries, not only between bodies, but also among genders, social groups, and even species. In return, bodily boundaries are constantly reinstated through violence and the reassertion of privilege, from the aristocratic right to hunt to executions of dehumanized nonbelievers. Because their instability calls for repeated reinforcement, these boundaries and privileges are subjected to an exponential proliferation, particularly in a literature that simultaneously expresses the concerns of a social elite and represents a playful space where the

[47] Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 20-21.
[48] Madeline Caviness, "From the Self-Invention of the Whiteman in the Thirteenth Century to *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*," *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art*, 1 (2008), 1-33, quoted in Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 181-185.

disruptive potentialities of flesh can be expressed. Eventually, this proliferation of modes of corporeal difference prevents any stabilization of nature-culture and social divides. In the pages that follow, I work through literary representations of women eating their shared lover, trans-species companionships grounded in sharing meat, and noble characters impersonating carnivorous animals alongside anthropomorphized predatory animals creating a liminal space between humanity and animality. Enacting a constant return to the body and its cultural making, literary scenes of sharing flesh reveal the precarity of the social order as well as of human exceptionalism. My dissertation offers a non-modern theorization of flesh; with the conceptual term of flesh, I demonstrate the multiple modalities through which difference and sameness are produced, with a specific emphasis on the bodily materiality of modes of difference.

The following three chapters investigate three different ways of sharing flesh. The first, "A Dinner to Remember: Consuming the Lover's Flesh in *Ignaure*," reads a lay composed circa 1200 in which twelve noble ladies are tricked by their husbands into eating their lover's heart and genitals, cooked as a stew. The jealous husbands frame their vengeance as a fulfilling of the ladies' desire ("you ate what you desired"), responding to a sexual consumption of flesh with an alimentary consumption of flesh in ways that recall Perlesvaus literalizing the Lord of the Marshes's bloodlust by drowning him in actual blood. However, after their cannibalistic meal, the ladies claim that they were already replete with Ignaure's love, and since they could never have a meal of such worth ever again, they stop eating altogether; a life without pleasures (of the table and of the bed) would not be worthwhile for them. Fasting to death, the ladies dedicate their last moments to composing a lay to their deceased lover, a song that is also a lay to their own unapologetic bodily pleasures that they wish to be remembered. I argue that in *Ignaure,* as in other eaten heart stories, the consumption of the lover's flesh underscores a core carnality of

"courtly love" as codified in twelfth-century lyric poetry but that here, the excessive flesh involved – twelve ladies instead of a single one, the genitals in addition to the heart – designs an alternative model to courtly love that imagines female homosocial bonding over the divided male flesh. It features a focus on shared consummated pleasure rather than a model of desire as lack and valorizes community over exclusivity. Because it stresses physical contact and co-belonging, flesh seams what bodies divide in this story about patriarchal authority, allowing the women access to a sexual agency that conflicts with noble social structures. I demonstrate that in *Ignaure*, circulations of flesh subvert the political, social, and gendered structures that define the court, for the lay calls on provocative ways of understanding – and enjoying – flesh.

In the following chapter, "The Knight with the Lion's Share: Eating with a Beast in the *Chevalier au lion*," I read Chrétien de Troyes' twelfth-century romance about a knight who bonds with a lion after he saved the animal from being devoured by a dragon. The knight, Yvain, recognizes the lion as noble, whereas the dragon is characterized as an evil pest and ends up chopped by the knight's sword into thin slices of meat. As the thankful lion goes to hunt deer for Yvain, the sharing of flesh grounds the man-beast companionship. In this chapter, I stress the significance of butchering as a violent way to turn flesh into meat and living beings into consumable objects. Butchering assigns all bodies to a position in social and human/nonhuman hierarchies, from the deer butchered for sustenance to a racialized giant symbolically expelled from the realm of the human when a violent dismembering turns his body into meat. The act of butchering separates the butchering subject from the butchered object, producing a hierarchy between eater and eaten, but it also separates the "noble" carnivores from the prey or the pest, thereby securing the knight's own status. In medieval romances, violence defines the social, political, and so-called "natural" order; through the *Chevalier au lion*, I show that the violence

inflicted on flesh, both literal and taxonomic, produces corporeal difference, between and within bodies, as it tears limbs – and beings – apart, while asserting the significance of an imaginary trans-species (upper)class solidarity over species divisions.

In my final chapter, titled "Fleshing Out Another Perspective: Inhabiting Animal Bodies," I read a series of texts from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries – the chivalric romance *Guillaume de Palerne*, werewolves' stories, the *Roman de Renart* and some of its later avatars – in which I interrogate the possibility of an animal perspective in medieval French literature. Whereas the two previous chapters focus on the implications of sharing flesh in terms of class, gender, sexuality, and race, this one interrogates animality and particularly the crossing of human/animal divides by inhabiting a nonhuman flesh. I investigate three forms of inhabiting flesh: the wearing of animal skins by courtly lovers impersonating animals, the magical transformation of a noble man into a wolf, and "real" animals granted human minds, speech, and aristocratic titles, but whose very animal interests – such a fox's theft of poultry – puts them at "war" with the human world. Furthering the association of aristocratic men with carnivores, these transformative tales revolve around what medieval writers imagine an animal life to be: finding food and escaping hunters. I show that flesh can be inhabited, metaphorically and literally, since skins can be exchanged, and I demonstrate that these carnivorous creatures clothed in flesh complicate any dualist reading of humanity versus animality by proliferating modes of distinction among beings and bodies. Drawing from the "ontological turn" of anthropology, and particularly from a comparative approach with perspectivism as theorized by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Tania Stolze Lima, I interrogate how a medieval imagination would attempt to capture what it feels like to be an animal, to inhabit a space differently through a different body, and the ontological implications of putting oneself into someone's skin. The

concept of perspectivism refers to an animist system of thought attributing the same agency and mind to both human and nonhuman animals.[49] When every being is granted personhood, the body acts as the "great differentiator" in Viveiros de Castro's words; a diversity of bodies engenders a diversity of points of view.[50] This fourth chapter investigates this multiplication of embodied perspectives, looking for traces of non-dualist perspectives (animism, analogy) in medieval texts, as Susan Crane recently invited us to do in her work on Bestiaries, and arguing for an alternative conceptual system based on multiplicity instead of dualism, and proliferation rather than iteration.[51]

Focusing on flesh brings to the fore newly visible configurations of relationality. In this dissertation, I show that literary representations of carnivorism offer new perspectives on bodily difference; they endorse the hierarchy of eater and eaten even as they question, and resist, ontological distinction based on who or what may be consumed.

[49] Tânia Stolze Lima, "The Two and Its Many: Reflections on Perspectivism in a Tupi Cosmology," *Ethnos* 64, no. 1 (January 1999), 27.
[50] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, HAU Masterclass Series (HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory, 2012),117.
[51] Susan Crane, "An Ontological Turn for the Medieval Book of Beasts: Environmental Theory from Premodern to Postmodern," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Animals and Literature*, ed. Susan McHugh, Robert McKay, and John Miller (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 115

Chapter 2. A Dinner to Remember: Consuming the Lover's Flesh in *Ignaure*

In the *lai d'Ignaure*, twelve ladies are tricked by their husbands into eating the flesh of their lover, cooked as meat in a stew. After their discovery of the dish's gruesome contents, the ladies swear to fast until death and compose a lament for their beloved Ignaure, remembering him in a lay that Renaut, as the author of the text calls himself, records in writing and dedicates to his own lady and to Ignaure himself, "who was dismembered for love" ("ki por amor fu desmembrés," l.664).[52]

Written in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century and set in a mythical Brittany, Renaut's *lai d'Ignaure* offers a variation on the theme of the eaten heart, a literary motif found in other contemporary or later texts.[53] In the relatively limited subset of courtly narratives that develop the eaten heart motif, the husband takes revenge on his wife's lover by first murdering him and then serving his heart to his lady in a meal. An example of eaten heart is found in Thomas' *Tristan*, from the late twelfth century, where Queen Yseut composes and sings a lay about Guiron, a lord who was murdered by his lover's jealous husband who then deceptively served Guiron's heart to the lady.[54] The "lai de Guiron" and *Ignaure* share the core features of the *coeur mangé* story as defined by Jean-Jacques Vincensini: the adulterous relationship, the

[52] Renaut, "Lay d'Ignaure," in *The Old French Lays of Ignaure, Oiselet, and Amours*, ed. and trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook, Cambridge: Woodbridge, Suffolk; Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer; imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd., 2010). Unless indicated otherwise, I use Burgess and Brooks' translation.
[53] Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook, "Introduction," in *The Old French Lays of Ignaure, Oiselet, and Amours* (Cambridge : Woodbridge, Suffolk ; Rochester, NY : D.S. Brewer ; imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd., 2010), 9-10.
[54] Thomas, "Tristan," in *Tristan et Yseut : Les premières versions européennes*, ed. Christiane Marchello-Nizia and Régis Boyer (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 150-151.

murder by the husband, and the lady tricked into eating her lover's heart, to which I would add the final remembering of the lay in a woman's song.[55]

Renaut's text distinguishes itself by two major variations. The lover does not seduce a single lady, but rather twelve, and not only do his lovers consume his heart, but their meal also includes "his lowest member down below" ("tout le daerrain membre aval," 542). Scholars have discussed whether Renaut's version is an exaggeration of an original tale or a more primitive form of the legend; whether most eaten heart narratives, like the "lai de Guiron," have pared down the motif to make it more refined and less bodily, or whether *Ignaure* is a parody of the more refined, less bodily narratives.[56] Whether parodic or not, the lay makes explicit the dimension of sexual pleasure at the core of eaten heart tales by an excess of flesh, with its focus on the devouring of male genitals and the multiplication of the lovers. In this chapter, I highlight how flesh, in its material and discursive presence, makes visible the carnality of love in a tale where a rather unusual number of bodies mingle and inter-penetrate each other through sex and eating, and what type of (gendered) discourses and communities are produced, or challenged, by these bodies and their carnal appetites.

Renaut inscribes love onto the physical body from the very beginning of the tale. "Somebody who loves should hold no secrets" ("Cors ki aimme ne doit reponre," 1), states Renaut in the opening line of the lay. "Cors" can be translated by either "a body" or "somebody" (as translators Burgess and Brooks do), with a phonetic proximity with "cuers" ("heart"). Somebody/body/heart: this wordplay, rather common in Old French lyric poetry, is particularly

[55] Jean-Jacques Vincensini, "Figure de l'imaginaire et figure du discours. Le motif du 'Coeur Mangé' dans la narration médiévale," in *Le "cuer" au Moyen Âge Réalité et Senefiance*, ed. Begoña. Aguiriano et al. (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 1991), 451-453.
[56] Burgess and Brook, "Introduction," 36.
Martina Di Febo, "Ignauré. La parodie « dialectique » ou le détournement du symbolisme courtois," *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes. Journal of medieval and humanistic studies*, no. 5 (October 30, 1998), 167-201.

salient in a text where the main character is reduced to some of his body parts, including his heart. The poet makes no distinction between a person in love and an amorous body, encoding desire and pleasure in the flesh; from there one can orient oneself toward a sexuality that shouldn't be hidden, the body in love must unveil itself. *Ignaure* not only underscores the sexual appetites at the core of courtly narratives, it also focuses attention on the corporeality of pleasure, with its insistence on Ignaure's body parts associated with love and sexual satisfaction. As mentioned in Chapter 1, carnality's etymology derives from flesh; here the body in love is simultaneously the object to unveil and the position from which sexuality can be written.

The ingestion of the lover's heart and genitals fleshes out courtly poetry with a consummated sexual pleasure, underscoring a core carnality of courtly love. In my reading of flesh, I stress the notion of contact, of coming-into-touch with the other and with the material world, while not forgetting how inescapably sexually charged is the concept of flesh. I read Ignaure's flesh as the persisting material site of intersections of discursive and poetic practices on love and sexuality. Passed along as a dish, a prodigal lover's body, and literary material, it enables contacts between multiple bodies, compelling the audience to consider the most physical aspects of courtly love. Renaut quite literally brings flesh to the table: his *Lai d'Ignaure* restores flesh to courtly discourses on love where it had been more often eviscerated or at least concealed.

The knight's body is coveted, loved, envied, mutilated, butchered, consumed, and finally praised and remembered; it is multiply and repeatedly devoured and digested. Eaten heart tales run counter to a normative model of desire where men consume women, who are merely consumed by them.[57] However, psychoanalytic-oriented readings highlight that these tales also

[57] Catherine Waldby, "Destruction. Boundary Erotics and Refigurations of the Heterosexual Male Body," in *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism*, ed. Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (Routledge, 1995), 268-269.

represent a masculine fantasy of incorporation into the body of the beloved, a longing to disappear in female flesh that haunts courtly love.[58] "To love without wanting to devour must surely be anorexic," as Jacques Derrida once put it.[59] Derrida notes that a desire for incorporation in one's own body structures practices of relating to the other, such as love, friendship, or mourning; he emphasizes that even "the so-called non-anthropophagic cultures practice symbolic anthropophagy."[60] The "symbolic anthropophagy" of love surfaces in literary texts when eating the other leaves the realm of metaphor to become a cannibalistic meal. Eaten heart tales actualize the desire to incorporate the other symbolically when carnal sexual consummation turns to meat-eating; in Jakemes's *Roman du Châtelain de Coucy et de la dame de Fayel*, the lady refuses to disavow her love and chooses to die with her lover's heart inside her, turning her own body into a reliquary for the lover's heart.[61] But what *Ignaure* does, in regard to other eaten heart tales, is not a fusion of bodies into a single entity, but a dissemination of the lover's flesh among multiple bodies. The lay puts amorous flesh into circulation, among a collective whose limits are not secured, because the husbands themselves enter in contact with the male lover's flesh through their revenge. Threatening boundaries among bodies and genders, the circulation of flesh transforms the ladies who unapologetically assert themselves as subjects of their own sexuality, as well as the very notion of courtly love itself, made plural and shown to be driven by consummated carnal satisfaction as it refocuses on genital and oral pleasures.

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[58] Simon Gaunt, "Le coeur a ses raisons...: Guillem de Cabestanh et l'évolution du thème du coeur mangé," *Le coeur a ses raisons...*, 2003, 364.
[59] Birnbaum, Daniel and Olsson, Anders, "An Interview with Jacques Derrida on the Limits of Digestion - Journal #2 January 2009 - e-Flux," accessed February 3, 2020, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/02/68495/an-interview-with-jacques-derrida-on-the-limits-of-digestion/, 3.
[60] Derrida and Nancy, "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida.," 114.
See also Jacques Derrida, Jacques Derrida, "Force de loi: Le fondement mystique de l'autorité. Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice," *Cardozo Law Review* 11, no. Issues 5-6 (1990 1989): 920–1046, 952.
[61] Anthony Allen, "La mélancolie du biographe: *Le Roman du Castelain de Couci* et le deuil de la voix," *Neophilologus* 85, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 25–4, 37.

Consuming the lover's flesh underscores courtly love's carnality, but in this chapter I show that it also opens up an alternative model of love that refutes a more canonical lyrical model based on lack. Since at least Lacan, courtly love has been read through our modern idea of desire as striving "to fill a lack that can never be filled," since "what is desired is always displaced, always deferred."[62] In this reading, courtly love represents a narcissistic, even masochist game where the "Lady" provides a mirror for the male lover's own desire.[63] In *Ignaure*, pleasure is not deferred for the ladies or their lover, and the male body becomes its object. By claiming their own sexual satisfaction and forming a community based on their unapologetic sharing of a lover's flesh, the ladies invite a reconsideration of courtly love, switching focus from male desire to female pleasure. Centering pleasure reasserts the bodies' own fleshliness and sensations, for bodies appear too often "singularly devoid of sex" – in the sense of sexual activity and pleasure, not gender – in critical conversations.[64] In return, sensations fashion the ladies' own status as subjects, and not poetic abstractions, because experiencing sensations, such as physical pleasure, "marks the body's existence as a perceiving subject."[65]

The pleasurable sharing of the lover's flesh among multiple bodies enables the ladies' coming-into-being as perceiving subjects, for the lay offers a rather unique case in courtly poetry of a female homosocial collective body bound by the objectified male flesh they all enjoyed in bed and at the table, redefining our common understanding of courtly love as male desire for the singular body of a quite abstract Lady. Whereas the husbands focus on what they imagine the

[62] James A. Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 63.
[63] Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality*, Wo Es War (London ; New York: Verso, 1994), 90-91.
[64] Oliver Davis and Tim Dean, *Hatred of Sex*, Provocations (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2022), 81.
[65] Musser, *Sensational Flesh*, 1.

ladies crave (the lover's body), the ladies instead insist not on desire, but on satiety; not on exclusivity, but on communal bonding; not on longing, but on belonging to a group that experiences sensual pleasure with the same flesh.

I focus first on *Ignaure* as a text underscoring the core carnality of courtly love, and how the process of uncovering the carnal consumption through a confession game leads to a narrowing of the lover's path in the narrative that announces his literal consumption. I move to the lover's flesh as a point of contact among wives and husbands, and how the discovery of the (sexual) sharing of flesh challenges homosocial and heterosexual structures and escalates to the sharing of flesh as meat. I discuss butchering as a process transforming the lover's flesh into meat, then I examine the various readings of the butchered flesh offered by the text, contrasting misogyny and claims for female sensual pleasure, and how they inform the reader's interpretation of the narrative. I conclude with the final re-membering of Ignaure by the ladies and the poet, which is also a reassembling of the lover's members through poetry and an unapologetic reclaiming of the ladies's past pleasures, bringing flesh back to the fore. I demonstrate that, in *Ignaure*, circulations of flesh destabilize the political, social, and gendered structures that define the court, eventually highlighting unconventional ways to share flesh.

Multiple Lovers: A Very Courtly Life

The *Lai d'Ignaure*'s multiplication of the titular knight's lovers disrupts the traditional triangle of courtly poetry (lord-lady-lover) and posits Ignaure as a character of unusual carnal appetites. As the narrative opens, Ignaure enjoys separate affairs with the wives of the twelve peers of the castle, loving each of them as if she were the only one, or so they all believe. "Ignaure, a man of noble heart, / Courted all twelve wives / And each of them granted him / Her

love in accordance with his desire" ("Ignaure, ki ot le cuer gent, / A toutes .XII. s'acointa, / Et tant chascune l'en creanta / S'amour trestout a son voloir," 44-47). The "noble heart" is treated as a defining feature for Ignaure. Whereas the introductory wordplay between somebody and body anticipates the reduction of the lover to some of his body parts, the text already hints at *which* parts we should be paying attention to (at least one of them). Both the wordplay some/body and the reference to the "noble heart" appear as courtly tropes, innocuous stereotypical formulae that the audience should expect. Yet they signal Ignaure's reduction to his heart and body, foreshadowing his literal dismemberment. The mention of the noble heart immediately precedes the line describing Ignaure having an affair with all the twelve ladies of the castle; the "all" ("toutes," 45) is not far from suggesting that if there were more ladies in the castle, Ignaure would have seduced them as well.

Renaut perhaps ironically comments that Ignaure led "a very courtly life" ("Molt demainne cortoise vie!"; 56) with his twelve simultaneous lovers. "Courtly" here names the place and kind of the knight's love affairs: he is a successful courtly lover at court, but the adjective "molt" implies abundance, a profusion of pleasure, that seems to contradict the discipline, self-restraint, and delayed rewards that most often characterize courtly love affairs.[66] Moreover, the narrative quickly shifts focus from the male protagonist's perspective to the ladies', and Ignaure's "very courtly life" comes under scrutiny when the ladies decide to play a game of confession that valorizes their desires and not those of the male lover's.

The twelve gather in a garden and one makes the following proposal:

'We are ladies, all of us cheerful,
Elegant, noble and esteemed,
Wives of the peers of this castle.
We all are full of revelry;
Not a single one of us fails to love passionately,

[66] Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, xvi-xxi.

And this day is one for enjoyment.
Let us make one of us a priest,
And let her go and sit in the middle of this garden,
Beside that fruit-tree, which is in bloom.
Let each of us go and tell her,
In confession, whom she loves,
And to whom she has given the gift of love.
Thus we shall know for certain
Which one of us has the noblest lover.'

'Dame[s] sommes et renvoisies,
Cointes et nobles et prisies,
Femmes as pers de cest chastiel.
Plainnes sommes de grant reviel;
N'i a cheli n'aint par amours
Et molt est envoisiés cis jours.
D'une de nous fasons nous prest[r]e,
Seoir en voist en mi cel ester,
Lés cele ente ki est flourie.
Chascune i voist et se li die
Cui ele aimme en confiession,
Ne a cui elle a fait le don.
Ensi sarons certainnement
Li quele aimme plus hautement.' (81-94, translation modified)

That each lady has a lover in addition to her husband is not even in question: the play of confession should not determine whether they each have a lover, but who their lovers are.[67] And it is precisely because they are "cheerful, noble and esteemed wives of the peers of this castle" that the speaker assumes they all have one. The text roots the assumption in a characteristic they all share: they claim that they all are full of revelry. The word "reviel" signifies a taste for pleasure and entertainment, but *reviel* could just as well be translated by our contemporary *rebellion*. The expression designates a riotous vassal in a feudal context before naming a taste for

[67] Simon Gaunt once noted that the *Lai d'Ignaure* represents "the fundamental paradox of courtly literature" and "its central ethical problem": courtly love must be secret to survive, but courtly literature is at its core based on the very principle of exposing love affairs. Simon Gaunt, *Love and Death in Medieval French and Occitan Courtly Literature: Martyrs to Love* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2006), 87-88.
See also Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery. Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), particularly pages 92-99.

sensual pleasure, and the two meanings coexisted in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[68] The expression "grant reviel" implies that the ladies' behaviors tend toward rebellious excess, and they are full ("plainnes") of this tendency, as if they fed on it; the unnamed lady who proposes the confession game suggests that they are all governed by the carnal passion that fills them.

By proposing to designate a priest among them so they can all confess who their lover is, the lady's discourse illustrates this disorderly tendency, for their re-gendering of the priestly role is also transgressive. Although the confession is part of a game, it nonetheless signals that the ladies do not need men as confessors since they can elect one of themselves to do the job. They not only appropriate male privileges in religious rites, they also hijack the Church's policing of women's sexuality through confession. The irreverent references to Christian practices throughout the text draw attention to the lay's interplay with its Christian framework. In reading religious imagery in the *lai,* critics have tended to focus on Renaut's apparent parody of the Last Supper, which substitutes the twelve ladies for the twelve apostles at the cannibalistic meal, and they've insisted on the eucharistic overtones of the eaten body, sometimes putting both representations into relation with an antifeminist ideology.[69] For Barbara Newman, "a devastating parody of women's eucharistic devotion lurks within [*Ignaure*'s] obscene and macabre plot," and she links the parody to the increasing repression of female mystic devotion during the thirteenth century, particularly in Picardie where the text may have been composed.[70] But, as Amy Heneveld has argued, such readings "minimize the importance of female agency that runs throughout the work, from the vocal, active female lovers at the beginning of the text to

[68] Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX^e^ au XV^e^ siècl*e, 1881, "Revel," accessed September 8, 2022, http://micmap.org/dicfro/search/dictionnaire-godefroy/revel
Di Febo, "Ignauré. La parodie « dialectique » ou le détournement du symbolisme courtois," 9-10.
[69] Burgess and Brook, "Introduction," 56-57.
[70] Newman, *Medieval Crossover,* 174.

the twelve verses these twelve female bodies compose at the end of the tale to commemorate their despair."[71] Moreover, interpreting the narrative as merely a re-enactment of a familiar religious ritual like the Eucharist risks explaining away what is unsettling in the text about gender roles and sexuality by retaining only the symbolic elements of the story. If the communion of the lovers, that is, the fusion of their bodies, forms "a kind of *corpus mysticus* of love" as Helen Solterer writes about the *Roman du Chatelain de Coucy*, and more so in a narrative where twelve ladies recall the apostles invited to eat Christ's body, the lay also departs from its obvious Christian framework in some critical instances, such as its sequencing of two consumptions (sexual and commensal) or the ignorance of the ladies about the content of the cannibal meal.[72] The Eucharist must be acknowledged as a familiar frame for the lay's audience, but it should not divert us from the dynamics of sensual, secular love that the text offers to unveil.

The love relationships that the ladies name are indeed physical, as is indicated by the elected priestess's advice to one of the confessing ladies: "Sweet sister, beat your croup, / Which is the source of the sins / With which your body is tainted" ("Douche suer, mais batés la crupe, / Ki vous fait faire les pechiés/ Dont vostre cors est entechiés," 124-126, translation modified). The mention of the lady's guilty "croup" (haunch or buttocks) underscores the sexual aspect of the "sins" they want to "confess" in a comical gesture mimicking the Christian mortifications of the flesh, but the word also animalizes the ladies. "Crupe" is a word commonly used for horses, and the priestess compares having sex with a knight with horse-riding, perhaps a pun on the social function of their lover as a *chevalier*, a man whose knighthood depends upon his close

[71] Amy Heneveld, "Eating Your Lover's Otherness. The Narrative Theme of the Eaten Heart in the Lai d'Ignaure," *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales et Humanistes / Journal of Medieval and Humanistic Studies 2018 – 2, N° 36. Varia*, January 29, 2019, 396.
[72] Helen Solterer, "Dismembering, Remembering the Châtelain de Couci," *Romance Philology; Berkeley* 46, no. 2 (November 1, 1992), 117.

association with a highly trained warhorse.[73] The ironic use of religious and feudal language and parodic gestures marks the ladies' disregard if not disdain for the social and religious norms regulating marriage and women's sexuality. Although their game takes the form of confessions to a priestess, none of the ladies expresses any regret or repentance for their relationship with Ignaure. They overturn the confession into a celebration of their own carnal passions, a celebration that proves to be ambivalent though, for it marks both a rejection of shame regarding their sexuality – a shame at the very heart of the confessional process – and a play with trivial, animalizing representations of sexuality that echo antifeminist discourses on women ruled by their carnal appetites.

Confessing love reveals the flesh, as well as its dissemination, to the ladies' dismay. The confession game represents a turning point in the narrative for as the ladies voice their claim to love whom they wish; they also learn that they have all chosen the same lover. Even though the game only requires the ladies to state their lover's name, most of them add details; they insist on his handsomeness, his elegance, his courage, his courtly manners and education, calling him "the flower of chivalry" ("flours de barnage," 173). Each lady believes she holds exclusive rights to the knight, ignoring that they all share his flesh with each other. These rights on the knight's flesh are expressed in feudal terms. Upon learning that she shares the knights' flesh with the other women, the priestess voices her resentment of Ignaure's treason in political terms: she believed that Ignaure "was pledged only to her" ("Qu'ele cuidoit tout liege avoir," 140). A conflict is exposed between the claims each lady thought she had on her lover's body and life,

[73] Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé, "Croupe," accessed April 2, 2022, http://stella.atilf.fr/Dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/visusel.exe?11;s=1036177455;r=1;nat=;sol=0;
Jeffrey J. Cohen, "Chevalerie," in *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis, United States: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 46.

and the discovery that she shares him with eleven other lovers, disrespecting the exclusive liege-vassal relationship that characterizes courtly love.

When the ladies realize that all love the same man, the flower of chivalry becomes "a presumptuous and brazen rogue" ("un fol outrecuidier et cointe," 220), and the ladies decide to set a trap for him by attracting him in a garden where they will all gather:

> Ignaure, who was unaware of this plot,
> Went to one of them.
> He embraced and kissed her a great deal,
> But was not able to go any farther.
>
> Ignaure, ki cel engien ne sot,
> A une d'eles s'en ala.
> Assis l'acola et baisa;
> A sourplus ne puet il venir. (226-229)

Here as elsewhere in Old French, the "sourplus," or surplus, denotes a sexual act, literally an excess or addition to the romantic relationship. The text makes it clear that Ignaure is accustomed to receiving this surplus from his lovers, and the lady's refusal to sleep with him represents an unusual situation for both of them. Sexual activity retrospectively becomes manifest when it no longer is available to Ignaure because the ladies withhold it; carnal satisfaction comes to the fore when it is refused, or rather delayed since the lady uses sex to lure the knight into a trap.

The lady promises "the surplus" to Ignaure if he will join her in a garden on a Sunday. According to the revenge scenario the ladies have devised, they will all meet him there, "well equipped with sharp knives" ("bien garnies de bons coutiaus," 247). The ladies' knives suggest a desire to tear apart the flesh that they unknowingly already shared among themselves and to reclaim it through murder. About to be butchered, Ignaure saves himself from the deadly situation by softening the ladies' heart with his "fine speech" ("biaus parliers," 336), seducing

them again in order to save his own flesh. Persuaded by the knight's words, the priestess offers a compromise to the ladies' desire to reclaim him as theirs: he must choose one of them or be butchered. The priestess speaks from the position of authority accorded to her by the other ladies and she not only keeps her privileged, male-coded title of "priest," but she is also the lover chosen by Ignaure. Chosen under constraint though; Ignaure first refuses to separate one lady from the others, and therefore to separate himself from all the ladies. Yet confronted by the menacing knives, Ignaure is forced to yield. He escapes a first butchering by agreeing to separate his flesh from the other ladies to become the unique lover of a single lady. In other words, the knight and the priestess accept to form a more conventional courtly couple, but this arrangement leads to Ignaure's capture by the husbands.

Multiplicity represented a form of camouflage for a lover who seemed impossible to track down, since he always appeared at a different place, near a different lady who herself ignored the other aspects of his highly compartmentalized life. Exclusivity makes the adulterous love more threatening because it restrains the knight's movement. Renaut describes the exclusivity of Ignaure's relationship with the priestess in terms of a narrowing of Ignaure's path, as Ignaure is then twice described as a mouse who is going to be trapped because he has no way out, in a crude fabliau-style wordplay that assimilates the lady to a hole (367-373; 480-481). Counterintuitively, Ignaure appeared safe when he was sleeping with all the ladies of the castle, but his exclusive, more conventional courtly relationship with only one adulterous lady puts him at risk because it requires visiting the same place repeatedly. On the ladies' side, exclusivity benefits a single lady but deprives the eleven others of their lover's flesh and the pleasure he gave them. While the multiple lovers seemed to model a shared carnal satisfaction, exclusivity condemns Ignaure to death by bringing him into the closed lady-lord-lover triangle of the

conventional courtly love affair and into the conventional *coeur mangé* story in which the lover must be caught and killed.

From The Husbands' Disturbed Meal…

In a tale about eating one's lover, it does not come as much of a surprise that the husbands discover their cuckoldry while they are eating together, when a gossip who spotted Ignaure with his lover comes to report to the husbands:

> One day the twelve peers
> Had all gone to eat together;
> The rogue also went, I believe.
> Before he left the dwelling,
> He would tell them such a tale as
> Would anger the shrewdest man there.
> The rogue began to speak;
> He laughed and crossed himself.
> 'What are you laughing at now, rogue?
> This is an unwelcome dish!
> I know what your intentions are;
> You are preparing some slander for us.'
>
> .I. un jour estoient tout alé
> Li .XII. per mangier ensamble;
> Li lechiere i ala, moi samble.
> Ains k'il isse de la maison,
> Lor contera tele raison
> Dont li plus cointes aura ire.
> Li trahitres a pris a dire;
> Rist et fist crois en mi sa chiere.
> 'De coi ris tu ore, lechiere?
> Ichi a malvais entremés.
> Bien sai de coi tu t'entremés;
> Auchun mesdit nos apparelles.' (384-395)

The lords' disturbed meal anticipates the ladies' disturbing dish to come, but it also insists on the adultery as located in an in-between space. One of the husbands describes the arrival of the gossip as a bad "entremés," a small dish served between the main courses, literally

a "between-dishes" (393). A "malvais entremés" can also describe a poor entertainment, while the conjugated expression "tu t'entremés" evokes the gossip's personal involvement in other people's business. That the "entremés" is not going to be flavored to the husbands' taste is announced when the gossip laughs at the husbands, even crossing himself at the thought of the scandal he is about to unleash. First the narrator and then one of the husbands designate the gossip as a "lecher" ("lechiere," 386 and 392). While the word represents a rather generic insult in Old French, its etymology refers to a man prone to gluttony and carnal sins, and it derives from the verb "to lick."[74] The lecher/licker laughs at the husbands sharing a meal to which he is not invited and therefore unwelcome, before releasing the news that is foreseen by the husbands as an attack on their habits and reputation. Intrusion calls on inappropriate positions, since both the gossip and Ignaure are out of place, where they should not be, in regard to the husbands: at their table or in their wives' beds.

While they are sharing food, the lords learn from the intruder's mouth that they share something else: Ignaure's flesh, a point of contact among the lords and the ladies. As mentioned in the previous chapter, my conceptualization of Ignaure's flesh as standing in-between characters draws from Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh as a fold articulating the sensible, allowing for touch and for being touched, for seeing and being seen, a point of contact rather than separation.[75] The spy tells the husbands: "you are all being made cuckolds by a single man, / Just as I see you in this place" ("D'un seul homme estes tout huihot, / Si con jou vous voi en cest ester," 411-412), unveiling a relationship that was invisible to them before. Ignaure's flesh represents the fold through which a network of relationships among ladies and husbands comes

[74] *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IXème au XVème siècle*, ed. Frédéric Godefroy, (Paris: F. Vieweg, 1881-1902), "Lecheor," accessed January 27, 2022, http://micmap.org/dicfro/search/dictionnaire-godefroy/lecheor
Trésor de la Langue Française Informatisé, "Lécheur," accessed January 27, 2022, http://stella.atilf.fr/Dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=417851415;
[75] Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, 181-190.

into touch. Through Ignaure, each lady has been in contact with each other, because they all slept with the same man. Similarly, each lord has been in contact with Ignaure through his wife, and by extension with every other lord and wife, because all the characters have in common either to have slept with Ignaure or to have slept with someone who slept with Ignaure.[76] Because the husbands' bodies have been in contact with each other through their wives and Ignaure, the collective adultery creates a pattern of indirect sexual intimacy among all of them.

For medieval canonists, "sexual relations, whether licit or illicit, meant that the partners became one flesh."[77] The concept of men and women being "one flesh," drawn from Genesis 1 and on the likeliness of men and women created at the image of God, has a complicated and conflictual history in Christian theology, for the potential of subverting gender hierarchies it carries.[78] In the present case, the possibility of being "one flesh" through sexual intercourse collides with social hierarchy, conjuring the specter of sodomy and its potential of "polluting" social entities.[79] Since Ignaure became "one flesh" with twelve ladies who are supposed to be "one flesh" separately with their husbands, the collective adultery undermines the delimitation among bodies and between genders, for every character has indirectly been in contact with the flesh of the other, no matter their gender or matrimonial situation, positing a challenge to the husbands' dominion over their wives and the exclusivity of the relationship husbands assume they share with their wives, sacred and closed to other bodies.

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[76] As Eve Sedgwick states, "To cuckold is by definition a sexual act, performed on a man, by another man." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Nachdr., Gender and Culture (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2003), 49.
[77] James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 382.
[78] Jacqueline Murray, "One Flesh, Two Sexes, Three Genders?," in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe*, ed. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 40-41.
[79] William E. Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature France and England, 1050-1230* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 21-22.

When the lecher leaves, the husbands complain among themselves ("ki de lor honte entr'iaus se claimment," 448). They are defined by the shame that stands among them ("entri'aus"). This is a quasi-juridical lexicon since their complaint *about* Ignaure could also be a complaint *against* him, for they feel that they have been wronged in their rights as lords and husbands. Their shame results less from the adultery itself than from its public disclosure and the political challenge it represents. The adultery's public revelation makes visible both the wives' agency to take a lover and the erotic bond among husbands, wives, and lover, however involuntary or unwanted this bond may be in the husbands' case. Because the lover's flesh acts as a point of coming-into-touch among the wives and by extension their husbands, it threatens the separation of bodies and constitutes an offense to the lords's own bodily integrity. Shame results from a recognition of the sharing of flesh and from a recognition of the homo-intimacy implied by the presence of the lover standing in-between. Ignaure becomes a target, identified as the source of disorder and shame, slotted in where he should not be, like the gossip intruding during mealtime, a "malvais entremés."

The fact that the husbands all seem to live in the same castle underlines the shared aspect of their political power, repeated in the cuckoldry that brings their flesh together. The lords are merged into a single figure with twelve bodies, for they have no names, no individuality, nor anything of their own that they do not share, not even their shame. They are united in their distrust of their wives, in their fear of losing their feudal authority along with their domestic authority. Curiously, the husband of the woman who plays the priestess declares that he is worthier than the others when he learns that his wife is the one preferred by Ignaure: "I am worth a lot more than the rest of you" ("je vauc miez que li autre assés!," 441). He reacts, perhaps ironically, as if he were validated by Ignaure through his wife. By choosing his wife Ignaure

makes him "special," the only lord slightly distinguished from the others, even if only in his role of husband.

The husbands' fear of bodily disorder expresses a fear of social disorder, as one of them declares: "They will have control over the castle/ If we cannot avenge ourselves" ("De cest chastiel avront dangier / Se nous ne nous poons vengier," 449-450). A fear of losing sovereignty to their wives motivates the husbands' vengeance, as they have already lost control of their wives' and the knight's bodies. The husbands understand their wives' sexual activity as political; the expression "avront dangier" underscores the sexual transgression as a political threat, as a danger hanging over the castle and the feudal political power it monumentalizes. The collective adultery with a single lover subverts the separation between the homosocial institution of the court, where the wives are notably absent, and the heterosexual institution of marriage, where no other man should be involved. Courtly poetry routinely challenges this separation to the extent that it always brings a third body in the couple, but here the collective nature of the adultery empowers a female homosociality conflicting with male homosociality. As sex appears as a potentiality to undo the political order, the husbands come to recognize a trait of their wives that Renaut emphasized earlier in the text, when the ladies are twice described as full of "reviel" (63 ; 84), that is, full of rebellious passion, and the same expression applies later to Ignaure himself, "who was full of revelry" ("qui plains estoit de reviel," 471, translation modified), just before his arrest by the husbands.[80] As I noted above, "reviel" comes from the language of political revolt, and the husbands understand the ladies and Ignaure's shared inclination to pleasure in political terms. Behind the husbands' will to preserve their bodies from any contact with another male body appears the need to preserve the political body from their wives' behavior.

[80] Davis and Dean, *Hatred of Sex*, 88.

The dismemberment of Ignaure and the violence used to unmake Ignaure's body enact a visceral reaction intended to cut the carnal link among the characters and an attempt to restore the husbands' authority over their wives and their vassal's flesh, and to preserve their own flesh from promiscuity and homo-intimacy. A political male body thought to be impermeable has been violated by the presence of a foreign male body, which justifies unleashing violence to restore the transgressed boundaries.[81] The husbands' cutting intention comes to the fore in the description of Ignaure's arrest, when the "priestess's husband" bursts into the bedroom, fully armed and ready to defeat an enemy. Sword drawn, he intends to separate Ignaure and his wife in an act that will separate him from Ignaure and from the others' flesh, and finds him dosnoiant" (489) with his wife. The verb "dosnoier" refers both to fighting in a military context and to making love, underlining the dual nature of Ignaure as warrior and as lover, his appropriate feudal function as a knight and his inappropriate sexual situation in the lord's wife's bed. The husband then exclaims "'Ha!' he said at once, / 'You have no business being here!'" ("'Ha!' fait a chelui maintenant, / 'Ne deüsciés pas estre chi!'" 492-493). Until then, the husbands only knew they were cuckolds through messengers and spies, and the sexual act was solely suggested, but never described to the audience of the tale. The words the husband uses express the satisfaction to trap the lover ('Ha!') and they state the inappropriateness of Ignaure's position – he should not be here ("Ne deüsciés pas estre chi"), in this bed; with the lady; in this situation. The adverb "chi / here" designates literally the place where Ignaure lies (the lady's bed) but also by extension the whole situation of cuckoldry. He lies between the lady and her husband, where he shouldn't be because this setting makes the circulation of the flesh visible. To prevent the castle from being

[81] Waldby, "Destruction. Boundary Erotics and Refigurations of the Heterosexual Male Body," 269-272.

"taken over" by the rebellious sensualist ladies and their lover, the husbands must reenact a separation of bodies by isolating and removing the flesh that stand among them all.

… To The Ladies' Disturbing Meal

The husbands' revenge reworks the shameful discovery of a carnal sharing at a moment of sharing food; they devise an alternative way of consuming flesh. Once Ignaure is caught with his lover, the husband announces his vengeance: "He promised him shame and suffering. / His dinner would be very meagre!" ("De honte et de dolour l'afie. / Molt sera povres ses soupers!", 514-515). The meager dinner and the shame promised to Ignaure echo to the news of the shameful cuckoldry revealed by the "malvais entremés" who earlier interrupted the husbands' meal. When they meet to discuss Ignaure's punishment, one of the lords makes the following proposal:

> 'In four days time let us remove from the vassal
> His lowest member down below,
> The delights of which used to please them,
> And have it made into a meal;
> We'll put the heart in as well.
> We'll make twelve bowls out of all this
> And trick them into eating it,
> For we couldn't take any better revenge on them.'
> They accepted this plan
> And dismembered the good knight.
>
> 'Au quart jor prendrons le vassal
> Tout le daerrain membre aval,
> Dont li delis lor soloit plaire,
> Si en fache on .I. mangier faire;
> Le cuer avoec nous meterons.
> .XII. escuieles en ferons;
> Par engien lor faisons mangier,
> Car nous n'en poons mius vengier.'
> Cele devise creanterent;
> Le bon chevalier desmembrerent. (541-550)

Renaut describes the butchering of the knight as a dismemberment; it is also a castration. To accomplish their vengeance, the husbands must isolate what *they* consider to be the most pleasurable part of Ignaure's body: his penis. Breaking with the passivity or naivety of the famous cuckolds of the courtly canon (King Arthur, King Marc), the husbands' revenge provokes the collapse of the courtly system based on the triangle formed by the lady, her husband and her lover. The lover is murdered by the lord, the lady dies for love and out of revenge, and the lord loses both his wife and his good knight, in an implacable cycle of self-destruction. As the literal body of the courtly knight is dismembered, the literary model of courtly love itself ends up dismembered with him when the lords decide to point out that Ignaure's penis is, after all, what the ladies want above anything else, and therefore should be the object and weapon of their vengeance. The lords' logic reveals sexual intercourse, that is, sharing flesh, to be the core of courtly relationships, as the lover's flesh represents the target of their anger.

They throw the knight's heart into the meal as well, but almost as an afterthought, subsequently bringing the text into the eaten heart tradition. For the husbands, love, which the heart embodies, seems accessory to the sexual delights represented by Ignaure's penis. Martina Di Febo has argued that, by reducing the heart to a garnish, Renaut inverts the metaphysics of the heart inherited from the lyric tradition, elevating its obscene and material twin: the phallus.[82] However, the systematic use of "phallus" to describe Ignaure's genitals is inaccurate and tends to obliterate carnality through sublimation, reproducing what Leo Bersani once characterized as a tendency among intellectuals to sanitize the penis into the phallus.[83] The text clearly refers to

[82] Di Febo, "Ignauré. La parodie « dialectique » ou le détournement du symbolisme courtois," 19.
[83] Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," *October* 43 (1987), 220.

organs made of flesh, that is, to a material body part that can be consumed as meat, not to a symbolic image of the penis. In order not to denude the text of its own flesh in a purely figurative reading of Ignaure's genitals, I use the words "penis" and "phallus" to emphasize respectively literal and figurative meanings, not really as a distinction (since the literal and the figurative cannot be taken apart) but as a way to stress either materiality or symbolism in my reading, even though one relies on the other.

Focusing on Ignaure's penis also reveals a phallocentric conception of sexuality, perhaps marked by an immediately repressed homoeroticism. The lords reach their wives through Ignaure's flesh, or rather through the sexual interests they project on his flesh. Castrating him implies uncovering his sexual organs, coming into contact with them, even possibly manipulating and cooking them if they made the revengeful dish themselves, whereas up to this point any contact with Ignaure's flesh was indirect; all these inadvertently homo-sadistic actions are paradoxically intended to cut the carnal links between Ignaure and themselves.

Butchering responds to a fear of gender and sexual undifferentiation in flesh. Targeting Ignaure's genitals enacts a policing of gender and sexuality, that I read as a reaction to prevent the castle from being "taken over" by the unruly ladies and their lover. Carolyn Dinshaw has argued that "heterosexual gender, indeed, has historically worked to organize the body into an intelligible whole, to give form and coherence to a chaotic set of parts. At least over the long span of the Christian West, even as the forms of coherence differ, the principle of intelligibility itself is straight gender: it has determined what parts of the body are sexual and how they are related to each other."[84] For Dinshaw, corporeal disaggregation threatens chivalric identity and its bodily coherence, that stands in a perpetual need of being reasserted and re-naturalized

[84] Carolyn Dinshaw, "A Kiss Is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and Its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Diacritics* 24, no. 2 (1994), 214.

through heterosexual narrative.[85] Disaggregation jeopardizes the husbands' position both as a political collective body and as individual "straight" bodies. They seek to "save" their homosocial power from both homoerotic intimacy and the possibility of their wives defining themselves as desiring subjects, therefore they destroy the flesh that came among their wives' bodies, and indirectly among them. Once the "malvais entremés" consumed, passed on to the ladies, the only bodies left are those of husbands and their wives, without the triangulation implied by the lover's presence. Butchering enacts sexed separation in its own perverse way, for it reaffirms "straight" gendered positions as it cuts the bound between the lords, the ladies, and the knight.

The husbands objectify Ignaure's flesh as an instrument of sexual pleasure, and the castration, which may happen post-mortem, is a punishment targeting the ladies more than Ignaure himself. Through Ignaure's flesh, the husbands aim to punish the women for the pleasure they took from him. Since they express their fear of sexual and bodily disorder in political terms, castrating Ignaure to punish the ladies' pleasure makes this pleasure political, the mere possibility of sexual satisfaction in an adulterous relationship endangering the whole feudal and patriarchal edifice. But the consequence they did not foresee is that by making sexual satisfaction political, the husbands allow their wives to reclaim it; since it is not a secret anymore, the wives can speak their own pleasure and defend themselves. After Ignaure's arrest, the ladies refuse to eat until they gain knowledge of what happened to their lover; the text yet again shapes the ladies' relationship to their husbands and to Ignaure in terms of consumption. In the lay's economy of consumption, the hunger strike relocates the question of adultery from the licker's

[85] Dinshaw, "A Kiss Is Just a Kiss," 206 and 214-216. See also Miri Rubin, "The Person in the Form: Medieval Challenges to Bodily 'Order,'" in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), about the medieval society's obsession of fragmented bodies and the economy of salvation based upon body parts.

gossiping tongue to the ladies' mouths, to what they accept or refuse to ingest, and to how they express themselves. Whereas the husbands define their vengeance as retribution for the offense made to them, an offense they define as a political threat, the ladies position themselves as unrepentant, as holding a right to know what happened to their lover, making clear that repentance and denial have never been an option to them.

The hunger strike poses a challenge to the husbands because the ladies at first refuse to eat the meal served to them because, they claim, "each lady's heart is already replete" ("Chascune ot le cuer asasé," 554). The ladies express their satisfaction as satiety: they have already had *enough* of Ignaure's flesh. The husbands seem to acknowledge this satiety when describing Ignaure's genitals as source of delights instead of an object of desire; the pleasure has been consumed. But the ladies ignore that the meat served to them was once the flesh of their lover, and the husbands trick them by praising its "the sweet aroma, good and fine" ("Douche saveur et bonne et biele," 556). The sweet aroma reflects the attractiveness of the lover's flesh, even after it is transformed into meat. As Simon Gaunt notes, the heart is always described as tasty by the lady in eaten heart tales, as if the taste conveyed the qualities of the lover.[86] The sweet aroma appears so powerfully attractive to the ladies that they finally yield and enjoy the meal.

Meat is not readable, unlike flesh. As mentioned earlier, flesh is "the condition of both seeing and being seen, of touching and being touched, of their intermingling and necessary interaction."[87] Flesh is the condition of visibility and exchange between subjects, allowing them to recognize others as much as themselves; to be in contact with each other. By contrast, meat escapes flesh's visibility: the familiar, appetizing aspect of the cooked product says nothing of its

[86] Gaunt, "Le coeur a ses raisons..," 369-370.
[87] Grosz, "Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray in the Flesh," 43.

source, as illustrated by the misleading sweet aroma. The meat can come from any animal, blurring the line between carnivorism and cannibalism. As Claude Lévi-Strauss has argued, the transformed, concealed nature of meat, that is, the fundamental unknowability of its origins, fuels fears about alimentation. In a text written after the outbreak of the Creutzfeldt-Jakob pandemic and the scandal of European Union cows fed with products made of animals of similar species, Lévi-Strauss underlines how carnivorism is deeply tangled with cannibalism, hence the horror provoked by the industrial practices unveiled during the pandemic. Many myths elaborate on the idea of what he calls "endocannibalism" or "self-cannibalism," that is, humans eating animals with whom they identify to various degrees, translating the immemorial discomfort humanity has to deal with when it comes to eating the flesh of the other, even the nonhuman other.[88] If the flesh on the plate comes from a being whose alterity might not be as clear as we thought, where do we draw the line between carnivorism and cannibalism, or even between literal and symbolic cannibalism, if not different in nature but in degree? Hence Lévi-Strauss' provocative conclusion: "we are all cannibals" to various degrees of literality, knowingly or not (and possibly more knowingly that we would be ready to admit).[89] In *Ignaure*, the unknowability of the flesh made into meat enables the husbands' revenge, as the text instigates trouble about what can be on a plate behind deceptive appearances. Or its twin question: Which flesh *could be* on the plate?

To describe meat's origins we only have words that can be trusted or not, since it has lost flesh's main feature: knowability, either by vision or touch. The intelligibility of meat relies on discursive practices, as the lords successively (and successfully) conceal and reveal to the ladies the nature of the meat. Deception precedes ingestion: "Their lords praised the dish so much that /

[88] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Nous sommes tous des cannibales*, 218-221.
[89] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Nous sommes tous des cannibales*, 163-173.

They drank and also ate" ("Lor signor tant le losengierent / K'eles burent et si mangierent," 557-558). The verb *losengier*, to trick someone, echoes the word *engien* previously used (547), thought by the husbands as an answer to their wives' transgression.

Once eaten by the ladies, the priestess's husband can reveal the dish's content:

You have eaten the object of your great desire,
Which gave you so much pleasure,
For you had no wish for anything else;
In the end it has been served to you.
I have killed and destroyed your lover;
You can all share in the pleasure
Of what women are gluttonous for.

Mangié avés le grant desir
Ki si vos estoit em plaisir,
Car d'autre n'aviés vous envie;
En la fin estes servie.
Vostre drut ai mort et destruit;
Toutes partirés au deduit
De chou que femme plus goulouse. (568-573, translation modified)

The husbands' version of the events represents their own reading of the story: the ladies ate what they desired. The reference to gluttony underlines the appetite at stake in the husbands' discourse: a sexual appetite for extra-marital relationships that the lord proposes to fulfill with the same flesh, but differently taken in. The husbands' revenge aligns two forms of consuming flesh since in their view the ladies partake of the pleasure of ingesting their desire's object. The women's so-called gluttony provoked the situation and they ended up literally consuming their lover's body. In suggesting that the ladies are responsible for eating their lover, the husbands put the responsibility for the crime on the ladies' uncontrolled desires, distancing themselves from the lover's flesh that united them all. This discursive operation not only conceals the human flesh into meat, but it also hides the husbands' own relationship to Ignaure, with their fixation on his

penis as the sign of their wives' sexual pleasure as well as the object of their own vengeful desire.

The husbands' obsession with Ignaure's penis as an object of pleasure to which the heart is simply a garnish, reduces the knight's love affairs with the ladies to something purely sexual. The lords do not acknowledge the other aspects of the knight that attracted the ladies and that they abundantly describe during their confessions; not only his handsomeness, but his courage, education, good manners, military abilities, all things that denote his chivalric status and that underscores the ladies' own "aristophilia," namely, their love for the ideal of courtliness itself embodied in Ignaure's perfect body and manners.[90] The husbands ignore this courtly ideal for a purely phallocentric conception of desire, a misogynistic narrowing of the narrative illustrated not only in the husbands' discourse but also in the single manuscript (MS fr.1553, BnF, Paris) that has been preserved of *Ignaure*.



Figure 1. The ladies threatening Ignaure (Fol. 485r)

[90] Schultz, *Courtly Love, the Love of Courtliness, and the History of Sexuality*, 91.

A painted illumination opens the text, a "C" containing a representation of the ladies threatening Ignaure. One lady holds him while another raises a knife against him as he begs for mercy; Ignaure's curved position reflects the C of "cors," first word of the opening sentence: "A body in love should hold no secrets" ("Cors ki aimme ne doit reponre," 1, translation modified). On the right, a lady holds something that she seems to cradle: the pommel of a sword that looks like a phallus, here a symbolic representation rather than an actual organ. Her blue dress shares the same color as Ignaure's tunic, and it stands out from the red dresses of the other ladies, distinguishing them both from the other figures in the miniature. The reader might see the priestess in this woman holding the phallus, if we read it as a symbol of an authority she detains in the text, as well as the symbol of the exclusivity of her love with Ignaure during the second part of the narrative. As a result, it is unclear whether the phallus should be seen as Ignaure's penis or as a broader representation of power or female desire, as the title "priestess" also suggests.

The ambiguity of the phallus-pommel, its visual indeterminacy, underlines the invisibility of the blade which is *hors-champ*, as though plunged into the text; the visual subtraction of the blade is precisely what makes the pommel particularly phallic. Anticipating the castration, the phallus-pommel and its invisible or merely suggested blade recalls how the violence of the castration makes the penis visible in the text, as it appears in the husbands' discourse when they decide to isolate it from the rest of Ignaure's flesh and therefore to make it disappear (because, as noted, the ladies never mention it). As the penis becomes visible through its castration, butchering Ignaure underscores the carnality at the core of courtly love, by publicizing the sharing of flesh. Carnality and genitality cannot always be untangled in medieval texts. In the thirteenth-century *Confession de Renart*, when aroused, "the whole flesh erects" ("herice toute la

chars"), whereas in the fourteenth-century *Tristan de Nanteuil* the word "flesh" ("char") simply means the genitals.[91] Both cases recall the Christian categorization of flesh not just as a physical envelope for the mind, but as where and how sinful sensual pleasures are experienced, and pointing to the genitality of these pleasures.

The penis represents an object of desire, pleasure, or male jealousy, but also potentially generation. In *Tristan de Nanteuil* where Blanchandine is transformed into Blanchandin and magically granted a penis to be able to consume his wedding, the penis becomes a supplement that "inscribes the body in the genealogical logic of the text," allowing sexual desire to lead to procreation and therefore to the continuation of a noble bloodline.[92] Of course, the addition of a penis results from a long-standing misogynistic tradition describing women as "lacking" what men have, but the addition of the penis raises the possibility of altering bodies and genders for narrative purposes.[93] In *Ignaure*, procreation is excluded; it is through a negative alteration – castration and ingestion – that the devoured penis becomes "fertile," but in a literary sense, and only through its appropriation by ladies who bend a misogynistic discourse in their favor. Because the lover is castrated and his genitals ingested by the ladies, the story can "seed" ("semenchier," 13), that is, the body in love, the "cors" whose first letter encompasses the figure of Ignaure prostrated and facing the ladies, can be unveiled, realizing Renaut's explicit project to spread the knowledge of courtly love. The lover is disseminated through the loving mouths that regurgitate his story in the form of the lay, inscribing him in the alternative genealogy of the

[91] Armand Strubel et al., eds., *Le Roman de Renart*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade 445 (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 138.
Blake Gutt, "Holy Queer and Holy Cure: Sanctity, Disability, and Transgender Embodiment in *Tristan de Nanteuil*," in *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography*, ed. Blake Gutt and Alicia Spencer-Hall, Hagiography beyond Tradition 2 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 237.
[92] McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast*, 153-154.
[93] Gutt, "Holy Queer and Holy Cure: Sanctity, Disability, and Transgender Embodiment in *Tristan de Nanteuil*," 237.

martyrs of courtly love.[94] However, this "body in love" does not appear as securely gendered since the knight's flesh disappears in twelve other bodies in love: the ladies.

Moreover, if the phallic pommel suggests the castration to come, it does not represent a faithful illustration of the text, for the ladies do not hurt Ignaure in the story. The focus on this relatively minor episode suggests that the ladies overwhelmed Ignaure. The illumination simplifies and collapses the lay, for it invites the reader to see Ignaure as a victim of the ladies and of their appetites for sex and power, as suggested by the phallus-pommel held by one of them. Since the husbands are not represented, their contribution to the story is obscured, as is their crime; the illumination seems to validate the husbands' presentation of themselves as simply accomplishing what the ladies truly want.

The husbands define their revenge by claiming that the ladies should eat what they craved, and this claim echoes representations of sexuality found in Old French fabliaux, where references to penises as tools of female pleasure are numerous.[95] Examining the "sex wars" at stake in some fabliaux, Alexandre Leupin describes an economy of sex based on the voracious swallowing of the penis by female genitalia whose consuming desire cannot be satisfied.[96] Renaut seems to toy with this misogynistic representation from the fabliaux, through the husbands' discourse and the literal ingestion of Ignaure' sexual organs by the ladies, but he eventually challenges the antifeminist interpretation of the wives' motivations by having them swear to fast to death for Ignaure's love, for they will never have such a precious meal again ("Ne si presieus mes n'avroient," 587).

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[94] Gaunt, *Love and Death in Medieval French and Occitan Courtly Literature*, 78.
[95] Denis Ferhatović, "Detachable Penises and Holes in Knowledge: Reading Exeter Riddles 44 and 62 Alongside *Le Fevre de Creil* [*The Blacksmith of Creil*] and Jean Bodel's *Le Sohait Des Vez* [*The Dream of Cocks*]," *Exemplaria* 33, no. 1 (January 2, 2021), 10-11.
[96] Alexandre Leupin, *Barbarolexis : Medieval Writing and Sexuality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 136-137.

The ladies' suicide does not enact an unproblematic assertion of agency, since it shows the ladies' lack of options to counter their husbands' authority, for the latter were able to reassert their control on their wives' bodies, by controlling what flesh can enter and how, with the dismemberment and deceptive ingestion of the lover's flesh. Collective suicide in itself does not challenge the patriarchal ideology of the husbands' control over their wives' bodies, but actually works to reassert it on the long run, as famously argued by Gayatri Spivak.[97] But the celebration of the consummated pleasure, enshrined in the lay said to have been composed by the ladies themselves, undoes the husbands' forceful reassertion of authority by substituting their reading (and the long-standing misogynistic tradition supporting it) with a claim that a life devoid of sensual pleasure –a life without "precious meals"– is not worth living.

The precious meal represents the opposite of the "malvais entremés"; not shameful, but priceless. Fasting echoes sexual abstinence: when the ladies refuse to eat because they could not have a meal of such value ever again, it means that they could not find a lover of such worth.[98] The ladies' desire not only can be satisfied, but it *has been* satisfied, even before the ingestion of the cannibalistic meal, since before their meal the ladies are said to be "asasé" (554), that is, replete with Ignaure's love. For Amy Heneveld, *Ignaure*'s narrative "hides a story of satisfied female desire" that triumphs over the husbands' jealousy through the fast that underlines the "shared, communal aspect" of the ladies' love.[99] She reads Ignaure's ingestion as an embodiment of the ladies' satisfied desire, described as hyperbolic and mirroring other desires, those of the male poet and of the (implied) female reader.[100] If Heneveld's conclusion draws on the playful

[97] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Harlow London New York, [etc.]: Longman, 1994), 98-99.
[98] About the significance of fasting for women in a religious context, and the link to carnality, see Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, particularly 74 and 189-191.
[99] Heneveld, "Eating Your Lover's Otherness. The Narrative Theme of the Eaten Heart in the Lai d'Ignaure," 406-407.
[100] Heneveld, "Eating Your Lover's Otherness. The Narrative Theme of the Eaten Heart in the Lai d'Ignaure," 411.

ambiguity of gender roles in the tale, processes of identification involving the readership, and on "the possibility of unity between two desiring subjects," I stress instead difference, the opposition between ladies and husbands as carrying two sets of antagonistic reactions to the same flesh, that is, between a masculine discourse on desire as craving, leading to homo-sadistic and misogynistic abuse, and a poetic claim for carnal pleasure, expressed through fasting; between shame and fulfillment.[101]

The precious meal does not generate shame among the ladies, it does not represent a "between-dishes" betraying an unwelcome in-between lover; it instead states the cohesiveness of a group united through the beloved flesh they shared and that satisfied them, in opposition to the husbands as a group unified through the fear of a male flesh with which they come into contact nonetheless. The contact with the same flesh triggers opposite reactions from the lords and the ladies, as two groups whose discourses and positions appear irreconcilable; if flesh represents a surface for common experience, the discursive construction of flesh tears apart ladies and husbands. The husbands, by making the adultery a political issue, politicize their wives' sexuality, giving them the opportunity to act and to speak for themselves. Since everything is on the table, so to speak, now the wives can appropriate the flesh that was taken from them and given back through the shared meal, to tell their own story about the flesh they shared and enjoyed.

Re-membering Flesh / Reclaiming Pleasure

Embracing and incorporating Ignaure's flesh into their own represents for the ladies an unapologetic recognition of their love for him. The lay subsequently composed by the ladies

[101] Heneveld, "Eating Your Lover's Otherness. The Narrative Theme of the Eaten Heart in the Lai d'Ignaure," 412.

provides their version of the events, with a remembering of who Ignaure was for them. Echoing their descriptions of their lover's qualities and attributes in the confession game, they mourn his body, his handsomeness, and all the qualities that made him charming in the eyes of the aristocratic ladies, from his generosity to his hunting abilities, and even the way he stood on his stirrups, memorializing him as an outstanding knight for a hundred lines (508-608). They mention his heart, "sweet" ("douch," 597; like the meal's aroma!), but not his sexual organs. The ladies elaborate a counternarrative to the husbands' slurs, reaffirming the qualities of their lover and thereby of their love for him. They transform the meat they have eaten back into the flesh of their perfect courtly lover. They conclude by grieving their sexual pleasure with him: "they all mourned the pleasure he had given" ("toutes plaignoient son delit," 607). The pleasure at the table recalls the pleasure in bed, in an association between erotics and dietetics that is not proper to medieval culture, but here the singing furthers the association by adding poetic pleasure to the lay's erotics of the mouth.[102] Furthermore, this knot of erotic, alimentary, and poetic pleasures opposes the husbands' own unpleasant discovery of cuckoldry at the table and discourse of shame. Countering the violence performed by the husbands to undo the lover's body and its relationship to their wives (and to themselves), the ladies reinstitute Ignaure's flesh as an object of desire and an instrument of carnal pleasure, a flesh to be mourned, sung, re-membered, so precious that no other meal could ever replace it.

After the ladies vow never to eat again, mourning turns the fast into poetic creation. It directly precedes the ladies' own deaths, but it also represents another stage of incorporation of Ignaure into their own flesh. Mourning constitutes a symbolic anthropophagy, an ingestion of the

[102] Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure. The History of Sexuality, Volume 2*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 50.
Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the Nineteenth Century*, America and the Long 19th Century (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 5.

other that can be put into relation with other "carnivorous" cultural practices playing on intersubjectivity, such as love and breastfeeding.[103]

> Memory and interiorization: since Freud, this is how the "normal" "work of mourning" is often described. It entails a movement in which an interiorizing idealization takes in itself or upon itself the body and voice of the other, the other's visage and person, ideally *and* quasi-literally devouring them. This mimetic interiorization is not fictive; it is the origin of fiction, of apocryphal figuration.[104]
>
> Mémoire et intériorisation, c'est ainsi qu'on décrit souvent le « travail du deuil » « normal » depuis Freud. Il s'agirait d'un mouvement par lequel une idéalisation intériorisante prend en elle, sur elle, dévore idéalement *et* quasi littéralement le corps et la voix de l'autre, son visage et sa personne. Cette intériorisation mimétique n'est pas fictive, elle est l'origine de la fiction, de la figuration apocryphe.[105]

Mourning implies a *dévoration*, a voracious ingestion of the other who has no existence left outside of the one mourning them. But the lay literalizes the ingestion of the other. Entering the ladies' mouth as meat, Ignaure's flesh finally comes out of these mouths as speech, as an abstraction, that is, as an idea of the regretted courtly lover with a tragic fate, distinctly disjointed from the joyful character (and notorious liar) Ignaure was when he was alive. He has been transformed twice, once by the husbands and then by the ladies who reassemble him in idealized form and who re-member his body as they interiorize his flesh and memory, without ever replacing it since they shall never have another meal of such value. In Derrida's words, mourning engenders fiction, which is an apocryphal reconstitution of the lost figure, the lost member of a group. In Renaut's own fiction, the ladies share Ignaure's memory as they shared his flesh, for remembering the dismembered lover ensures the cohesion of the group they forged in the garden when they "confessed" and discovered they all shared the same lover. The shared meal unites not only the ingested lover's flesh and that of the ladies, but it also unites the ladies

[103] Derrida, "Force De Loi," 952.
[104] Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man, *Mémoires: For Paul de Man*, The Wellek Library Lectures at the University of California, Irvine (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 34.
[105] Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires pour Paul de Man* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), 54.

themselves, and from the commensal sharing of that same meal they decide to formulate their own counter-discourse to the husbands' shaming. Mourning the deceased lover and the pleasure he gave them allows the ladies to reclaim this pleasure against the husbands' demeaning characterization and, in a way, to reclaim their own flesh and the carnal delights the husbands wanted to trivialize and destroy.

The husbands are those who ultimately lose their wives and their reputation, who are shamed as they recognize themselves as cuckolds, whereas the ladies gain a sense of community and free themselves from marriage through death, rejecting the shaming of their sexuality. The ladies take literally courtly poetic tropes such as having a lover or dying for love, but only when those literalized tropes allow them to access or reassess pleasure or to turn the punishment against their husbands. Appropriating male privileges, they assert themselves as subjects who do not apologize for their sexual behavior or their choice of love object. Confronting a dire situation, the ladies always choose to escalate, ultimately to the point of fasting unto death. As in other eaten heart tales, this escalation puts medieval literary models of masculinity at an impasse: in *Ignaure*, the courtly lover dies punished for his adultery while the lords lose their cheating wives when they try to re-establish their authority as husbands. The courtly love triangle and marriage both have failed as male-dominated institutions to regulate women's sexuality.

And yet, the lay ends with a dedication to Ignaure "who was dismembered for love" ("ki por amours fu desmembrés," 664), and the ladies seem ultimately divested of their own story. Only Ignaure is named, by opposition to the ladies and to their husbands. Reading the *Châtelain de Coucy*, Helen Solterer concludes: "Eating is remembering, but at the expense of [the lady's] own physical integrity. It is [her dead lover] the Châtelain who benefits principally from the sacrificial meal, living forever in the flesh he shares with all canonized lovers, and in the body of

the text kept alive by countless readers."[106] Ignaure's dismemberment and subsequent remembering through the mouths that ingested him inscribes his body into the body of the text, confusing the literary body and the body made of flesh that fed the lay composed by the ladies as it literally fed them. In short, Ignaure merges with *Ignaure*, in and out of the mouths of the ladies who in death remain anonymous.

The equation of who is the principal benefactor of the narrative is complicated in *Ignaure* by the presence that the author, Renaut, claims within his own text: "For the subject-matter is entirely true, as Renaut testifies" ("Car la matere est toute voire./ Ensi con tiesmoigne Renaus," 620-621). Even if Renaut asserts that the ladies composed the lay, he signs it with his own name, presented as a guarantee of truth; an authorship that is also a validation through male authority. Alongside his authorship, Renaut claims to have written the lay down for the love of a lady, concluding by depicting himself as bounded by his love toward his lady, and this love enchainment to be the true matter of the lay that is called "lay of the Prisoner" ("lay del Prison," 660). The conventional image of the "prison of love" in which Renaut feels he is chained comes to rename the entire lay, in a rather surprising turn that has confused many critics, for it seems loosely related to the rest of the narrative.[107] Heneveld reads Renaut's final assertion of his own suffering for love as an identification with the ladies more than with Ignaure: "in the *Lai d'Ignaure*, a male narrator sings of female desire to reflect his own."[108] Renaut fleshes out his own desire by devoting twenty lines (632-651) to a conventional depiction of his beloved, mostly of her body, with a particular focus on her breast he imagines under her tunic, reasserting a conventional distribution of gender positions, with desiring subjects and desired objects. Seen

[106] Solterer, "Dismembering, Remembering the Châtelain de Couci," 122.
[107] Burgess and Brook, "Introduction," 12-13.
[108] Heneveld, "Eating Your Lover's Otherness. The Narrative Theme of the Eaten Heart in the Lai d'Ignaure," 396.

only through Renaut's eyes and described through Renaut's pen, the anonymous and voiceless lady ends up symbolically disembodied, reduced to a focus on some body parts of interest for her male observer. Butchered, in other words.

One could write about *Ignaure* what has been said of the *Roman du Chatelain*, that is, that the text "embodies the construction of male subjectivity at the expense of female autonomy."[109] However, the conventional affirmation of desire and male authorship that finally seals off the lay appears shaky in regard of the provocative claims carried by the lay throughout, as a last pirouette reinstating more conventional figures of desire and literary authorship after having challenged them. After highlighting the carnality of courtly love, after building communities around the sharing or rejection of flesh (ladies versus husbands), the text offers a last twist by not only paralleling a single man's desire for a single lady with the sexual consumption of a man by twelve ladies, but by capping a text built on female homosociality and the pleasurable dissolution of bodily boundaries with an assertion of a quite conventional male desire for an objectified lady. I argue that the lay eventually invites the reader to reconsider the conventional dedication to the beloved lady in courtly poetry as hiding non-heteronormative and communal figures of love, the "ladies" expressing what the husbands or 'Renaut' (who is only a signature in the text, a poetic convention, no more than a name) could not. "Heterosexual identity is purchased through a melancholic incorporation of the love it disavows," the ungrievable love for someone of one's own gender, as Judith Butler has argued; the *Lai d'Ignaure* hints at a disavowed love object, the male flesh, incorporated in twelve fictional ladies whose claims for carnal pleasure mirror those of the presumable male author.[110]

[109] Roberta L. Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance*, Cambridge Studies in French 43 (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 197.
[110] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1997), 139.

Whereas the female voices can be said to express a male subjectivity, the male authorship claims to be made up of female voices; whereas Renaut asserts a seemingly conventional desire for one lady at the end of the lay, his own love object reflects the ladies' love object, a male flesh forcefully incorporated in the ladies by the husbands, for they felt threatened by it. In a sense, Renaut's desire could also be said to reflect the husbands' own melancholic desires, their obsession for the main character's genitals that they transfer on their wives, literally as well as metaphorically. Perhaps the poet does not long so much to be incorporated by a lady than to be in the ladies' position, because aligning his own desire with the ladies' consummated pleasure points more to a shared status of devouring subject in the consumption of (a male) flesh than to any desire to be subjected to this consumption. This confusion of love objects unsettles gender boundaries, and both female and male objects co-construct themselves in a "gender melancholy" that disavows its object, for gender is "composed of precisely what remains inarticulate in sexuality," of the very denial of an inappropriate, yet coveted, love object that here is male flesh.[111] Eventually, Renaut is the one who enacts the re-membering of the lover's flesh through his writing and authorship.

Yet the lay does more than staging the impasses of courtly love and gender positions in lyric poetry. Unavowable or not, desires are sidelined by pleasure in the dissolution of gender boundaries, a move permitted in this text by the multiplicity of bodies involved; gender melancholy gives way to becoming one flesh. The female voices said to have composed the lay and its claims for carnal pleasure offer an alternative to a male-dominated discourse on sexuality and love poetry, and they do so by putting carnal experiences upfront. While shame, craving, and violence characterize the husbands' own relation to flesh, their wives not only emphasize

[111] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 140.

pleasure and satisfaction, they also vocalize their relationship to flesh through the confession and the composition of the lay. In her reading of *chansons de toile*, Jane Burns stresses the possibility of redefining "a love based on shared pleasures," where the female singer, no matter the actual gender of the author (if known), occupies the subject position.[112] The anonymous sewing songs emphasize the "physical cojoining of two lovers wrapped in mutual pleasure," offering "an alternative model for the courtly love story: a model of coming together, of union with a new twist."[113] To the voicing of female subjectivity and the praise of pleasurable physical contact, and even merging of the lovers' flesh, the *Lai d'Ignaure* adds another twist, the multiplicity of lovers creating a non-monogamous yet exclusive (since definitively closed) collective of thirteen lovers who become one flesh, against the morbid body of the husbands defined by shame and enacted by sadistic actions.

Multiplicity and sharing represent not just a playful digression from canonical courtly love, centered on a closed triangle between the lord-husband, the lady-wife, and the knight-lover, but multiplicity and sharing *are* the conditions of an intensified courtly life praised by Renaut, pointing perhaps mockingly at the limitations and contradictions of the courtly genre. Hence the incorporation of saucy *fabliaux* elements to destabilize the boundaries of the genre, in a similar fashion than the incorporation of the flesh thwarts bodily boundaries. A single lover satisfied twelve ladies; he was able to maintain the twelve relationships simultaneously, and his heart and genitals provided enough food to feed the same twelve ladies. Exclusivity marked the downfall of Ignaure, but the shared meal creates a communal bond among the ladies, by making them share one last time the pleasure of the precious meal, the attractive flesh of that man who could

[112] E. Jane Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed: Reading through Clothes in Medieval French Culture*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 107.
[113] Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed*, 116-117.

satisfy them all. Against the dead-end of the single adulterous relationship that represents the standard courtly relationship, twice described by Renaut as a hole with no way out, the *Lay d'Ignaure* offers an alternative centered on consuming and sharing flesh, on commensal solidarity and remembered pleasure.

In this alternative model to courtly love grounded in sexual pleasure, in the fluidity of flesh, and in a general impertinence regarding codified genres and discourses, the stereotypical "suffering for love" happens *after* instead of *before* that the relationship has been consumated, "a suffering for love" conjured by commensality and the shared memory of the pleasure taken which the narrator's describes sympathetically, and possibly even identifies with. Since pleasure was consumed already, *re*membering flesh constitutes the future of the ladies' relationship with Ignaure, for they die with him, part of the same flesh since they ingested his. Flesh undoes bodily boundaries in the acts of eating and having sex, but *Ignaure* raises the question of futurity of the ladies' carnal and commensal love, of flesh after its consumption. The lay is an act of remembrance, and its composition makes the pleasure and the lovers' union last long after life has left the lovers' bodies. As the mourned flesh becomes a lay, textuality itself becomes flesh, to be shared by future readers and singers.

Turned simultaneously inward and outward, flesh is the shared dimension, the shared world of the actors of the courtly theater, their skins all connected directly or indirectly to each other through the flesh of Ignaure, their perfect knight and the erotic embodiment of a courtly chivalry whose very existence threatens from the inside the social edifice it is supposed to support. If vulnerability characterizes the flesh (easily transformed, divided, digested, re-interpreted), *Ignaure* testifies to a certain obstinacy of the flesh: it shall not be forgotten. No matter how hard the husbands try to obliterate the excess of flesh that threatens them, by

transforming it and by feeding their wives with it, as if the excess could be simply digested and the court going back to its previous, peaceful life, where adultery is hidden and under control, it only attracts more attention to flesh. It pushes the ladies to justify their desires, to reclaim carnal pleasure. It turns Ignaure into a martyr whose story should be sung and shared with lovers. The flesh, deceptively entering the ladies' mouths, comes out of them as literary matter; in return, the literary matter produced from flesh underscores the carnality of courtly love, weaving its own fleshiness. Flesh represents the fold from which discourses and materiality of love produce and reproduce each other. As multiple appropriations compete, the constant division and recreation of the lover's flesh offer a narrative of escaping the mouth of the other, through reparative poetry, rewriting, and alternative readings of the story, as the fleshiness of the text survives material flesh and stays open to new readings, new interpretations, new ingestions. For *Ignaure* has been masticated for centuries without ever exhausting its sweet aroma, like the deceptive meal served to the ladies for their last dinner.

Chapter 3. The Knight with the Lion's Share: Eating with a Beast in the *Chevalier au lion*

Turning the lover's flesh into a meal calls on the transformativeness of not just cooking, but of butchering as well, in order to make a consumable object out of a living being. There's no eating meat without butchering; in *Ignaure*, the lover's dismemberment follows his capture by the husbands, but most of the literary butchering scenes of animals follow the animal's capture after the hunt. Whilst hunting, and particularly deer-hunting, appears widely across chivalric romances, nowhere does the subsequent butchering of the successfully hunted deer appear in more strikingly detailed and bizarrely ritualized form than in Gottfried van Strassburg's Middle High German adaptation of the Anglo-Norman legend of Tristan and Yseut, composed between the end of the twelfth century and 1210. The young Tristan, abducted by Norwegian sailors from his natal Parménie, finds himself lost in Cornwall after a tempest, when he comes across a group of hunters about to dismember the stag they just killed. When the hunters lay down the hart "on all fours like a boar," Tristan intervenes, offering to teach them the way to flay the hart properly and not like a wild pig, an animal of lesser symbolic value.[114] Thus begins a dialogue where Tristan explains the three stages of the deer's butchering. He provides a specialized vocabulary to the master-huntsman and illustrates it by proceeding to the dismemberment: the Excoriation (*Bast*), the Fourchie (*Furkîe*), and the Quarry (*Curîe*).[115]

[114] Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, trans. Arthur Thomas Hatto (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1960). 78.
[115] Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan und Isolt*, ed. Hans Ferdinand Massmann (Leipzig: G.J. Goschen, 1843), 73-76.

The Excoriation consists of flaying the entire animal, proceeding from the head to the belly and methodically removing the best parts to eat: fore-quarters, breast, ribs, belly, hind-quarters, piling them up neatly on the side of the carcass. The High German verb *enbasten* used in the text specifically refers to peeling off the deer's antlers, but here it extends to the skin and the breaking-up of the entire beast. For the second stage, the *Furkîe*, whose name translates the French origin of the practice (from *fourche*, fork), Tristan removes the liver, the loins, and the hart's genitals, and ties them together to a stick with some blast, before asking a groom to hold the fork then created. The text provides no further details about this ritualized practice of emasculation seemingly aimed at displaying the successful hunt, by brandishing an insignia made with the remnants of the defeated hart. The last stage, the *Curîe*, is derived from the French *curée*, and as in French consists of feeding the hounds with the pluck. Tristan cuts the heart in four quarters and chops the lungs and entrail, on the animal's flayed skin, and calls the hounds to eat them. Tristan explains the use of the word *Curîe* because the pluck must be given to the hounds on the animal's skin, that is *cuir* in Old French. To complete what appears as a "ceremonial," Tristan puts the head and antlers aside in the process, and he mentions a custom of offering them to a poor person should the occasion arise.[116]

Impressed by Tristan's skills despite his young age, the hunters invite him to ride with them to the court of King Mark, with the dismembered hart as trophy. Beyond the documentation offered to the modern reader about ritualized hunting practices in the Middle Ages, this scene provides an insight about the significance of butchering for medieval aristocracy. Lost in a foreign land, deprived of support and resources, the young Tristan exhibits his noble upbringing to complete strangers by demonstrating his ability to break a hart, following a precise process

[116] An Smets and Baudouin van den Abeele, "Medieval Hunting," in *A Cultural History of Animals*, ed. Brigitte Resl, vol. 2 (Oxford ; New York: Berg, 2011), 61.

and naming each stage of the process; the capacity to dismember an animal's body in a certain way points to social status.[117] Each piece of the hart's flesh that he takes builds his own noble status in the eyes of the professional hunters who attend his demonstration; through the classificatory knowledge of the game that he displays, Tristan performs his social status of an aristocratic young man who belongs to a court. His performance results in the hunters bringing him to the court of King Mark, who turns out to be his uncle. Tristan's recognition and acceptance in the court occurs through his dissection of the deer both as a social "ritual" and as a metaphor of his own transformation into a part of the royal family into the eyes of the hunters. Tristan's butchering skills therefore turn a dire situation into a homecoming.

Butchering differs from mere killing by the skills it implies and the taxonomy it involves, classifying beings and body parts as edible or not, and how edible and for whom. If cooking has been said to be the proper of man, in the wake of Claude Lévi-Strauss's writings on the raw and the cooked, in the case of meat butchering predates cooking, and even outweighs it in medieval romances.[118] Especially since some types of meat can be eaten raw, yet prepared. In the fourteenth century romance *Perceforest*, set in Britain, a foreign knight, Estonné, offers a way to prepare meat without cooking it: he cuts and compresses a stag's thigh between two branches and with the help of a horse exerts traction, extracting all the blood and humours from the flesh, which is then flayed and seasoned.[119] The knights describe the meat thus obtained as particularly delicious, better than an emperor's meal. Even without fire, the preparation of the meat involves a particular knowledge of butchering, to select the flesh, to bleed it, and to flay it using what the knights have at hand: a sword and a strong horse, in addition to hunting abilities. Medieval

[117] Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 111.
[118] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Le cru et le cuit*, Mythologiques (Paris: Plon, 1964), 152.
[119] Gilles Roussineau, ed., *Perceforest, Première Partie*, vol. 1, Textes littéraires français (Genève: Droz, 1987), 300-301.

romances tend to elide cooking, but, as Gottfried's *Tristan* and the anonymous *Perceforest* illustrate, they describe butchering at great length, as a set of knowledge and praxis proper to a social elite.

Butchering can be oriented toward one's subsistence or intended to be an economic exchange, which largely corresponds to our modern understanding of butchering animals in a market economy. But as illustrated by Gottfried's *Tristan*, butchering opens up a variety of meanings that extend far beyond self-subsistence or the exploitation of animal flesh; the making of the fork with the hart's genitals and liver on a stick has no economical or practical purpose, other than creating a strikingly visual symbol of the hunted beast, as well as of the manhood of the successful hunters. Tristan's three-step butchering of the hart takes place outside the merchant economy, displaying a specific knowledge by carefully separating what should belong to a king's table and what should be given to the dogs, as well as what an aristocratic man can do that nonnoble men were unable to perform after the hunt.[120]

A practical and a classificatory knowledge at the same time, butchering enacts an essential transformative process for turning flesh into a meat that can be eaten, but also through which humans define themselves, for butchering proclaims "our intellectual and emotional separation with animals" in the words of Carol J. Adams.[121] This separation aims to make the consumption of animal flesh morally acceptable, but it also stages the butcherer's own status regarding the object "meat" produced by butchering. By coldly excoriating the deer, Tristan proclaims his difference from the beast he reduces to meat; there is no possible identification between the young man and the dead animal he breaks into pieces. Dividing the hart's flesh

[120] About the ritual butchering as converting the wild stag, a worthy opponent, into food worthy of human consumption in Gottfried's *Tristan*, see Salisbury, *The Beast within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 47-48.
[121] Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, 20.

between a meat meant for human consumption and entrails left to the hounds proclaims a difference as well between hunters and hounds, while rewarding the dogs, thus recognizing in their lives a value denied to the hart's. Ultimately, Tristan distinguishes himself as noble through his butchering performance, raising his own value above the hunters who were about to flay the deer as though it were a vulgar boar. The butchering scene has Tristan recognized as noble and brought to the court of his relative King Mark. Butchering therefore stages every body's place in a cultural and social hierarchy of carnivorism, from the living beings to be killed to the living beings to be fed. Turning living flesh into meat and unequally redistributing it, the knight butchering a beast reasserts his noble privileges for he determines who can eat whom and how, reenacting the existing social conventions and establishing human/ nonhuman hierarchies in the making.

In Gottfried's *Tristan*, butchering distributes roles and puts every being in a specific position; Tristan reorders social roles and the human/animal hierarchy as he dismembers the hart, paving the way for his own return to the place he owns by birthright, at the side of his regal uncle. But what happens when this narrative of homecoming involves a wild beast not being butchered but walking side by side with the knight; when a nonhuman animal comes to be defined as the knight's companion, companion in butchering, companion in sharing flesh, to the point that the knight ends up claiming that he loves him as his own body? These interrogations spur from a reading of another romance, Chrétien de Troyes's *Chevalier au lion*; they form the backbone of this chapter.

In the *Chevalier au lion*, composed between 1177 and 1181, a series of butchering scenes marks the main character's reconquest of his noble status and humanity. Yvain, the protagonist, falls into madness and becomes a wild man living on raw meat after failing to keep his promises

to his newlywed wife; the second half of the romance is devoted to Yvain's reconquest of his status of knight and of his marriage, during which each encounter involves either butchering or sharing meat. One of these encounters, with a lion Yvain saved from being devoured by a serpent, gives its title to the romance. As the knight and the lion go on to hunt, fight, and eat together, the sharing of flesh grounds their ensuing companionship. The transspecies companionship reshapes Yvain's identity as the "chevalier au lion." While the Latin etymology defines companions as those who share bread together, Yvan and the lion share flesh instead: the flesh of the prey and the foes they butcher together or that they butcher for each other, whether the butchering entails a literal consumption of flesh or a metaphorical one. Companionship does not mean equality, though. Like Tristan separating the muscles that are good to eat from the entrails that are fit for the dogs, *Le Chevalier au lion* raises the question of the lion's share, in its double meaning of what the literal lion gets and who gets more from the butchered flesh; who benefits the most from butchering?

During the knight's journey, bodies are either subjected to butchering or benefit from butchering; those who benefit from butchering therefore receive their share of flesh. In this chapter, I read a series of encounters made by Yvain with a hermit, a few deer, the lion who gives him his title of "Knight with the Lion," a voracious dragon, and a racialized giant clothed in a bear's skin. All of these encounters involve butchering. My reading shows that violence assigns all bodies to a position in social and human/nonhuman hierarchies, from the deer butchered for sustenance to the racialized giant symbolically expelled from the realm of the human as a violent dismembering turns his body into meat. The act of butchering separates the butchering subject from the butchered object, producing a hierarchy between eater and eaten; as in Gottfried's *Tristan*, it secures the knight's own Christian noble status. Nonetheless, as I will

demonstrate in this chapter, the companionship between the knight and a wild animal complicates the hierarchization of beings, unsettling boundaries between human and nonhuman alongside class divides.

I first discuss an exchange of food between Yvain as a wild man and a hermit in the woods, interrogating what it means to give the other to eat, then I move to the production of taxonomies, with the violent separation of the lion from the serpent as they are both fighting, and the dragon attempts to devour the lion. I then show how the lion and the knight become companions through the meat they share, before moving to the butchering of a racialized giant – racialized because butchered – before interrogating who gets their symbolic share of the giant's flesh degraded into meat. In medieval romances, violence defines the social, political, and so-called "natural" order; through the *Chevalier au lion*, I show that the violence inflicted on flesh, both literal and taxonomic, produces corporeal difference, between and within bodies, as it tears limbs – and beings – apart.

A Transaction of Flesh

Yvain's encounter with a hermit provides the romance's first representation of butchering; it happens at a time when Yvain is lost to society and it predates the encounter with the lion. Yvain initially left the court of King Arthur to avenge the humiliation of a relative.[122] After killing the guardian of a magic fountain, Yvain marries the defeated knight's widow with the help of her servant's tricks and takes his place, but King Arthur's nephew, Gauvain, convinces Yvain to join him in a life of tournaments. Fearing *recreance*, the loss of virility

[122] Corinne Pierreville, "Introduction," in *Le Chevalier au lion*, by Chrétien de Troyes, ed. Corinne Pierreville (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2016), 10-11.

implied by domestic life, Yvain obtains permission from his wife to leave for one year. He fails to return by the allotted time and, rejected by his lady, he falls into madness, rips off his clothes, and lives in the woods as a wild man.[123] The madness episode, located at the midpoint of the romance, constitutes its watershed. If the first half of the romance can be described as a classic "coming-of-age" narrative about a young man proving his worth and ultimately becoming a married lord, Yvain's decision to leave his wife to follow Gauvain and the subsequent episode of madness testify to the contradictory injunctions faced by the knight and his failure to address them. On the outskirts of the courtly world, Yvain must restore his status as both knight and husband, in a context of crisis of the feudal and patriarchal institutions where knights no longer protect young ladies from spoliation and depredation caused by "uncourtly" figures; the forest where he finds shelter represents a liminal space, a wilderness located on the margins of the courtly world, yet inhabited not only by wild beasts but by human figures as well, enabling a series of encounters that will gradually bring him back into society and redemption.[124]

Yvain steals a boy's bow and survives in the woods by preying on local game: "In the woods he lay in wait for animals, then slew them and ate their flesh raw" ("Les bestes par le bois agueite, / si les ocit, et se manjue / la venison trestot crue," 2826-2828).[125] The wild man forgets the aristocratic way of hunting. A major theme of medieval literature, the hunt as part of the aristocratic lifestyle is a highly ritualized practice, as demonstrated by Tristan in the introduction

[123] "Il a dépouillé les deux habits du corps et de l'esprit, le vêtement et la mémoire." Le Goff, *L'imaginaire médiéval*, 156.
[124] Pierreville, "Introduction," 30-32.
As Miranda Griffin notes, "The wilderness is already a powerful concept in the Bible, being a space of punishment and redemption, exile and self-discovery, temptation and resistance to it." Miranda Griffin, "Figures in the Landscape: Encounters and Entanglements in the Medieval Wilderness," ed. Sarah Kay and Nicolette Zeeman, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 49, no. 3 (September 1, 2019): 501–20, 507.
About the medieval concept of the forest and its narrative use and representation in *Yvain*, see: Le Goff, *L'imaginaire médiéval*, 155-156 and 163-164.
[125] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier au lion*, ed. Pierreville, Corinne (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2016), 296.
Chrétien de Troyes, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, trans. David Staines (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 291.

of this chapter.[126] In the words of Susan Crane, "the ritualization of hunting *endorses and validates* noble skill, superiority, and governance."[127] The significance of hunting for noble men can be traced back to the Carolingians, when horse-mounted hunting became a marker of Frankish kingship and aristocratic manhood.[128] Instead of chasing deer, mounted, with hounds, Yvain hides himself in order to trap unspecified beasts, because the word "venison" in French broadly refers to game meat, whether it is deer, boar, rabbit, or hare; anything Yvain can catch from his hideout.[129] As Dorothy Yamamoto puts it, Yvain becomes "a practical opportunist, taking from the forest whatever he needs to survive."[130] No taxonomy appears, and in any case, he eats the animal flesh raw. Not only does Yvain not cook the flesh, but there is no mention of butchering either; he goes directly from killing to eating, as a predatory animal would. What makes the raw flesh venison, that is, meat, is the fact that Yvain eats it; in absence of transformation, the function ascribed to flesh (to be eaten) defines it as meat, and the hunted game becomes venison.

The wild man's madness translates a "loss of the properly human, which includes correct clothing, behavior, weaponry, reason," to quote Peter Haidu; a "social de-gradation" that finds its illustration in what Yvain does to the animal flesh, or rather in what he fails to do, that is, butchering, as any noble hunter would.[131] By suggesting that Yvain devours his prey without butchering or any kind of culinary preparation, the text reinforces the image of the wild man driven out of society, but also out of "culture." Yvain's madness highlights not only a social

[126] Smets, "Medieval Hunting," 59-61.
[127] Susan Crane, *Animal Encounters: Contacts and Concepts in Medieval Britain*, 1st ed, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 107.
[128] Eric Joseph Goldberg, *In the Manner of the Franks: Hunting, Kingship, and Masculinity in Early Medieval Europe*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 3.
[129] Trésor de la langue française informatisé, accessed February 21, 2022, http://stella.atilf.fr/Dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=350988375
[130] Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature*, 183.
[131] Peter Haidu, "The Hermit's Pottage: Deconstruction and History in 'Yvain,'" *Romanic Review* 74, no. 1 (January 1, 1983), 1-3.

degradation, a loss of his aristocratic status, but also a failure to distinguish himself from wild animals. As famously underscored by Lévi-Strauss, cooking, or at least the culinary preparation of food, represents the process of culture, as opposed to the "raw," that lies on the side of the wild, the animal-like.[132] Alongside his nakedness and his de-socialization in the woods, what Yvain eats and how he eats it locate him in a liminal space between the human and the nonhuman.

Yvain's first re-acquaintance with human society takes the form of the encounter with a hermit who is clearing land ("li hermites essartoit," 2833). The hermit marks the irruption of human's society in the woods. Clearing the land turns the woods into a livable space for human standards, but also a productive space. The hermit flees at the view of the naked wild man, but he charitably displays bread and vegetables on his window for Yvain ("De son pain et de sa porrete / par charité prist li boens hom, / si li mist fors de sa meison / desor une fenestre estroite," 2840-2843).[133] The leeks suggest the existence of a garden, which explains why the hermit clears the land; the garden assigns a productive function to the hermit's cottage. The hermit's economic activity and his consumption of bread underscore that he belongs to human culture and society, in stark contrast with Yvain, even though they are neighbors in isolation in the woods.[134] Despite the fear that the sight of the naked wild man inspires, the hermit recognizes him as human, by providing food to him, out of charity: cultivated food (the leeks) and transformed food (the bread). Yvain shows no appetite for the vegetables, but he covets the bread and eats it

[132] Lévi-Strauss, *Le cru et le cuit*, 152.
[133] Corinne Pierreville translates "porrete" by "oignons" (onions), while indicating in her notes that the term could name leeks ("poireaux" in modern French) as well. Since the word "porrete" is still in use in rural *patois* to designate leeks, I favor this translation. Moreover, it is unlikely that the vegetables are provided raw to the wild man, so I follow Peter Haidu's lead on the fact that the vegetables meal is likely to be a pottage. Haidu, "The Hermit's Pottage," 4.
[134] "The man-beast is asocial and subrational; the hermit is asocial and suprarational, to the extent that he has rejected even the religious community of the monastery and a life of learning for solitary meditation of the most immediate and passionate sort. Together, then, the man-beast and the hermit represent the lower and upper limits of a human hierarchy." Eugene Vance, *From Topic to Tale: Logic and Narrativity in the Middle Ages*, Theory and History of Literature, v. 47 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 71.

immediately. Yvain's craving for bread implies that his diet of raw meat did not satiate him, and his continuous hunger for bread sets up a relationship with the hermit:

> And so while Yvain was mad, not a week passed that he did not carry some wild animal to the hermit's door. Thus he lived, and the good man undertook to stretch out the skins for him and to cook a large portion of the meat. There were always the bread and the water jug on the window ledge for the madman's nourishment: food and drink were his, venison without salt and pepper and cold spring water. And the good man also took it upon himself to sell the skins and buy bread made of barley and unleavened rye. In this way Yvain had an ample supply of bread and venison which the hermit provided him. The supply lasted a long time.[135]

> Puis ne passa .viii. jors antiers,
> tant com il fut en cele rage,
> que aucune beste salvage
> ne li aportast a son huis.
> Iceste vie mena puis,
> et li boens homs s'antremetoit
> de l'escorchier, et si metoit
> asez de la venison cuire.
> Et li peins et l'eve et la buire
> estoit toz jorz a la fenetre
> por l'ome forsenez repestre,
> s'avoit et a mangier et a boivre
> venison sanz sel et sanz poivre
> et aigue froide de fontainne.
> Et li boens hoem estoit an painne
> de cuir vandre et d'acheter pain
> d'orge et de soigle sanz levain,
> s'ot puis tote sa livreison,
> pain a planté et veneison
> qu'il li dona tant longuement (2864-2883)

The sharing of flesh between the mad man and the hermit is neither literal or sexual, as in *Ignaure*, but economic, and it relies on the hermit's ability to butcher the animals brought to him by Yvain. The hermit thus performs something Yvain was not able to do anymore, since he has lost the ability of butchering together with his chivalric identity. The hermit divides the animal's body between the edible flesh and the flayed skin that becomes leather, that is, an exchangeable

[135] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 291.

good used by the hermit to buy bread that he shares between himself and Yvain. The flesh is transited from Yvain's hands to the hermit's hands, then to outside economic agents, integrating Yvain into a market economy.[136] However, the hermit's action stands in sharp contrast with the chivalric performance displayed by Tristan, because the hermit's butchering is opportunistic and market-oriented, for it establishes an economic relationship to the outside, where he can trade leather for bread.

Haidu posits that this economic exchange relies on charity, on the hermit's side, and gratitude, from Yvain, enabling the "elaboration of more complex social relations" through "the instauration of a simple exchange system between the mad knight and the hermit."[137] Commenting on the same episode with a similar focus on charity and economic exchange, Eugene Vance argues that "the hermit's motive of *charity* in the process of exchange set him up as an ideal model of commercial exchange that is not built on *cupidity*."[138] While Haidu emphasizes gratitude as a response to charity, Vance stresses the possibility of an "ideal" exchange not motivated by greediness. Yet, in both readings, the quite sentimental idea of a relationship set up by charity generates a tension with the concept of an economic relationship that involves a transaction to satisfy the agents' interests, as both critiques otherwise developed. Overstating an affective reading of the economic relationship tends to simultaneously veil the ambiguity of the hermit's motives, the lack of indication of what Yvain actually thinks or feels, and the violence at the core of their relationship: the consumption and exploitation of animals hunted by Yvain and butchered by the hermit.

[136] Haidu, "The Hermit's Pottage," 7-8.
[137] Haidu, "The Hermit's Pottage," 4-5.
[138] Vance, *From Topic to Tale*, 71.

The hermit's charity has its limits. Chrétien notes that, after Yvain ate bread at the window for the first time, "when the good man saw him leave, he prayed under his roof to God to defend him and protect him, lest the man ever come there again" ("li boens hoem desoz son toit / prie Deu, quant aler l'en voit, / qu'Il le desfande et qu'Il le gart, / que mes ne vaigne cele part," 2856-2860).[139] Fear initially motives the hermit's "charity," then the exchange based on mutual advantage characterizes the hermit's relationship with Yvain. Even though the hermit's original impulse is to protect himself from the wild man by providing him with food, he manages to profit from the situation, by making and selling leather from the animals hunted by Yvain. Mutual interests guide the two character's actions; the hermit's transactional butchering reasserts his own role as economic agent and, to some extent, Yvain himself triggers a socialization of the hermit, alone in the woods until Yvain's appearance, through the economic exchange it creates between the two isolated men in the woods on one side, and the outside trading world on the other side. The hermit first appears to the reader as he is clearing the land, and he successfully integrates Yvain into his own economic schemes, for exploiting his environment characterizes his economic function. On Yvain's side, nothing in the text points to a feeling of gratitude. He returns to the hermit because the hermit feeds him, as a wild animal in the process of being domesticated, but not quite even as a dog, since a dog develops an affectionate relationship with its master that is clearly absent between the hermit and Yvain. Coming back certainly illustrates Yvain's own interest in the exchange sets up with the hermit, but it has little to do with the sentimental attachment precluded in the notion of gratitude.

Byproducts of the animal flesh's transformation into edible food and exchange value, the meat and the bread handled to Yvain by the hermit constitute him as a human economic agent.

[139] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 291.

Reintegrated into a wider economy existing outside the woods, Yvain develops a social relationship with the hermit, and this relationship goes through the animal flesh they share; the hermit and the knight not only participate into an exchange, but they learn how to provide food one to another. The issue of giving the other to eat recalls Jacques Derrida's insights on commensality and hospitality:

> What is eating? […] The infinite metonymical question on the subject of "one must eat well" must be nourishing not only for me, for a "self," which, given its limits, would thus eat badly, it must be *shared*, as you might put it, and not only in language. "One must eat well" does not mean above all taking in and grasping in itself, but *learning* and *giving* to eat, learning-to-give-the-other-to-eat. One never eats entirely on one's own: this constitutes the rule underlying the statement, "One must eat well." It is a rule offering infinite hospitality.[140]
>
> Qu'est-ce que manger ? […] La question infiniment métonymique au sujet du « il faut bien manger » ne doit pas être nourrissante seulement pour moi, pour un moi, qui alors mangerait mal, elle doit être *partagée*, comme tu le dirais peut-être, et non seulement dans la langue. « Il faut bien manger » ne veut pas d'abord dire prendre et comprendre en soi, mais *apprendre* et *donner* à manger, apprendre-à-donner-à-manger-à-l'autre. On ne mange jamais tout seul, voilà la règle du « il faut bien manger ». C'est une loi de l'hospitalité infinie.[141]

Eating always implies a relationality, as emphasized here by the use of certain verbs: sharing, learning, giving. Despite his ambivalent intentions, a mix of charity, fear, and interest, the hermit nonetheless recognizes that Yvain must eat by providing bread to him; however, can we say that Yvain eats "well," given the poor quality of the meal shared with him, and since an economic relationship takes place instead of a relation of hospitality? Here lies a seminal distinction between commensality and hospitality, as two modes of providing food to an other who is recognized as a subject. Commensality involves sharing flesh as well as the recognition of a shared condition, the condition of human beings who must eat well, who belong to culture and

[140] Derrida and Nancy, "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," 115.
[141] Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy, "« Il faut bien manger » ou le calcul du sujet," *Cahiers Confrontation* 20, Après le sujet qui vient (1989): 110.

therefore should eat bread and cooked meat, but commensality does not exclude transactions, interests, and a limited application in time or in content, as hospitality should do according to Derrida. In Yvain and the hermit's relationship, hospitality stays at the door, so to speak, like Yvain himself; yet their relationship implies sharing and "learning-to-give-the-other-to-eat," based on a relationality that processes itself from the hermit's recognition that Yvain should eat bread, pottage, or cooked meat, instead of raw venison; that he should eat well, somehow.

They do not eat together but they do share flesh together, for each of them must eat well, in the very minimal sense of an "appropriate" food for human beings, and they eat well by cooking meat or buying bread with flayed skin. Because it enables the transformation of animal flesh into both meat and leather traded for bread, butchering is key. As opposed to the mere fact of cutting up an animal to take some flesh from it, as Yvain probably did when he was eating raw venison in the forest, butchering involves a certain degree of ritualization, of charging the gestures of dividing up the animal body with social and cultural meaning, but also the flesh itself with socio-cultural and/or exchange value. Butchering determines who eats whom and which body parts should be consumed by whom, or transformed into an object that is not edible, but still granted an economic or symbolic function, such as the leather or the liver and genitals on the stick in Gottfried's *Tristan*. Butchering produces difference within the animal body *and* among bodies, in a single operation; commensality relies on this operation, for sharing flesh necessitates first determining what can be shared and by whom. Butchering therefore offers a way of "eating well," as it codifies what is meat and how and by whom it may be eaten, but a focus on butchering switches attention from consumption (properly eating) to the undoing of the animal's body at the core of Yvain's commensal reintegration into the human economy.

For the transaction between Yvain and the hermit should not conceal the third part involved: the animals whose flesh is exploited. The violence of the sharing is displaced onto animal bodies. The exchange would not be possible without the putting to death of animals and the exploitation of their flesh turned into meat and skin turned into leather. As emphasized by Karl Steel, violence toward animals is part of the process of the making of the human, as a way of distinguishing, of expressing a dominion over creatures defined as subalterns; not subjected to violence because they are subalterns, but subalterns because subjected to violence.[142] I read violence as both performative and tautological, for it justifies itself at the very moment it engenders itself. Violence actively defines who belongs to the subalterns' category, and who does not. Before his encounter with the hermit, Yvain was already hunting animals, but in a beast-like mode, in an optic of opportunistic survival in the woods, as illustrated by the fact that the creatures he hunted were unnamed. As soon as he eats cooked food instead of raw venison, the beasts he hunts do not appear indistinct anymore in the text: he now hunts deer ("cers et biches quiert," 2856), a proper game and an appropriate food for a knight. The introduction of a taxonomy of hunted animals results from Yvain's humanity being recognized by the hermit. The species is named, for it is now subjected to the human hunter's violence and objectified by economic exchange, founding the social relation between the mad man and the hermit. Deer enter the realm of human dominion when they are killed and turned into meat and leather. The exploitation of animal flesh is the very condition of the exchange between the wild man and the hermit, stressing the butchering violence at the core of the knight's gradual reintegration into human society.

[142] Karl Steel, *How to Make a Human: Animals and Violence in the Middle Ages*, 21-23.

Producing Taxonomies: Tearing Bodies Apart

As the second part of the romance describes Yvain's progressive reintegration into the courtly world, his return to society involves a series of butchering episodes labeled as chivalric performances. As the modern title of the romance suggests, these chivalric performances come to be associated with the presence of a lion. The lion has attracted much of scholars' focus, for good reasons, given his prominence in the narrative, but the taming of the lion cannot be dissociated from an original scene of butchering that untangles the lion from a serpent's body engulfing him. The scene takes place after Yvain was cured from his madness by a fairy balm, and given clothing, weaponry, and a horse, whose presence reasserts a more normative relation to animality.[143] Yvain sets himself up on his path to restore his status as knight, under an anonymous identity. While Yvain crosses some deep woods, he hears a cry of pain and decides to follow it:

> When he reached a clearing, he saw a lion and a serpent, which was holding the lion by the tail and scorching his haunches with burning fire.[144]

> Et quant il parvint cele part,
> vit un lÿon en un essart,
> et un serpant qui le tenoit
> par la coe, et si li ardoit
> trestoz les rains de flame ardant. (3343-3347)

Yvain meets the lion in a peculiar position, in a cleared part of the woods, an "essart," the same type of landscape that is crafted, turned into a potentially productive space, by the hermit who "essartoit." The encounter does not happen in the wilderness per se, but in a man-made space. It appears somewhat like a stage set for dramatic effect that guides the knight's perception and directs the audience's attention to the importance of the fight. The moves described render

[143] Cohen, "Chevalerie," 46.
[144] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 297.

the scene vivid: we cannot really figure out what the position of the lion is, as the serpent appears to try to devour him and burn him at the same time. The serpent's maw duplicates itself through the double action of biting and burning; its capacity to do both at the same time, although difficult to visualize, saturates the space of the text with the serpent's carnivorous intentions. The serpent's flaming breath roasts the lion's flesh, conflicting with the idea that cooking represents a social or cultural act since a monstrous creature performs it. The description emphasizes the scene's abnormality, a "wonder" in Yvain's eyes ("mervoille," 3349), and focuses on the monstrosity of the beast to justify his destruction, noting the size of his gaping maw ("gole," 3363), described as larger as a cooking kettle ("ole," 3364). The serpent's (g)ole, in which the lion is simultaneously cooked and engulfed, grounds its monstrosity on a culinary comparison emphasizing the stakes of the fight: a carnivorous beast devouring another carnivorous beast, turning the lion into a prey, and specifically into a roasted meat, like the deer cooked by the hermit. Part of the "mervoille" consists in the uncanny sight of a predator turned into a prey, of the becoming-deer of the lion about to become the serpent's meal. Furthermore, the serpent's apparent taste for roasted meat and its anatomy evoking a cooking pot align with human cooking implements; both the setting of the fight – the cleared land – and the serpent's cooking of the lion entangle the wild animals' confrontation with human industry, implicitly recalling another cleared land, the one where the hermit fed Yvain with cooked meat.

Facing the fight, Yvain first hesitates about what to do in front of the two wild animals, then he chooses to take a stand and to interrupt the process of roasting and ingestion of the lion by the serpent: "He decided to go to aid the lion, because a serpent with its venom and treachery deserved nothing but harm" ("Lors dist qu'au lÿon se tanra, / qu'a venimeus ne a felon / ne doit

an feire se mal non," 3351-3353). [145] Yvain's decision values the lion's life above the serpent's life, by projecting human values on animal bodies; the serpent is described as a treacherous, venomous pest, and therefore the animal *deserves* to be harmed. Yvain illustrates his Christian ethics by associating the serpent with the (d)evil.[146] This association also echoes "the priorities of heraldic representation," as Peggy McCracken puts it, where the serpent is associated with pagan knights, and the lion with Christian knights.[147] In a way that recalls his own recognition as human by the hermit, Yvain sees the lion as a "noble animal" ("beste gentil et franche," 3371), just as Yvain himself is a noble man, deciphering the lion as a sign of Christianity against the serpent as a demonic sign. Yvain and the lion do not share a common humanity, but a shared nobility, across species. Later on, Yvain will explicitly value the lion's life over nonnoble human lives, making nobility a criterion more important than humanity for judging somebody's worth.

The heraldic, Christian, and social lens through which Yvain reads the scene motivates his intervention in favor of the lion, yet he does not completely forget that lion represents a potential danger for him and keeps himself ready to fight the lion once the serpent will be dead. Behind the heraldic emblem, Yvain still perceives the lion as a wild beast, whose reactions may be unpredictable.[148] Ultimately, the greater alterity the serpent represents to Yvain motivates the knight to prioritize killing the monster; the knight cannot relate to the serpent as he somehow can with the lion, and the serpent dies for this reason.

> With his keen-cutting sword he attacked the evil serpent, pinning it to the ground and slicing it in two. He then struck again and again until he had cut and hacked it to pieces.

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[145] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 297.
[146] Bruckner, Matilda Tomaryn. "The Lady and the Dragon in Chrétien's *Chevalier au lion*," in ed. Jane Burns and Peggy McCracken, *From Beasts to Souls: Gender and Embodiment in Medieval Europe* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 73.
[147] McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast*, 77.
[148] Despite its Christian and Christological associations, the lion also inherited from an ambivalent image in the Bible, as an animal that can be cruel and violent. See Michel Pastoureau*, Bestiaires du Moyen-Âge* (Paris: Seuil, 2011), 58-60.

> But he had to sever a piece of the lion's tail because the head of the wretched serpent still gripped the tail.[149]

> A s'espee qui söef tranche
> va le felon serpant requerre,
> si le tranche jusqu'anz enz terre,
> et les .ii. mitiez retronçone,
> fiert et refiert, et tant l'en done
> que tot le demince et depiece.
> Mes il li covient une piece
> tranchier de la coe au lïon,
> por la teste au serpant felon
> que par la coe le tenoit. (3372-3381)

Yvain is not content with killing the serpent; he literally butchers it, slices it repeatedly into pieces from tail to maw, to the point of cutting the part of the lion's tail that the serpent held in his mouth. The violence of the serpent's slaughtering characterizes the serpent as a non-assimilable other, enacting a degradation initiated by the many pejorative adjectives attributed to him. Violence is not mere killing, since the animal would have probably died after Yvain's first blow that chopped its body in half; but Yvain keeps going relentlessly, hurting the lion in the process. Nothing in the text presumes that the serpent's head would continue to live by itself once the body was destroyed, so nothing justifies why Yvain would keep chopping the head up to the lion's tail. But the vocabulary used draws attention to the serpent's death as butchering, as it relies on terms of culinary preparation, for the serpent is chopped ("demince et depiece"), reverting the situation of the serpent's body from "cooking kettle" to thin slices of meat. Butchering the serpent represents for Yvain the logical outcome of his decision to characterize the serpent as an evil pest that deserves to be harmed; Yvain *must* butcher the serpent to distinguish the lion he identified as a noble beast from the serpent's status as pest.

[149] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 297.

Yet the loss of the tail by the lion prevents any simplistic reading of freeing the noble lion against the evil dragon, because the lion himself got hurt by Yvain, while this harm could have clearly been avoided. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner reads the fight between the two animals and Yvain's intervention as an interplay between aggression, love, and taming, with a possible identification of the serpent with the wife Yvain earlier abandoned and whom he now wishes to win back: "The erotic potential here is obvious, especially when the tip of the tail cut off suggests a symbolic taming (castration for psychoanalytically inclined readers, circumcision for medieval readers informed by biblical usage)."[150] In her reading, the lion is tamed for he is freed at the price of a semi-castration (or a circumcision) that announces his docility to Yvain, but the two animals also represent metonymies for the dysfunctional and broken couple. The scene thus evokes the violence of love and the complicated relationship between Yvain and his wife, mirrored in the two animals. Yvain frees the lion by dismembering the dragon that was devouring his tail. Following this logic, the lady/dragon is seizing the phallus in a psychoanalytic-oriented reading, trying to incorporate the phallus by devouring the tail. However, as noted by Bruckner herself, "competing intertexts and their ironic reinvention will undercut Yvain's allegorical model of interpretation," and the association lady/dragon can be challenged, since the narrative is not about freeing the knight from his wife, but about reconciling him with her after he favored the homosocial company of other knights and a life of entertainment over his duties toward her.[151] Rejecting the lady/dragon association does not necessarily invalidate the reading of the tail cut off for taming/ circumcision, since Yvain must abandon both wildness and his youthful life of *bachelier* running all the tournaments, which

[150] Bruckner, "The Lady and the Dragon in Chrétien's *Chevalier Au Lion*," 72.
About circumcision and castration in this passage, see also: Vance, *From Topic to Tale*, 90, and Le Goff, *L'imaginaire médiéval*, 176.
[151] Bruckner, "The Lady and the Dragon in Chrétien's *Chevalier Au Lion*," 73.

represents possibly a sexual metaphor, to save his marriage. Evacuating the specter of the lady from the serpent's body does not necessarily ward off the specter of sexuality though, if we read the tournaments he favored over marriage as a sexual metaphor; preferring Gauvain's company to his wife's company, or even preferring Gauvain *tout court* to his wife.

What makes the fight so graphically impressive is the fact that, by biting the lion's tail, the serpent himself becomes a continuation of the tail. The lion-serpent entanglement calls again on Christian representations of these two animals, in sermons as well as in iconography; as Haidu notes, the two creatures are sometimes associated, by doubling or by contrast, as figurations of evil.[152] But Haidu warned us that Chrétien playfully uses polysemy to free the text of any didactic intention, whether religious or moral.[153] The meaning we can ascribe to the lion-serpent entanglement resides in the text itself rather than its theological or iconographic context, and it is revealed when butchering tears apart the animal bodies identified by the knight. Yvain imposes separations on the composite animal body: a taxonomic one (lion/ serpent), a moral one (good/ evil), and a social one, for the characterization of the lion as noble integrates him into the aristocratic world from which the serpent is excluded.

However, to date scholars' focus on the allegorical meanings of Yvain's intervention in the fight tends to obliterate its violence and messiness. Butchering the serpent with the lion's tail untangles the lion-serpent knot and enacts the divides Yvain projects on them; it "frees" the noble lion from the evil creature, but it subjects the lion to slaughter too. The focus on what the scene might allegorize veils both the significance of the quite explicit taxonomies projected by Yvain on the beasts and the actual violence of the scene: a knight stepping in to separate two

[152] « Le lion peut s'associer au serpent (ou au dragon avec lequel celui-ci est souvent confondu) par dédoublement aussi que par contraste : dans tel texte ou telle représentation graphique, on les retrouve tous deux figurant le Mal. » Peter Haidu, *Lion-queue-coupée, l'écart symbolique chez Chrétien de Troyes* (Genève: Droz, 1972), 60.
[153] Haidu, *Lion-queue-coupée, l'écart symbolique chez Chrétien de Troyes*, 72-73.

wild animals fighting, and doing so by slaughtering one and mutilating the other. The categories identified by Yvain in the lion's body do not prevent him from being ready to kill the lion if he attacks, and do not appear secure, since the "noble animal" loses a bit of flesh anyway; after all, fighting with other "nobles" characters, even injuring them with the possibility to kill them, represent a chivalric romances' routine. Remembering that this scene takes place in a clearing, an "essart" like the hermit's cottage, by butchering the serpent as the hermit butchered deer, and getting himself ready to kill the lion as well if it proves to be a menace like the serpent, what does Yvain do if not the same fundamental activity as the hermit: clearing the land, but this time from wild beasts and marvelous creatures, all carnivorous, who represent a danger for wanderers and a competition to human dominion over the land and its resources, including meat?

The wounded lion manages to save himself from the knight's potential slaughtering, by refusing any fight:

> Hear what the lion did. In a manner befitting the worthy and nobly born, he began to show that he was surrendering. [154]

> Oez que fist li lÿons donques,
> com fist que preuz et deboneire,
> com il li comança a feire
> samblant que a lui se randoit. (3388-3391)

Proving himself a creature no less marvelous than the serpent, the lion escapes death by humbling himself, defying Yvain's expectation of animal aggressivity yet validating his reading of the lion as noble. The line inviting the audience to pay particular attention to the lion's behavior emphasizes its uncanniness. The lion *seems* to surrender (*feire samblant*), as Chrétien notes, bowing to the knight and adopting a posture that recalls humility and yielding from a human perspective. The lion cries for mercy, however Yvain reads the lion's behavior as

[154] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 297.

thankful for delivering him from the deadly serpent: "For certain Sir Yvain realized that the lion was thanking him and humbling himself before him" ("Messire Yvains por verité / set que li lÿons le mercie," 3398-3400).[155] Yvain can decode his behavior because he identifies the lion as noble, by associating cultural traits to the beast. The denouement validates Yvain's choice to help the lion and to recognize him of being worthy to be saved, yet the text does introduce more ambiguity than Yvain acknowledges. The lion, already injured by Yvain and in danger of being slaughtered after attending the serpent's gruesome death, begs Yvain to spare him. He does so by pretending ("feire samblant") to surrender, in Chrétien's words, adopting an attitude able to arouse the knight's pity: a pity that made Yvain intervene in favor of the lion; a pity that makes Yvain accept the lion's capitulation; a pity that the serpent failed to inspire. Yvain is the one who sees thankfulness in the scene, but the lion appears mostly concerned about saving his own life; the narrator does not say that the lion is thankful, but the reader interprets the lion's behavior through Yvain's perspective.

The ambivalent saving of the lion marks the beginning of the companionship of Yvain with the beast: "The lion walked beside him, never to leave him, but to accompany him always to serve and to protect him" ("Et li lÿons lez lui costoie, / que jamés ne s'an partira : / toz jorz mes avoec lui ira, / que server et garder le vialt," 3408-3411).[156] Because Yvain spares the lion and accepts his mimicking of a feudal homage, the lion henceforth serves him. The notion of service here matters, since a service implies an exchange, even if the exchange is not even. Consequently, service grounds the lion's fidelity to the knight. A couple of lines later, the expression "his lord" ("son seignor," 3421) about Yvain from the lion's perspective reinforces the voluntary hierarchical relationship established by the mutilation and the feudal homage.

[155] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 297.
[156] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 297.

Service does not exclude thankfulness, or gratitude, but it does not necessarily include them either; the same applies to coercion, that can represent the origins of service, especially in a feudal context, and the text explicitly uses the vocabulary of feudal service to characterize the lion's relationship to Yvain. Later in the romance the lion indeed demonstrates warmer feelings to his new "master," but at this stage of the narrative the lion appears to have submitted to Yvain, and to reward Yvain's mercy by serving and protecting him. From now on the lion will stroll at Yvain's side, for the lion has been subjected to Yvain's will and by Yvain's blade. The taming that scholars have traditionally read in the cut off tail as circumcision or castration, or as about Yvain himself in a symbolic or psychologically-oriented reading, might, very simply, be about the taming of the lion, and only the lion. With his mutilated tail and the spectacle of the serpent's butchering, the lion gets a major warning of what it is to be Yvain's enemy, and we know that Yvain envisaged killing the lion if it proved to be a danger for him. Yet the lion does not run away. His decision consists of allying with the knight and becoming his companion. By protecting the knight, the lion protects himself as well, from Yvain and from other potential foes; by siding with the knight, he reasserts his own position as carnivorous subject, escaping his own becoming-meat by avoiding being butchered by Yvain, after being almost devoured by the dragon.

Cum Carne: Companions in Flesh

The hierarchical companionship between Yvain and the newly tamed lion opens with a hunting scene. The lion smells prey in the woods, and both Nature and hunger encourage him to track the deer, but he does not dare to hunt until he receives Yvain's approval. The lion sets out on the trail then waits for Yvain's orders:

> By such behavior, Yvain realized that the lion was showing him that he awaited his direction. He understood and knew that if he held back, the lion would hold back, and if he followed him, the lion would catch the game he had scented. He then incited the lion by his cries, as he would have done to a hunting dog.[157]

> Et cil parçoit a son esgart
> qu'il li mostre que il l'atant.
> Bien l'aparçoit et bien l'entent
> que s'il remaint, il remanra,
> et se il le siust, i l panra
> la veneison qu'il a santie.
> Lors le semont et l'escroe
> ausi com uns brachez feïst. (3428-3435)

The lion demonstrates his taming by waiting for his master's encouragement before undertaking the hunt; his obedience to his "seignor" proves to be stronger than hunger or the call of nature. The mention of the "brachez," the hunting dog, underlines the lion's apparent domestication and the canalization of his predatory skills in a way that would benefit a knowledgeable aristocratic hunter who would be familiar with hunting with hounds. Because of his experience of hunting, Yvain understands the lion's behavior, he decodes the lion's attitude and sounds, and in turn he encourages him with cries, as he would do with a dog. Yvain's receptivity to the lion's attempts to communicate recalls that domestication does not constitute a one-way process, but a mutual adaptation of the human and the animal to the behavior of each other, to be able to understand each other. While the lion proves that he can serve Yvain rightfully and obediently, Yvain demonstrates the aristocratic skills of hunter, of a trained sensibility to animal communication unveiling his aristocratic upbringing.[158] These huntsman's skills distinguish his noble identity, like mounting a horse or knowing how to fight, but they also represent a connection to the nonhuman, a porosity in the human-animal separation that makes him and the lion able to understand each other.

[157] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 297-298.
[158] Crane, *Animal Encounters*, 127.

Encouraged by Yvain's cries, the lion sets up for the trail and finds a deer:

> If he had his way, he would seize the deer, and this he did on the first bound, and drank the still-warm blood. He laid the slaughtered deer on his back and carried it to his master, who then, because of the lion's dear devotion to him, held him in great affection.[159]

Celui panra il ja son vuel,
si fist il au premier asaut,
et si an but le sanc tout chaut.
Qant ocis l'ot, si le gita
sor son dos, et si l'en porta
tant que devant son seignor vint,
et puis an grant chierté le tint
por la grant amor qu'an lui ot. (3442-3449)

The first manifestation of gratitude between Yvain and the lion occurs when the lion brings Yvain the flesh of the animals he hunted, almost unscathed, except for the blood the lion drank from the deer. The warm blood-drinking recalls the lion's nature as a savage beast, eating a food forbidden to humans, but it also initiates the butchering and preparation of the meat, by bleeding the animal.[160] David Staines' translation stresses the service provided by the lion as leading to an affective exchange; by proving his affection and devotion to Yvain, the lion kindles Yvain's affection for him. However, the last two lines are ambiguous. Staines, like Pierreville in her own translation in French, understands "et puis" as a causality, making Yvain the subject for the verb "tint": Yvain then holds the lion very dear (3448). But "et puis" can be read as temporal as well, which makes the lion the subject of all the verbs of the passage: the lion brings the deer to his master, *and then* he (the lion) holds him (Yvain) very dear, for the great love that he (lion) has for him (Yvain). Beyond the grammatical aspect, my reading draws from the comparison of the lion to a hound that opens the hunting passage. Bringing the product of his successful hunt to the knight, the lion celebrates him, as a hound proudly trotting back to his master, the "grant

[159] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 298.
[160] Montanari, *La chère et l'esprit*, 95-99.

chierté" being a dog-like manifestation of joy, justified by the love that the lion is now said to feel for Yvain. Translating "et puis" by "and then" instead of "who then" shifts the focus from the affective exchange to the likeness of the couple Yvain-lion to a huntsman-hound couple. Chrétien describes the hunt from the lion's perspective, describing *his* actions and *his* feelings, making him truly the agent of the passage.

Once settled for the night, Yvain decides to prepare the meat. The ensuing butchering of the deer deepens the lion's and Yvain's companionship:

> He began to flay the animal, splitting the skin along the ribs and cutting a slice from its loin. He drew a flame from a flint and set a dry log in the fire. He then put his slice on the roasting spit to cook quickly over the fire, roasting it until it was cooked. Yet there was no delight in the meal as there was no bread, no wine, no salt, no tablecloth, no knife, or anything else. While he was eating, his lion lay completely still in front of him, watching him intently until he had eaten his fill of the large steak. The lion ate the rest of the deer to the very bones.[161]

> Lors le comance a escorchier.
> Le cuir li fant dessus la coste,
> de la longe un lardé li oste,
> et tret le feu d'un chaillot bis,
> si l'a de busche sesche espris,
> puis mist en une broche an rost
> son lardé cuire au feu molt tost,
> sel rostist tant que il fu cuiz,
> mes del mangier ne fu deduiz,
> qu'il n'i ot pein ne vin ne sel
> ne nape ne coutel ne el.
> Que qu'il manja, devant lui jut,
> ses lÿons, c'onques ne se mut,
> einz l'a tot adés regardé
> tant qu'il ot de son gras lardé
> tant mangie qu'il n'en vost plus.
> Et del chevrel le soreplus
> manja li lÿons jusqu'as os. (3450-3471)

In stark opposition with himself as a wild man devouring raw venison in the woods, Yvain now correctly prepares the meat. Chrétien humorously notes that Yvain does not prize the meal

[161] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 298.

because of the lack of seasoning, bread, wine, and proper dishware, underscoring Yvain's return into the social realm and cultural habits. Yvain's lack of pleasure in the rudimentary meal stresses an opposition with the wild man he was, when he enjoyed the hermit's cooked but not seasoned meal, as well as to the hermit himself who feeds from poor bread, cold water, and vegetables. Furthermore, Yvain reasserts his noble status by properly butchering the deer. The text details the butchering, whereas it did not when it was performed by the hermit. Yvain breaks the deer in a way that recalls Tristan's butchering; he slices open the deer by the ribs and removes the loin, which he estimates to be the best part of the beast that he roasts for himself. The lion devours the rest of the deer's flesh afterwards, much like the hounds in the *curée*. Inscribed in the sharing of the deer's flesh, hierarchization grounds Yvain and the lion's newly found companionship in this sharing of flesh. Yvain selects the cut he wants to eat, and then divides the flesh between himself and the lion, who recognizes Yvain's precedence by waiting for him to finish to eat before eating.

Yet the first step of the butchering was initiated by the lion, when he bled the deer, underscoring a peculiar dynamic of sharing flesh. In this dynamic, the nonhuman character has an active role and the carnivorism of the knight appears animal-like, breaking a taboo about animal flesh killed by another animal being improper to human consumption.[162] As he domesticates the lion, Yvain showcases his own bestiality, eating a flesh contaminated with contact with a carnivorous beast who drank the blood of the deer after killing it. With regard to the human/animal divide, Yvain and the lion should not have shared this flesh; the same flesh should have not been touched by the mouth after the maw. The man-beast companionship represents as much a domestication of the lion substituting himself for a hound as a reminder of

[162] Alison Langdon, "Fit for a Dog? Food Sharing and the Medieval Human/Animal Divide," *Society & Animals* 28, no. 1 (November 26, 2018), 48-49.

Yvain's own ties to wildness, his liminal position from the courtly society from which he has been excluded, again stressed by his diet habits that contain the possibility of the becoming-beast of the knight to the contact of the lion, through the flesh bitten and bled by the beast, in company of the beast. Eating with the lion, which is also eating from the lion's maw, even if not directly since the meat has been cooked in the meantime, brings the knight closer to the beast.

Yvain is later defined as the lion's "companion and his lord" ("son conpaignon et son seignor," 3501). The two dimensions, companionship, an apparent equality, and lordship, a fundamental inequality of status, characterize the relationship of Yvain and the lion. While the word companion etymologically refers to sharing bread, *cum pane,* here the companionship relies on sharing flesh, *cum carne*. Such a relationship wasn't possible between Yvain and the hermit. Despite the recognition of a shared humanity, there was no communication, and the sharing of food had its limits; the hermit handled bread to Yvain, yes, but out of charity and fear, in the initial hope of getting rid of the wild man instead of founding a relationship with him, and the ensuing relationship of Yvain bringing venison back to the hermit created a transactional, economic relationship between them; nothing like a companionship then.

The companionship between Yvain and the lion builds over time, with increasing manifestations of affection between them, until Yvain claims to love the lion as himself, when the lion is denied entry in a castle, to justify that Yvain would not come inside if the lion is not allowed: "Either we shall be both lodged, or I shall stay outside, for I love him as much as my own being" ("Ou nos avrons l'ostel andui / ou je me remanrai ça fors, / qu'autretant l'aim come mon cors," 3790-3792).[163] Yvain claims that he loves the lion as his own body, like his own flesh. The companionship between the knight and the beast grows from a commensal sharing of

[163] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 302.

flesh, of eating meat together, into a declaration that, as companions, they belong to the same flesh. Yet the affective reading ought not to obscure the hierarchy between them, since Yvain is as much the lion's master as his companion, which is plainly recognized by the lion himself with his mimicking of feudal homage and the precedence granted to Yvain in eating. The double qualification of Yvain as companion *and* lord prevents reading their relationship as simply of a master and his pet, but also as equals, mirroring, again, the feudal relationship of service, that relies on a mutual recognition of nobility as well as on a hierarchy between lord and vassal.

Grounding a companionship in sharing flesh involves another hierarchy: the divide between who eats (Yvain, the lion) and who gets eaten (the deer). The opposition between eaters and eaten animals structures interspecies relationships, while never being claimed, because considered as obvious in a carnist society. Reading Chaucer's Prologue of the *Canterbury Tales*, Steel comments on the character of the Prioress who cannot stand animal suffering (particularly of trapped mice) but nonetheless feeds her dogs with meat: "When the Prioress gives her dogs a roast – of whatever animal, but presumably not the flesh of dogs or mice – she marks which animals matter and which do not, which are truly alive for her and which relegated to nonlife […] the Prioress' distribution of care marks how community operates."[164] There would be no commensality, no shared meal, between the knight and the lion without the deer's butchering, its relegation to nonlife, that is, to a life not worth to be protected as the lion's; the killing of the deer represents the corollary of the shared meal, and thereby a foundation for the man-beast companionship. To this extent, the shared meal prolongs the destruction of the serpent. Not only because it represents a service given by the lion to Yvain after his saving (and violent taming), but it also reaffirms what brings together the knight and the lion: nobility and carnivorism,

[164] Karl Steel, *How Not to Make a Human: Pets, Feral Children, Worms, Sky Burial, Oysters*, 39.

inscribed in ethics, eating habits, and class codes, social codes that are even partially mastered by the lion when he humbles himself. As a beast deemed "noble," the lion can eat meat with Yvain, and their common "nobility," while not establishing any equality or not levelling down species barriers, allow them to share flesh together, the flesh of those who stand outside the community of noble carnivores. Sharing nobility is also what makes the becoming-beast of the knight a possibility; it not only elevates the lion to a particular rank, it creates a porosity between species defined as part of a "noble" transspecies community.

Both serpent and deer are excluded from the community of those allowed to eat meat, and their exclusion makes the man-beast companionship possible; first, by motivating Yvain to kill the serpent and to spare the lion, second by grounding their companionship into commensality. The text does not present any other way to establish relationships than butchering animals, whether they only appear in the narrative for the food they can provide or end up eliminated as pests because of the threat to human dominion over the land's resources that they represent. But the hierarchy between eaters and eaten animals does not appear secure, even less natural. The serpent started to devour the lion before Yvain intervenes in front of what is qualified as a "merveille,' that is, an uncanny, unnatural sight for the knight. The knight arbitrates who should eat whom, by slaughtering the voracious serpent first, then by allowing the lion to chase the deer and by butchering the latter. By "reestablishing" the hierarchies he judges natural, Yvain's intervention underlines how culturally constructed they are, since his decisions produce these hierarchies.

Producing Race: Butchering the Giant

The putting to death of the gluttonous serpent underscores the fact that culturally-constructed carnivorism is not only about consuming creatures whose life is seen of lesser value in a given cultural system. It equally involves competing with other forms of carnivorism, perceived as wild, beastly, or inappropriate. Sylvia Huot states that "humans strive constantly to demonstrate their ability to kill even the most savage of carnivores – though often as a game, not necessarily as food – and consider themselves off limits as food for any species. And giants, as is well attested in medieval literary traditions, are the most formidable carnivores of all."[165] Giants, then. One of the main episodes, perhaps the most famous, of Yvain's reconquest of his lost dignity under his new identity of "chevalier au lion," opposes him to the giant Harpin de la Montagne. Harpin captured the four sons of a local lord, and he offers to take the desperate man's daughter as a prostitute in exchange for his sons' lives. In the narrative, the ensuing fight between Yvain and the giant is the one that relies the most heavily on a lexicon of butchering.

The giant's carnivorism does not literally target humans. Despite the figure of the giant being frequently associated with man-eating, the text does not present Harpin as a cannibal. Yet his appetite saturates the text, as when he is said to have poached and rampaged the whole country; Harpin took everything he could from the local lord, including his sons, and from whom he now covets the daughter. Intriguingly, the giant does not want the daughter for himself, because he considers her unworthy of him. He wants to prostitute her to his men, a thousand of them who would all pay her ("que tuit i metront lor escot," 4118), in a form of consumption that would make his villainous servants share the flesh of the fair maiden as part of a degrading transaction, in a radical upsetting of social and sexual hierarchies. The sons themselves are

[165] Sylvia Huot, *Outsiders: The Humanity and Inhumanity of Giants in Medieval French Prose Romance*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 52-53.

presented half-naked, bound together, harassed by the giant with his stick and whipped like cattle by a dwarf servant of the giant. The nakedness of the sons announces the nakedness of the daughter, in their shared vulnerability before the giant's depredations. Jerome J. Cohen argues that "in the copious body of Harpin de la Montagne is condensed the sexual perversity (sexual expression *is* sexual perversion in the romances), anarchic violence, disregard for authority and its world-ordering hierarchies, and the gross, boundary-breaking appetite that characterize the giant of romance."[166] Harpin's gigantic appetite translates man-eating as sexuality, substituting a desire for flesh for another, but even his sexual appetite for flesh proves to be ambiguous. As the text associates the bad treatments endured by the sons with the sexual violence verbally promised to the daughter, the prostration and nudity of the sons make one wonder who the object of the giant's desire is. Especially since Harpin claims that he has no interest in the daughter herself, but wants to see her raped by other men: male bodies are offered as proxies for the giant's desire, whether they be the victimized bodies of the sons or the threatening bodies of his servants. The use of other male bodies to convey the giant's own desires feeds a sexual and bodily confusion that recalls the lion-serpent entanglement, leading to a similar outcome: Yvain's violent intervention to separate bodies and rebuild hierarchies, which means the butchering of the giant.

For Yvain does not simply defeat Harpin as if the giant were an ordinary rivalrous knight; the vocabulary depicts the fight as a butchering, ridden with culinary metaphors. "Yvain dealt him such a blow in the chest that he pierced the skin and wet the head of his lance in the giant's blood as though it were sauce" ("messire Yvains que la piax fausse: / el sanc del cors, an leu de sausse, / le fer de la lance li moille," 4195-4197); "he sliced a piece of coal-roasted meat from the cheek" ("le fiert si que il li abat / de la joe une charbonee," 4208-4209, translation modified);

[166] Cohen, *Of Giants. Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, 77.

"Sir Yvain took aim and sliced bacon with two blows" ("Et messire Yvains antesa, /si a .ii. cos entrelardez," 4430-4231, translation modified).[167] The verb "entrelardez," quite difficult to translate in English, means something along the lines of "making bacon out of him." The culinary metaphors stress that the giant's body is already meat, not living flesh, without going through the process of cooking and without clear intent to consume it. While flesh allows shared contact, shared experiences, to touch and to be touched, to undo a strict separation between bodies, between object and subject, meat represents a dead object, intended for the subject's consumption. Reducing the giant to bacon dehumanizes him, turning him into a pig, but it also replicates the process of turning a living being into a consumable being through butchering; the giant joins the livestock relegated to nonlife, simply "good to eat," even metaphorically. The giant's butchering doesn't only affect his bodily integrity, but it discursively turns him into meat.

From predator the giant moves down the scale to prey, then to "bacon," but the lexicon also hints at something other than animalization, when it compares the mutilated cheek to a roasted meat; it attracts the audience's attention to the giant's putative skin color. The piece of cheek detached by Yvain's sword is defined as a "charbonnee" (4209) a meat that is roasted on coal ("charbon") and may be a pun on the giant's skin color, as brown as cooked meat. The giant's skin color appears ambiguous on the following illumination (M.S. Garrett 125, Princeton University Library), since the artist didn't represent Harpin as brown, but we can note a difference of skin color between Yvain and Harpin, Harpin's shade being rather gray compared to Yvain's glowing whiteness with his rosy cheek, with an unsettling parallel between the knight's rosy cheek and the giant's bleeding cheek.

[167] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 306-307.



Figure 2. Yvain and the lion fighting Harpin de la Montagne (Fol. 57r)

A knight's confrontation with the giant is a common trope in Arthurian romances; Huot describes it as a clash between the so-called civilized word, represented by the knight, and a cultural Other who rejects all the codes of civilized society.[168] "Tales of barbaric, uncultured giants, then, were a place in which fears and desires aroused by cultural and racial alterity could be freely explored," she explains. "As such, these narratives both mirror and shape the lurid accounts of religious, racial, or ethnic groups targeted for conquest, subjugation, or expulsion by

[168] Huot, *Outsiders*, 3-8.

historical or fictional monarchs—be they Saxon or Celtic, Jewish or Muslim, European, African, or Asian."[169] The giant's outfit, a bearskin, and his weapon, a club, emphasize his non-belonging to the same culture as Yvain, and its liminal position between humanity and animality.[170] Earlier in the romance, another giant-like character, a guardian of bulls, is said, among a succession of comparisons to animals, to "look like a Moor" ("resanbloit Mor," l.286), like a Muslim. Both the Moorish guardian of bulls and the dark-skinned Harpin conflate a dark skin color with Otherness, thereby racializing alterity. In Old French romances, the figure of the giant epitomizes the Other of French courtly culture and of medieval Christendom, and the fight with the giant can be read as a cultural fantasy of destruction or expulsion of another ethnic, cultural, or religious group from a given land.

The dark cheek of the giant reveals the association of blackness with alterity and animality at work in this twelfth-century text, and it works against a scholarly tradition in medieval studies that has long claimed that there wasn't any form of racialization in premodern Europe. This tradition has been challenged, primarily by medievalists of color, in arguments against the idea that the European Middle Ages would be free of racial prejudice; as Cord Whitaker argues, race "has mattered for far longer than is generally recognized."[171] While French romances associate white or fair skin with the "superior class and noble bloodlines," as opposed to peasants baked by the sun, they also associate blackness with religious and cultural others, as well as with devils, demons, and sinners.[172] This correlation of a dark skin with demons and sinfulness finds its origin in early Christian culture, but demonic darkness is increasingly associated with black people in the European Middle Ages, in a context of

[169] Huot, *Outsiders*, 8.
[170] McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast*, 71-73.
[171] Cord J. Whitaker, *Black Metaphors: How Modern Racism Emerged from Medieval Race-Thinking*, 1st edition, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 1.
[172] Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 16.

intensifying contacts between Europe and Africa.[173] The common literary association between blackness and the demonic finds its illustration in another episode of the *Chevalier au lion*, with the two demons fought by Yvain later in the narrative; they are hideous and black ("hideus et noir," 5506), and one ends beheaded by Yvain and the other one torn down by the lion's fangs, to deliver a hundred of young women they keep prisoners and force to work for them. In the following illumination (M.S. Garrett 125, Princeton University Library), the demons are represented as black men, fighting with cubs like the giant.



Figure 3. Two demons represented as black men (Fol. 26v)

As with Harpin, the text equates a dark skin with abusive behaviors to which the knight and the lion put an end through dismemberment. Reading Hortense Spiller's works about the

[173] Lynn Tarte Ramey, *Black Legacies: Race and the European Middle Ages*, 2015, 28.

creation of "black flesh" by the slave trade, Amber Jamilla Musser notes that the "dismembering of bodies into flesh is part of the equation of blackness with depersonalization and nonsubjectivity"; the *Chevalier au lion* hints at a much earlier date for the association of blackness with depersonalized flesh, prior to the mass enslavement of African populations by European merchants.[174]

Harpin's becoming-prey is further stressed when the lion attacks him during the fight. The lion dismembers the giant as well: "he ripped off a huge piece of the thigh along with the flesh and the nerves. Like a bull, the giant roated and screamed as he escaped him, for the lion had mauled him badly" ("une grant piece de la hanche. / Les ners et les braons li tranche, / et li jaianz li est estorz, / si ret et crie come tors," 4218-4222).[175] The concluding metaphor, "screaming like a bull," implicitly recalls the Moorish-looking giant who keeps bulls from earlier in the romance, further underscoring simultaneous animalization and racialization of the giant. Moreover, the bull has the particularity of being both a fierce and dangerous animal and an animal culturally sanctioned as edible. This characterization both justifies Harpin's butchering and even invites it. Animalization is simultaneously the logical outcome of the reduction of the giant to meat and a literary device to encourage butchering and the lion's participation. The text carefully posits Harpin as a predator with huge appetites, whether they are sexual or related to greed. Yet the fight reverses roles, Harpin becoming the prey of a savage slaughtering by a former wild man and a beast.

The simultaneous Othering and the discursive objectification of the mutilated body create a distance from the violence inflicted to the giant, possibly preventing the text's audience from identifying with the giant, but it also makes visible the material and discursive operations that

[174] Musser, *Sensational Flesh,* 20.
[175] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 307.

result in the giant's transformation into meat, as well as in Yvain's status of devouring subject. The giant's desubjectification through butchering demonstrates that the giant's degraded nature, as well as the knight's own humanity and nobility, are not self-evident, and must be produced; the main protagonist ascends as the chivalric savior of a threatened community while the giant is reduced to bloody meat on the ground, rendered both harmless and impossible to relate to, and readily available for consumption, like a coal-roasted meat.

Chrétien's light-hearted puns on the giant's becoming-meat, with references to sauce, bacon, roasted meat, make even the violence pleasurable – consumable – to the audience, de-dramatizing the gruesome slaughter by turning Harpin's death into a laughing matter. Since violence determines hierarchies and produces subalterns by making them the object of butchering and consumption, the narrative ought to prevent any empathy toward the victim of butchering. The narrative normalizes the use of extreme violence, making it enjoyable; violence aims to make flesh available for consumption, materially as well as morally, without ambiguities or remorse. Yvain and the lion do not literally devour their enemy's flesh, even though we could ask about what becomes of the portion of Harpin's hip that the lion puts into his mouth. As both the lion and the knight take part in making the giant into meat, they are assimilated in a predatory, carnivorous violence. This violence animalizes Yvain, to the point that Yvain decides to take the name "Chevaliers au lÿon" (4285) after this fight precisely, closely knitting his identity to his companionship with the lion. Yet Yvain's animality does not exclude nobility, since an animal can be noble too, such as the lion. And he proves this nobility by displaying a technology of butchering proper to the chivalric class, condemning the giant to a ridiculed death, the culinary metaphors ripping him of any dignity to better elevate the Knight of the Lion's own dignity. Given their respective similarities, their use of violence, their animality, and even their

mirroring names (Harpin/Yvain), the giant must become as unrelatable as possible, the stakes of the fight must be finally evacuated quickly, as if the giant could never had stood a chance, and the pile of bloody meat becomes a display of the triumph of the Knight of the Lion.

Violence represents a defining act. Harpin's "coal-roasted" cheek condenses a polysemy of metaphors associated with blackness in the Middle Ages: it emphasizes the giant's sinfulness, his radical alterity, his animality, his exclusion from Christian courtly culture, the denial of his humanity.[176] The butchering literalizes the metaphors used to describe the giant's behavior and appearance. As the text parallels the disfiguring of the giant with the cutting of a piece of cooked meat, racialization does not so much enable Harpin's butchering as his butchering defines him as a racialized, morally degraded Other. When Yvain cuts his cheek as "charbonnee," Harpin becomes irreversibly the Other, simultaneously racialized as brown, animalized since "charbonnee" is normally made from nonhuman animals, and objectified as meat. By flaying his face, Yvain also deprives him of a recognizable human figure. To this extent, the mutilation of the giant's face is a paradigmatic assertion of the main protagonist's noble status against an enemy who is dehumanized. The metaphorical characterization of the giant as subhuman becomes a material reality within the text when the combat turns him into a nonhuman, blackened bloody meat; it enacts his downfall from a position of carnivorous subject to flayed animal.

La Curée: The Hounds' Share

Immediately after the giant's death, Chrétien depicts the crowd rushing to witness the butchering of Harpin, whose mutilated body now lays powerless on the ground:

[176] Whitaker, *Black Metaphors*, 29.

> All those on the battlements were eager to see the effect of the blow. It then became obvious who was the quickest, for all sped to the spoils like dogs racing to a fallen animal after a long chase. Without sign of laziness, all the men and women raced in their excitement to where the giant lay, his mouth agape.[177]
>
> Ce cop vuelent molt tuit veoir
> cil qui estoient as creniax.
> Lors i parut li plus isniax,
> que tuit corent a la cuiriee,
> si com li chiens qui a chaciee
> la beste tant que il l'a prise.
> Ensi coroient sanz feintise
> tuit et totes par enhatine
> la ou cil gist gole sovine." (4242-4250)

Chrétien frames Harpin's death as a spectacular event, attracting the crowd to contemplate the monstrous fallen body, with an insistence on the wide open maw. The reference to the maw, a "gole" like the serpent's, and not a mouth, furthers the giant's animalization. The open maw shows the giant deprived of the capacity to devour anything as much as deprived of speech, of his boasting and threats of rape, for the silenced maw comically calls on his predatory nature reduced to powerlessness. Here, I use the expression "predatory nature" in the sense that the text naturalizes the giant's voracity by attributing him a maw instead of a mouth. The dehumanization of Harpin is total in this description as well as in the public display of his dead body offered to the gaze.

The publicity of the giant's death is important here. To complete his dehumanization, Harpin's body is not given a tomb, and the giant's corpse remains displayed in public as carrion, at the entrance of the castle where he was killed, as a trophy that testifies to the exploits of the Knight with the lion. In another episode of the romance that I mentioned earlier, when invited to a castle to eat and to rest, Yvain claims that he will refuse the hospitality offered to him if the lion is not offered the same hospitality as well. The companionship between the knight and the

[177] Chrétien and Staines, *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes*, 307.

beast grows from a commensal sharing of flesh, of eating meat together, into a declaration that, as companions, they belong to the same flesh. But the contrasted treatments provided to the lion and to the giant do not represent a contradiction in how the text handles the production of the Other. In the *Chevalier au lion*, the companion between the knight and the lion, between the noble man and the beast he claimed to be noble too, remains inseparable from the exploitation of the other's flesh. There is no commensality, no "eating together," without determining who is not invited to the feast, who can consume and who can be consumed, and it's no coincidence that the defeated giant's body is exposed at the door of a fortress, at a threshold he would never have been allowed to cross, but that even the lion can enter.

Chrétien describes the public display of the giant's demise and Yvain's victory as a *curée* for the castle's inhabitants. The *curée* represents the feeding time following the hunt, when the carrion, that is, the parts of the animal body deemed improper to human consumption, is abandoned to the dogs; the "dog's fare" in the words of Alison Langdon.[178] Chrétien's reference to the curée turns the castle's inhabitants into a pack of dogs, rushing for the distribution of meat. Those who were only spectators of the fight suddenly become active members of the giant's demise, like hounds who chase game. They run "sanz feintise" (4248), without faking, to Harpin's dead body, with the excitement of dogs at the end of a successful hunt, highlighting the crowd's pleasure to see the giant dead as well as prolonging the animal metaphor, in a depiction of a complete abandon into a doglike joy toward a prey turning into food. And this animalization, the becoming-hounds of the crowd, is made possible by the treatment of the giant's body as meat, not as a corpse. Since Harpin is butchered by Yvain, since he became meat, then the

[178] Langdon, "Fit for a Dog?", 48-49.

castle's inhabitants who benefit from his death become animals themselves, they become hounds gratified with the prey's carrion.

As Yvain's "assistant" during the fight, the lion, already invested with doglike qualities by the text when describing his communication with Yvain during the deer-hunt, could be expected to be the "hound" to which the carrion is attributed. Yet the castle's community substitutes for him. Chrétien's metaphor of the curée displaces the role of dogs onto the human crowd, distinctly separated from the couple knight-lion who loses any interest in the giant once dead. Human beings, including noble human beings such as the lord and his family, take the position of the beast, even though they play no role during the fight per se. To the animalization of Harpin responds the animalization of the courtly society, reversing the hierarchy of eaters and eaten, and turning the voracious foe into meat and its victims into a pack "feeding" from his butchered flesh. Aligning the giant's becoming-meat with the townspeople's becoming-hounds underscores the permeability of the boundaries defined and policed by violence. As we already saw with the lion saved from the voracious serpent, the knight's butchering intervention aims to draw a hierarchy where certain beings must be in a position of carnivorous subject and not devoured objects. The text naturalizes this hierarchy with the reference to hounds; a hierarchy that appears far from being secure, since it needs naturalization in order to make it unquestionable.

Harpin's carrion is not meant to be literally eaten by anybody; his flesh is offered to the gaze, and it is through the gaze that the castle's community rejoices of its liberation. I stress the notion of community, since the becoming-hounds applies to a collective. As Joyce Salisbury has argued, "the curée took the form of a ritual feast, and medieval feasting always served to

reinforce the sense of community and communion of the participants."[179] The curée involves a commensality, a form of sharing flesh, of eating together, even framed in a highly ritualized and hierarchical way. The commensal sharing of the giant's flesh, though symbolic, reasserts the townspeople as a community, a community defined by its belonging to the castle and the feudal structure it represents, as opposed to the voracious giant who challenged the political feudal order with his desire to destroy the local lord's dynasty by prostituting his daughter and murdering his sons.

However, let us not forget that this apparently celebratory narrative nonetheless animalizes this feudal community in a way that would hardly be considered as an elevation, raising once again the possibility of Chrétien using irony against those townspeople who were unable to get rid of the giant by themselves and who now celebrate his death as happy dogs. Moreover, the specter of cannibalism haunts the whole passage. Even if the townspeople do not literally devour the carrion, the reference to the curée raises the possibility of the feudal community eating the giant's body, a body that itself threatened to engulf this community prior to Yvain's intervention. Ironic when one thinks that giants are usually associated with cannibalism. Here, it's the human feudal community that appears to be "devouring" the giant. Again, the possibility of cannibalism contained in the text disturbs any straightforward readings of a triumph of civilizing forces against nonhuman foes, because references to animality as well as the extensive use of graphic violence against bodily integrity are present on both sides of the fight. And the way the narrative manages to make the giant's slaughter and dehumanization acceptable is by denying to the fight the fact that it's a fight: it becomes a hunt.

[179] Salisbury, *The Beast within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, 49.

The language of the curée inscribes the "natural" hierarchy into the aristocratic hunting lexicon. By making a reference to the curée, Chrétien rewrites the fight as a hunt, and therefore Yvain, aided with the lion, as hunter, and Harpin as a hunted beast. Sharing flesh and butchering circle back to the question of hunting and the hierarchies, the division of tasks it involves, but Chrétien unveils the hunt retrospectively, after the text initially described Harpin's butchering as a fight between a knight and a giant. The curée stresses the feudal community as doglike beings who must enjoy the carrion, the nonnoble leftovers of the hunt; the reference to hunting through its aftermath, the curée, not only involves the becoming-meat, and therefore becoming-prey, of Harpin, but also the bestiality within the feudal community itself. From Harpin's butchered flesh, the crowd gets the hounds' share, what Yvain left them in his heroic journey, whereas he preserves for himself the lion's share, that is, his new identity of chivalric hero under the lion's emblem, carved out of the giant's bloody demise. Most importantly, the recourse to the hunting lexicon reveals how violence constructs categories, between beings who deserve attention and care and beings who don't, between nonnoble and noble, between legit carnivores and voracious foes, and how fragile these constructions are; a simple slip in vocabulary determinates if violence is legitimate or not, indicates where empathy should be oriented or not. The difference between animal-like, barbaric furor and chivalric violence is purely a matter of word choice.

From the deer butchered for subsistence to the racialized giant symbolically expelled from the realm of the human as his violent dismemberment turns his body into meat, butchering produces a dynamic of domination grounded in a violence inflicted to flesh. As Tristan demonstrated, the ability to butcher an animal a certain way, to display a specific knowledge of flesh transformation and taxonomies, signals an aristocratic upbringing and thus the integration

of the knight performing the butchering into the romances' political order. But the *Chevalier au lion* demonstrates that butchering as chivalric skill not only involves the knight himself; through butchering the knight reorders his surrounding environment, projecting his feudal and courtly values even upon the nonhuman world, drawing hierarchies between beings contingent on their relative proximity or remoteness to the aforesaid values.

Butchering assigns all bodies to a position in social hierarchies, but such divisions do not map neatly onto animal/human difference, as proved by the elevation of the lion from a wild beast to a doglike companion, then to a companion loved by the knight as his own body, sharing the same flesh. Considerations of nobility, a nobility that can be extended to nonhuman animals such as the lion, disrupt the human/nonhuman divide, when an individual such as Harpin, presenting features of humanity such as human language, a human shape, the use of clothing and tools, undergoes a full process of dehumanization, crossed by animalization and racialization, under the knight's sword and the lion's fangs. On the other hand, anthropomorphizing represents a justification for butchering certain nonhuman creatures, for example the serpent invested of negative human qualities, such as felony (3352). Butchering redraws nature-culture divisions along the lines of a political order from which all the other categories flow.

However, the fundamental reordering function of butchering in the narrative suggests a great instability of the social, political, and natural order it aims to "preserve." Most of Yvain's adventures happen *after* he proved himself a worthy knight, after he conquered the magical fountain and married the guardian's widow. Failing to find a balance between husbandry and chivalric life, he plunges into madness and must come back under a new identity of Knight with the Lion, to save his honor and his marriage. And this new identity implies lots of blood spilled along the way, for the knight relentlessly butchers living beings identified as foes of a political

order turned upside down: a serpent devouring a lion, a giant whipping a lord's sons and threatening to prostitute the lord's daughter to his servants, demons exploiting fair ladies' forced labor, uncourtly knights, and so on. Butchering shows that birthright, the basis for the romance's human political order, must be performed through a violence that enacts corporeal difference. Noble birthright alone fails to maintain the political order; chivalric dominion must be constantly reenacted through butchering, the hierarchies reasserted over and over against the carnivorous appetites of other beings, such as the giant or the serpent.

Ultimately, Yvain carves out the lion's share for himself since he retains full benefits of his work of chasing down the courtly society's opponents, whereas the feudal community must enjoy the curée, the nonnoble parts of flesh left by the hunter to the hounds. The narrative does not so much focus on a young hero finding his place in the world, as in a typical *Bildungsroman* that the *Chevalier au lion* seems to be at the first glance, than it stages a main character tailoring the world around him with the help of his sword; shaping the world in bloody flesh for the courtly knight, his allies, and his subordinates to fit in, each at their own assigned place.

Eating with a lion represents a political statement about how the world must be ordered and which creatures deserve to live and to share a meal together, from an aristocratic perspective, but also it also challenges a conception of social life and culture that would exclude nonhuman animals, or reduce them to metaphors or instruments, which, interestingly, the lion isn't, for he does act on his own and he is not predictable, or reducible to an iconography. It also reveals which human beings were actually considered as human beings and which were seen as less than beasts, even in a time that predates modern conceptualizations of race, designed to exclude from full humanity certain groups of people, an exclusion that relied on skin color well before the European invasion of the Americas and the Atlantic slave trade. Ultimately, the *Chevalier au*

lion shows that what matters is not only what makes the human and what separates it from the nonhuman, but that the production of privileges – whether they be social, racial, or related to species, or to gender and sexuality – all this production of privilege is a production of corporeal difference, for privilege literally feeds on and carves the others' flesh.

Chapter 4. Fleshing Out Another Perspective: Inhabiting Animal Bodies

In a thirteenth-century compilation of the *Roman de Renart,* a rooster dreams of what it feels like to be devoured by a fox. Parodying chivalric romances where knights ask hermits about the significance of their dreams, Chantecler the rooster asks Pinte the hen the meaning of a distressing nightmare he just had:

> During my sleep, it seemed that a beast came to me, wearing a reddish brown pelt, perfectly cut without scissors, and that the beast forcefully put the garment on me. The collar was made of bones, all white, but very hard. The fur was turned inward, and the pelt was made in such a way that I entered through the collar, but I did not stay in for long.
>
> Avis me fu el sonmeillier
> Que une beste me venoit
> Qui. I. rous peliçon portoit,
> Bien fet sanz cisel et sanz force,
> Sel me fesoit vestir a force.
> D'os estoit fete l'oleüre,
> Toute blanche, mes mout ert dure.
> Le poil avit desors torné,
> Le peliçon si atorné
> Que par la chevesce i entroit,
> Mes mout petit i arestoie. (C - 5., 172-182)[180]

Earlier, the description of the nightmare underlined that "the neck was so tight that the rooster felt distressed" ("Estroit en estoit la chevesce / Si qu'il en ert en grant destresce," 127-128). Pinte interprets the dream beast as the fox, and the tight, bony collar as his maw; Chantecler had a premonitory dream of being devoured by Renart. This excerpt provides a rare medieval account

[180] Naoyuki Fukumoto et al., eds., *Le roman de Renart*, Lettres gothiques (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2005), 176. I detail my quotation system of the *Roman de Renart* p.153. All translations in this chapter are mine.

of how an animal would experience his own ingestion by another animal, even if in the mode of dreams and allegory. Chantecler's nightmare stresses ingestion as incorporation, as being stuck in a foreign skin, and as a loss of identity. Chantecler enters the skin of the fox upside down, and his general feeling is that there's something wrong with that situation. Beyond the humorous overtones of the rooster's dream, with the fox's maw represented as a collar too tight for him, Chantecler's point of view de-normalizes the consumption of poultry by the fox (and, by extension, by the humans raising poultry), by imagining how the rooster would feel about ending up into someone's belly. In the roughly contemporary *Roman des Romans*, where animals – under the shape of animated pelts – condemn the use of their furs by human beings, the poet imagines "a world in which animals could speak to protest the carnivorous and vestimentary needs and desires of humans."[181] The vivid, extensive descriptions of Chantecler's dream, its recital to Pinte, and her interpretation – 96 lines total – invite the reader to share the perspective of a living being subjected to carnivorism, envisioned in the dream as wearing someone else's quite uncomfortable skin; this is a double inhabitation of animal flesh, the rooster's body and the fox's belly.

In Chantecler's dream, the rooster dreams of being devoured as becoming part of the fox; through ingestion, his flesh becomes part of the other's flesh. Chantecler's discomfort at being stuck in a skin that isn't his own calls on the ambivalent fleshliness of being enclosed in another's body, in a context that is not just contact, but complete incorporation; where does one body end and where does another start? Flesh represents the stuff from which all living beings are made, yet this stuff is constantly cut up, partaken of, divided into individual bodies, genders, or species, turned into meat, assimilated or rejected, overwritten with social significations,

[181] McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast*, 32.

injunctions and prohibitions, praised and dejected, butchered and re-assembled. As I argued in Chapter 2, flesh seams what bodies divide, but here, the discomfort of the rooster seamed into the fox fleshes out another body's perspective, stressing how it feels for a creature inhabiting a nonhuman body to be cladded into another pelt; to inhabit another body that doesn't quite fit. Whereas the previous chapters addressed consumption and butchering, this chapter investigates cases where medieval authors imagine what slipping into a beast's skin, willingly or not, could look like; what it feels like to be an animal, to endure the violence inflicted to nonhuman animals in the flesh. In other words, what an animal perspective might look like in medieval literature when imagining nonhuman embodiments, a perspective that, I argue, is experienced in the flesh.

What does the animal see, and what perspectives can be derived from an animal's perceptions? If the possibility of an animal point of view has long been a haunting question, as illustrated by Michel de Montaigne's question about who, his cat or himself, is actually playing with the other, it has triggered in the last decades a surge of publications, part of the so-called animal turn in the humanities.[182] In one of the most influential works on animality of the last twenty years, Giorgio Agamben reflects on the anthropogenesis of the moderns: Linnaeus' taxonomies, Agamben writes, work as "an optical machine" through which one becomes human by recognizing oneself *as* human through sight.[183] Agamben then complicates the primordiality of sight in modern approaches to the animal by stressing the distinction elaborated by early-twentieth century naturalist Jakob von Uexküll between the *Umgebung*, the objective, unified space where human beings can observe all the other beings, and the *Umwelt*, the world-environment of a specific animal – or "world-around" to quote Liam Lewis' translation –

[182] Jacques Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis* (Paris: Galilée, 2006), 21-22.
[183] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2004), 25-31.

constituted only by the signs that interest the animal.[184] But ultimately, Uexküll demonstrates that the *Umgebung* happens to be the human *Umwelt*, which is only one *Umwelt* among others: every being inhabits a different world according to its own perception, because the same place represents a very different world for the creature moving through it. Nonhuman animals can have a point of view, and the human point of view is just one among many possible others.

I turn my attention to imagined nonhuman points of views in several Old French narrative poems that stage a character's point of view from an animal body. As famously hypothesized by Jacques Derrida, poetry might represent a way to access the "animal thought" in ways that (Western) philosophy, concerned with asserting human exceptionalism, has historically failed to provide, thus challenging scholars to look for animal perspectives within literary texts, beyond those texts' various degrees of anthropocentrism.[185] If the question of imagining a nonhuman animal's perspective has accompanied the rise of critical animal studies over the last three decades, it has also found a strong resonance in anthropology, particularly among Americanists who study forms of Amazonian animism that they characterize as perspectivist.[186] The concept of perspectivism was first developed by Brazilian anthropologists Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Tânia Stolze Lima in the 1990s; from field work in Amazonia, notably with Tupi people from the Xingu River area, they conceptualized from an ontology in which points of view entirely reconfigure the distribution of subject-object positions.[187] In Indigenous perspectivist

[184] Liam Lewis, "Animal Umwelt and Sound Milieus in the Middle English *Physiologus*," *Exemplaria* 34, no. 1 (January 2, 2022), 25-27.
Agamben, *The Open,* 39-42.
[185] Yasmina Foehr-Janssens, "*Animal Studies* et littérature médiévale: fictions politiques de la domestication," *French Studies* 72, no. 4 (October 1, 2018): 572–89, 578.
Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis*, 23.
[186] Not that literary scholars and medievalists didn't draw from anthropological works as well, especially from Philippe Descola. Foehr-Janssens, "*Animal Studies* et littérature médiévale," 576-581.
[187] Stolze Lima, "The Two and Its Many," 27.
See also Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4, no. 3 (September 1998), and Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli: Leibniz et le baroque*, Collection "Critique" (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1988), 27, from which the word "perspectivism" is borrowed, even though reconceptualized.

ontologies, according to Viveiros de Castro, "the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and nonhuman, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view."[188] Perspectivist ontologies always presume personhood, that is, a singular mind, in the acting body, including nonhuman bodies.[189] Tupi societies can be described as multinaturalist – one culture across species, where communication among species would be perfectly possible if beings were not divided in different types of bodies – in opposition to Western multiculturalism, that presupposes a unified nature but different human cultures, with animals excluded from culture and belonging to nature.[190] For example, for Tupi people, jaguars consider that the blood they drink is manioc beer: there is no objective, common nature in a Western sense – no *Umgebung* – but the position of being-in-a-jaguar body or being-in-a-human body determines the reality of the thing, if it's blood or manioc beer.[191] Since every being is assumed to have a mind of its own, the body acts as the "great differentiator" in Viveiros de Castro's words; a diversity of bodies engenders a diversity of points of view, of perspectives onto the world.[192]

In other words, each animal configures the world not from its mind, but from their body.[193] Perspectivist ontologies are fully incarnated, fully encapsulated in the flesh. A specific body interacts with a specific environment; to quote concrete examples from philosopher and ecologist Baptiste Morizot, who focuses on how human and nonhuman beings inhabit a given space, an exposed peak would invite wolves' scent markings that would go completely unnoticed for us humans, while a door handle would only make sense to animals who have the ability to

[188] Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, 45.
[189] Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, 99.
[190] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-Structural Anthropology*, trans. Peter Skafish, First edition, Univocal (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2014), 56.
[191] Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, 47-48.
[192] Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, 117.
[193] Baptiste Morizot, *Manières d'être vivant: enquêtes sur la vie à travers nous*, Mondes Sauvages (Arles: Actes Sud, 2020), 95.

grasp.[194] These body-environment interactions that are proper to each species fashion the animal's perspective and personhood. Even though ontological perspectivism is proper only to some Indigenous ontologies and has been barely encountered outside South America, it nonetheless represents an invitation to think outside of modern categories and to break with the obsession with what is going on inside nonhuman brains ("Can they think? Can they answer?") and its logocentric impulse. I focus instead on the materiality of lived experiences as what creates a perspective and how premodern literature imagines those material existences.[195]

Perspectivism enables literary scholars to move away from the question of the gaze – what an animal can see, how we see them – and from the modern production of the human based in sight and recognition posited by Agamben, to the question of the physical conditions of the creation of a perspective – what it feels like to be an animal – and how the physicality of the senses grounds this process of perspective-making into the world's materiality experienced through flesh, and not just through sight. The world's materiality comes to us through signs, that is, "things" with which we interact, and that are defined by these interactions. Building on Charles Peirce's definition of a sign as "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity," Eduardo Kohn has shown that "signs surely have an important materiality: they possess sensuous qualities; they are instantiated with respect to the bodies that produce and are produced by them."[196] Perspectivism entails a particular emphasis on the senses and on the sensuous perception of the world. Because focusing on experiencing physical

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[194] Baptiste Morizot, *Sur la piste animale*, Babel (Arles: Actes sud, 2021), 131.
[195] About the geography of perspectivism, see Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, 49. About the questions asked by philosophers to animals who never answer, see Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis*, 30-50, and Vinciane Despret, *Que diraient les animaux, si on leur posait les bonnes questions ?*, La Découverte-poche (Paris: la Découverte, 2014).
[196] Charles S. Peirce et al., *Principles of Philosophy: Two Volumes in One*, 5. [printing], Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce / Ed. by Charles Hartshorne „ Vol. 1/2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1985), 228, quoted in Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 29.
Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think,* 35.

sensations "marks the body's existence as a perceiving subject," the sensuous relationality between bodies and signs calls on flesh as a conceptual tool, for bodies experience the world through flesh.[197] Since, as Merleau-Ponty has argued, we gain access to the world through our own flesh, through the perception of the world through our senses and the awareness that others can feel in their flesh what we are able to feel (such as pleasure or pain), we can project our bodies into others and introject them, for "my body is as well made of their [the others'] corporeality."[198] In the example above of Chantecler's dreaming of the fox's belly, this introjection manifests itself quite literally with the incorporation of the rooster into the fox, but also through the poetic imagining of the rooster's experience, that calls on the reader's own sense of bodily integrity, that could be violated as well as Chantecler's.

I argue that creating a dialogue between perspectivism and a phenomenological approach to the flesh unlocks new possibilities for reading animality in medieval fiction, with an emphasis not just on how an animal body can be inhabited, but on how flesh, and particularly the way flesh folds the body and its environment together through physical interactions, produces different types of embodiments that are not confined to individual bodies. Stacy Alaimo conceptualizes trans-corporeality as "the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from "nature" or "environment""; an environment she defines as "a world of fleshly beings, with their own needs, claims, and actions."[199] Bodies and environments mutually fashion each other, to the point that bodies "become the space they inhabit": an environment differs for each body, for it does not offer the same constraints or potentialities to every being.[200] Inhabiting

[197] Musser, *Sensational Flesh*, 1.
[198] "Mon corps est aussi bien fait de leur corporalité." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La nature: notes, cours du Collège de France*, ed. Dominique Séglard, Traces Écrites (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1995), 281.
[199] Stacy Alaimo, "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature," in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan J. Hekman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 238.
[200] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 53.

other bodies not only entails inhabiting different *Umwelten*, but the flesh folds together the body and its environment, that is, the perspective – what is in the flesh – and the *Umwelt* – what is experienced through the flesh – that mutually produce each other. My reading of medieval literature, that calls on perspectivism and phenomenology, does not aim at capturing what a "real" animal sensibility might be, but to investigate how different embodiments produce different perspectives, and the ontological consequences of an unstable and relational subject-object division.

Convoking a cultural comparison between perspectivism and the phenomenological trans-corporeality of the flesh invites reading medieval animals in a new light, by escaping a modern dualism that has retrospectively constructed the entire so-called "Western tradition" (from Plato to the Enlightenment) as dualistic, in a sweeping generalization that does not do justice to the multi-layered, effervescent cultural landscape of the European Middle Ages.[201] As Caroline Bynum wrote back in 1995, "it is partly because premodern Western philosophy is not dualistic, not essentialist, that we struggle so hard today with certain issues of philosophical vocabulary inherited from the Enlightenment," a struggle that continues to be relevant.[202]

Regarding specifically the question of the nonhuman, Susan Crane argues that in the medieval composition of the literary animal, there are traces of ontological schemes other than the familiar "Christian dualism of animal materiality versus human spirituality: analogism, drawn from classical and medieval natural science, and animism, drawn from classical animal lore and mythology."[203] For example, Thomas Aquinas argues for a clear-cut dualistic separation of the human from the rest of the animal world, because of the "perfection" of man granted of

[201] Caroline Walker Bynum, "Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 1 (October 1995), 6.
[202] Bynum, "Why All the Fuss about the Body?", 30. Bynum writes particularly about the issues of identity, gender, and mind-body distinction.
[203] Crane, "An Ontological Turn for the Medieval Book of Beasts: Environmental Theory from Premodern to Postmodern,"115

reason and made a the image of God, yet to justify this distinction Aquinas also relies strongly on analogism, where all forms and substances – corporeal as well as incorporeal, "low" as well as "high," from vegetative life to immortal souls – are interconnected, forming a coherent yet hierarchized whole.[204] If the texts I read differ in many instances from Aquinas' theology and from the bestiaries read by Crane, they nonetheless depict animality in ways that do not conform to a naturalistic or purely dualistic approach, where the nonhuman animal is always the other of "man," always to be seen and glossed, but never envisioned as a subject. Instead, animality in medieval romances is relational, determined and produced by its context, to the point that sometimes, characters cannot decipher whether the creature in front of them is human or nonhuman.[205] While grounded in biblical lore and theology, human exceptionalism does not appear self-evident or even secure in vernacular literature.

In this chapter, I investigate three forms of inhabiting animal flesh: the disguise in a beast's skin in the thirteenth century *Guillaume de Palerne*, the magical transformation into a beast in werewolf tales from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, and the staging of animals who fight with each other as lords in an "animal kingdom" that mimics a feudal organization in the *Roman de Renart*. I now move away from primary accounts of eating and commensality as modes of distinction and I read instead texts that undermine the binary distinctions at the core of a dualistic system, such as body and mind, or what belongs (ontologically speaking) to the human or to the nonhuman. With the exception of *Guillaume de Palerne*, which stages courtly lovers and a queen donning deerskin, these texts mostly depict knights wearing carnivores' skins,

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[204] Ian P. Wei, *Thinking about Animals in Thirteenth-Century Paris: Theologians on the Boundary between Humans and Animals* (Cambridge ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 151-152 ; 185-187.

[205] Some of the most famous examples can be found in Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier au lion* with the bestial-looking guardian of bulls who needs to specify that he's a man or, outside the genre of romances, in Gerald of Wales' account of christened werewolves in Ireland.
About the guardian of bulls, see Foehr-Janssens, "*Animal Studies* et littérature médiévale," 578-580.
Regarding Gerald's werewolves, see Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 16-18.

furthering the association of aristocratic men with carnivorism, and of hunting and meat-eating with virility.

If Chantecler's dream introduces an animal perspective from inside another animal, so too does *Guillaume de Palerme* in which the exchangeability of skins, illustrated by the possibility of inhabiting another being's physical envelope, stages fluid embodiments, since sharing another being's flesh cannot be reduced to wearing a garment, but implies the exploration – and introjection – of another creature's corporeality. Then I discuss how werewolf tales produce the dual status of the werewolf as simultaneously human and animal not only through physical transformation, but by immersing the werewolf into situations where he is simultaneously the carnivorous hunter and the chased game. This creature experiences in his own flesh the hunt, a paradigmatic moment of encounter between aristocratic hunters and wild animals in chivalric literature. Finally, I investigate the immersion of flesh into space in the *Roman de Renart*, circling back to the question of the *Umwelt*, and how body-environment interactions produce personhood, regardless of whether this personhood can be qualified as human or nonhuman. These three forms of inhabiting animal flesh manifest, if not perspectivism per se, the fictional envisioning of an animal perspective. After the cannibal and sexual consumption of *Ignaure*, after the butchering and the distribution of meat (and subject-positions) in *Yvain*, these fictions of inhabiting animal bodies represent another way to share flesh, beyond delineated bodies and entities. In medieval French literature, I argue, different embodiments shape different perspectives, different ways to inhabit the world "in the flesh" beyond one's given body, thus unveiling ontologies that are neither dualistic or essentialist.

Exchangeable Skins

In *Guillaume de Palerne*, an anonymous chivalric romance set in Italy and Sicily, two lovers in flight adopt animal disguises. A single manuscript preserves *Guillaume de Palerne*, Arsenal 6565, even though two lost manuscripts were known to scholars in the nineteenth century.[206] From its dedication to countess Yolande of Hainaut (1131-1223), and its strong intertextuality with two Old French werewolf stories, Marie de France's *Bisclavret* and the anonymous *Melion*, scholars situate *Guillaume de Palerne*'s composition between the 1190s and the 1220s.[207] While the text's language locates its redaction in northwestern France, the story takes place in southern Europe, which represents not only a geographical but also an ideological "outside," marked by a cohabitation with non-Christian cultures in the historical context of the Iberian *Reconquista* and the Norman conquests in the Mediterranean.[208] This postcolonial context represents a shared feature with the two werewolf tales – Norman England in *Bisclavret*; Anglo-Norman Ireland in *Melion* – inscribing them in a space of hybridity and changing identities.[209]

In this romance, Melior, daughter of the emperor of Rome, loves Guillaume, a young knight in the service of her father, but she is betrothed to the son of the Greek emperor. They are all unaware that Guillaume, abducted by a werewolf when he was a child and found in a forest

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[206] Alexandre Micha, "Introduction," in *Guillaume de Palerne. Roman du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Alexandre Micha (Librairie Droz, 1990), 7-8.
[207] Micha, "Introduction," 23-25.
Sarah Kay and Peggy McCracken, "Introduction : Animal Studies and *Guillaume de Palerne*," *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales et Humanistes*, no. 24 (December 30, 2012), 2-3.
[208] About *Guillaume*'s Spain as an ideological outside marked by Arabic magic and occultism, see Francis Dubost, *Aspects fantastiques de la littérature narrative médiévale, XIIème-XIIIème siècles: L'autre, l'ailleurs, l'autrefois*, Nouvelle Bibliothèque du Moyen Age 15 (Paris: Libr. H. Champion, 1991), 561.
About the absence of references to non-Christian cultures in the text even though Norman Sicily was mainly populated by Muslims and Jews at that time, and the reinvestment of the suppressed references in the hybrid figures of the werewolf and the disguised lovers, see Lisa Lampert, *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies*, Postcolonial Literary Studies (Edinburgh [Scotland]: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 53.
[209] Matthieu Boyd, "Melion and the Wolves of Ireland," *Neophilologus* 93, no. 4 (October 2009), 559.
Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, 38-40.

by the emperor, is himself the son of the Norman king of Sicily and Puglia. To escape the court, the teenagers ask Melior's servant Alexandrine for help. Alexandrine's suggestion is that the lovers be sewn within animal skins ("dedens fussiés encousu," 3021).[210] Alexandrine collects the skins in the kitchen:

> Alexandrine went straight to the kitchen, knowing well what to do. She reached for the butcher's hooks where deer and bears were skinned, as well as beasts of other kinds. She chose the large and complete skins of two white bears and a snake.
>
> A la quisine s'en vint droit,
> Bien i sot faire son esploit
> Et va droit as escorcheors
> Qui escorchoient cers et ors
> Et bestes molt d'autres manières.
> .II. en choisist grans et plenieres
> De .II. blans ors et d'un serpent. (3057-3063)

Since they are found in the kitchen and not in the tannery, these skins are the "byproducts of butchering."[211] This location raises questions about the skin's eviscerated content and about the quite unusual possibility of having white bears and a snake eaten at a court.[212] In any case, whether it became meat or not, the animal flesh is missing, and the skins made available for the lovers' disguises. Their choice is explained by Alexandrine's desire not only for dissimulation, to hide the lovers in the hides, but also to frighten people away from them: "These are beasts that we greatly fear, so cruel and strong and fierce that anyone who sees them will flee and never dare to approach them" ("Ce sont bestes c'on molt resoigne, / Nus ne les voit qui ne s'esloigne / Ains que vers eus ost asprimer, / Tant sont cruel et fort et fier," 3015-3018). More than a skin-

[210] Alexandre Micha, ed., *Guillaume de Palerne. Roman du XIIIe siècle* (Librairie Droz, 1990), 128. My translations.
[211] Even though the snake does not appear later. McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast*, 79.
Could these white bear skins echo the presence of polar bears in European courts? Unknown to the Ancients, polar bears were known in the Middle Ages as exotic animals and diplomatic gifts from Nordic kings. Historians recorded the sensational presence of polar bears in royal menageries in Palermo and London, but after 1235, later than the likely composition of *Guillaune de Palerne* then. See Michel Pastoureau, *L'ours: histoire d'un roi déchu* (Paris: Points, 2015), 200.
[212] "Eating or serving a bear may have been a marker of status or wealth, perhaps implicitly recalling a dangerous hunt and the feat of overpowering and killing a ferocious beast." McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast*, 80.

deep disguise, the hides carry and transfer the qualities attributed to the dead animals onto the lovers. Sutured within the bear skins, the lovers adopt the qualities projected on bears' bodies (strength, fierceness) and Guillaume suggests that they "[they] should think to exploit it" ("pensons de l'esploitier," 3100). In other words, they should not just look like bears, but also perform as bears.

As they are leaving, "walking on all fours like hounds" ("A .IIII. piés vont comme viautre," 3147), the lovers scare away a Greek man who sees them leaving the city. He then reports to his companion that he saw "two white bears, fierce and savage" ("doi blanc ors, fier et rubeste," 3160), proving that disguised lovers' transformation is successful. They do not just fulfill the skins found in the kitchen, they animate them, they brought back to life a bear's shape by imprinting movement to it, and by giving up their own vertical position to a more horizontal one. Impersonating a bear was made easier by a certain likeness between a bear and a human shape, that was noted by medieval authors, whilst prelates condemned the practice of *ursum facere*, to disguise oneself as a bear, testifying of the existence of that carnivalesque practice, that may find echoes here in the text.[213] Sight and recognition play a role in asserting the lovers' nonhumanity from the Greek man's perspective, but this recognition relies on the lovers not just wearing bear suits, but moving like a bear's body moves, to properly, and convincingly, inhabit a bear's body.

When they leave the court, Alexandrine prays for the lovers' success, addressing God as one who took "shape of man and human flesh" ("en forme d'ome et char humaine," 3137), appealing to a God who assumes flesh; the Incarnation is etymologically an enfleshment, an embodiment–in-the-flesh. On the following lines, Alexandrine also refers to God as the one

[213] Pastoureau, *L'ours*, 89-90.

"who saved Jonas from the whale who engulfed him" ("Et garesis en la balaine, / Jonas qu'ele avoit englouti," 3138-3139). Invoking Jonas being swallowed by the whale suggests that the lovers sewn into bear skins are "devoured" by the bears, awaiting their deliverance from the beasts' bellies, just as Jonas awaited his deliverance from the whale's stomach.[214] Alexandrine's reference to Jonah symbolically positions the lovers as meat. Given that the bear skins are byproducts of butchering, this reading sounds rather ironic, since the bears' flesh would appear to have ended up in human bellies. The kitchen in which the skins were found "fuses nature and culture, reworking the material of the bear according to the gustatory and sartorial use-values of the aristocracy"; the lovers "do not just become bears – they become food and clothing."[215] Alexandrine's precaution to make sure that the lovers can still use their hands from within the skins demonstrates a reworking of the animal flesh as a garment for the noble humans within, and yet the lovers also become bears by replacing the eviscerated bear flesh with their own, suggesting an equivalence between their flesh and the bears' flesh, with the possibility that their flesh could endure the same violence than animal flesh does.[216]

Yet I am interested here in how the prayer brings together the devouring of a man by an animal and God's own enfleshment, as two ways to inhabit a flesh somehow foreign to the spirit inside of it (God in a human body and Jonas in the whale's body), in ways that recall the rooster's anxiety about being cladded in the fox's skin. As the lovers are "sewn" ("encousus," 3021) by Alexandrine in the skins collected in the kitchen, the text stresses the sartorial value of the bearskin; as the other's skin can be worn, a different body can be inhabited. It becomes thus

[214] "For the medieval Christian, the human body was saved from [a] kind of base animality." Miranda Griffin, *Transforming Tales: Rewriting Metamorphosis in Medieval French Literature*, First edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 136.
[215] Randy P. Schiff, "Cross-Channel Becomings-Animal: Primal Courtliness in *Guillame de Palerne* and *William of Palerne*," *Exemplaria* 21, no. 4 (October 2009), 430.
[216] About the juxtaposition of the hand, a sign of humanity, with animal skins, see McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast*, 81-83.

possible to imagine different fleshly incarnations, and to transition from a body to another, but at the same time, Alexandrine prays for the lovers to be delivered from the animal flesh they inhabit, as if to ward off their becoming-meat, though they are dressed as beasts who were butchered; she prays for them to not end up caught by the hunters like the bears whose skins they wear were.

The lover's symbolic becoming-meat echoes another aspect of impersonating bears, that is, becoming hunted beasts themselves. The emperor's men hunt them, especially when they deduce that the white bears spotted by the Greek man were the lovers disguised in the skins discovered to be stolen from the kitchen. Earlier in the text, Guillaume, while a youth raised by a cowherd and his wife, was described as a skilled hunter, and skilled hunting always enacts noble origins in chivalric romances.[217] Once sutured in the bear skin, Guillaume becomes the object of the hunt, though he himself does not dare to hunt ("il ne s'osent porchacier," 3204), and Melior fears that their pursuers will find them if they steal food. Wearing a bear skin inverts the position of the aristocratic subject, the hunter becomes game.

Like the hunted beasts they impersonate, Guillaume and Melior travel as bears to Sicily, avoiding human settlements as much as they can. The lover's perspective becomes a bear's, at least for as long as they wear the skins; impersonating the bears simulates a bear's *Umwelt*, and this simulation represents a foray into a bear's own ontology. When they want to rest, "the lovers lie in a deep wide swamp, under the canopy, in the forest" ("En .I. parfont markais et grant / Somt embuscié li sui amant / Desous la raime, en la foillie," 3193-3195). As they try to leave their pursuers behind, they adopt a bear's behavior by avoiding contact with humans and finding shelter in places difficult to access, such as the wetlands seemingly inhospitable to human

[217] Crane, *Animal Encounters*, 107.

activity. Originally, the word *foresta* designated the Carolingian game park, a space of cultivated wilderness and aristocratic socialization, but it also represented a productive space, populated with workers.[218] Consequently, the lovers' attempts to completely avoid human encounters fail. Even deep in the woods Guillaume and Melior have multiple encounters with people of various social ranks and occupations as they move south, illustrating how crowded the medieval "wilderness" turns out to be. In fact, before joining the emperor's court, Guillaume was initially found by the emperor while the latter was hunting in the forest close to where the boy lived with his adoptive cowherd family, and this family had found him as an abandoned infant a few years before in the same forest. The forest appears as a destination where human characters' paths cross repeatedly, as well as a space of contact among human and nonhuman creatures; it is a common territory composed by a layering of uses.[219]

Slipping from one skin to another conditions a change of perspective, between human and nonhuman, between different uses of the territory, and between hunter and game. Later in the text, realizing that their white skins reveal them to their pursuers who have made the association between the lovers in flight and the stolen skins, Guillaume and Melior exchange once again their skin for another, leaving their bear skins for a stag's and a doe's skins. Cornered in a quarry, they make the exchange and flee:

> The countrymen came and they looked everywhere, finding the flayed beasts and the bearskins [the lovers] abandoned. From this, they know the truth, that the lovers have been there. Everybody knows for sure that they have left disguised in deerskins.
>
> Venu furent cil du païs
> Et ont par tout cerquié et quis.
> Truevent les bestes escorcies
> Et les piax d'ors qu'il ont laissies :
> Por ce sevent la verité
> Que ce ont il enfin esté.

[218] Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, Collection Folio 607 (Paris: Gallimard, 2015), 104.
[219] Vinciane Despret, *Habiter en oiseau*, Mondes sauvages (Arles: Actes sud, 2019), 117.

Chascuns en est seürs et cers
Que es .II. piax s'en vont en cers (4391-4398)

The strange sight of mismatched skinned bodies and flayed skins that welcome the pursuers highlights how the exchangeability of skins relies on butchering, even though it's unclear how the lovers could have skinned the beasts and sewn the skins on themselves on the spot, without even drying them. The waste of animal flesh materializes the process of shapeshifting by stressing its leftovers, abandoned as carrion: the lovers inhabit animal bodies through violence. If they can survive by donning skins, this possibility doesn't extend to the beasts they encounter, and the skinned deer lay lifeless alongside the bearskins, with no possibility of sewing and reviving them; in the carnivorous economy of the romance, exchanging skins has no magic, and only benefits the noble human characters who leaves after them a trail of discarded meat and useless skins.

Arguably a more effective camouflage in southern Europe than white bearskins, the deerskins represent an attempt to fool the pursuers, only partially successful since they understand the lovers are now impersonating deer. By changing skins and abandoning the old ones to the hunters, the lovers illustrate the French expression of *donner le change*. During a hunt, a deer is said to *donner le change* – literally, "to give the change" – when it mixes its scent with that of another deer, misleading the hounds into the pursuit of a second deer, mistaken for the first. In medieval hunting manuals, the deer's trick appears as a concern for aristocratic hunters who see their sport ruined when they lose the animal they were initially pursuing.[220] In *Guillaume de Palerne*, the lovers do not mislead their pursuers by leading them toward other white bears – which would be quite difficult in those latitudes – but instead by sacrificing

[220] Thangam Ravindranathan and Antoine Traisnel, *Donner le change: L'impensé animal*, Collection "Le Bel Aujourd'hui" (Paris: Hermann, 2016), 9-10.

different animals and stealing their skins. They kill the deer and they become the deer, leaving the carrion behind them, in a cross-species move of "giving the change." While the hunters follow the trail of the two lovers sutured as bears, they find two other dead animals instead, alongside the discarded bearskins that were the sign they followed. The change was given, the trail is lost.

The lovers resume their journey "en cers": "as deer" is the translation I chose, but "en cers" means also "in deer." They go as deer; they go in the deer. The deerskin allows them to eventually escape their pursuers, sneak into a boat, and make it safely to Palermo, besieged by the king of Spain, where they find shelter in the city's luxurious gardens. They are spotted there by Queen Felise (who turns to be Guillaume's mother) who sees the deer and notes that they seem to love each other. Observing them again later, she notices something odd about the beasts:

> Looking down, she sees the beasts just as she had seen them in the evening, but the skins they had put on had been dried by the heat, shrunk and narrowed to the point that their clothes, red and purple, jutted out through the seams.
>
> Et garde aval, les bestes voit
> Si com le soir les ot veües.
> Mais les piax qu'il orent vestues
> Erent si por le chaut sechies
> Et retraites et restrechies
> Que contreval par les coustures
> Lor saillent hors les vesteüres,
> Lor porpres indes et vermeilles. (5092-5099)

The protagonists' human aristocratic identity appears when their original clothes become visible through the stitches of the damaged deerskins that don't seem to be as well-sewn as the bearskins were by Alexandrine. Beneath the deer skin, one finds not human flesh, but another garment. In her work on "sartorial corporeality," Jane Burns shows that courtly bodies are "generated by clothes that extend the flesh of literary protagonists symbolically and ideologically."[221] The

[221] Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed,* 13.

costly garments of courtly culture represent a "new skin," that is also a "social skin," that "might construct, maintain, control, and transform social identities based on gender and class distinctions."[222] When Guillaume and Melior's social skins show beneath the animal hide, the queen can notice the quality of the garments through the seams, a quality demonstrated by their colorfulness and the "inde," the purple from India, that suggests the lover's upper-class status.[223]

As numerous scholars have shown, shapeshifting stories consistently stage the permanence of aristocratic identity behind the animal skin, which the courtly garments kept under the beasts skins illustrate.[224] However, the queen is not so sure about what she sees: "It seemed like a marvel to the Lady, when she saw the clothing peeping through the pelts" ("Molt vient la dame a grant merveilles, / Quant les dras voit des piax issir," 5100-5101). As she recognizes the costly garments, she wonders who or what hides behind the two skins, the noble skin of courtly clothing and the animal skin. The layering of social and animal skins on the same bodies unsettles any conclusion about what kind of beast the lovers are.

One of the queen's advisers discloses Melior's identity to her, and foresees that Guillaume will save her realm, but he does not reveal that he is her son. The queen therefore decides to approach the lovers, and she does so by wearing a stag skin herself.[225] Felise assumes personhood within the animal body, that there is a mind inhabiting that flesh, with which she can communicate, but not that the person within would necessarily be human. To establish communication, she decides to adopt their perspective by adopting their embodiment, by

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[222] Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed*, 25.
[223] As Griffin notes, "the convention of lining or edging woven cloth with animal fur is reversed here, as the sumptuous fabrics of Melior's clothes line the deerskin." Griffin, *Transforming Tales*, 122.
[224] Dubost, *Aspects fantastiques de la littérature narrative médiévale, XIIème-XIIIème siècles: L'autre, l'ailleurs, l'autrefois*, 565.
Schiff, "Cross-Channel Becomings-Animal," 420.
[225] It is unclear why, and this part is missing from the manuscript Arsenal 6565: it is deduced from the rest of the text and from a passage in the prose version of *Guillaume de Palerne*, mentioning the queen sutured in a great stag's pelt. See Alexandre Micha's footnote, in Micha, *Guillaume de Palerne*, 191-192.

inhabiting a deer body. As the queen puts herself in the lovers' hooves, she adopts an animal way of walking as well, for she joins them "on all four like any other beast" ("A .III. piés comme autre beste," 5172). She lays close to the shrub where the lovers rest, in a careful approach reminiscent of how a camouflaged hunter tries to get close to a deer. The queen mimics a deer's behavior by imagining how the lovers would see her, anticipating their potential reactions (fear or trust); she doesn't only impersonate a stag herself, but she imagines the deer's perspective. She consequently does not only inhabit a deer body, but she enters the deer's *Umwelt* as well; she wants to communicate by becoming part of their world, and to not scare them away.

She does so quite successfully, since the lovers note her presence, but they feel free to speak to each other, ignoring the beast lying close to them, though a little surprised that she is not afraid of them. Guillaume notes that "she has a right [to lay next to them], she doesn't think we are other than what she sees; if she knew our condition, she wouldn't be part of our company" ("ele a droit/ Ne nos cuide autres qu'ele voit ;/ S'ele savoit nostre convaigne,/ Ne seroit pas nostre compaigne," 5199-5202). After Felise imagining what the deer's perspective might be, it's Guillaume's turn to imagine the stag's perspective: they look like deer, so the stag looks for their company, but wouldn't if the stag knew about the lovers-deer's "condition." Of course, the irony is that the queen noticed their noble garments through the stitches, but they don't realize that a woman hides behind the stagskin; the queen impersonates a more convincing stag than they do. Wearing an animal skin entails imagining different perspectives, deduced from the physical appearance and the way a given creature moves. Why would a stag be afraid of them if they look like it? And why to doubt that the stag is a stag if it looks and acts as a stag? For Guillaume, a specific ontologic status comes with specific rights: because it's a beast and they look like they belong to the same species, the stag has a "right" to lay close to them, conferred by the taxonomy

that Guillaume derives from the stag's embodiment and behavior; the text even hints that the lovers-deer may have wronged the stag's rights by deceiving it to stay in their company, thereby conferring to the stag a status of *person* who has rights that can be wronged, without assuming at all that that person might actually be human.

Then the queen speaks to the lovers and they are at first dismayed, shocked to hear a stag talking. The queen reassures them by declaring "I am a beast just like you" ("Si sui tex beste comme vos," 5224), a statement that claims their shared nobility as much as their shared position of wearing a pelt. When the queen approaches the lovers on all fours, covered by a deer skin herself, before talking to them, she assumes that there are persons behind the deer skins, as revealed by the colorful garments, but she acts as though she has to imitate them, to prove to them that she is "a beast like them" to gain their trust. Her own transformation reflects the ambiguity of her appreciation of the lovers, and it does so not only by adopting their perspective, but by aligning their ontological statuses, when "I am a beast just like you" can mean "I'm human under the beast skin as you are" but also, "I'm an animal that looks like you, speaks like you, and walks on all fours like you," an ambivalent declaration that does not disentangle the human and the nonhuman. "I am a beast just like you" refers to a shared condition; they are made of the same flesh, noble-human and deer-nonhuman – the fleshly continuity among beings enable their changing embodiments – but also of the same flesh in terms of being from the same kind, since Guillaume turns out to be Felise's son, and Melior her soon-to-be daughter-in-law.

This move recalls perspectivism, where animals share a similar mind as human beings, but bodies differ and ground ontological differences. However, if the queen does assume personhood, and even the mastering of language and therefore, of culture, under the deer skins, she uses a different logic. The queen relies on a way of thinking that draws analogies between

the lovers-deer's apparent animality and her own and, without any contradiction, between their assumed nobility and hers. In the analogical thinking that, according to Philippe Descola, prevailed in European medieval cultures, the world is ordered through seemingness, through an infinite number of connections holding a fractioned world together as one giant network.[226] Queen Felise's desire to connect with Guillaume and Melior by stressing how similar they all are betrays an analogical obsession for similitudes and symmetries as a way to order the world, and to re-order *her* world which is threatened by the king of Spain. She can both save her realm, according to her advisor's prediction, and reach out to the lovers by becoming like them, placing her trust in surfaces, appearances, and bodily likeness. The queen is not concerned with what could be the "true" interiority of the creatures in front of her, she doesn't separate the inside and the outside, but she assumes that they could share a similar perspective on things if they share a similar embodiment, which she makes happen by donning an animal skin herself. The identical white bearskins previously united the lovers under this identity of "lovers," walking identical side by side, unrecognizable from the outside.[227] By wearing the stagskin, Felise stresses that they are the same beasts, and by extension that Guillaume should help her; the similar animal flesh they inhabit unites them, and not just in appearance, since they actually belong to the same family.

The verbal exchange among the disguised deer marks the end of the lovers' "animal experiment" since they then leave the skins, when the queen unstitches them with a knife, before they are given a bath that fully restores their human form, under the appraising gaze of the

[226] However, as pointed out by Susan Crane and mentioned in the introduction, analogism is only one of the different ontological systems at work in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, alongside dualism and animism. Crane, "An Ontological Turn for the Medieval Book of Beasts: Environmental Theory from Premodern to Postmodern," 115.
Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture*, 351-359.
[227] Hartley R. Miller, "'Hey, You Look Like a Prince!' Ideology and Recognition in *Guillaume de Palerne*," *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales et Humanistes*, no. 24 (December 30, 2012), 354.

queen's servant who notes how beautiful and well-shaped the lovers are. The text rhymes *fors* with *cors*, "out" with "body" (5339-5340), opposing a beautiful human body to the "hideous" ("hisdeus," 5320) animal bodies from which the lovers emerge. The aesthetic appraisal of the beautiful human bodies separates them from an animality now left behind, but the contrast dialectically maintains the presence of the animal bodies, as referential point, to assert the lovers' bodies' value in the eyes of the court, a value that the queen had already guessed when she noted the commodity value of the lovers' clothes under the stitches in the animal disguises.

Another instance of a noble human being emerging while deerskin is flayed is found in the anonymous twelfth century *lai de Tyolet*: a stag turns into a knight under the eyes of the eponymous character, Tyolet, while he flays a doe in front of the stag.[228] The transformation triggers a discussion between Tyolet, who has never seen a knight, and the knight himself, who explains to the peasant what kind of "beast" a knight is. The knight reveals his humanity and his nobility as he is freed, in a sense, of his stag's skin as Tyolet peels off the skin of the doe. Miranda Griffin reads this lay as a demonstration of "the dependence – punctuated by language, lack, and the interpretation of surface – of the human on the beast."[229] Transformation, she argues, stages the separation of the categories of the human and of the animal while stressing that they often overlap.[230] In *Guillaume de Palerne* the queen's gesture of cutting the pelts' stitches enacts this separation of the human from the animal, of the courtly lovers from their deer suits. Restored to his human form, Guillaume defends his mother, gets his regal title back by thwarting a Spanish invasion of his kingdom, and marries Melior once his noble identity is reestablished. The relative equality promoted by the identical beast skins of Guillaume and Melior also makes

[228] "Lay de Tyolet," in Alexandre Micha, *Lais féeriques des XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, Edition bilingue, GF 672 (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 186-188.
[229] Griffin, *Transforming Tales*, 103.
[230] Griffin, *Transforming Tales*, 104.

way for a more traditional masculinist narrative, pushing Melior to the background. This outcome apparently confirms the inhabiting of the animal skins as an aristocratic "rite of passage," in Randy Schiff's expression; adopting an animal condition was purely transitional, and like Jonas saved from the whale, the humanity within has been preserved from the beast whose interior it inhabited, and the aristocratic order has been restored.[231] Yet two details come to trouble the idea that Guillaume has been left unscathed by his animal experience.

Before entering the battlefield, Guillaume manifests his affection for his dead father's warhorse in a way that puzzles the people around him:

> He rubs his head and his ears. Those who came to watch wondered greatly at it; they all said among themselves that he would have eaten the horse alive.
>
> Le chief li frote et les oreilles.
> Molt par vient cex a grant merveilles
> Qui esgarder venu estoient;
> Trestot ensamble entr'ex disoient
> Qu'il le deüst tot vif mengier. (5507-5511)

This passage is particularly disconcerting at first because there is no obvious link between rubbing a horse's ears and devouring it alive, even metaphorically. Yet Guillaume's behavior with the horse provokes puzzlement and the people around him discuss his behavior not publicly, but later, among themselves, as if there was something shameful about it, or something to be feared from Guillaume if he overheard them. To be sure, a symbolic longing to consume the other may express a strong affection, as Derrida argues and as I discuss in Chapter II, and the scene marks the reunion of the knight with his family heirloom: the horse instinctively recognizes Guillaume as his rightful master.[232] Yet, the reader is left to wonder about the bewildered witnesses of Guillaume's behavior, since it remains unclear what they see that

[231] Schiff, "Cross-Channel Becomings-Animal," 420-421.
[232] Derrida and Nancy, "'Eating Well,' or the Calculation of the Subject: An Interview with Jacques Derrida," 114.

suggested to them that Guillaume would, or was about to, eat this horse raw and alive, "tot vif." His excessive, devouring affection doubles the ordinary knight-warhorse relationship (quintessential to the knight's identity) with another seam, the potential ingestion of the *cheval* in the *cheval*ier. It raises the question of Guillaume's own bestiality, since both eating raw meat and consuming horseflesh represent socially unacceptable, explicitly forbidden practices in Christian Europe, whereas it repositions him as a devouring subject, after being chased by the emperor's hunters all across Italy, and as the rightful heir of the Sicilian crown, recognized as such even by the horse.

The second detail involves a character who has stayed in the shadows of my reading so far, focused as I was on the lovers' trail. But they would not have survived in the woods without the help of another character trapped in a beast skin, a werewolf who first saved Guillaume as a child and later provided the lovers with food and guidance during their journey. Guillaume acknowledges his debt toward the werewolf by protecting him at court just as the werewolf protected him in the wild, then he adopts the wolf's image as a blason on his shield, becoming "the knight who carries the wolf" ("le chevalier qui le leu porte," 5964). He ties his newly found chivalric (and regal) identity on his partnership with a human-beast hybrid.[233] Ironically, the werewolf is himself the son of the Spanish king, as the story later reveals. As the king of Spain complains about the number of his soldiers killed by Guillaume on the battlefield, he successively names Guillaume "the one with the wolf on his shield, who had my people killed" ("cil qui le leu en l'escu porte/ qui a ma gent ocise et morte," 65881-6582), then just "the wolf" ("le leu," 6583), assimilating the knight to his heraldic animal and defining his military actions as predation. The insistence on the wolf as sign for Guillaume almost suggests that Guillaume

[233] Which is not without recalling Yvain becoming "the knight with the lion," but Yvain associates himself with an actual lion, even though he recognizes the beast as "noble" (see Chapter III), and not with a man-beast hybrid.

devours his foes like an animal, behaving on the battlefield like a savage beast. The description of the battlefield after Guillaume's passage truly evokes a scene of wild slaughtering, with knights' body parts and bloody flesh scattered all over the place. Whereas earlier, while impersonating a bear, Guillaume had to rely on the werewolf to be fed, he now wears the sign of his association with a carnivorous beast on his shield and his adversary characterizes him as a predator on the battlefield; the transitory embodiment did not just make a king out of him, it also turned a young courtly lover into someone perceived as a bestial man. Guillaume appears to retain something of the beast, and that's obvious enough to other observers for the king of Spain to qualify him as a (were)wolf himself. If their bodies diverge, carnivorous predators and noble men may share more than a similar flesh: they share a quite similar mind that becomes apparent when their perspectives come to be shaped by similar embodiments, as when Guillaume impersonates a beast or when a noble man is trapped into a wolf skin.

The Werewolf's Trail

Medieval werewolf stories have triggered an impressive body of scholarship attempting to decipher the hybrid figure of the man-wolf. Narrative texts describe the medieval werewolf as a sympathetic noble man trapped in a wolf body, who nonetheless retains his human mind, his "sen d'ume," as Marie de France describes her own werewolf in the twelfth century lay of *Bisclavret*.[234] In a fourteenth-century anonymous rewriting of Marie's *Bisclavret* in *Renart le contrefait*, the transformation of the knight Biclarel into a werewolf is explained as follows:

> Two full days or three, he stayed in the woods as a beast. He dwelled with other beasts, and he fed from beasts' raw flesh, and as a strong and powerful wolf, with a hard pelt and

[234] Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*.94.
Crane, *Animal Encounters*, 54-55.
Marie de France, "Bisclavret," in *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1983), 66.

big bony limbs, he nonetheless didn't lose his human mind, his memory or his self-control.

Deus jours trestoz antiers ou .III.
Demouroit beste par le bois.
Avec autres bestes onjoit
Et char de beste crue manjoit,
Et conme loups grans et corsus,
Fort cuir et de mambres ossus,
Ne pour ce ne perdoit son san,
Sa memoire ne son asan. (30441-30447)[235]

This passage illustrates the double nature of the werewolf. Living among the beasts as a beast himself, Biclarel remembers who he is and is still in possession of his human self. However, compared to Marie's original material, explicitly reworked here, the text insists on the immersion of Biclarel among the beasts, with the repetition of the word "beast" in three successive lines: the beast the knight becomes, the beasts he lives among, and the beasts he eats. This sequence highlights the depth of the transformation, not just the wolf-like appearance, but the body as a whole (as the reference to the bones shows), the alimentation, and the nonhuman company he keeps, for the werewolf completely abandons human society to be surrounded by other beasts during the two or three days of his transformation. And here is another beast involved in this text, which is a story within a story: Renart the fox narrates the lay of Biclarel, which builds a complex layer of bestial and human features into the text. The lay of Biclarel is the story of a noble man changed into a mute beast, told by a talking beast to a man, and used by the fox as an *exemplum* to profess a misogynistic discourse on female deception, in order to discourage the young man from getting married.[236]

[235] Corinne Pierreville, "Quand un Renart conte une histoire de loup-garou," in *Du temps que les bestes parloient. Mélanges offerts au professeur Roger Bellon*, ed. Valérie Méot-Bourquin and Aurélie Barre (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018), 276.
[236] *Renart le contrefait* is itself a reworking of the *Roman de Renart*, that will be discussed in the third section of this chapter. Despite its apparent straightforward antifeminist stance, the text proves to be highly ambivalent since Renart is a deceptive liar and notorious adulterer. See Pierreville, "Quand un Renart conte une histoire de loup-garou," 269-270.

As in *Bisclavret* and other werewolf tales, Biclarel is betrayed by his own wife, who hides his clothes while he wanders as a wolf, preventing him from going back to his human shape. The misogynistic theme of inevitable female betrayal constitutes the backbone of werewolves stories, in which a woman always holds responsibility for turning a man permanently into a beast. The noble man retrieves his proper human form through the establishment of a companionship with a king, re-integrating himself into the homosocial world of the court before re-inhabiting his human shape.[237] The persistence of human nature behind the werewolf's hide and the reinstatement of his noble appearance and identity constitute the stakes of the werewolf motif.[238] However, the werewolf is *also* a wolf, a beast among beasts as the tale of Biclarel highlights, and scholars have stressed the significance of envisioning a human-animal continuum that does not exclude one category in favor of the other.[239] The medieval literary werewolf offers "a pause, a hesitation, a concurrence during which what is supposed to be contrastive remains coexistent, in difference, indifferent"; essentially a double-being, the figure of the werewolf stages the full inhabitation of a nonhuman flesh where the skin is not worn and cannot be exchanged, and yet the werewolf's embodiment preserves human features of reasoning, but not of language, since the mouth is replaced by a "maw," as in *Guillaume de Palerne* ("goule," 86).[240]

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[237] About misogyny, see Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "Of Men and Beasts in Bisclavret," *The Romanic Review* 82, no. 3 (1991): 251–69 ; Cristina Noacco, "La Dé-mesure du loup-garou: un instrument de connaissance," *Revue des langues romanes*, no. 111:1 (2007): 35-37 ; and Noah D. Guynn, "Hybridity, Ethics, and Gender in Two Old French Werewolf Tales," in *From Beasts to Souls. Gender and Embodiment in Medieval Europe* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 157
About homosociality, see Lucas Wood, "Of Werewolves and Wicked Women: "Melion'' 's Misogyny Reconsidered," *Medium Ævum* 84, no. 1 (2015), 63, and Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval Literature France and England, 1050-1230*, 168 ; Burwinkle reads the werewolf's taste for human flesh as homoerotic desire.
[238] Dubost, *Aspects fantastiques de la littérature narrative médiévale, XIIème-XIIIème Siècles*, 565.
McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast*, 69.
[239] Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, 172.
Peggy McCracken, "Translation and Animals in Marie de France's *Lais*," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 46, no. 3 (September 2009), 215.
[240] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "The Werewolf's Indifference," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 34, no. 1 (2012), 353.

Named Alphonse, *Guillaume de Palerne*'s werewolf has been cursed by his mother-in-law to take animal form, evicting him from the succession to the throne of Spain. Like Guillaume, Alphonse is the rightful heir to a throne, but unlike Guillaume, he knows his own regal origins, but he is deprived of speech. A double loss of social identity thus structures the romance's plot.[241] The narrative opens with the abduction of Guillaume, son of Embron, king of Sicily and Puglia, by the werewolf. Embron's brother plots to have his nephew murdered by a guard while the family gathers in a "marvelously noble garden, fully enclosed by walls and masonry, where many wild animals were kept" ("…un vergier merveilles gent, / Tot clos de mur et de cyment; / S'i ot mainte sauvage beste," 65-67), within the city of Palermo. The mention of unspecified wild animals' presence turns the garden into a liminal space between a tamed, enclosed "nature," and a wilderness. The space of the initial action, a garden enclosing wild animals within the city, blends urbanism with wilderness and imagines a cohabitation between the royal family and wild animals in the same space at the heart of the city. Even before the appearance of the werewolf, a creature composed along a human-animal continuum, and long before the queen meets her son in a deerskin, the place where the story begins reveals a contingency of nature and culture, an entanglement of the human and the animal, the courtly and the wild; a piece of wilderness contained within a human-crafted landscape.[242]

The werewolf's double identity anticipates the lovers in a bear skin, for both situations stage noble characters clothed in a carnivorous animal flesh. However, despite their comparable status, the werewolf and the lovers inhabit differently the flesh whose skin they wear, and not only because the lovers are voluntarily sutured into the skins whereas Alphonse is magically turned into a werewolf against his will. The werewolf can rely on himself, and he can live as a

[241] Micha, "Introduction," 30.
[242] Miranda Griffin, "Figures in the Landscape," 504-505.

wolf, while the lovers cannot live as bears or as deer. Impersonation is not fully becoming, and the lovers lack critical animal skills to survive by themselves.[243] As mentioned earlier, the lovers cannot hunt, so they feed themselves by gathering nuts and seeds, until Alphonse comes to their help by bringing them meat and bread. Alphonse steals meat from priests and commoners, then "he brings his prey to the young people" ("As .II. enfans porte sa proie," 3282). The lovers cannot display such skills, and the scene of the werewolf bringing meat to Guillaume and Melior repeats an earlier scene of Guillaume as a child fed by Alphonse, even though Guillaume has no memory of his previous reliance on the man-wolf.

To be clear, werewolves do not just steal, the texts also describe them actively hunting. Even though they practiced hunting as aristocratic men prior to their transformation, their predation as werewolves underscores how they use their wolf's body in the way a wolf would, without any remnants or traces of human aristocratic hunting. Melion, in the eponymous twelfth-century lay, provides a particularly telling example: when his wife tells him that she will die if she does not taste the flesh of a certain stag, Melion, a knight, dismounts and reveals that he can be turned into a wolf by undressing and touching a certain jewel to his head. Once transformed, he uses his new body to hunt the stag: "the wolf took off, running quickly to where he saw the stag lying, and he soon sets himself on its trail" ("Li leus s'en vait, molt tost corant / la ou il vit le cerf gisant, / tost se fu en la trace mis," 183-185).[244] The Old French "trace" refers to the trail, probably represented by the stag's scent from a wolf's perspective, but of course it could be translated by "trace" as well: following the trail and the trace of the stag are the same thing in French.[245] The stag's "trace" refers to what the stag's body leaves behind (scent, but possibly

[243] McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast*, 81.
[244] Prudence Mary O'Hara Tobin, ed., "Le lai de Melion," in *Les lais anonymes des XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Genève: Librairie Droz, n.d.), 302.
[245] Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis*, 82-83.

also footprints, sounds) as well as to their perception by the werewolf. Two animal bodies interact through the trace/trail, and interact in ways that are specific to their own embodiments, but not restricted by them, since the trace/trail is located precisely between the bodies, in the space between the fleeing stag and the running wolf. Melion orients himself toward the stag through his senses, as the trace/trail connects the wolf's flesh and the stag's flesh and anticipates their physical contact.

The text provides a short description of the chase:

> Melion chased **the stag**, rushing **it** at marvelous speed; he found **it** on the moor and then killed **it**, taking a great piece of flesh from **it** and carrying **it** in his mouth.
>
> Melïon ki **le cerf** chaça,
> a grant merveille **le** hasta ;
> en la lande **l'**a conseü,
> tot maintenant **l'**a abatu,
> puis prist de **lui** .I. grant lardé,
> en sa bouche **l'**en a porté." (205-210)

The vocabulary emphasizes the powerfulness of Melion's new wolfish body, which does what a human body could not: not just following a scent but outrunning a stag and killing it without any tool or weapon. Driven out of the woods as it tries to escape the wolf, the stag cannot "give the change," that is, confuse its scent with another deer's. This dynamic, verb-driven passage insists on the action of the hunt, while the use of pronouns, which I bolded in both the original excerpt and the translation, recalls the target at each line, until the slaughtered stag becomes the piece of flesh the werewolf tore from its body and took back to his wife. Not only do we follow the werewolf following the stag, but through an active depiction of the werewolf's pursuit, the tale invites the audience to share the werewolf's point of view, intently focused on the fleeing stag. The grammatical structure of the passage itself animalizes both Melion and the reader, and yet Melion carries the meat away in his mouth ("bouche"), not in his maw (which would be "gole").

As he returns to his wife with the meat he hunted for her, his perspective shifts to a human perspective again, which is suggested by the sudden humanization of what still remains a wolf's maw at this point.

When Melion returns to his wife, he discovers that she has betrayed him, leaving for Ireland with the magic stone that would turn him back into his human form. His wife's betrayal not only condemns Melion to remain in the shape of a beast, inhabiting a wolf's body. The betrayal also expels him from social structures, notably by interrupting the exchange intended for the stag's flesh, that his wife asks for as a gift and that she gives up, leaving Melion alone, in the flesh of a beast and holding in his maw a piece of flesh that is deprived of its social and exchange value. Trapped in his wolf's body, but also hungry, Melion eats the flesh that was intended for his wife, without any cooking or preparation, outside of any social or commensal relationship. As a real wolf then.

Melion is not the only aristocratic werewolf who hunts deer; in *Guillaume de Palerne*, the emperor finds the young Guillaume in the woods as he chases the werewolf that pursues a stag:

> Suddenly he saw the werewolf coming in front of him, hunting a stag, following its trail as the emperor rides after them. He follows [the wolf] until he comes upon the child, but he doesn't know what happened to the stag or the werewolf that day.
>
> Atant es vos que li garous
> Vient devant lui .I. cers chaçant ;
> De pren en pren la va sivant
> Et l'empereres cort après ;
> Tant l'a suï tot a eslés
> Que sor l'enfant s'est embatus,
> Mais il ne set qu'est devenus
> Li cers ne li garox anui. (408-415)

Not just a hunter, the werewolf himself is also hunted, like a wolf. Wolves were hunted not for their meat, deemed inedible by the cultural standards of the time, but for the competition they

represented with human beings, since they devoured domestic animals and hunted game, as illustrated almost comically here with the emperor running after the wolf who himself runs after the stag.[246] A double status of hunter/hunted characterizes the werewolf as much as his dual nature human/ animal. As I've noted above, this dual nature should be understood more as a continuum than an opposition. The two moves of hunting and being hunted merge in the same animal, which is not antithetical: hunting and being hunted at the same time are common experiences for many carnivorous animals.[247] In the lay of *Melion*, we find this double nature of hunter-game of the wolf as well, when the werewolf, who took command of a pack of wolves to vengefully ravage Ireland (his wife's country), is himself hunted down and trapped, and becomes the only survivor of the subsequent slaughter of the wolves.[248]

In *Guillaume de Palerne*, this doubled status is complicated by the trick performed by the werewolf on the emperor in the woods: leading him to find the child Guillaume, in an encounter that clearly appeared "stage-managed" by the werewolf, to borrow Griffin's expression.[249] Here, the stag is not the one who "gives the change," i.e., exchanges itself for something else, but the werewolf uses the stag to give Guillaume to the emperor, with a subtle play on exchanges of sovereignty: a son of king is exchanged for a son of king, the child for the werewolf, but the royal birthrights are hidden from the emperor, who still ignores that the child he found will one day be his son-in-law, just as he ignores that the wolf is a Spanish prince. This play of hidden sovereignty during a chase is not unique to *Guillaume de Palerne*, and it finds echoes in both *Bisclavret* and "Biclarel." In *Bisclavret*, when the werewolf is chased by the king's hounds, he

[246] However, whilst its consumption was taboo, wolf's flesh could provide occasional medicinal or magical ingredients. See Aleksander Pluskowski, *Wolves and the Wilderness in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 115-116.
[247] Jacques Derrida, *L'animal que donc je suis*, 83.
[248] Later on, Melion meets the usual fate of literary werewolves (reintegration of his king's court and of his human form) while his wife faces banishment.
[249] Griffin, "Figures in the Landscape," 513.

decides to run to the king and to humble himself both like a dog and like a feudal lord, convincing the king to adopt him as a pet. We find a similar description in the fourteenth century rewriting of the lay, but "Biclarel" is slightly more detailed than its model regarding the wolf's trick. It highlights Biclarel's tactic to cut across the chase to reach the king and how conscious his move was, because "he was not without his mind, no matter that he was turned into a beast" ("De son san n'estoit desnuez, / Combien qu'an beste fust muez," 30716-30717). Even as the text frames the werewolf's agency as the persistence of his human mind in the beast, it imagines how a beast could surprise a hunting party, confusing humans and dogs alike by not doing what is expected, that is, running away.

Medieval treatises on hunting and modern writings on tracking animals all agree that beasts rarely just run away. They often deliberately confuse their hunters, as when stags "give the change" or wolves track their pursuers behind their backs. Baptiste Morizot recalls an anecdote in which he and fellow scholars were tracking a pack of wolves in Southern France. One morning, as they studied the spoor and footprints around their campsite, they realized that the wolves were behind them the previous evening, actually following them and watching them from an elevation over the campsite; the wolves had a literal *point of view* on them. Whereas the scholars thought they were tracking and studying the wolves, the wolves were following them, showing curiosity about their behavior, meaning that the scientists became the object of the wolves' own investigation.[250]

Animal ruses reveal a crafty intelligence, and they do so through the use that animals make of their bodies; by asserting that a wolf can have, behind perfectly animal appearances, a "san," a rational mind, the fox-narrator of the lay of Biclarel implies that any beast

[250] Morizot, *Sur la piste animale*, 124-125.

demonstrating agency and "smart" behaviors could too. The possibility of human and nonhuman creatures sharing, to some extent, a "san" highlights bodily differences among those creatures, since possessing a mind doesn't clearly set apart the human and the nonhuman anymore. The significance granted to corporeal difference gestures toward perspectivism, with its particular emphasis on inscribing ontological distinctions in the flesh, rather than on an human nature or a Christian "core" that could be separated – and that, in a theologian perspective, must even be saved– from the flesh.

When they survive the hunt by tricking their pursuers, escaping their objectification as trophies or as always-already meat, hunted beasts raise the troubling question of what kind of mind inhabits animal flesh. Even the (non-were)wolves enrolled by Melion in his war against the king of Ireland behave as a personal army, proving allegiance to Melion, in ways that align the human feudal system with the wolves' own social organization in packs. The possibility of a *san* in an animal body never represents an abstract claim, but it is deduced from embodied perspectives, as when Queen Felise imagines how the deer would see her and decides that the only way to establish communication with the lovers-deer is to adopt their embodiment, or when werewolves use their animal bodies to achieve their human goals, such as Melion hunting the deer as a wolf to bring the meat back to his wife, Biclarel speeding up through the chase to reach the king, or Alphonse manipulating the emperor's hunting party to lead them to Guillaume. Werewolf tales eventually suggest that bodies, much more than minds, mark the ontological difference among beings.

In Amazonian perspectivist ontologies, beasts are said to think of themselves as persons, and of humans as preys or rivals, turning the human into the object of an animal point of view.[251]

[251] Stolze Lima, "The Two and Its Many," 111.

Medieval French literature would perhaps not go that far, yet the idea of an ongoing conflict between human and nonhuman animals, all granted of a "san " –already alluded to in *Melion*– is at the heart of the *Roman de Renart*. I thus conclude this investigation of medieval fictional envisionings of animal perspectives with an animal who leads a very personal war against other creatures, human and nonhuman alike. Renart –fox, lord, and trickster of both worlds – offers the conditions of investigating a permanent animal embodiment combined with a "san," a mind that is human-like yet never considered as human, with a focus on animals' ability to dupe human characters.

The Trickster's Fur

> "Tell me, in the name of God, how many fox pelts do we have? - Sir, we have nine of them. - Nine? By all the saints, I see ten." Stunned by what he discovered, he moves forward and sees sir Renart hanging to the rope, holding onto it with his fangs and paws. The hunter marveled when he recognized him.
>
> "Diva, fait il, se Diex t'aït,
> Quantes piaus avont de houpil?
> - Sire, nuef en avons, fait il.
> - Nuef? Por les sains Dieu, j'en vois dis."
> Cilz saut avant tous esbahis
> Et s'en vint tot droit cele part.
> Si a coisi sire Renart
> Qui a la hart pendus estoit.
> Illueques forment se tenoit,
> Tenoit soi as dens et as piés.
> Li veneres s'est merveilliés,
> Qui bien l'avoit reconneü. (H - *Renart le noir*, 802-813)[252]

Hiding among the pelts of his dead fellows, Renart the fox managed, for a while, to hide himself from his pursuers, the lord and his hunters whom he deceived for days, stealing food in the castle. And, indeed, he escapes once more by biting the hunter who tries to seize him. The desire

[252] Strubel et al., eds., *Le roman de Renart*, 454. All translations are mine.

for the fox's skin represents a familiar reality of medieval Europe, for its significant monetary and sartorial value. It is as well an important narrative start for the adventures of Renart, who often has to "escape" from foes and hunters. Escaping, etymologically, refers literally to saving one's skin (the "chape / cap").[253] However, Renart does more than escape skinning, for he also abuses human characters by using their desire to possess his skin, as when he plays dead on a road. Two greedy merchants find him and put him into their cart full of eels, which he devours before fleeing with more eels for his cubs.[254] In *Renart le noir*, the living fox can hide among the flayed skins because that's all he is from a human, exploitative perspective: a fur. Hence the marvel of the hunter facing the additional, animated pelt of Renart hiding in plain sight. Not only is it alive; it bites, too.

The *Roman de Renart* is not the work of a single poet, but a collection of narrative poems composed by mostly anonymous authors between c.1175 and c.1250, with later avatars such as the *Renart le contrefait* mentioned earlier.[255] Whereas parts of the *Renart* are derived from the Latin *Ysengrimus,* itself product of an Aesopian tradition, most of the stories consist of rewritings of some core motifs articulated around the fox/wolf rivalry which were subjected to various arrangements in "branches" and chronologized as early as the thirteenth century, before modern scholars painstakingly classified the numerous manuscripts and their variants.[256] In this chapter, I will refer to tales from manuscripts "C" and "H" of Ernest Martin's standard classification.[257] The texts I will discuss stage an animal perspective from nonhuman

[253] Pierre Bureau, "Les valeurs métaphoriques de la peau dans le *Roman de Renart*. Sens et fonctions," *Médiévales* 11, no. 22 (1992), 130-133.
[254] "Renart et les anguilles" in Strubel et al., eds. *Le roman de Renart*, 307-320.
[255] Kenneth Varty, *The Roman de Renart: A Guide to Scholarly Work* (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 1998), 1.
[256] As Jean Scheidegger puts it, *Renart*'s originality is that there is no original text: the rewriting is constitutive of the work. Jean Scheidegger, *Le Roman de Renart, ou Le texte de la dérision* (Genève: Droz, 1989), 31.
[257] In the case of H (Arsenal 3334), the tales' names will be preceded with the manuscript letter, followed by the lines, as in the quotation above (H - *Renart le noir*, 802-813). I refer to the 1998 edition directed by Armand Strubel, whose publication in the prestigious Pléiade collection marked the entrance of the trickster into a "mainstream" French canon where both medieval literature and "obscene" texts – a description often given to *Renart* – were long denied entry.[257] Regarding "C" (BnF fr.1579), I

embodiment, but numerous other examples can be found in the branches and editions of the *Renart*, whose polymorphic and polyphonic nature renders impossible any exhaustive approach.

If these tales reproduce roughly the universe of Aesop's fables, with its cohort of recognizable characters (the sly fox, the voracious wolf, the noble lion and so on), they also elaborate more complex narratives, drawing from various literary genres and, famously or infamously, resisting moralization, when they don't simply dive into ferocious violence or pure obscenity. The *Roman de Renart* enacts a parody of feudal society in which Renart is a disobedient lord, at war with the wolf in an animal kingdom led by a complacent king, Noble the lion. He also steals from peasants and monks; *Renart*'s animal kingdom doesn't replace the human world but coexists with it, in a usually conflictual way. If the *Renart* has often been read as a commentary on human society through animal anthropomorphism, the texts also explore human-animal relationships by staging what the animals' perspective is, and it does so by assuming personhood in animal bodies.

Not all animals are granted personhood in the *Renart*; some animals appear only for the food they can provide, such as the eels mentioned earlier, whereas the poultry's status appears ambivalent, sometimes anonymous and always already meat, sometimes composed of individuals endowed names and personhood, such as Chantecler the rooster and the mourning hens who bring to Noble's court the remains of their sisters devoured by Renart. The leading hen, Lady Pinte ("Dame Pinte," H - *Le Jugement*, 382), asks the king to judge Renart for his crimes against her family. Her title of "lady" suggests that she belongs to an aristocratic world. The animals granted with personhood, speech, and a name consistently feature an upper-class

use the 1985 edition by Naoyuki Fukumoto, Moboru Harano, and Satoru Suzuki, revised in 2005 by Gabriel Bianciotto; this manuscript offers one of the most comprehensive anthologies of Renart's tales, presented in chronological order from the birth to the death of the main character.[257] Because C presents itself as one continuous narrative, and the subdivisions' names chosen by the editors are rather long (such as "2. Comment Renart mangea le poisson des charretiers"), I will refer to this manuscript only as "C" followed by the section number, for sake of concision.

title, representing an internal class divide among animals. This internal class divide has often been read as a distinction between carnivores and herbivores, or between wild and domestic animals, however multiple herbivorous and domesticated animals enjoy personhood and a noble status in Renart's adventures, such as Pinte the hen, Bernart the donkey, Bruiant the bull, or Belin the ram.[258] It is true, though, that the most important characters are wild carnivores: the fox, the wolf, the lion, the bear, but also the cat, even though the latter enjoys an ambivalent status regarding domestication.[259]

The parallel human and nonhuman feudal societies, with animals possessing aristocratic titles and sharing a Christian culture with their human counterparts, recall perspectivism, but with a notable difference: whereas Tupi people think that, for example, the jaguar considers blood as manioc beer, for if material reality changes, the animal society strictly parallels the human one with its codes, in the *Roman de Renart* the animals use the same words as human beings to designate the same things.[260] In *Renart*, the thistles that Bernart the archpriest (the donkey) eats are thistles, named as such, and perceived as such by him ("chardons," H - *Le Pèlerinage*, 244). However, the situation gets more complicated when, for example, the fox's family is said to skin and to roast eels in their den-castle (C - 3., 4-14), leaving to the reader's imagination to decide if the foxes actually cook the eels or if the language only puts fox consumption into parallel with human consumption using words understandable for human beings.

[258] Foehr-Janssens, "*Animal Studies* et littérature médiévale," 582.
[259] Another possible explanation of some animals' special status and individual naming is that they would represent residues of totemism, possibly from Old German cultures. Massimo Bonafin, "Le nom du loup et le trickster-renard. La discussion sur les stratifications ethniques dans le *Roman de Renart*," *Reinardus. Yearbook of the International Reynard Society* 9 (December 31, 1996), 3-9.
[260] Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere*, 47-48.

The ambiguity of the fox's ontological status, beast and lord at the same time, points to Renart's mediating role between the human world and the animal kingdom. He deceives the beasts as well as human characters, for he is "the one who abuses everyone" ("cils qui le mont conchie," H - *Le jugement de Renart*, 92); this observation could be translated as "the one who shits upon the world," something Renart literally does on several occasions.[261] A figure of the margins, the fox is "an animal of the gaps, of taboo," associated with depravity, cunningness, and a dreadful stench that makes its flesh improper for consumption.[262] The name of Renart's castle/den, Maupertuis, literally the "bad/ evil hole," further emphasizes that the fox belongs to the underworld, to orifices. The figure of the trickster is often stressed at the beginning of the tales: "Renart seduces, Renart cajoles, Renart is an evil teacher. With him, nobody ends with clean pants [belts]" ("Renars atrait, Renars acole: / Molt est Renars de male escole. / De lui n'a nuls corroies ointes," 25-27, H - *Le puits*). The "evil teaching" of the fox dragging everybody into the mud represents, provocatively, an invitation to enjoy the main character's immoral adventures, but also to share Renart's animality, to dirty one's pants by following the fox.

Whereas *Guillaume de Palerne* and the lays stage transitory animal embodiments, the *Roman de Renart*'s characters permanently inhabit their animal bodies. Because of his nature as a talking – even talkative – beast gifted with *logos* who routinely outsmarts human and nonhuman characters alike, a major scholarly discussion regarding Renart relates to his anthropomorphism. The character of Renart himself represents neither a human consciousness trapped in an animal body – like the werewolves – nor an animal endowed with a human voice, but both at the same time. The texts playfully and unevenly alternate human and animal features

[261] Roger Bellon, "Lévi-Strauss en Renardie," in *Banquets et manières de table au Moyen Âge* (Presses universitaires de Provence, 1996), 395.
[262] Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 113, but see also 56-74..

in the course of Renart's adventures, staging an unspoken metamorphosis devoid of magic for Elisabeth Charbonnier.[263] For Strubel, too, anthropomorphism in *Renart* is never a metaphor or a stable given, but an ongoing and precarious metamorphosis, a constant process blurring the limit between humanity and animality, while Bianciotto insists that *Renart* imprints several levels of human and animal realities without producing a coherent image.[264] Recent works have questioned whether there is any anthropomorphism at all in this collection of tales, because characters can adopt human behavior without any change in their animal morphology, which results in no anthropomorphism or metamorphosis properly speaking.[265] My reading takes a step away from these debates on anthropomorphism; instead, my interest lies in the different perspectives shaped by animal bodies, and the kinds of subjects that inhabit the animal flesh in these tales.

I argue that the contrast between the transitory embodiments studied earlier and the permanent embodiments in *Renart* constitutes a difference not of nature, but of degree. However, the envisioning of an animal perspective becomes more systematic in *Renart* that it was in the previous texts I read, and it is not subsumed into a coming-of-age narrative for an aristocratic subject. Renart remains a fox despite his *logos* and aristocratic titles, and he drags everybody into the mud with him. Instead of asserting the main character's humanity in the end, as in metamorphosis stories, Renart's adventures unsettle the distinction between human and animal,

[263] Elisabeth Charbonnier, "Animalité et Anthropomorphisme," in *Métamorphose et Bestiaire Fantastique Au Moyen Âge*, ed. Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: Ecole Normale Supérieure de Jeunes Filles, 1985), 173.
[264] Strubel et al., *Le Roman de Renart*, XXXVII.
Gabriel Bianciotto, "Renart et son cheval," in *Études de langue et de littérature du Moyen Âge offertes à Félix Lecoy par ses collègues, ses élèves et ses amis* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1973), 41-42.
[265] Louis-Patrick Bergot, "Le problème de l'anthropomorphisme dans le *Roman de Renart* : approche cognitive." (Communication au 141e Congrès national des sociétés historiques et scientifiques « L'animal et l'homme », Université de Rouen, 2016), 2-3.

because they offer no clarification of ontological statuses at the end, as Renart remains simultaneously a lord and a fox.

Lady Pinte's mourning of her deceased, half-devoured sisters, all granted personhood and individuality, illustrates a disturbing reality of the *Roman de Renart*: that it is "above all a universe where one eats, and where one eats adversaries gifted with language, not just thing-ified animals."[266] An "epic of hunger," the *Roman de Renart* insists that physiological needs motivate Renart's adventures.[267] Hunger illustrates a shared corporeality between the animal characters and the human audiences. The tales almost systematically depict animal bodies tormented with hunger, and Renart's adventures commonly start with the necessity of finding food, for himself or for his cubs. The authors describe at length the animal's suffering caused by hunger, alternating comparisons with the feudal world; they describe hunger waging war against the fox (C - 2., 20); they engage the audience's empathy, as when Renart's whole family cries because of the pain caused by starvation (H - *Le Partage des proies*, 22-30); and they describe the fox's own bodily reactions to hunger. In *Le Puits*, Renart's body seems animated by hunger as he is leaving the woods:

> He stopped and yawned, hungry. He was thin and very frail; there was a famine in the country. From time to time, he stretches, and his belly, as well as the guts inside, wonder what his legs and fangs are doing. He whines in anxiety and distress, because of the great hunger that torments him.
>
> Arestés s'est; de fain baaille:
> Maigres estoit et molt chetis,
> Grant fains avoit en son pais.
> D'eures en autres s'estendelle
> Et ses ventres si s'esmervelle
> Et si boel qui sont dedens
> Que font ses poes et ses dens.

[266] "C'est avant tout un univers où on mange, et où on mange des adversaires doués de langage, pas seulement des animaux chosifiés." Jean Batany, *Scène et coulisses du "Roman de Renart."* (Paris: Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1989), 201.
[267] Strubel et al., *Le Roman de Renart*, XXXXI.

D'angoisse gient et de destrece
Et dou grant fain qui moult le blesce. (H – *Le Puits*, 48-56)

Every feeling finds its translation in a bodily reaction – hunger in yawning, anxiety in moaning, restlessness in stretching – and in return, these bodily reactions translate affects into sensations, making them tangible, focusing the text's attention on the fox's corporeality through his suffering. Even if it is unlikely that the writers and most of the audience of the *Roman,* who belonged to the elites of the time, themselves experienced starvation, hunger represents a highly relatable feeling, and the need to be fed a universal imperative for every living being. The fox's guts, animated by hunger, protesting the inactivity of the legs and the maw, encapsulate in a few words the sensation of the empty belly and provide a justification for Renart's subsequent action: stealing poultry from monks.

The texts routinely depict Renart as a victim of hunger, but Renart often relies on other nonhuman characters' own hunger to trick them. He does so multiple times with the wolf who craves meat, or he traps the cat in a room where the peasants will beat him up by promising that there are mice inside, but sometimes, simply coveting food out of gluttony is enough. When summoned to the court to respond for his crimes, Renart gets rid of his escort, Brun the bear, by exploiting the bear's alleged love for honey, but also the bear's specific embodiment; Renart reaches to other creatures through their bodily reality, the way they suffer through flesh, but also the way they move into space, the way they interact with their environment. At first, Renart recognizes the bear's approach by his gait ("Reconneü l'avoit au cors", C - 10., 496; "course" in another version, H – *Le jugement*, 515), merging the bear's walk to the bear's body in a wordplay on "cors" that means both "body" and "walking" in Old French. Identifying a given body with the way this specific body moves, more than the way it looks, is a constant in the tales, as when Renart's fox walk is described as "small jumps" ("S'en vet Renart les saus menuz," C –

1., 301), or when he recognizes the badger by the way this one enters in a den, "bottom first" ("le cul avant, la teste ariere," C - 10., 954).

The fox then reflects on how he could torment the bear's body ("comment son cors porra tenser," C - 10., 498), and he decides to lead him in a trap by promising him honey, taking him to a hole in a tree where the bear's head gets stuck as he tries to get the imaginary honey. Beaten up by a group of peasants that appears, Brun struggles to escape and skins his head as he pulls it out of the trunk. The narrator details that "there is not enough skin left on Brun's face to make a purse with it" ("En tot son vis n'a tant de pel / Dont l'en peüst fere une borse," C - 10., 650-651), referring to human uses of bear's pelt, and to what would have probably happened to Brun's whole body if the peasants managed to kill him. Brun doesn't become meat or clothing, but he fails to properly escape and save his skin, triggering a succession of cruel jokes, from Renart asking him which religious order he joined with his "red hood" ("rouge chaperon", 697), to Noble the lion asking him who removed his hood in such an ugly way (712). Disfigured, the bear becomes "the ugliest beast ever seen" ("Onc nus ne vit si lede beste," 648), turned into a monster who is not quite a recognizable bear anymore, his face reduced to a "red hood," making visible the raw flesh that lies behind any skin. Brun's flayed head becomes the sensuous sign of and tangible martyr to Renart's crimes at the court, inscribing these crimes in a bloody flesh where every animal present can project their own suffering (and other animals get murdered or mutilated during this story of Renart's "judgement," whereas he triumphantly escapes his death sentence, with his skin still on his back).

While *Guillaume de Palerne* presented us with mysterious bears' skins hanging in a kitchen and worn by lovers who hide by impersonating bears, the *Roman de Renart* introduces a living bear who is skinned alive, associating flaying with physical pain, mutilation, and cruelty.

The insistence on the "red hood" recalls the bloody, suffering flesh behind the flayed skin. Not that the tales argue against animal abuse or call for much empathy with the fox's foes, since Renart's mutilation of his enemies is a recurring source of jokes and wordplays. But like the guts protesting hunger, the description of physical pain invites the audience to consider the animal character not as an object, but as a perceiving subject –which is not to say an equal– through recognizable bodily sensations. Moreover, each cruel punishment derives from the targeted animal's own embodiment. The bear sticks his head in a trunk while looking for honey; the cat sneaks his lean body in a room where a slipknot traps him like the mice he covets; the wolf loses his tail after Renart convinces him to fish with it in a freezing lake, and so on.

If hunger and pain stage a shared corporeality across living beings – characters of the stories as well as the readership – bodily differences condition the way animals move through space, as suggested by Brun's body/gait (cors/cors). By conditioning ways to move and to interact with the others, each specific embodiment modifies the relationship to space in the stories; following Renart's quest for food implies for example imagining geography at a fox's height, that is, sharing the fox's perspective on the environment that surrounds him. This is to be invited into the fox's *Umwelt*. Renart barely encounters the castles and hermitages proper to most vernacular literature (*Renart le noir* constituting a singular exception); these settings are replaced by opulent farms, well-stocked abbeys, and crowded barnyards, all ready to be poached, and the main character travels from the woods to human-crafted landscapes, in a reverse move from chivalric romances.[268]

Wandering in the countryside, the starving fox comes across a rich peasant's house, whose barnyard abounds in chicken, but is circled by a strong wooden fence (H – *Le Partage des*

[268] James R. Simpson, *Animal Body, Literary Corpus: The Old French "Roman de Renart,"* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 94.

proies, 93-106). The following lines then describe the fox's growing frustration, watching the prey he cannot reach, until he makes a discovery:

> Circling around the fence, Renart the red-haired, the evil, eventually discovers, by chance, a stake rotted by the water running out of the garden when it rains. Through there he enters inside, carefully, and he swears on his fangs that soon he will make his whiskers rustle on a capon or a hen, whatever the harm that will come out of it.
>
> Tant va a destre et a senestre
> Renars li rous, li maleïs,
> Que par devers le plasseïs
> Trova un pel par aventure
> Qui ert uses de poreture
> Par la ou il regors couroit
> Dou jardin quant pleü avoit :
> Par la s'en est entrés dedans
> Tout souef, et jure ses dens
> Qu'a cui que il doie nuire
> Fera il ja ses grenons bruire
> Ou de capon ou de geline. (H – *Le Partage des proies*, 152-163)

Close to the ground, the fox notices something that could have escaped a human character's attention, a hole in the fence which his lean body can go through. Combined with his intelligence, the fox's physical characteristics allow him to detect and take advantage of the situation. The rotten stake appears as an affordance for the fox. James Gibson defines affordances as "what [the environment] offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes;" those affordances are "relative to the animal," specific to the needs and body of a given animal.[269] An affordance represents precisely a possibility of projection of one's body into its surroundings, of making sense of one's environment through one specific embodiment. The fox's perception of the environment derives from the specific agency of the body he inhabits, founding his perspective on an articulation of sight and embodiment, where the first relies on the second.

[269] James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), 127.

Renart swearing on his fangs that he will soon be able to devour a bird both echoes and contradicts an earlier comment from the narrator: “I believe and swear by my teeth that he will stay outside” (“Mais je cuit et croi par mes dens / Qu’il fera par dehors sejor,” H - *Le Partage des proies*, 102-103). This curious swearing on one’s teeth that the fox won’t be able to put his fangs on a prey introduces a parallel between the animal and human jaws, stressing what the fox and the narrator have in common: teeth of course (and”dens” can be translated by both teeth and fangs), but also a shared carnivorism that appears in the unveiling of the teeth and in the competition between human characters and the fox, a competition materialized by the fence that is supposed to keep the fox outside. Whereas the (human) narrator swears on his teeth that the fox won’t enter the barnyard and won’t access the chicken raised for human consumption, hinting at a human complicity with his audience against wild animals’ depredations, the fox swears on his fangs that he will do precisely that, overturning the obstacle with his own animals means, those afforded by his specific embodiment.

By looking at the flaw in the fence, the fox recognizes what the rotten stake affords him, that is, entrance to the barnyard. Most importantly, it takes the audience’s gaze to the level of the fox’s, and conditions sight to embodiment. Mischievously contradicting his earlier stance that Renart would not enter, the narrator leads the audience to consider a fox’s point of view, physically, by showing the fox circumventing the obstacle designed precisely to keep him out. Not only does Renart’s intrusion jeopardize the separation between the domestic space of the barnyard and its “wild” outside, but the tale invites a sharing of Renart’s perspective, dragging the audience into the muddy hole and through the fence with Renart.

Various affordances are spotted by the fox in his adventures. In the tale mentioned at the opening of this chapter, where Renart tries to devour Chantecler the rooster – prior to the latter's nightmare – the fox finds, once again, a damaged stake that allows him to enter a barnyard:

> And Renart goes stealthily, swaying, and at the fence's angle he sees a crumbling stake and gets in. Where the fence was loose, the peasant had planted cabbage. Renart enters there, goes through the fence, and lets himself fall to hide himself from sight.
>
> Et Renart se va chanlevant,
> El retor del paliz choisist
> .I. pel froissié, dedens se mist.
> La ou li paliz fu desclos
> Avoit li vilain planté chos.
> Renart i entre, outre s'en passe,
> Chair se laisse a une masse
> Por ce que la gent ne le voient. (C - 5., 49-55)

To translate the expression "to go *chanlevant*," I follow Gabriel Bianciotto who points out that the word designates a fox's swaying walk when it prepares to approach a prey, moving up and down its spine.[270] It is unclear if the cabbage was planted to hide the fact that the fence was damaged, or if it's just a happy coincidence for the fox who can sneak through the fence and immediately hide among the vegetables. The cover provided by the cabbage represents another opportunistic use by the fox of his environment, benefitting simultaneously of his own small size and of the presence of the plants at this particular space.

On the other hand, the human-shaped landscape also makes the fox vulnerable; the same affordances that grant him access to food can fail him. In *Les enfances Renart*, the fox is spotted in a fresh-cut clearing by the wolf Isengrin:

> At the turn of the road, there was a clearing, next to an enclosure, where Renart almost got caught. The peas had been cut already, and the stalks were bound together and put in bundles alongside the road. Renart knew his way well: he came to ferret, to investigate, and to watch out for meat. Ysengrin, who could ask for nothing better than seizing him, lowers his head and recognizes him.

[270] See Bianciotto's footnotes in Fukumoto et al., *Le Roman de Renart*, 137 and 167.

Einsint come la voie change,
Lez .I. essart, delez .I. clos,
La du estre Renart enclos.
L'en avoit ja les pois soiez,
Et le pesaz estoit lïez
Et amassé et tret en voie.
La savoit bien Renart la voie :
Venuz i estoit por furgier
Et por enquire et por surgier
Dont il poïst avoir viande.
Ysengin, qui el ne demande
Mes que il tenir le peüst,
Besse la teste, sel connut. (C - 1., 498-510)

The enclosure implies the presence of chickens, even if they are not mentioned, but the rhyme clos/ enclos (enclosure/ getting caught) highlights how the fox's search for meat entails risks, frequently leading him to get almost caught by human beings defending their property, or by the wolf in this case. Here, the cut peas cannot hide Renart as the cabbage did in the previous example, but they make human interventions in the landscape visible as well as staging the impact a medieval author would imagine they have on a beast, who needs some sort of cover from the environment to move safely through space. The wolf lowering the head emphasizes again the fox's small size, but this time framed as vulnerability: the fox cannot fight the much bigger wolf. He nonetheless uses his small size to escape the wolf once again, running through "the narrow way" ("la voie estroite," C - 1., 519) and finding shelter in a "steep hollow" ("val crués," 529), again fashioning the text's environment through body-environment interactions.

These body-environment interactions highlight the senses and emphasize orientation through a given space with a given body, fleshing out Renart's adventures with a peculiar attention to the sensible, that calls on a phenomenology of the flesh. Since, for Merleau-Ponty, one measures the world through one's body, the flesh of the world is understood through the

flesh of the body, in the sense that it draws a landscape from the senses.[271] Or, in other words, "the sensible is the flesh of the world, i.e., the sense/ meaning in the external."[272] Renart's environment comes to be through the way Renart moves through it. At the same time, the way Renart moves fashions his own body: the steep hollow only exists in the text for what it can afford to the fox, and the fox's embodiment takes shape through its capacity to enter the steep hollow. Writing the perspective from a fox's body redesigns the world at fox's heights, distorting a familiar environment suddenly entirely encapsulated in the "narrow way" that only a fox can use, and certainly not a wolf or a human being. If the notion of *Umwelt* insists on a bodily delimitation of a creature's own world-view, the perceptive flesh opens the *Umwelt* to the Other.[273] As we follow Renart in the "narrow way," we share his own perspective on his surroundings, and what his environment can afford to him and couldn't for someone in a human body.

The sense of detail displayed by the authors of the *Renart* not only renders the animals' adventures more vivid, but it invites the audience / reader to think beyond their own bodies; to orient ourselves differently. To quote Sara Ahmed, "What makes bodies different is how they inhabit space: space is not a container for the body; it does not contain the body as if the body were 'in it.' Rather bodies are submerged, such that they become the space they inhabit; in taking up space, bodies move through space and are affected by the 'where' of that movement. It is through this movement that the surface of spaces as well as bodies takes shapes."[274] Swaying with Renart's body along the fences, running with him on paths that would be impracticable for a

[271] Merleau-Ponty, *La nature*, 278-280.
Merleau-Ponty's use of the word "flesh" as the sensual world altogether recalls the Old Testament and the Hebrew word for flesh, *bâsâr*, that extends to corporeal matter as a whole, human and nonhuman, beyond bodies. Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages*, 27.
[272] "Le sensible est la chair du monde, i.e., le sens dans l'extérieur." Merleau-Ponty, *La nature*, 280.
[273] Merleau-Ponty, *La nature*, 283-287.
[274] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 53.

wolf (or a human being!), sneaking through rotten fences and steep hollows to the evil hole of Maupertuis, the text reshapes the landscape of medieval French literature as it shapes the audience's perspective through Renart's own fluid embodiment which which the reader/ listener is invited to identify. And this play of identification is only possible through an awareness of sharing the same flesh as the fox, that is, the same faculty to feel and to perceive, beyond delineated bodies and *Umwelten*.

The possibility to "be" the fox, and not just the disciple of his "evil teaching," finds an illustration in a later text that does not properly belong to the *Renart*, a fourteenth-century poem, *Le dit de la queue* (The Tale of the Tail). Addressing a Parisian audience, the anonymous poet laments that in adopting the fashion of wearing a fox's tail on their hats or as a hairstyle, the princes have elevated Renart as a model that even the clergy emulate:

> Renart has reached the top. Everybody honors him nowadays: prelates, bishops, abbots. Everybody works for him nowadays: priests, monks, Jacobins, Cordeliers, and beguines, who are hypocrites, because they hide Renart behind their cloaks / skins.
>
> Regnart est en haut montez.
> Chascun au jour d'uy l'onneure :
> Prelas, evesques, abbez.
> Chascun au jour d'ui labeure :
> Prestres, moingnes, Jacobins,
> Cordeliers et li beguins,
> Qui font bien le papelart.
> Sous leur chapes ont Regnart. (H - Le dit de la queue, 41-48)

A colorful portrait of the Parisian population follows, sparing nobody, from noble ladies to brewers to carpenters, all inspired by Renart, judged responsible for wars and for the poor state of the society in general.[275] The poem ends with a prayer to get rid of the fox who leads his followers to hell ("Pour ceux en enfer mener / Qui se traient a sa part," 174-175). This moralistic

[275] To be true, the context of the fourteenth century, marked by endless wars and by a massive epidemiologic and demographic crisis, contrasts steeply with the booming twelfth and thirteenth centuries during which the original *Roman de Renart* was composed.

poem represents a very different take on the character from the *Roman de Renart* properly speaking; its purpose is as much to edify as to entertain, if not more, and the fox is no more than a lifeless, fleshless symbol, eviscerated since he is literally reduced to an ornamental tail, to fashionable uses of his fur. However, I want to draw attention to the last word of the excerpt above: "chapes." A first possible, quite logical translation is "cloaks" – behind the cloak that signals the religious man's status, he hides Renart, a figure of deceptiveness and treachery – but as discussed earlier, "chapes" also means "skins," and particularly the skin that the fox wants to save when he es*cap*es, when he saves his "chapes."[276] The fox tail that was in fashion in the fourteenth century may as well signal that behind a human skin, there's a fox hiding, bringing us back to Queen Felise's interrogations when she saw the lover's beautiful clothing behind the deerskin. Whose flesh lurks behind the social skin of the cloaks, or behind a literal human skin? Particularly since the poet associates the behavior of the failed Christians (hypocrisy, treason, warmongering) to a sign of animality, the fox's tail. The fox's tail threatens the human status of the flesh under the religious cloaks, fancy clothing of the aristocracy, or workwear of the laborious classes, a flesh good for hell and not for the Resurrection, if the fox is not extirpated from under its skin.

Cross-species literary identification entails recognizing the possibility of a nonhuman perspective (and the personhood that stems from it), but the *Renart* points to a fluidity of perspectives and possibilities of identification that ontologically destabilizes not only the multicultural/ mono-natural Western conceptual system, but doesn't quite fit with the monocultural/ multinatural system of perspectivist cultures as well. Either way, Western and

[276] Another possible origin for the word "to escape" would be that it refers to the cloak that one would leave behind in the hands of the pursuers, while escaping. See Thangam Ravindranathan, *Behold an Animal: Four Exorbitant Readings* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2020), 65.

perspectivist ontologies presuppose a stable referent, a common nature or a common culture. *Renart* moves close to the perspectivist system, by presupposing a "san" in animal bodies, but it never quite fully goes there, since the referents (whether cultural or natural) are never stabilized, and always a playground for the fox who invites his (human) audience to dirty their pants and to follow him in his narrow ways. What's proper to "man" and what's proper to the beast are never untangled in these tales, as it never is in *Le dit de la queue*. Quite the contrary, the poems actively confuse these categories, to the point that it's not clear if the perspective given is human or animal; is the deceptiveness of the clergy inspired by Renart a product of human hypocrisy or of animal cunning? Does it even matter to make that difference? Ultimately, cross-species identification is not only made possible by the flesh, that is, by the simultaneous shared corporeality of beings and the wrapping of the world in one's flesh through the senses that extends relationality beyond one's individual body, but also by a "san" that seems *presupposed* by the flesh: if a creature can feel, what prevents it to have its own mind; to be a person?

Over the course of this chapter, and more broadly of this dissertation, the distinction between body and flesh has been primordial, even though the two concepts overlap frequently and exist only in dialogue with the other, with no real possibility of separation. If my focus on materiality allowed me, slyly, to cast aside the question of the mind, or of the spirit, perspectivism brings this question back through its notion of personhood, not in opposition to the materiality of the flesh, as a Cartesian approach would entail, but as something that actually goes hand in hand with flesh. Perspectivism presupposes that every being has a similar mind, and that species are differentiated by their bodies: different natures but one shared culture, a multinaturalism strikingly different from Western multiculturalism, with one nature divided in

different cultures, and nonhuman animals being part of nature and excluded from culture. Sharing flesh across species enables human characters to experiment with other embodiments, to impersonate animals, to envision different spaces; to inhabit their own flesh differently, whether the alternative embodiment is transitory or permanent and, beyond, to inhabit their world differently.

But what makes human characters able to impersonate animals in the texts, a king to call a rivalrous knight a wolf, or a medieval author to imagine a werewolf's or a fox's adventures, is not only sharing flesh and its potency of trans-corporeality, but the possibility of sharing something other than flesh, that yet belongs to flesh: minds. Whether the texts stage a fox duping his world, a (were)wolf leaving his pursuers behind, the possibility for hunted animals to "give the change" to their chasers, or a rooster expressing his fear to be devoured, there is, consistently, the possibility for animals to have a mind of their own, which certainly puts medieval literature closer to Amazonian perspectivism than to modern dichotomies. However, medieval French literature cannot be said to be "multinaturalist" in the sense that perspectivism is: the feudal world of *Renart* works essentially as satire, and does not imply that people in the Middle Ages believed in an animal kingdom mimicking their own social organization. Nonetheless, like the werewolf proving his "sen d'ume," his human mind, by acting as a devoted dog to the king, the possibility of having a "sen" is always inscribed in flesh, in physical actions for creatures deprived of *logos*, and relatable because human and nonhuman animals are all part of a fleshly continuum. This long journey brings us finally back to the etymology of the animal: something that is animated, and by the principle called the *animus*: the spirit.[277] Flesh is not dead matter – as

[277] Following an Aristotelian tradition, having a spirit (animus) does not entail having a soul (anima) though, and this distinction was important for medieval theologians; it also makes compatible the possibility for animals to have a spirit while preserving human exceptionalism by reserving the afterlife to human beings who have a soul, and not just a spirit. See Bynum, "Why All the Fuss about the Body?", 13, and Agamben, *The Open,* 13-14.

opposed to meat, but also to all the parts of the material world that cannot move by themselves – but is animated by spirit; in a culture permeated with the principle that the Word became flesh (John 1:14), enfleshment and animation (in the sense of being given an *animus*) cannot be untangled, and yet the secular texts I read depart from the Scriptures by extending spirit, and the possibility of personhood attached to it, to nonhuman animals. The double principle enfleshment/ animation doesn't work as a dichotomy but reciprocates itself as a mutual ontological consequence, and it cannot be contained within human bodies: flesh is animated matter, personhood materialized through enfleshment. And this double principle enfleshment/ animation overflows individual bodies, making the person-as-being possible only through its relations to other beings and to its environment; a productive, dynamic opening rather than the trap of the enclosure.

Shapeshifting, impersonating nonhuman animals, and talkative beasts all represent literary consequences of the ontological correspondence between flesh and spirit. Speech can come out of an animal mouth, and a noble man can be changed into a wolf and eat raw meat; as soon as matter is animated, that it is flesh, having a mind of one's own becomes a possibility. The wide circulation, even banality, of these trans-corporeal, transspecies transformations and impersonations in medieval French literature testifies to a fluidity that does not undermine the human-animal "divide" per se, but that multiplies and displaces its lines of demarcation. Body-environment interactions (permitted by and through flesh) produce an endless stream of different embodiments, of different ways to inhabit one's flesh and one's "world-around," in a constant play that summons a variety of cultural influences and slips outside its own Christian framework more often than not. In return, if nonhuman animals can have a mind of their own, human characters who already share flesh with them can also share a very similar type of mind, and can

thereby be very similar *persons*, as the Parisians haunted by the crafty, immoral spirit of the fox whose tail they display on their hats, or Guillaume who, as a knight, replicates the savagery of a wild beast in the battlefield and apparently threatens to devour his horse out of affection for him. Not unlike Renart who consistently es/capes judgment for his crimes, saving both his flesh and his immoral spirit, the ontological statuses of human and animal, whose unity in flesh always threatens to lead to a unity of spirit, appears too fluid, too slippery, to be fully encased in theological, modern, or contemporary dichotomies, for they give us the change, more often than not.

Chapter 5. Conclusion:
More Than the Eye Can See

Throughout "Sharing Flesh" I endeavored to make visible the material processes that form social identities in medieval French literature, conceptualizing flesh as what connects, on one hand, social distinctions, hierarchies, and ontologies, with eating practices, butchering, and bodily boundaries on the other hand; in other words, to flesh out social formation by stressing its corporeality in works of fiction. Here I want to continue to unravel the threads that I pulled out from *Ignaure*, the C*hevalier au lion*, and the corpus of texts investigated in the fourth chapter, and to bring them together. I do so by welcoming back Perlesvaus or rather, Perceval, his singular model, main protagonist of one of the most canonical Old French texts, Chrétien de Troyes's twelfth-century *Conte du Graal*, where many themes addressed by this dissertation unfurl: the romance opens with a hunting scene; chivalric quests result from broken rules of commensality; and most famously, the incomplete narrative initiates the motif of the Grail quest, when Perceval fails to ask who is served by a "graal," a plate carried in a mysterious procession. The motif of the grail, an invention from Chrétien, calls attention to a plate's contents not by directly questioning what's in there, but for which use and for whom. Even though I argued in the introduction that flesh is the condition of visibility, since it represents the materiality of the sensible, the *Conte du Graal* plays with the (in)visibility of the flesh by questioning what can be on one's plate, in which there seems to be always more than the eye can see.

Flesh is the condition of visibility, yet, and this is not a trivial paradox, it has to be revealed, as several examples of this dissertation demonstrated. The unveiling of the flesh often takes a gruesome shape, as when Brun's face is reduced to a bloody flesh as he is skinned alive in the *Roman de Renart*, becoming an unrecognizable creature who could be any other, since every creature is made of a similar flesh. Flesh can also be revealed by its absence or material erasure. In *Ignaure*, the carnality of the main protagonist's relationship with the ladies comes to the fore when the husbands decide to serve his penis to the ladies as a meal, literally uncovering the sexual consumption that took place as they uncover his genitals to castrate him. In a similar fashion to *Ignaure* when it comes to revealing flesh by subtracting it, the *Conte du Graal* stresses the importance of commensality as a set of rules and social praxis, precisely when these rules are not respected; flesh becomes visible when social practices of consumption are voluntarily or accidentally transgressed. Perceval, a young hunger of noble origins but without any education, and thus oblivious of social codes, misunderstands his mother's advice and behaves in an outrageous way with a lady he meets. He manifests his ignorance of courtly rules by kissing her and taking her ring by force – despite his mother's lesson about the rites of courtly love and consent – but also by sitting himself at the lady's table, uninvited, to eat her food and drink her wine, "as much as he wished" ("tant con il plot," 723); his ravenous appetite underscores his asociality.[278] The text associates kissing a lady without her consent with eating, uninvited, the meat that belongs to someone else; Perceval's sexual misconduct and non-commensal eating practices mirror each other, at the expense of the assaulted lady.

[278] Chrétien de Troyes, "Le Conte du Graal, ou Le Roman de Perceval (Édition et traduction de Charles Méla, d'après le manuscript Berne 354," in *Chrétien de Troyes: romans suivis des Chansons, avec, en appendice, Philomena*, ed. Charles Méla and Jean-Marie Fritz, 1. éd, Le livre de poche Classiques modernes (Paris: Libr. Générale Française, 2005), 964. All translations are mine.

This scene, which bears important consequences for the lady who is then mistreated by her lover, prefigures a later one at the court of King Arthur, when the Vermilion Knight defies the King's authority by publicly pouring a glass of wine over the queen, offering to the young Perceval his first opportunity to shine as a knight when he avenges the queen and kills the intruder who insulted her. At this point, the reader of this dissertation won't be surprised to read that the uncourtly knight ends up butchered and his mutilated flesh explicitly compared to meat; on top of that, Perceval takes for himself the Vermilion Knight's weapons and armor, literally unveiling his flesh as he denudes his dead body and symbolically turns him into meat, into a dehumanized matter, as a retribution for disrespecting the queen in a commensal context.

A third account of a disturbed meal occurs at the castle of the Fisher King. Perceval has received some education by now and during the dinner he sees a procession of several marvels including a spear dripping blood from its tip and most importantly a "graal." Perceval, who has been warned to not talk too much and to not ask stupid questions, doesn't dare inquire about the procession that passes in front of him three times; instead he focuses on his own meal. Whereas the text names the luxurious meal provided to Perceval, including a "stag's hip with pepper sauce" ("hanche de cerf au poivre," 3222), the content of the grail remains at first mysterious, despite the fact that the grail is "uncovered" ("descovert," 3239). When Perceval wakes the following day, the castle is empty; he later learns the identity of the lord he met, a disabled man called the Fisher King. Perceval is held accountable for the ruin of the land, because he didn't ask *the* question that would have cured the Fisher King from his infirmity and brought back prosperity, the question of "who is served by the grail" ("Do graal cui l'an servoit," 3183). The question is not about what the plate precisely contains, but about to whom the invisible food is served. The food will be revealed with its recipient, which implies that a plate's contents makes

sense in regard to whom and how it will be consumed, that is, that it doesn't hold any value in itself, outside its own commensal context.

It's only toward the "end" of the uncompleted romance that a hermit reveals to Perceval that the grail contains not "pike, lamprey, or salmon" ("Luz ne lamproie ne salmon," 6347), but the Eucharist that keeps the Fisher King's own father alive. The Eucharist, synonymous with an enfleshed god, substitutes for the animal flesh one would expect to find on a plate. I won't comment on the symbolism of Chrétien's liturgy of the grail and its possible meanings – these have puzzled generations of readers from the late twelfth century onward – but I'm interested here by the interplay between the visible and the invisible, that is, between the venison meal Perceval enjoys and the invisibility of the meal contained in the grail, even though, as the text stresses, the grail is uncovered and lidless. The contents of the grail are a flesh twice invisible, first, the absent flesh of the fish one would have expected as part of the Fisher King's father's dinner and that only exists as a discursive referent, what *is not* in the plate, and second, the flesh of god that is contained in the Host, but that doesn't look like flesh.[279]

I have argued throughout this dissertation that the consumption of flesh – including *how* it is consumed – brings to the fore one's status. In the Fisher King's father's case, the fact that he doesn't eat animal flesh, but subsists exclusively on Christ's flesh, marks his status as a "holy man" ("sainz hom," 6348). In Perceval's case, his glutinous devouring of the meat marks his earlier status as a crude, uneducated young man ignorant of courtly mores, whereas later, his silent savoring of the venison, without daring to ask about who is served by the other plate – the grail – betrays his new anxiety to behave correctly at the table and to not violate the Fisher

[279] With a few literary and mystic exceptions, such as the thirteenth-century *Queste del saint Graal*, where the Christ covered in blood spectacularly emerges from the grail to give communion to Galaad.
Fanni Bogdanow and Anne Berrie, eds., *La quête du Saint -Graal: roman en prose du XIIIe siècle*, Lettres gothiques (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2006).

King's hospitality. Perceval is now aware that there are certain ways to eat that signal his belonging or non-belonging to the courtly community to which he aspires. The way one eats and what one eats reveal the formation of identities and of social values in literary texts, positioning characters in larger social constructions that reflect the worldview of French nobles.

Whereas eating venison signals an aristocratic status, and subsisting on the flesh of Christ a holy status, there are ways to consume flesh that are degrading, and that work as a literary device to illustrate one's subhuman status. In the *Chanson d'Antioche*, an anonymous 1180s epic recounting the events of the First Crusade (1096-1099), a famine affecting the Christian troops besieging Antioch leads to acts of cannibalism (likely reflecting historical events), but not just any human flesh is consumed, and not by any Christian soldier. It's a "subaltern class of the poor" within the Christian army that commits cannibalism, the Tafurs, and they devour dead Turkish soldiers, not their own.[280] The Tafurs treat the corpses as though they were animals, butchering them in order to be able to consume them: "They flayed the Turks, removing the skin, and they cooked them by boiling them or by spit-roasting them" ("Les Turs ont escorciet, s'en ont le quir osté, / En l'eve et el rostier ont le car quisiné," 4052-4053). The detailed, realistic account of how the Tafurs butcher and cook the Turks doesn't just demonstrate the consumption of human flesh as a possibility. It also shows that, taboo aside, butchering somebody would be something relatively easy to do on a material level, because of the knowledge that medieval people already had from the consumption of animal flesh.[281] Far from understating the gravity of the act, the poet adds a second round of details that I reproduce in full:

> With their sharp knives, [the Tafurs] flayed the Turks, down in the meadow. As they saw the pagans, they cut them into pieces, and cooked them with water or coals. They ate

[280] Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 2003), 33.
[281] Bernard Guidot, ed., *La chanson d'Antioche: chanson de geste du dernier quart du XIIe siècle*, Éd. bilingue, Champion classiques 33 (Paris: H. Champion, 2011), 506.

them willingly, without bread or salt, and one said to the other: "This is delicious, it's worth more than pork or roasted bacon."

A lor coutels qu'il ont trençans et afilés
Escorçoient les Turs, aval par mi les prés.
Voiant paiens les ont par pieces decolpés,
En l'eve et es carbons les ont bien quisinés.
Volunteers les manjüent, sans pain, tos dessalés;
Et dist l'uns a l'autre: "Molt est cis savourés,
Mius vaut que car de porc ne que bacons ullés" (4068-4074)

Not only do the Tafurs eat human flesh, but they enjoy it. The dead Turks are reduced to meat and this time, unlike Harpin de la Montagne or the Vermilion Knight, their flesh is not just butchered, but consumed as actual meat. In a particularly sinister joke, the flesh of the Muslims is even said to taste better than pork. If the aristocratic members of the army do not take part in the cannibal feast, they do not oppose it either, and the army's Norman leaders actually laugh at the practice ("rïant," 4101). One of them then denies any responsibility for the feast, saying that they didn't order it, and seems to suggest that the Tafurs "naturally" enjoy human flesh, "they enjoy the flesh of the Turks more than peppered peacocks" ("Plus ainment cars de Turs que päons enpevrés," 4117). Not only does this comment appear spectacularly cynical, for peppered peacock was a luxury dish that the Tafurs would never have the opportunity to try, and the soldiers were starving and given nothing to eat before they consumed the dead Turks, but it turns the Tafurs' cannibalism into a question of *taste*, almost as a cultural choice, that distinguishes them from the rest of the Christian army. Geraldine Heng has argued that accusing the Tafurs and only the Tafurs of cannibalism is "scapegoating"; it holds only a portion of the Christian army (the poorest, nonnoble, and possibly even racially ambiguous one) accountable for what appears as a historical stain on the morality of the Crusades, even for their contemporaries.[282] The Tafurs' sharing the Turks' flesh emphasizes the becoming-meat of the enemy as well as the

[282] Heng, *Empire of Magic*, 33-34.

Tafurs's own degraded status as man-eaters. The Norman aristocracy distinguishes itself both from the becoming-meat and the man-eating, and yet this scene nonetheless represents Christians devouring Muslims. Even if it could stand as an allegory for colonialism and for the Norman conquests in the Eastern Mediterranean, it's not quite how the Crusaders would present their own ideological project of "freeing" the Holy Land, nor how they would present themselves. The distinction between the Tafurs and the rest of the Christian army appears ambiguous given the Tafurs' unquestioned belonging to Christendom and the amused reaction of the Norman leadership to their exactions.

Furthermore, the cannibalism is not hidden, but demonstrated in full view of the besieged population of Antioch:

> The pagans were greatly frightened by this. They leaned on the remparts, attracted by the smell of the [cooked] flesh; the debauched soldiers are watched by twenty thousand pagans. There wasn't a single Turk who didn't cry, grieving the people they ate.
>
> De cel furent paien durement esfreé;
> Por le flair de la car sont al mur acouté,
> De .XX.M. paiens sont li ribaut regardé
> K'il n'i a .I. seul Turc qui n'ait des iex ploré;
> De lor gent qu'il mangüent ont grant dol demené. (4055-4058)

The Turks even claim that "those are not Frenchmen, but vile demons" ("Ço ne sont pas François, ançois sont vif malfé," 4063), explicitly characterizing the cannibal feast as improper to human beings, and identifying as devils not only the Tafurs, but the Christian army as a whole. The shock extends to the emir of Antioch, as he exclaims, from the walls, "these devils are eating our people, look!" ("Cil dïable manjüent nos gens, or esgardés!" 4086). This is a "look!" addressed as much to the Antiochian population as to the audience of the tale invited to imagine a scene whose realism relies on the knowledge of how to skin and break up a body, that a medieval audience would have from experience with the butchering of animals. The emir's

reaction stands in a sharp contrast to the complacent, sardonic attitude of the Norman leaders, whose own attempts to distinguish themselves from the Tafurs appear somewhat weak in comparison to the pure horror felt – and abundantly described – by the besieged people of Antioch, and that the epic's audience is invited to contemplate as well. Through a certain way to consume a certain flesh, the "demonic" status of the Tafurs becomes visible and contaminates the whole Christian army to the eyes of the Turks. Whereas cannibalism or even the suggestion of cannibalism has been used to demonize racialized Others in literary texts, as argued in Chapter 3, in the *Chanson d'Antioche* a Christian poet imagines a Turkish, Muslim perspective in which the Christians are demonized because of their cannibalistic practices, revealing, once again, how unsteady the social distinctions are, and how the expected hierarchies of medieval French literature can be suddenly turned upside down from within by a change of perspective. To the eyes of the (literary) Turks, the Christians lose their own humanity when they erase the Turks' own, by turning their flesh into meat and devouring it, not quite like animals, since the meat is cooked, but not quite as "civilized" humans either, since the meat is unsalted; the cannibals are like devils who inspire only horror in the watchers and who reveal their demonic status through their consumption of human flesh.

The aristocratic male subject of medieval French literature must be an eater of flesh, but apparently not the way the Tafurs are. The *Conte du Graal* similarly stresses the importance of commensality and of consuming flesh in the right way, with Perceval distinguishing himself from the young wild man he previously was through his eating practices, and it ties commensality and carnivorism with carnality: whereas he kisses by force the lady whose food he selfishly eats, once educated Perceval behaves properly with another young lady, Blanchefleur, by which I mean, he behaves as a young knight should do with a lady, in a courtly context,

kissing her with her consent. Whether the context is sexual or commensal, the texts address an appropriate way to deal with the consumption of flesh for the male aristocratic subject and yet, as showed by Perceval's failure at the Fisher King's castle and multiple examples throughout this dissertation – from *Ignaure*'s ladies turning a unwilling cannibal meal into a claim for their own existence as sexual actors to Perlesvaus engaging in extreme punishments framed as consumption to Yvain's trans-species companionship with the lion – this appropriate way to share flesh always escapes any rigorous definition, and the texts themselves often appear as a playground on which to question, sometimes wryly, the centrality of flesh in medieval culture.

In the *Chanson d'Antioche* as well as in the texts read throughout this dissertation, sharing flesh makes visible the devouring structures of society, reflected in the "cannibal poetics" of medieval French literature that I evoked in the introduction; the aristocracy's power appears linked to its capacity to devour the Other and the subaltern, positing its members as devouring subjects, whether their carnivorism is literal or metaphorical.[283] Focusing on flesh unveils a social, cultural, and literal carnivorism, and by doing so it highlights the materiality of the social fabric. This unveiling provokes a destabilization of those devouring structures of society, because it de-naturalizes them: as demonstrated when the Tafurs devour the Turks with the complacent non-opposition of the Norman aristocracy, cannibalism is not restricted to monstrous, racialized Others. The *Chanson d'Antioche* hints at an excessive carnivorism from within Latin Christian society; not just the voracity of the monstrous races such as the giants that knights fight in chivalric romances, but a carnivorism that appears in a feast under the walls of Antioch, orchestrated by Christian subjects even if not approved by the Norman aristocracy – and, seemingly, by the epic's poet – but not contested either. Even though this text belongs to a

[283] Cohen, *Of Giants. Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, 82.

corpus of epics centered on the rivalry with a religious, increasingly racialized Other – the Moor/ Muslim that we met in the *Perlesvaus* and, under disguise, in the *Chevalier au lion* – the *Chanson d'Antioche* complicates the production of racial difference. Reading twelfth century literary texts invite to relocate premodern notions of race in a network of notions of difference, distinction, and privilege, that encompasses religion and class but that is not reducible to it. Given the significance of the consumption of the flesh in those narratives in order to produce / deject the Other, these texts offer to rethink premodern notions of race in relation to a concept of flesh that consistently undercuts the very binary oppositions that the political discourse works to implement.

Sharing flesh is simultaneously a cultural work of boundary-making *and* an undermining of this very work because flesh unites the devouring subject and its devoured object. A fundamental ambiguity results from a quite insolvable tension between outside and inside, between visibility and invisibility, between materiality and immateriality, all folded together through the notion of flesh. It appears insolvable because our categories of thought are inoperative: an epistemology of the flesh has to be rewritten outside of binary oppositions, since those oppositions always represent some kind of butchering, whether talking about separating body from mind, or nature from culture, or the human from the nonhuman. As I sketched in Chapter 4, I argue for an understanding of the concept of flesh that stresses enfleshment as animation (and vice-versa), and that does not rely on an opposition to soul, or to body, or to the world "exterior" to oneself, because such oppositions fail to encompass what flesh *does* to notions of personhood, hierarchies, social formation, and individual identities, enfleshed not in the world, but enfleshed *through* the world. Folded together, the being and its outside are impossible to separate if not through butchering. Moreover, social formation and identities are

made visible through the materiality of the flesh, even though this visibility can result from its own obliteration, a presence that can be made all the more potent through its absence.

I want to make clear that I'm not advocating for any universalizing concept of the flesh, nor for the idea that flesh would "precede" social formation, as some sort of primordial state from which identities and taxonomies are chopped up. Butchering reveals flesh when it obliterates it to produce meat; consuming flesh stresses the corporeality of the eater as well as of the eaten, and these corporealities conjoin in the merging of the flesh. This coming-together can either be embraced or rebuked, stressing the distinction between who devours and what is devoured or celebrating the dissolution of bodily boundaries, but that really is a matter of perspective, a perspective made possible precisely by the fact that flesh is animated, that flesh can be inhabited. A concept of animated flesh should encompass the mind *within* rather than being defined in opposition to it. Because flesh is animated, it enables a positionality; flesh is the site from which the subject positions itself – or at least attempts to – in a permanent flux of contacts and exchanges with the others' fleshes and with the world experienced through flesh. Caught in a stream of feeling-with and feeling-through, the subject-in-the-flesh represents a fluid entity whose environment is produced through its body, and vice-versa, as illustrated by the shapeshifting stories of chapter four.

My conceptualization of the flesh makes visible the unstable ontologies at work in medieval French literature alongside the work of producing taxonomies and hierarchies. Animated flesh contributes to rethinking premodern literature in its own terms, in its own messiness as well as its very own, and for us unsettling, cohesiveness that is so estranged from the twenty-first century intellectual and political categories, still heavily marked by the Enlightenment. An epistemology of the flesh that insists on its liveliness – animated because

flesh, flesh because animated – enables the modern reader not only to read medieval texts differently, to give room to the thought experiments and the literary musings these texts put through, but also to envision other ways, non-teleological and non-modern, to think about social organization, taxonomies, and identities in medieval Europe and elsewhere. In other words, to make visible the work of producing medieval French culture through the experiences of the flesh, through an attention to the materiality of the living and to a sensual, corporeal way of being in the world. And, eventually, to restitute to an eight-hundred-years-old literature its own flesh.

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