Fragmented Beasts: Monsters, Hybrids and Shifting Eschatological Boundaries in Medieval French Texts

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Abstract

The Apocalypse was, for many medieval thinkers, an inescapable and looming reality which could occur at any moment 'like a thief in the night' (1 Thessalonians 5:2). Indeed, the *Book of Revelations* is one of the most illuminated books in the *Bible* during the Middle Ages for its vivid images of angels, kings and beasts, particularly in England and France with the Anglo-Norman Apocalypse tradition. The prevalence of apocalyptic imagery throughout the Middle Ages as well as theological debates on whether nonhuman animals will be resurrected at the end of time, cultivated eschatological connotations within medieval animal portrayals. This dissertation explores, in conversation with Giorgio Agamben's theoretical work, the parallels between sovereignty and animality, and proposes a new approach to reading medieval animal portrayals by considering their eschatological implications. Not only do apocalyptic animal and sovereign imagery appear in the *Book of Revelations* with the burning of beasts and condemned sovereigns, but they also permeate in many medieval literary texts. *Fragmented Beasts,* examines, then, a series of sovereign figures in *Le Roman d'Alexandre, Le Conte du Papegau* and *Le Roman de Mélusine,* whose portrayals raise questions around the human-animal boundary, and reveal how the boundary often falls within the sovereign. Ultimately, the sovereign, who is a threshold figure existing both inside and outside of human law, risks permanently falling into the category of animal and therefore, enduring a fragmented death if the ontological boundary between man and beast is not sustained.

Note on Translations: The English translations of the medieval French texts are my own unless stated otherwise.

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Introduction

Apocalyptic visual and literary culture flourished in the Middle Ages and gained particular momentum in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in England and France. The popularity of apocalyptic imagery not only saw the rise of the beautifully illuminated Anglo-French Gothic Apocalypse Cycles[1] such as the illuminations on fol.35r, MS Add 17333 and fol.33v, MS Yates Thompson 10 (Cover and Figure 1), but across other forms of medieval material culture such as the famous Angers Apocalypse tapestry commissioned by the Duke Louis I of Anjou, and woven in 1377-79 (Klein, 1992: 191). As Michael Camille asks, 'what other biblical book would have been well enough known to be legible without any accompanying inscriptions?' (1992: 280). Indeed, the *Book of Revelations* is an inherently visual text which describes the vision that John of Patmos has of the end of the world. This last book in the New Testament describes John addressing the Seven Churches of Asia, followed by a series of obscure signs of kings, beasts, angels, the Whore of Babylon and the liturgy of the Christological lamb which comprise the final events at the end of time. Not just a visual phenomenon, however, the apocalyptic lore from *Revelations* fascinated many theologians and writers of the Middle Ages such as Bede, Thomas Aquinas, Peter Lombard, Hildegard of Bingen and Joachim of Fiore across the centuries. The theological fascination with the end of time provoked a myriad of eschatological debates. Along with inspiring intrigue and awe, however, these theological debates and visions also reveal an anxiety about the apocalypse since it is depicted as a violent event full of suffering and anguish for the condemned. Such violent visions, as seen in Figure 1 below, incite an unsettling question for the viewer – who will be saved and who will be devoured by the great beast or swarming vultures at the end of time?

[1] See Peter K. Klein (1992: 188) for more on the history of Anglo-Norman medieval apocalyptic illuminations.

Figure.1, British Library MS Yates Thompson 10, fol.33v, British Library, London, http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=48188, accessed 28th June 2020.

This particular illumination from British Library MS Yates Thompson 10 depicting a scene from a fourteenth-century French Apocalypse highlights that kings and peasants will be alike – no earthly crown can protect a sovereign against God's supreme judgements if their soul is stained with mortal sin. These apocalyptic images express a suspension of earthly hierarchy – in this scene, not only do we see a king brought down to the level of a peasant in their shared condemnation, but the king is also now under the violent dominion of an animal as the two vultures devour his flesh. At the end of time, therefore, the most horrific reality of being thrown into Hell is not only the eternal separation from the Creator, but also the suspension of hierarchal boundaries between king, peasant and animal. In this way, the Apocalypse of the Middle Ages is an event which problematises ontological boundaries – between sovereign and subject, and between human and animal.

This leads me, then, to question what does it mean to be 'human' as opposed to being 'animal' for thinkers of the Middle Ages? Thomas Aquinas claims that the blessed will leave behind their animal life at the end of time for the heavenly, contemplative life for he states that 'after this renewal animal life will cease in man. Therefore neither plants nor animals ought to remain' (Aquinas, *ST*: Supplement, Question 91, Article 5). His assertion poses two

main ideas – firstly, that humans embody some form of animality during their earthly life, and secondly, that animality will perish completely at the end of time since it does not belong in Heaven. Aquinas further posits that although animals have some form of souls, it is only human souls which hold the prospect of salvation at the end of time, and therefore only humans can be resurrected (*ST:* Reply to Objection 1, Article 6, Q.75). Such scholastic doctrines do not necessarily outline, however, a clear boundary between human and animal per se since humans too can be cut off from salvation if they are in a state of mortal sin. Moreover, this theological distinction creates a looming uncertainty about the Apocalypse, that is to say, the fate of human bodies and souls after death if humans too are somewhat 'animal' when in a state of sin. Eschatology and specifically, the physical details of the resurrected body, were theological conundrums that were heavily debated in the Middle Ages. The *Book of Revelations,* whilst a key eschatological text, is undoubtedly the most elusive book within the *Bible* with its vivid and fantastical imagery including the monstrous Beast and the Whore of Babylon which have produced wild and obscure theories on what such allegories could symbolise, such as the popular theories of Joachim of Fiore (Daniel, 1992: 73). As a result, eschatological debates often birthed heresies on the nature of the human body, such as those challenged by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 requiring 'Cathars and other heretics to assent to the proposition that "all rise again with their own individual bodies, that is the bodies which they now wear"' (Bynum, 1991: 240). In response to these disputes, some medieval theologians even warned people not to excessively contemplate the details of what would happen to our bodies in the Resurrection as we will not know for sure until the time comes (Bynum, 1991: 241). Because of the myriad beliefs around the end of time, medieval apocalyptic imagery became a vehicle for exploring the eschatological boundary between humans and animals. On account of this, what it means to be 'human' for medieval thinkers, is often constructed against what it means to be animal and, this man-made distinction, I propose, catalyses anxieties over eschatology in the distinction's unstable attempt to maintain the exclusivity of humankind.

Animal studies has become an important area of work within many scholarly fields and across the humanities. The Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, who draws extensively on medieval culture, claims that man is defined against what it means to be 'animal', a definition that seeks to sustain the exclusivity of humankind (2004: 37). He maintains that the boundary between the human and the animal is an artificial one and is in fact quite 'fragile' as it must be continually reaffirmed and thus becomes a 'historical production' (Agamben, 2004: 30,

36). In his philosophical enquiry into the human-animal boundary, Agamben dedicates a chapter to Thomas Aquinas's theology of the Apocalypse with regards to the nature of the physical resurrected body. Agamben sees Christian eschatology as an example of this system of distinction, which he later calls the 'anthropological machine' – the varied processes through which man divides that which is human and that which is animal (Agamben, 2004: 33). As Aquinas affirms, in Heaven, although the Blessed will be reunited with their physical bodies at the end of time, the resurrected human no longer craves food or sex since they have left their mortal, 'animal' life behind for the heavenly, contemplative life (Agamben, 2004: 19). Salvation, therefore, is reserved exclusively for the human being made in the image of God. In *The Open* (2004), Agamben uses Aquinas's theological material to outline his political concept of the anthropological machine, a development of his earlier position in *Homo Sacer* (1998), in which he proposes that society's biopolitical mechanism consistently casts out humans by stripping them of their humanity/sovereignty *'bios*' thus leaving them with bare, animal life '*zoe*' (Agamben, 1998: 67). If Aquinas's theological assertion is doctrinally true, that the 'animal' parts of us will not be resurrected to their former function, this corporal human-animal taxonomy of the Resurrected, I argue, potentially sparks an underlying anxiety about bodily fragmentation, hybridity or of total disembodiment, an anxiety which appears within medieval animal portrayals since the animal parts (or wholes – for men who lead full animalistic, sinful lives) of humans will be, like the souls in Figure 1, thrown into the Lake of Fire at the end of time.

Agamben's concept of the 'anthropological machine' (2004: 33) is therefore a useful theoretical lens to examine representations of medieval animal portrayals and to see them as vehicles for political and eschatological thinking. For Agamben, mankind is paradoxically riddled with an animality of which it cannot be purged entirely since '*homo sapiens* […] is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human' (2004: 26). The theological idea which Aquinas presents, that the animal life does not belong in Heaven, suggests a possibility for fragmentation within the human body if even the smallest fragment of animality remains within a human being at their death. The inevitability of 'being animal' can be understood in a literal sense of certain body parts, such as the sexual and digestive organs of the human body being made redundant in Heaven as they no longer have their use for their 'animal' needs (Agamben, 2004: 19). Animality, in this sense, is unavoidable during earthly life since humans eat, sleep, defecate and procreate as animals do. Yet, Agamben argues that such

taxonomies have political consequences as they animalise 'the slave, the barbarian, and the foreigner, as figures of an animal in human form' (2004: 37) and as a force which casts out such members from human society (1998: 67). In essence, Agamben reads the human-animal boundary as the expression of sovereign power, which he defines as the ability to strip the human of dignity and transform them into a fragment of bare, animal life, cast out of human society.

In works such as *Homo Sacer* (1998), *The Open* (2004), *The Kingdom and the Glory* (2011) and *The Highest Poverty* (2013), Agamben often uses medieval literature and culture to map out the genealogy of Western biopolitical thinking, and posits Aquinas as a key influencer for hierarchal structures within Western politics. In using Agamben within my theoretical framework of this dissertation, I hope to open up a hermeneutical enquiry on the medieval understanding of the human-animal boundary onto questions of eschatology, sovereignty and apocalypse. Various medieval scholars have explored the question of the human-animal boundary within animal studies from the context of the Creation narrative in *Genesis*.[2] I hope to build on this analytical corpus by also considering the apocalyptic and eschatological implications of medieval animal portrayals, influenced by the *Book of Revelations* as well as the bodily controversies born from medieval eschatological debates. These theological debates during the Middle Ages, I believe, are crucial elements to understanding medieval animal portrayals since, as I will argue, animality presents an ambiguity around embodiment and salvation. Not only this, eschatological portrayals of animality also reveal a political tension within taxonomy, not just in terms of a separation between human and animal, but within sovereignty. The Apocalypse in *Revelations* is the biblical revelatory event at the end of time in which social hierarchies will be suspended and powerful kingdoms such as Babylon will be overthrown. In other words, the 'historical production' of taxonomy as Agamben contends (2004: 36), will cease, tyrant kings will be destroyed, and political powers will crumble. Good and evil will fight each other one last time at the battle of Armageddon – a violence to end all violence.

[2] See in particular Alastair Minnis's in-depth study of the influence of *Genesis* in the Late Middle Ages in *From Eden to Eternity* (2016), as well as Susan Crane's analysis of the medieval bestiary in *Animal Encounters* (2012), and Peggy McCracken's *In the Skin of a Beast* (2017).

An Eschatological Approach to Medieval Animal Portrayals

Agamben's theory of the 'anthropological machine' enables us to read the human-animal boundary as a political construction which sustains sovereign structures. Paradoxically, in his reading of *Bisclavret*¸ Agamben also posits the sovereign as an animal *himself* since, like an animal, the sovereign remains outside of the boundaries of his own law through his exceptional state as sovereign (1998: 106). What I hope to do in this dissertation, in reading medieval tales about sovereigns who encounter or embody animality, is to argue, in conversation with Agamben, that the sovereign holds within them an eschatological instability which is dramatized through animality, hybridity and monstrosity. I have chosen to examine three medieval French texts in particular: *Le Roman d'Alexandre, Le Conte du Papegau* and *Le Roman de Mélusine* which all recount the story of a sovereign protagonist who encounters or embodies animality. *Fragmented Beasts* aims, therefore, to move beyond discourses around the *Genesis* narrative and enhance our knowledge of medieval animal portrayals by exploring their eschatological resonances. I will argue in this dissertation, in conversation with Giorgio Agamben as well as medieval studies scholars, that medieval apocalypticism explores the possibility of a suspension of hierarchical boundaries, but that this, in turn, brings about a paradoxical anxiety around animality and sovereign embodiment. In the *Book of Revelations*, John's vision prophesises the apocalyptic triumph over death in the form of the vanquished seven-headed beast; the damned are cast in the Lake of Fire along with the Beast, and the Blessed are reunited with God in the New Jerusalem (*Revelations* 10.4.2, 11.3). In medieval literary texts, however, when narrators explore the desire to overcome conflict and death allegorised through animal or monstrous bodies, these animal portrayals also reveal an anxiety about hybridity, fragmentation and disembodiment since animality is not just an external force, but a theological, political and ontological reality within the sovereign.

My literary analysis begins in Chapter 1 where I will explore the apocalyptic resonances in *Le Roman d'Alexandre*, a twelfth-century *roman d'antiquité* which reimagines the legend of Alexander the Great's world conquest. In this chapter, I will be exploring monstrous fauna and the shifting boundary between the human and the animal, arguing that they are symptomatic of an eschatological anxiety around the honouring of a pagan king's death. The imagery from the *Book of Revelations* permeates this vivid retelling and is crucial to understanding the hermeneutics of the narrator's treatment of Alexandre's death. The topography of the Alexander legend is full of fantastic beasts and animal marvels as the

pagan hero travels and conquers many lands. Yet, there is a lack of in-depth scholarship within medieval studies on the animal marvels which appear in the corpus of the Alexander retellings, especially on the apocalyptic connotations of these monstrous beasts in their medieval Christianised versions. Indeed, many of the animals which Alexandre encounters on his imperial adventures echo the apocalyptic figures described in the *Book of Revelations* such as serpents and dragons, or the Whore of Babylon, who, in the *Roman d'Alexandre*, appears as a Saracen woman giving birth to a monstrous child as a forewarning of Alexandre's looming death (IV, §1). This chapter will aim, then, to enhance our understanding of the text through its monstrous and apocalyptic themes which characterise the medieval Alexander tradition, by exploring ideas of embodiment and the blurring of ontological boundaries in Alexandre's quest to cross and conquer all territories. These marvellous and monstrous creatures are inherited from the earlier Alexander texts such as the *Greek Alexander Romance*, but as we move further into the Middle Ages in this twelfth-century Old French version, the Christianisation of the Alexander story shifts into eschatological hermeneutics in trying to reconcile (or not) Alexander's heroic portrait with his restricted salvation as a pagan king.

Chapter 2 examines *Le Conte du Papegau*, a late medieval Arthurian romance which tells the tale of Arthur's first adventures as a newly crowned king who adopts the epithet 'Chevalier du Papegau' on account of his acquisition of a talking parrot after a successful duel. Vastly different from the eschatological ambiguity which the *Roman d'Alexandre* expresses through its apocalyptic animal portrayals, the *Papegau* text appears, at first glance, as a light-hearted quest. However, the text also dramatizes the need for preservation of sovereign bodily continuity when faced with eschatological uncertainty, something which we will see with the episode of the 'Chevalier Poisson' and the ghost hybrid king. In this section, I will be arguing out my idea on the 'anthropological cage' which sets out the boundaries of the courtly game and allows the hero of the quest a sovereign 'state of exception' (Agamben, 1998: 90) over human and nonhuman forms of life. Finally, in Chapter 3, I will be analysing monstrosity and monasticism within the context of sovereign rule in Jean d'Arras's *Le Roman de Mélusine*. In conversation with Agamben's work on the early Franciscan movement, along with monastic reformers such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Hildegard of Bingen, I will be exploring the parallels between the monks and Mélusine's final monstrous metamorphosis, seeing both as figures who exist beyond the sovereign realm of law and provide a glimpse of the possibility of resistance against the problems of sovereign taxonomy. There is a substantial amount of

scholarship on Mélusine's serpentine hybridity, yet little attention has been paid to the details of Fromont's monasticism and Raymondin's hermithood which are crucial to understanding the political undertone to Mélusine's dragon-transformation and disappearance from her sovereign realm at the very end.

I hope that by exploring the apocalyptic and eschatological themes of these texts, I will demonstrate that animal and hybrid portrayals in medieval literature often have an eschatological undertone and can allegorise the bodily paradoxes of the sovereign figure. In this way, I hope to present a new approach to medieval animal studies by focusing on the apocalyptic and eschatological portrayals of animals, monsters and hybrids. The *Book of Revelations* was a highly influential text during the Middle Ages and one of the most illuminated books from the *Bible* in medieval manuscripts, it is only fitting then, that we explore the eschatological implications that this apocalyptic text inspired throughout the Middle Ages. All three of these medieval texts which I will be analysing in this dissertation depict sovereignty in a way which is perpetually stained with animality in various forms. However, the threat which animality poses for the sovereign is a fragmented and unstable form of bodily continuity.

1

The Serpent of Babylon: Eschatological Anxiety In *Le Roman d'Alexandre*

In my introductory chapter, I briefly outlined the eschatological debates within medieval scholastic circles and began to discuss the influence of apocalyptic thinking on animal portrayals in the Middle Ages, noting how they brought points of theological contention in the Resurrection of the Body. I also sketched out the foundations for my theoretical framework, using Agamben's biopolitical thinking on the anthropological machine. I began, in part, to set out the overarching theme to my argument which examines the dramatization of eschatological anxieties through animal bodies and how these symbolic representations can either accentuate or mystify sovereign violence in literature. In this chapter, I will be analysing Alexandre de Paris's Old French retelling of the Alexander the Great legend, *Le Roman d'Alexandre*,[3] which I believe, expresses an underlying anxiety of fragmentation, hybridity and disembodiment allegorised through the text's topographical animals. My theory of eschatological 'anxiety' builds on Venetia Bridges's reading which claims that *Le Roman d'Alexandre* of Alexandre de Paris perpetuates an inherent 'anxiety regarding ethical hermeneutics' (Bridges, 2018: 116) particularly as a Christian medieval *translatio studii* of a pagan legend (Ibid.). I expand on Bridges's statement by arguing that this anxiety is rooted in the *Roman*'s uncertainties about Alexandre's sovereign embodiment and that ultimately, the text allegorises these anxieties through animal bodies. Rife with prophecies, dreams, encounters and clashes with animals, *Le Roman d'Alexandre*, I contend, portrays Alexandre's continual strife against the animal other, who is both his mirroring rival and the symbolic embodiment of his sovereignty, ultimately taking the form of a serpent. This first section of this chapter will therefore examine the idea of disembodiment through the text's use of animal symbolism in Alexandre's prophetic childhood dream.

Paul H. Rogers emphasises the blurred boundary between dreams and reality in the *Roman* as he states that 'the juxtaposition within the text of realistic imagery and odd, inexplicable

[3] Currently, there is little scholarship on Alexandre de Paris's specific version. I cite the most recent studies on the text by Venetia Bridges (2018), Paul H. Rogers (2016) Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas (2002), Catherine Léglu (2013) and notes from Laurence Harf-Lancner's edition (1994). Alexander the Great became a popular topic for medieval writers, and as such, there is an extensive collection of textual variations on the legend in many different languages such as Latin, Old French, Persian, Ethiopian, Middle English, Scots, to name a few. For an overview of these variations see Richard Stoneman (2008).

dreamscape creates a text that mirrors the human consciousness upon awakening, trapped between the fleeting realm of night and the solid world of the senses' (2016: 3). Indeed, the *Roman* toys with the threshold between fantasy and reality through its ethereal and marvellous 'dreamscape,' as Rogers remarks (Ibid.). With numerous marvels and dreams woven through the narrative and a mixture of real and fantastical beasts, it is no wonder that the *Roman d'Alexandre* produced spectacular illuminations in surviving manuscripts, such as the MS Bodley 264, renowned for its imaginative marginalia.[4] Yet, dream interpretation was a problematic matter among medieval writers, as the line between pagan divination and Christian vision was difficult to draw. *Le Roman d'Alexandre* is a significant medieval text to examine therefore, as a product of the ongoing *Revelations* debate as it explores the middle realm between prophetic dream and reality. The matter of prophetic dreams correlates with the ongoing eschatological debates which according to Caroline Walker Bynum, took place primarily 'between 1100 and 1320' when 'they were really debating how far material continuity is necessary for identity' (1991: 254). *Le Roman d'Alexandre* is believed to have been composed around 1180 (Harf-Lancner, 1994: 21). Whether or not these eschatological debates had any direct influence in the composition of the Old French *Alexandre* (which is largely a patchwork of tales from other Alexander sources) is a question I cannot answer with certainty. Yet, what is apparent is that the text's treatment of death in dreams, often allegorised through animal bodies, is rather indicative of an uncertainty around the question of 'material continuity' – a key concept which Bynum identifies as perpetuating these theological debates (1991: 254). The surreal dreamscape becomes a fantasy-space in which Alexandre conquers or tames wild beasts, allegories for death, implicitly mimicking the victory over the beast in the *Book of Revelations*. What is more, the dreams of Alexandre and other characters often prefigure someone's death or downfall through animal metaphors such as the serpent, the peacock and the eagle. I hope to demonstrate, in this first section, how in the course of Alexandre's bid to conquer the whole of Creation, he recognises his own mortality reflected in the beasts he tries to dominate.

The intangible nature of the text's dream-like topography also perpetuates a fear of fragmentation, hybridity and disembodiment in Alexandre's quest to defeat beasts and become immortal. The prophetic dream at the beginning, which portends Alexandre's conquest of the world, plays out the fantasy of Alexandre's heroic triumph to its apex, whilst simultaneously prefiguring his death, which is presented through the allegory of the serpent.

[4] See Mark Cruse (2011) for an extensive analysis of the MS Bodley 264.

The ambiguous nature of dreams and their diverging interpretations generate multiple, paradoxical realities which propagate the underlying anxiety about disembodiment and fragmentation further. During his quest, Alexandre reins in animals as extensions of his sovereign body to emphasise his dominion over the Created world. We see this played out through his taming of the magical, ferocious horse, Bucéphale, as well as in other episodes which I will analyse in this chapter. Yet, something which Alexandre does not control fully is the animality within himself which comes with being sovereign of the world, a phenomenon which I read in light of Agamben's theory of the sovereign wolf (1998: 107). The argument I put forward is that Alexandre's anxiety around material continuity is not just expressed in his desire for world-conquest, but is also reflected in the marvellous and monstrous beasts he encounters throughout the landscape of his imperial campaign. Alexandre's expanding sovereignty accentuates his animalistic violence since in conquering the world, he becomes the ruthless sovereign beast who kills, and spares lives as he sees fit. By the end, Alexandre is poisoned by his mirroring rival, the Babylonian serpent, the very animal he identifies with in his dream at the beginning of the tale.

The Middle Realm of Medieval Dream Theory

Before we turn to the text's narrative, it is worth mapping out the theological debates which focused on dream interpretation in the Middle Ages. The nature of dreams and nightmares was a philosophical conundrum among several medieval thinkers. One of the most influential works on dream theory in the Middle Ages, written in Late Antiquity, was Macrobius's *Commentary on Scipio's Dream* which divides dreams into five distinct categories: the enigmatic dream, the prophetic vision, the oracular dream, the nightmare and the apparition (Stahl [trans.], 1990: 88). Curiously, however, Macrobius cautions the reader that 'the last two, the nightmare and the apparition, are not worth interpreting since they have no prophetic significance' (Ibid.). The pagan fifth-century writer explains his dismissal of nightmares by positing that they 'may be caused by mental or physical distress, or anxiety about the future: the patient experiences in dreams vexations similar to those that disturb him during the day' (Stahl [trans.], 1990: 88), whereas the other three types of dreams, according to Macrobius, contain some truth about the future (Ibid.). For Macrobius then, fear trumps prophecy and thus nightmares are not worth interpreting as they reflect our quotidian anxieties and do not reveal a truth beyond our mortal limitation. The thorny question which dreams posed for

medieval Christian writers, however, was whether or not dreams carry any religious truth or prophecy, and if so, how can one discern the divinely ordained dream from the diabolical, or purely mundane?

It is difficult, and perhaps even an impossible task, to define in fixed terms what the 'medieval' attitude was towards dream interpretation on the whole. There were many schools of thought which, like Macrobius, branched from the Classical philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and Timaeus (Kruger, 1992: 34). Eventually, however, dream theories in the Middle Ages began to overlap as writers attempted to establish a more dogmatic Christian attitude – especially in response to the popularity of 'dreambooks' (Kruger, 1992: 8) which fell into the heretical camp of divination. Kruger maps out the dream theory trends which developed from Macrobius and from patristic writers such as Augustine and Gregory the Great (1992: 44, 61), to depict the shifting views of the era as they moved towards a more Christian approach. Crucially, Kruger concludes that the converging argument of dream theories of the Middle Ages was that dreams, in essence, are characterised by an inherent 'doubleness and middleness' (1992: 65) as they inhabit a space between our earthly, mundane bodies and the transcendence of the created universe (Ibid.). Kruger further explains the origins of this philosophical 'middleness' of dreams which developed from Neo-Platonism, arguing that 'the human being […] was the microcosm of a universe that stretched from a perfect God to fragmented matter. Like that universe, humanity was torn between its upper and lower nature, but simultaneously joined those two natures in a single, middle being' (1992: 81). As Christian dream theorists began to integrate Neo-Platonism into their own beliefs, dreams thus became a disembodied, middle space between the human 'microcosm' and the 'macrocosm' of the universe (Kruger, 1992: 81). Often, medieval writers understood this 'middleness' of dreams, which floats between corporeal and spiritual, to be susceptible to either 'divine revelation or demonic seduction' (Kruger, 1992: 65). Deciphering dreams in the Middle Ages, therefore, was a tricky business where one could risk committing heresies or succumbing to the advances of the devil.

Le Roman d'Alexandre echoes this moral 'middleness' of medieval dream theory. The story recounts the voyages of a pagan emperor and praises him as a model king, yet with an underlying theological reluctance. These hesitations around the honour of Alexandre's rule are reflected in the paradox of his chivalric portrait, in which he becomes a hybrid figure of pagan and Christian heroism. Throughout the text, there is an implicit qualm about what Alexandre's status will be after his death and a substantial question mark around his

eschatological salvation as a pagan king despite the narrator's heroic portrayal of him. Bridges's reading of the text as inhabited by an 'anxiety regarding ethical hermeneutics' (2018: 116) which is seemingly absent in other Alexander retellings, originates as I suggested earlier, from the text's eschatological unease around honouring the death of a pagan king. The uncertainty of salvation after Alexandre's death, I argue, is one that remains suspended and allegorised through animality reflecting the text's anxiety over disembodiment and fragmentation. It is an anxiety which expresses the fear of death without salvation – to be locked in that same fragmented limbo which the dreamscape inhabits. The text has an apocalyptic resonance not only for its surreal dreams, monstrous beasts and various allusions to the *Book of Revelations*, but for its prefiguration of the end from the beginning. The hero, from the first branch of the text, is expected to die – a fate predestined from his prophetic childhood dream. The prophecy's ambiguity, born from the dreamscape's fragmented middle realm, engenders a fear of death which pervades the rest of the narrative. In his attempt at deferring death in all its beastly forms, Alexandre fulfils his ill-fated prophecy and is ultimately killed by his mirroring animal portrait, the rival serpent.

The Serpent Prophecy

The first branch of *Le Roman d'Alexandre* opens with prophetic occurrences sent by God to signify the destiny of the child who will one day become emperor. At his birth, animals tremble, the earth shakes, and the sea turns red proclaiming Alexandre's divine ordination as king (l.25-26). Nevertheless, whilst there are heavenly signs of his sovereignty, the narrator already anticipates his death through the use of a collocation which describes Alexandre as the best king that *God ever let die* ('Ce est du mellor roi que Dieus laissast morir' l.10). His sovereign power is, in this way, depicted from the beginning as divinely sanctioned yet, paradoxically, anticipates the eventual condemnation from God who lets Alexandre die tragically. Alexandre's sovereignty is also destabilised when the narrator depicts it as entwined with animality, describing him dominating the world 'come faus la torterele' (l.239) [like the falcon (capturing) the turtledove]. These narrative forebodings riddled with animal imagery predict how in Alexandre's quest to conquer the world and become immortal, he will slip into animality and provoke his fated demise. The narrator solidifies this eschatological synthesis between sovereignty, animality and mortality when Alexandre has a strange dream as a child about an egg and a serpent:

La nuit songa un songe, une avison oscure,

Que il mangoit un oef dont autres n'avoit cure,

A ses ains le roloit par mi la terre dure,

Si que li oés brisoit par mi la pareüre ;

Uns sarpens en issoit d'orgelleuse nature,

Onques hom ne vit autre de la sieue figure ;

Son lit avironoit trois fois tout a droiture,

Puis repairoir ariere droit a sa sepulture,

A l'entrer chaï mors, ce fu grans aventure (I, l.254-262).

> [In the night, he dreamt a dream, a dark vision, that he was eating an egg which no one else wanted, he made it roll in his hands on the hard ground, and the shell of the egg broke, a serpent of a terrible nature emerges, no man has seen anything like it, three times did it circle the bed, then it returned straight to its sepulchre and died upon entering it by a great wonder.][5]

These nine lines of verse, describing the birth of a snake and its subsequent death, are a microcosm of Alexandre's life and the text as a whole. The dream begins with the serpent's 'oef' (l.255), a symbol of Alexandre's infanthood which then transforms by the end of the dream into the serpent's 'sepulture' (l.261). The egg, paradoxically, becomes both the serpent's place of birth and its tomb in death. What is more, the subjectivity of the dream is ambiguous – is Alexandre the boy, the serpent, an outside onlooker, or a combination of these perspectives? The narrator leaves the dream's nature uncertain as three men will attempt to interpret Alexandre's dream in subsequent verses. Although Alexandre, the boy, appears to be present in the dream since the narrator uses the pronoun 'il' which describes the boy intending to eat the egg ('Que il mangoit' l.255), it is unclear whether Alexandre is dreaming of himself doing the action, or that he is observing himself roll the egg as an onlooker. This tension of perspective indicates a sense of disembodiment which the dream produces. It is that same space of 'middleness' or 'betweenness' which medieval dream theory inhabits (Kruger, 1992: 65). Alexandre as a unified subject becomes fragmented from his diverging potential identities in this dream of the boy, the serpent and the assumed onlooker. His

[5] The dream of the serpent and egg is a unique adaptation from the Pseudo-Calisthenes and the Epitome versions, as Laurence Harf-Lancner notes in the edition's footnotes, in which 'Philippe voit un oiseau pondre dans son poitrail ; l'œuf tombe sur le sol et se brise. Un serpent en sort, qui s'enroule autour de l'œuf et meurt en voulant s'y introduire à nouveau' (1994: 88, footnote 18).

fragmented identity is echoed quite literally in the hatching of the serpent's egg ('li oés brisoit' l.257) and remains fragmented until the serpent's death as its final tomb. The serpent and its egg, in this way, anticipate Alexandre's fear of fragmentation and disembodiment, which pervades the rest of the narrative.

Following this dream account, three men, Astarus, Saligos de Ramier and Aristotle, attempt to interpret Alexandre's dream at the king's request, recognising its prophetic nature. Astarus, a Greek man, claims that the egg is a 'vaine chose' and 'petite est sa vigors' (l.284). He also alleges that the serpent is a proud man who will conquer many kingdoms (l.286), but his effort will be in vain (l.291). On hearing Astarus's interpretation, the king, Alexandre's father, changes colour and believes Alexandre to be unworthy of his inheritance (l.293-4). The second man, Saligos, gives a similar interpretation of the dream and claims that the serpent is a mad man who is hungry for war (l.302). Finally, Aristotle comes forwards and claims that the egg symbolises the world, the yoke of the egg is the earth populated by men and the serpent is Alexandre who will suffer greatly (l.314-17). He will be master of the world then he will return to Macedonia, dead or alive like the serpent returns to his retreat (l.318-321). Unsurprisingly, the king favours the latter interpretation and Aristotle is subsequently appointed as Alexandre's mentor (l.333).[6]

To emphasise Aristotle's authority further, he is juxtaposed to another pedagogical figure – his predecessor, Nectanabus, who was Alexandre's mentor for the earlier part of his childhood. Nectanabus taught Alexandre many things and was allegedly the best magician in the world (l.359). It was rumoured, however, that Alexandre was Nectanabus's illegitimate son and on account of this, Alexandre kills Nectanabus by pushing him from a mountain (l.366-8). At first glance, this tale appears to be a diverging backstory to Alexandre's life, yet the narrator includes this detail in conjunction with the animal prophecy to signify the fragmented portrait of Alexandre as sovereign. Patricide is morally condemned in any society, yet, similar to Agamben's image of the sovereign wolf (1998: 107), Alexandre's exceptional status as the destined emperor of the world places him outside the boundaries of society's ethical code.

[6] For Catherine Gaullier-Bougassas 'the philosopher [Aristotle] is substituted for the seer Antiphon as one of the interpreters of the dream of the egg and the serpent (Br. I, 1. 9-14). His explanation that glorifies Alexander, accepted by Philip of Macedonia because it accords with his own desires, seems very partisan and reductive, all the more so since the author then places it into competition with those of two other seers' (2002: 66).

Returning to the prophecy of the serpent dream, I consider there to be an effect of including these diverging interpretations of Alexandre's strange serpent dream. Although the king ultimately deems Aristotle's interpretation as authoritative, the other two dream interpretations by Astarus and Saligos create a looming ambiguity around Alexandre's subsequent motives, and thus the narrative ending of *Le Roman d'Alexandre*. Both Astarus and Saligos believe that the serpent symbolises either Alexandre's failings as a sovereign or Alexandre's potential rival, depending on how their interpretations are read. Astarus believes the serpent to be a proud man, 'uns hom orgellous' (l.286), who will conquer many lands and similarly, Saligos considers the serpent to be 'uns hom de fol cuer' (l.302). The use of the indefinite article 'uns hom' in both cases is vague as it could imply either Alexandre or a rival. Another ambiguity is whether Philippe dismisses them because he finds them insulting to Alexandre, or he believes that the 'hom orgellous' (l.286) and the 'hom de fol cuer' (l.302) are potential enemies of Alexandre. Discussing these diverging omens, Paul H. Rogers contends that

> the first two practitioners of oneiromancy who analyze the sequence, Saligot de Ramier and Astarus, are perhaps closer to the mark in their understanding of what the dream may have signified. Both view the dream as an ill omen; the serpent does indeed symbolize Alexander, but they see him as a cruel tyrant, a conqueror who will eventually suffer a terrible defeat and disgrace' (2016: 5).

Indeed, although King Philippe disapproves of Astarus and Saligos' interpretations, both of their predictions hold some truth since Alexandre, as the power-hungry future emperor of the world, in some respect, does become, at times, the 'cruel tyrant' as Rogers argues (Ibid.), even though he still remains the central hero of the text. It is as if, in favouring Aristotle's interpretation, Philippe has determined the imperial path for his son, not necessarily because Aristotle's prediction was accurate, but that now Alexandre has an expectation to live up to, in order to fulfil the prophecy. Nevertheless, the other two interpretations create, in this way, parallel and paradoxical realities – the possibility of the serpent being a proud or mad enemy whom Alexandre must strive against as a mirroring rival in his feat to conquer the world.

The notion of rivalry is a viable explanation for the narrator's choice in including the various interpretations of the serpent dream. These parallel narrative timelines spark a mimetic desire in Alexandre to fulfil the prophecy favoured by his father. The interplay of rivalry and mimicry was theorised by René Girard who posits that

> Pour qu'un vaniteux désire un objet il suffit de le convaincre que cet objet est déjà désiré par un tiers auquel s'attache un certain prestige. Le médiateur est ici un *rival* que la vanité a d'abord suscité, qu'elle a, pour ainsi dire, appelé à son existence de rival, avant d'en exiger la défaite (Girard, 1961: 16)

According to Aristotle, the serpent symbolises a triumphant Alexandre who is conqueror of the world, whereas for Astarus and Saligos, the serpent could be Alexandre's future enemy. Even if the serpent is a rival, in Girard's mimetic terms, Alexandre will want to mimic his desires and pursue the same object of world domination. In this dream and its three interpretations, Alexandre has seen both himself and someone else conquer the world, embodied by the serpent circling his childhood bed. In a similar way to how the serpent in *Genesis* convinces Eve that the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge is desirable, so does the serpent in Alexandre's dream convince Alexandre that he should covet the world as his own possession lest an enemy attain it before him. Mimesis, in this way, can go beyond the boundaries of human-human imitation as Alexandre's desire mimics the serpent's symbolic conquest of the world. Alexandre's animal mimesis consequently fractures the human-animal boundary as he shapes his identity around the serpent prophecy and this will, in turn, produce an eschatological anxiety around his embodiment as sovereign of the world.

Bucéphale as Mirrored Sovereignty

The prophecy in Alexandre's childhood prologue is soon followed by the description of his knighthood before he embarks on his worldly conquest. The emblematic nature of Alexandre's chivalry culminates not only in the knighting ceremony, but also in his encounter with the strange and ferocious hybrid-horse, Bucéphale, imprisoned by Alexandre's father for its bestial violence. The episode of the magical horse occurs within the section of the first branch during Alexandre's childhood, although the scene is a clear marker for the end of his infancy. The account of Bucéphale is adapted from the late antique legend of Alexander the Great in which Alexander tames the wild steed, Bucephalus, who is afraid of his own shadow, by turning him towards the sun (Willekes, 2016: 27). What is curious about its medieval retelling in this particular text is the illustration of the horse as an alien hybrid, which was not the case in the earlier legend documented in Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* (Willekes, 2016: 27). The scene unravels when Alexandre hears an animal cry and his friend,

Festion, explains to him that the noise comes from a terrifying incarcerated beast. Remarkably, the creature is said to have been born on the same day as Alexandre, as Festion informs him. According to Festion's subsequent description of Bucéphale, no man has ever seen such a wild beast, which has spotted flanks, a tawny rump, an ox's head, the eyes of a lion, the body of a horse, and a peacock's tail (l.429-433). Despite being imprisoned, the beast devours any human who comes within its proximity. Thieves and traitors are handed over to Bucéphale to receive their gory punishment and he can even kill eighty men at once, resembling a king's power to kill his treacherous subjects through his own decree. It is no surprise then, when Festion claims that no one in Greece dares to free Bucéphale from his prison, that Alexandre sees it as a welcome opportunity for a burgeoning hero like himself to prove his valour. In any case, Alexandre must recognise something of himself in the ferocious beast, having heard that the animal was born on the same day as him. Indeed, Laurence Harf-Lancner comments that 'Bucéphale apparaît ainsi comme le double animal d'Alexandre. Le lien entre le cheval et la royauté remonte à la mythologie indo-européenne' (1994: 98, footnote 24). The parallel between sovereignty and animality has thus been made clear by the narrator – Bucéphale emphasises Alexandre's dominion as the soon-to-be emperor of the world. The taming of Bucéphale at Alexandre's hands signposts his development from child to future sovereign, as Bucéphale is a microcosm of the hybrid world which Alexandre will conquer. However, this hybrid, ferocious beast also reveals the implicit threat of Alexandre's own violent monstrosity mirrored in Bucéphale. This scene shows ultimately, how Alexandre and Bucéphale are, in this sense, dual halves of the same protagonist.

When Alexandre enters Bucéphale's prison, his companions grieve, expecting to see him being torn to pieces at the jaws of the beast 'Car il ne gardent l'eure que il soit depeciés / Et les menbres du cors derompus et sachiés' (l.455-6). In a rational response to facing a deadly creature, Alexandre's companions, functioning here as the chorus, express a displaced fear of fragmentation and dismemberment at Alexandre's encounter with the hybrid monster. Yet, what occurs is in some sense the exact opposite – instead of succumbing to bodily fragmentation, Alexandre gains a formidable extension to his body. At Alexandre's arrival, Bucéphale performs a sign of submission to his new master by kneeling in front of him. Avowing that Bucéphale will now leave his prison where he has suffered greatly, the narrator evokes a sense of compassion for Alexandre's new hybrid horse particularly when Alexandre caresses him (l.465). Alexandre then grooms Bucéphale, puts a restraint made of gold and

enamel in his mouth and mounts him, riding him to the middle of the palace (l.472-5). Seeing this, Greeks and Macedonians rejoice, believing Alexandre to be destined to protect their land and defeat King Nicolas who is currently threatening Alexandre's father's throne (l.491-3). Mounted on a powerful horse, Alexandre, aged thirteen, is knighted soon after. His barons praise him declaring that 'Dieus a fait petit terre' (l.515) for the emperor who will conquer the whole world. Alexandre, the destined sovereign, has tamed the untameable beast, the very likeness of himself.

On the subject of the bodily economy between rider and horse, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues that the horse's body accentuates the rider's vulnerability since 'the horse, its rider, the bridle and saddle and armor together form the Deleuzian circuit or assemblage, a network of meaning that decomposes human bodies and intercuts them with the inanimate, the inhuman' (2003: 76). However, Susan Crane opposes Cohen's Deleuzian reading claiming that 'his interpretation that dispersal compromises identity, and that dispersal was experienced as loss, speaks from within modernity's commitment to autonomous selves' (2012: 139). Crane, in conflict with Cohen's analysis, believes that when the horse becomes an extension of the rider's body, the extension renders him more powerful as the fulfilment of the 'performance of knighthood' (Ibid.). In her examination of the knight and horse, Crane highlights the problem that can arise from an unconsciously modern reading of embodiment and performance, by stating that 'postmodern versions of the self-embedded in materiality and open to integration with other species of being, both organic and mechanical, would look more familiar to a medieval knight than the free-floating, autonomous self of the Enlightenment' (Crane, 2012: 76). Bucéphale is no ordinary knightly steed, however, and perhaps is a more complex case than those which Cohen and Crane analyse. To be sure, the text refers to Bucéphale as a 'horse' when Festion identifies the beast: 'cheval l'apelë on' (l.424). Yet, Bucéphale's hybridity embodies fragmentary identities from a variety of species. The ox's head connotes virility, whereas the eyes of a lion are emblems of power and sovereignty, finally, the peacock's tail prefigures the prophecy of Alexandre's conquest of the Amazonians – elements which Alexandre will dominate throughout the text. Bucéphale's monstrous hybridity is both the embodiment of Alexandre's sovereignty and a microcosm of the world which Alexandre will tame under his yoke. Since Alexandre and Bucéphale are mirroring entities, when Bucéphale dies later in the text, Alexandre's identity as sovereign will become fragmented as the narrative nears his own death. Similar to Crane's analysis then, Bucéphale accentuates the performative aspect of Alexandre's powerful sovereignty.

Nevertheless, if the ontological boundaries between king and beast are not sustained, then, the portrait of the immortal sovereign can become fragmented if Alexandre's materiality blurs with mortal, animal flesh.

Master of The Sky, Land and Sea

Bucéphale is not the only case of hybridity in the text. Alexandre and his troops encounter (and often clash) with many wild and fantastical beasts in the Indian desert throughout Branch III. Many of the encounters between Alexandre and the exoticized flora and fauna of the East spur a similar intrigue and awe as do marvels found in illuminated bestiaries, along with impressions of fear or repulsion. Amongst the men-eating hippopotami and vicious serpents of Branch III, the army also come across strange and marvellous creatures who look like human women, but do not necessarily behave like women as the soldiers would know them to be. These are portraits of female hybridity which I label under 'feminine caesurae' as my own take on the gendering of Agamben's theory on the human-animal 'caesura' (2004: 79). Depicted as having subhuman natures outside the boundaries of human civilisation, these women, I believe, are also instances of what Sarah Kay terms as the 'zoological machine' found in medieval bestiaries (2017: 151). Kay defines this term as 'the tendency of bestiaries, despite their lack of generalizing vocabulary, to construct a category of "the animal" which was previously not well recognized in medieval thought, and which comes to include the human' (2017: 151). The further East Alexandre wanders on his imperial quest, the more exotic and otherworldly the flora and fauna become. Yet, included among this exotic bare life are fragments of human forms, some of which are feminine. The female marvels which Alexandre and his army encounter on their campaigns, I argue, are not just part of the topographical lore as mere exotic marvels, but are also examples of Agamben's caesura which 'passes first of all within man' (2004: 79) yet in these examples, the human-animal caesura passes visibly within *woman*, displayed as exotic hybridity. Alexandre (and the narrator's) 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975: 11), a cinematographic term which I use here to denote the visual aspect of the marvel, sexualises their female hybrid bodies and stirs a mimetic desire, erotic and, at times, repulsive, for the reader of the *Roman*[7] inciting a greater

[7] Sarah Kay describes the conflicting impressions a siren illumination from a *Physiologus* manuscript leaves on the reader of medieval bestiaries by highlighting that 'the division of the tail fins […] mark where the aroused eye might seek out genitals, only to meet with frustration and disgust' (2017: 18-19).

impetus for the men to subjugate them in being both woman and animal, or sometimes even vegetative.

In *The Open*, Agamben's concept of the 'caesura' emphasises the relentless proximity of animality within human sovereignty as the caesura falls itself within 'man' (2004: 79). Yet, I qualify the term here as a *feminine* caesura since I believe the nature of this proximity is more nuanced when it falls within female agency. The consequences are bodily ones – in other words, the proximity of animality and sovereignty manifest onto the female body as something both reproductive through the sirens' eroticism, and destructive through their murderous violence towards Alexandre's soldiers. There are variant nuances to each example of feminine caesurae which encompass the water nymphs (or 'water sprites' as Harf-Lancner names them [2002: 237]) and the flower-girls of the magical forest. These female portraits demonstrate how Agamben's taxonomical 'caesura' is more visible when mapped onto the female body and can even come to embody plant-life such as the flower-girls of the magical forest later in the text, and that these female hybrids amplify Alexandre's sovereign and mimetic power.

The marvel of the water nymphs appears in laisse 164 of Branch III. Whilst Alexandre and his army journey across far-off regions in the Indian desert, the indigenous guides lead Alexandre and his men to the sea, and there they discover the 'merveille' of women gathered on the shore (l.2897-8). Alexandre and his men had not come across any house, castle, city or other human habitation for more than five days and yet they find women on the shore and amongst the reeds of the beach (l.2899). They soon learn that these women live in the sea 'a guise de poisson' (l.2904) and are not part of human civilisation. Although the narrator never explicitly names their hybridity, the reference to 'poisson' implies that they are sirens which appear throughout classical mythology, folklore and bestiaries. The narrator describes how their hair shines like a peacock's tail and that it is their only form of clothing since the women are entirely naked 'c'au talon' (l.2906). Despite their fish-like behaviour, the soldiers are entranced by them, and the nymphs are neither afraid of Alexandre's men approaching nor do they feel required to hide themselves for shame of being naked (l.2911-2). Miranda Griffin states that 'human nakedness […] draws attention to the animality of the human body – an animality of which, unlike nonhuman animals, humans are ashamed' (2015: 125). Here the women's nakedness indeed emphasises their animality, leaving them exposed to male dominion as both women and hybrid-fish. Yet, the narrator emphasises the fact that these

women are *not* ashamed by their nakedness, declaring 'Ne por paor des homes pas ne se reponoient' (l.2912). Their lack of shame removes the vulnerability that comes with nakedness and demonstrates a lack of awareness of being naked, like an animal or the innocence of Adam and Eve before the Fall. Griffin's point is useful in seeing the sirens as paradoxically both naked and *not* naked since she argues that 'nudity, as Adam and Eve realize when they're looked at by the serpent, is not simply a state of being unclothed, but the consciousness that one is unclothed' (Griffin, 2015: 116). As Griffin's analysis indicates, if the water nymphs had been ashamed of their nakedness and attempted to cover themselves, their shame would be a signifier for their human vulnerability, but surprisingly, they lack this human qualifier.

When too many men advance close to the sirens, they swiftly return to the waters and await the men at the surface ('Qant trop [des homes] en i aloit en l'eaue se metoient' [l.2913]). The women's retreat to the sea, as we learn, is not to hide themselves, but to lure the men into the waters. And so, filled with desire, the soldiers follow them into the sea and the sirens lovingly embrace the men, dragging them underwater until they drown (l.2916-21). Whether or not the sirens eat the men's flesh is left to the reader's imagination; the narrator never discloses what the sirens do with the drowned bodies. What the narrator does make apparent is that the soldiers' deaths demonstrate how dangerous and deceptive even the most seemingly innocent women can be – for their nakedness was not one of innocence, but of bare, animal life – '*zoe'* as Agamben would term it (1998: 67). Watching his soldiers die at the hands of the sirens (and possibly even being eaten or torn apart), Alexandre witnesses how he has narrowly missed a violent death at the hands of the beautiful water nymphs, whose embrace is both erotic and deadly. As Alexandre realises what is happening to his men, rather than attempting to kill the sirens to protect the rest of his army, he threatens his men with hanging should any more soldiers approach the sirens by declaring 'Que tuit cil qui iront, s'il sont aperceü, / Ja nes amera tant qu'il ne soient pendu' (l.2930-1). Following Alexandre's violent warning, no one dares to wander off into the sirens' territory thereafter. In this manner, Alexandre prevents further deaths by matching the sirens' violence with his own brutality. His sovereignty over his army is once again re-established after momentarily being rivalled by the sirens' animalistic violence. Karl Steel believes that 'the human concern with independent animal violence aimed to do far more than just defend humans and their property. It aimed to support the human system by allocating vulnerability differentially' (2011: 66). Accordingly, when Alexandre realises that it is not the naked women who are vulnerable (for they are, in

fact, *not* humanly naked) but his soldiers, he decides to reallocate the vulnerability through sovereign violence. As deadly as the sirens are, their bare, animal bodies act as mirrors to project Alexandre's own violent nature as the sovereign who reallocates vulnerability in the face of independent animal violence.

The second community of female hybrids whom Alexandre and his army encounter are the flower-girls in laisse 189 of Branch III. After a long trek through perilous weather, to their relief, Alexandre's men reach a green and lush forest where there are trees of all species, medicinal herbs and rare plants such as the mandrake which can kill any man who is brave enough to gather it (l.3294). Laurence Harf-Lancner states that 'on attribuait autrefois à la mandragore, dont la racine évoque la forme d'un corps humain, des pouvoirs magiques' (1994: 502, n. 59). If the mandrake evokes the shape of a human body as Harf-Lancner suggests, this deadly root, then, could either serve as a reminder of the murderous sirens of laisse 164 or prefigure the erotic flower-girls which Alexandre and his men are about to encounter deeper in the woods. At the heart of this opulent forest, there is an Edenic orchard full of apples and pears and an abundance of other fruits (l.3299-3300). In contrast to the poisonous mandrake root found in the forest, the narrator describes how the sickliest man, victim of the deadliest poison, will find a cure from the plants and herbs within the orchard (l.3309-3316). It is in this magical and life-giving orchard where Alexandre and his men discover a marvel: under each orchard tree is a maiden of high nobility beautiful beyond measure:

> Les cors orent bien fais, petite la mamele,
>
> Les ieus clers et rians et la color novele.
>
> Plus iert espris d'amor qui veoit la dansele
>
> Que s'il eüst le cuer broï d'une estincele
>
> Et plus li saut el cors que destriers de Castele (III, l.3338-3342).

[Their bodies were well made, their breasts small, their eyes were light and smiling, and their complexion was fresh. The hearts of those who saw the maidens were burning with love as if they were embraced by a spark, and their hearts leapt like a steed of Castille.]

Alexandre subsequently orders his army to advance into the orchard and to have their pleasure with the girls of the forest as they please (l.3349-50). The damsels are described as singing and rejoicing at the encounter with the men. Admiring the girls' beauty, Alexandre

remarks that the maidens have eyes livelier than a moulted falcon and further praises the perfection of each of the girls' bodily features (l.3374). He even states, quite conveniently, that they seem to have everything except for the company of men ('Fors compaignie d'omes et si'n est grans plentés. / Or sejornons o eles, molt nos ont desirrés, l.3386-7). What is more, the narrator explains that due to the magical properties of the fragrance of the plants surrounding them, if a flower-girl and her lover have sex in this orchard, the following morning the flower-girl will find her virginity fully intact again (l.3318-3324). Venetia Bridges states that 'marvels that are not terrifying or dangerous, but simply spectacles, like the flower-girls, demonstrate Alexander's role as explorer and discoverer "par cel dieu qui forma trestoute creature" ("in the name of God who formed every creature")' (2018: 121). Indeed, 'spectacle' aptly describes their visual performance which is, in part what the flower-girls exhibit in this magical oasis within the Indian desert. Nevertheless, the flower-girls are described, I contend, through the erotic lens of the 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975: 11) which invites Alexandre and his soldiers to interaction beyond spectacle as passive observer. The girls act out a sexual performance as 'she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire' (Mulvey, 1975: 11) inviting the onlooker beyond mere spectacle, eventually engaging the men in all five senses through sexual intercourse.

Unlike the animal hybridity which the water-nymphs share, the maidens of the forest, as their epithet suggests, have a plant-like ability to metamorphosise into spring flowers and back again into their human form. The old native guides inform Alexandre that in winter, to protect themselves from the cold, the girls enter the earth in hibernation and in spring they are reborn in the form of white blossoms – each flower with a human girl inside. By the end of the transformation, the white petals become their clothing and anything that the girls desire will appear the following evening (l.3531-3542). The description of the white petal clothing contrasts with the portrayal of the naked water nymphs who were not ashamed of their nudity, heightening their animality. The flower-girls on the other hand, have an awareness of nudity and clothe themselves with what nature provides them during their metamorphosis. They prove themselves to be harmless, compared to the deadly water nymphs, and are even able to preserve their virginity after Alexandre and his men have sex with them, through their magical, flower-like abilities. Despite the flower-girls' erotic and life-giving qualities, however, there is still something deathly about them since, as the guides explain, the girls cannot walk beyond the shadow of the forest otherwise, they will instantly die (l.3353-57). Since the flower-girls cannot roam far, they entice the men into the orchard through their

beautiful singing, expressing their love for the soldiers (‘Mais plus aiment les homes que nule riens vivant, / Por ce q’en cuide avoir chascune son talent,’ l.3358-9). In this way, the flower-girls will perish if they wander too far from their territory, whereas with the water nymphs, it is the men who risk their deaths if they stray into their territory. The flower-girls are permanently chained to the forest grounds, as if in a vegetative state, where they hibernate in winter and metamorphosise into their floral form in spring.

The nuances of female hybridity determine whether women are violent killers or passive, sexual objects. The sirens share their hybridity with an animal indicated by their (paradoxical) nakedness whereas the flower-girls are semi-vegetative beings who clothe themselves with petals and magically retain their virginity even after fornication. In both instances, the narrator depicts a form of male penetration into female territory, with both imperial and erotic implications. Yet, when the army enters the sirens’ territory, it is the men who become vulnerable to the sirens’ animalistic, independent violence, whereas when the soldiers enter the flower-girls’ territory, they are met with spectacle and sexual reward. What is more, there is no consequence for the soldiers, not even after having sex with the flower-girls, since they are able to renew their virginity as if in the same manner of plants re-growing flowerheads. The problem of mimetic, competitive desire for men’s sexual possession of women’s virginity is completely erased – a temporary Girardian utopia void of rivals – where the girls’ can make anything they desire magically appear and where their virginity can be renewed without ever quantitively running out. The sirens, being animal hybrids threaten Alexandre’s army with independent violence, whereas the flower-girls share their hybridity with plant-life and are able to suspend mimetic conflict, at least temporarily, within the Edenic realm of the orchard. Both portraits of feminine caesurae, I argue, map male mimetic tensions onto the female body whilst exhibiting instances of Alexandre asserting his sovereignty. The threat of death for Alexandre still lingers, nevertheless, in the forms of sirens and poisonous mandrake roots on the edges of human civilisation.

As well as wandering into the water-nymphs’ and the flower-girls’ territories, Alexandre explores further realms beyond the boundaries of human civilization. Alexandre’s underwater exploration and his flight with the winged griffins, despite featuring in different parts of Branch III, emulate one another and are illustrative of Alexandre’s imperialist drive. Perhaps the most inventive episodes of the *Roman*, Alexandre’s underwater and aerial explorations

have produced surreal manuscript illuminations. Commenting on these surreal episodes, Mark Cruse emphasises Alexandre's impulsive curiosity by explaining that

> to inspire *admiratio,* one must perform *mirabilia*. Alexander's *admirabilitas* [admirableness] is in this sense overdetermined, since what makes him admirable is his desire to venture into, and his ability to conquer, a world that is not only unknown but full of the mysterious and the marvelous (Cruse, 2011: 138).

In both of these episodes, in flight and underwater, Alexandre wanders into realms unnatural to human beings. His companions warn him that these exploits are perilous and some even believe the young emperor to have lost his senses. Nevertheless, Alexandre persists, and his companions accede to his will by fashioning for him the right equipment to undertake these expeditions. For the underwater voyage, Alexandre's men construct a glass box so that he is able to see and breathe underwater (l.422-5) whereas for the aerial exploit, the companions manage to lure the wild griffins with portions of meat whilst the carpenters attach a box to the griffins wherein Alexandre stands (l.5016, 5036).

Whilst underwater in the glass box, Alexandre observes, through a philosophical gaze, the behaviour of the aquatic life below:

> Il vit les plus petis des gregnors envaïs ;
>
> Qant il un en prenoient, lors estoit trangloutis,
>
> Et qant pooit tant faire qu'il s'en iert departis,
>
> Adonques le estoit autres agais bastis
>
> Tant que pris iert par force et par engien traïs (l.453-7).

> [He saw the smaller [fish] being attacked by the bigger ones; when one is taken, it becomes engulfed, and even if it manages to escape, other traps await it, and is taken by force and by cunning artifice.]

Alexandre sees the event of the large fish devouring the small fish as a moral allegory of the poor being stripped of their goods (l.506-511). His awareness of the cruelties within the animal hierarchy, which he then projects onto human injustices, may seem somewhat out of character given Alexandre's power-hungry, imperialist nature, yet his philosophizing of the underwater exploit, I would argue, shows how his pagan philosophy lacks the Christian impetus to follow through in his actions as a pagan king. This ethical disparity is also made

visible in his aerial exploit with the griffins. When Alexandre takes flight on the griffin there is no clear moral meaning behind the encounter, only that he lands safely and that afterwards, some of the griffins either kill horses or injure powerful barons (l.5067-9). Michelle R. Warren believes that 'in flight, Alexander rules the world in the imaginative mode […]. Describing this landscape, the narrator adopts Alexander's imperial eyes' (2002: 146). The stark contrast between Alexandre's interpretation of the helpless poor in the underwater scene, and Alexandre's imperial gaze from the heights of the flying griffins, prefigures the narrator's following comment on Alexandre's limited salvation as a pagan: 'Onques teus rois ne fu, s'en Dieu eüst creance' [one has never seen such a king, if only he believed in God] (l.5158). This collocation echoes the recurring theological reluctance, or the 'anxiety regarding ethical hermeneutics' which is implicit throughout the text (Bridges, 2018: 116). What the narrator is trying to demonstrate to his Christian readership, I think, is that although Alexandre is undoubtedly wise, chivalrous and godlike in nature, his paganism limits his eschatological boundaries as he lacks the Christian incentive to put the moral message behind the fish marvel into practice.

Douglas Kelly and Laurence Harf-Lancner present opposing readings of both of these episodes. On Alexandre's flight on the griffins, Kelly writes that

> Alexander's flight is, like his underwater plunge, a test, in both senses of the word – an experiment and a trial. […] But he is testing more as an athlete tests himself than as a scholar, saying nothing about his scientific curiosity […]. What Alexander wants is that people marvel at his unique excellence, and that means at his marvellous, superhuman exploits (Kelly, 2002: 48).

Harf-Lancner on the other hand, reads Alexandre's exploits as overt scientific curiosity, affirming that

> if Alexander resurfaces in many accounts of voyages, it is because he is for the Middle Ages the emblematic figure of the discoverer thirsty for knowledge – because the Alexander romances offer the first manifestations, in French literature, of a scientific *merveilleux* linked to the need to know (Harf-Lancner, 2002: 253-4).

I believe that there is an element of truth to both Kelly and Harf-Lancner's arguments despite the fact that they do not immediately align. As Kelly notes, there is a desire on Alexandre's part to exhibit his 'superhuman exploits' (2002: 48), but there is also a drive for a 'scientific'

'need to know' as Harf-Lancner asserts (2002: 253-4). I suggest Alexandre's 'need to know' is linked to Alexandre's desire for spectacle, and more specifically, to see things which mortal men are not usually meant to see as he has witnessed with countless other animal marvels throughout the narrative and in his underwater and aerial exploits – in other words, an apocalyptic drive for the 'uncovering of a forbidden sight' (Corcoran, 2000: 63). Despite being a renowned explorer, what Alexandre cannot discover, as the narrator hints at through his sly comment from the very beginning – in his assertion that Alexandre is *the best king that God ever let die* – is that as a pagan, Alexandre lacks the eschatological impetus to sustain ontological boundaries – in a literal sense between human and animal, and in a theological sense within the boundaries of mortal sin. In this way, the animals Alexandre encounters throughout the texts in all manner of realms, in my view, accentuate his mimetic violence as a pagan sovereign and anticipate his tragic demise in the final branch.

Looming Prophecies: Alexandre's Death at Babylon

As Alexandre reaches closer to the end of his world conquest, he witnesses a series of prophecies which forewarn him of his death at Babylon. The first occurs after encountering the beautiful flower-girls of the orchard, when he discovers the magical Trees of the Sun and the Moon. These trees recount prophecies to Alexandre at dusk and dawn telling him that he will never return to his homeland and that he will die at Babylon. Before the trees announce his looming death, they assert four truths about Alexandre which claim that 'Tu ne fus onc vaincus, ja ne perdras ton brin, / Et criems molt morir d'armes, mais tout el en devin' (l.3835-6) ['you have never been vanquished, and you will never lose your strength, you fear dying in battle, but fate is already preordained']. These statements about Alexandre's sovereignty seem somewhat contradictory given that if he would never lose his strength ('ne perdras ton brin'), surely he would not die at Babylon. The cryptic nature of the trees' prophecies creates an ambiguity around Alexandre's doomed fate. Hearing the immediacy of his death, Alexandre shows distress as he cries and tears at his hair, but his barons comfort him by reiterating what the trees say – that no one can escape their eventual deaths and, in this way, that every creature carries the same eschatological burden. Interestingly, however, the Trees of the Sun and the Moon are by tradition depicted as having life-giving properties in other medieval texts. Clarck Drieshen catalogues their various portrayals in Alexander material as well as appearing in medieval encyclopaedias such as Gautier de Metz's *L'Image du monde*

and the *Speculum Historiale* by Vincent of Beauvais; the latter claims that the trees' balm allows local priests to live a further 300 years (2020). Other medieval sources also claim that the trees' apples provide longevity (Drieshen, 2020). In an illumination of the *Roman de Alexandre en prose*, the two trees in Figure 2 are depicted as standing either side of the 'Dry Tree' in which a phoenix is perched (Drieshen, 2020).

Figure 2, British Library MS Royal 15 E VI, fol. 18v, British Library, London, http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=38834, accessed 5th September 2020.

The phoenix connotes the possibility of resurrection with its association with death and rebirth. The early Christian St Clement of Rome uses the image of the phoenix as an allegory for the Christian resurrection of the dead at the end of time. What is unique, however, about Clement's eschatological imagery is that instead of the bird being reborn from the ashes as modern readers might expect, this earlier portrayal describes the phoenix dying, and the worms coming to eat its flesh, and then for the worms to grow wings (New Advent, Chapter 25). Caroline Walker Bynum interprets Clement's phoenix analogy as focusing 'not on what accounts for the survival of the individual but on the return of phoenix from death and putrefaction. For him, individual, community, and generic nature fuse' (1995: 25-6). The earlier Christian tradition of the resurrection of the phoenix can be interpreted in terms of the resurrection as a communal event, but also could connote the fragmentary nature of death and resurrection when expressed through animal imagery. Although this particular phoenix image

does not appear in manuscripts of Alexandre de Paris's *Roman*, the Trees of the Sun and Moon certainly also bring forth images of death and resurrection through their connotations of dusk and dawn. Not only this, but the prophecies that the trees state, which at first glance appear contradictory (claiming that although Alexandre will die, he will never be vanquished), can be read as an allusion to the language of resurrection, or perhaps in the case of Alexandre as a pagan king, as an allegory for his sovereignty living on through the phenomenon of *dignitas non moritur*, or in other words, the immortalisation of the sovereign's dignity (Kantorowicz, 1957: 424). The prophecies of the trees, then, along with announcing his looming death, hint at how Alexandre's sovereignty will never be vanquished, even in death, for it will live on through the memory of his dignity – or so we are to expect. The problem, as the narrator indicates through Alexandre's distressed reaction, is that Alexandre struggles to comprehend the universal reality of death and the Christian hope of communal resurrection, and on account of this, he will face a restricted salvation.

Soon after hearing the prophecies, Alexandre returns to his militaristic mode, and asserts his desire to conquer Babylon, nevertheless, for he acclaims that

> Ne por paor de mort ne lairai a aller / Ne praigne Babilone q'ai tant oï loër, / Car avoir veul la tour qui au ciel dut fremer / S'ocirrai le serpent qui la cuide garder' (l.3874-7).
>
> ['The fear of death will not hinder me from taking Babylon, of which many boast, I want to take the tower which rises to the sky, and kill the serpent which guards it.']

Spurred on by his ultimate desire to kill the Babylonian serpent, Alexandre carries on his imperial campaign and returns to India. There, he battles against Porus who kills Alexandre's beloved horse, Bucéphale, before Alexandre takes revenge and finally kills Porus. In this way, Alexandre is almost immediately met with misfortune after the prophecy of the trees with the death of his powerful, hybrid horse. At this point in the narrative, there is still an uncertainty as to whether each of these prophecies, which began with the serpent prophecy during his childhood, will be fulfilled as none of their details have so far occurred. Yet, the fact that Bucéphale dies, already pre-empts Alexandre's own death at the hands of his enemies at Babylon. Bucéphale's death shows that even the most ferocious monster, who at the beginning of the *Roman*¸ is described as being capable of killing eighty men at once, cannot escape death, and so neither will Alexandre. Bucéphale, who is the mirror of Alexandre's ferocious sovereignty, dies from an enemy's blow and anticipates his master's own downfall at the hands of his adversary and, consequently, Alexandre's sovereign portrait is fragmented.

Before his final conquest of Babylon, Alexandre's last campaign leads him to the remote land of the Amazonians. Samson, an ally to Alexandre, explains to Alexandre that the Amazonians are a population of women whose territory is surrounded by a formidable river rendering their region impenetrable (l.7235-6). Samson informs Alexandre that the Amazonians do not marry, and that they only unite with men once a year 'par lor rage' (l.7268) in order to reproduce. The Amazonians retain their matriarchal exclusivity, by 'mating' with men infrequently and on the occasion that they conceive and give birth to a son, they return the child to the father, whereas if they give birth to a daughter they keep her and raise her within their territory (l.7237-7249). Alexandre expresses his awe at this strange marvel and subsequently asserts his desire to conquer them despite their seemingly impenetrable stronghold and the fact that their community functions as a matriarchy. Indeed, Samson warns Alexandre just how difficult it is to reach their land as the river which surrounds them is deep and there is no bridge or ford in order to cross it (l.7255-7). What is more, the women and their queen are skilled in battle and know how to carry their arms well. Nevertheless, Alexandre expresses his firm resolution to obtain dominion over them, in order to prove his ability as sovereign, declaring 'Se ne la puis conquerre, ne me tieng pas por sage, / Et s'eles ne me rendent ou cens treüage' (l.7265-6) [If I do not conquer them, I cannot trust my own abilities, and will not oblige them in giving me a tribute]. Samson's warning of the wild nature of the Amazonians convinces Alexandre all the more to conquer them for he sees it as a challenge to prove his valour, virility and sovereignty. Henceforth, he resolves to postpone his coronation until he has conquered the Amazons, and only then will he become emperor of the world.

Alexandre's invasion of the Amazonians is prefigured by an animal prophecy. As Alexandre and his men travel to the Amazonians' far-away territory, the narrative point of view momentarily shifts to the Amazonian queen's perspective. The narrator describes how one night, the queen has a nightmare, a foreboding vision of a peacock being violently snatched by an eagle:

> Un songe mervellous a songié la roïne
>
> Qu'il avoit une peue en la sale perrine
>
> Et avoit paonciaus que aprés soi traïne.
>
> Par devers Babilone en mi une gastine

Vin tune aigle volant par molt grant aatine

Qui li voloit tolir ses paons par rapine,

Mais o ses paonciaus s'en fuit en la cuisine ;

Qant ele i dut entrer, si chaï jus sovine (l.7307-7314)

> [The queen dreamt a marvellous dream, that there was a peacock in the palace hall, and had younglings trailing after her. From Babylon she saw an eagle flying who wanted to take her younglings, she tried to flee with her younglings to the scullery where she fell upon entering it.]

The queen recounts this nightmare to a sibyl who interprets it as a prophecy which warns that her kingdom will be snatched by a powerful king and that she must submit to him willingly to avoid violence. Therefore, she must flee or give the kingdom to the king and accordingly, she advises the queen to place her kingdom under his sovereignty and to deliver him each year with a tribute of his choice since it is better for her to succumb to his wishes than to perish in battle. This king, of course, is Alexandre who fulfils this prophecy when he arrives at their border with his army and manages to cross their large, quasi-impenetrable moat. When the queen realises that they are being invaded by the very king whom she was warned about in a prophetic dream, she accepts the soothsayer's advice and welcomes Alexandre and his army without battle, conceding to his sovereignty and to anything that the men demand. The Amazonians' immediate submission to Alexandre's sovereignty emphasises his influence and sovereign power even over a matriarchal community and thus the prophecy of the peacock and eagle is fulfilled.

Unlike the other groups of women whom Alexandre encounters on his conquest – such as the sirens and the flower-girls who live beyond the confines of human habitation – the Amazonians consist of a *polis*. That is to say, the Amazonian queen oversees the *bios* of her people as the sovereign matriarch. The Amazonians also have an army and means to protect their land through the impenetrable river. The sirens and flower-girls do not have *bios,* Agamben's concept of political life (1998: 67); they are merely *zoe*, or bare life, despite their humanoid bodies. Faced with the threat of an attack by Alexandre's army, the Amazonian queen orders her messenger to bring Alexandre a gift and to ask for his pity lest he burn or destroy their land. The queen's instant resignation differs considerably to the violent reaction of the male leaders with whom Alexandre has gone to war with and conquered, such as Darius and Porus. Here instead, the exotic matriarch, knowing that she has no chance of victory against an emperor who has conquered the rest of the world, immediately succumbs

to his sovereignty even at the cost of her utopian matriarchy. Alexandre and the queen, both sovereigns, mirror each other's animality, yet their animality translates into two different categories of animal – the queen is the helpless, beautiful peacock and Alexandre is the violent eagle who can snatch her up at any given moment.

After the Amazonian campaign, Babylon remains the only kingdom left for Alexandre to conquer and so he returns there for his coronation. However, as Alexandre arrives in Babylon, the narrator foreshadows Alexandre's looming death with the text's final prophetic vision – a divinely sent premonition of a Saracen woman giving birth to a monstrous beast:

> Estoit en Babilone nes d'une Sarrasine
>
> Uns monstres mervelleus par volenté devine.
>
> Alixandres l'ot dire si manda la meschine.
>
> Deseure iert chose morte desi q'en la poitrine,
>
> Et dessous estoit vive, la ou li fait l'eschine.
>
> Tout environ les aines, la ou li ventres fine,
>
> De ces plus dieres bestes qui vivent de rapine
>
> I avoir plusiors testes et font chiere lovine ;
>
> Molt sont de male part et de malvaise orine
>
> Ne se pueent souffrir, l'une l'autre esgratine.
>
> Molt par est grans mervelle que Dieus el mont destine,
>
> Que la mort Alixandre veut demostrer par sinne.
>
> (IV, l.3-14)

['There was in Babylon a marvellous monster born from a Saracen woman by divine will. Alexandre, having heard this, sends for the young girl. The upper body up till the chest was dead, and below was alive, there where the back is. All around the groin, there where the stomach ends, were several heads of ferocious beasts that live on prey like wolves, they were most cruel and vicious, they could not stand each other, and would tear each other apart. This great marvel was a sign sent by God through which he announced the death of Alexandre.']

The birth scene of this Babylonian monster prefigures several details of what will occur at Babylon for Alexandre. The monster prophecy anticipates Alexandre's death through the section of the woman's body which appears to be dead. Yet, her lower body is alive where

the monster with several heads emerges from her vagina connoting, I contend, the continuation of the sovereign rule after Alexandre's death which is passed on to his companions. This, as we know at the very end of the tale, causes discord among the companions and the succession of Alexandre's sovereignty becomes fragmented, just as we see through the allegory of the heads of the ferocious beasts trying to tear each other apart on line 12. Catherine Léglu emphasises the fact that the omen of the monstrous child in *Le Roman d'Alexandre*

> is a visual phenomenon (though it is not actually seen by the Macedonian king), and a *monstre*. *Monstrum* is a creature or object that demonstrates: it shows or reveals a portent. In Old French, the masculine noun *monstre* and the verb *monstrer* (to show or display) could work together: a 'monster' could 'demonstrate' an idea. A monster is above all a visual phenomenon, or at least a thing of external appearances (2013: 88).

As Léglu contends, the monstrous child serves as a portent of what is to come – the death of the sovereign and, consequently, the fragmentation of his legacy through his companions. However, this vision of the monstrous birth at Babylon also holds specific apocalyptic parallels to the beast and the Whore of Babylon in the *Book of Revelations* which appear in Chapter 17.[8] The Babylonian harlot is described sitting on a scarlet beast with seven heads:

> 'I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was full of blasphemous names, and it had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and jewels and pearls, holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her fornication; and on her forehead was written a name, a mystery: "Babylon the great, mother of whores and of earth's abominations."' (Rev. 17: 3-7).

The omen of Alexandre's death and the image of the beast and the Whore of Babylon both prefigure apocalyptic catastrophe through the allegory of monstrous maternity. The *Book of Revelations* also explores the downfall of sovereignty in the chaotic images of the kings worshipping the beast, and later being thrown in the Lake of Fire for their sin. And so, now

[8] This extract of the monstrous birth is also acutely similar to Hildegard of Bingen's apocalyptic vision of a woman giving birth to a monstrous, hybrid beast with gnashing teeth in the *Scivias*. I analyse Hildegard's vision in more depth in my third chapter on *Le Roman de Mélusine*.

crowned as emperor of the world, Alexandre experiences a brief moment of a divine power but is soon brought down by God as this monstrous, apocalyptic omen foretells.

During the coronation feast, two enemies of Alexandre prepare a vial of serpent venom which they slip into his wine. The narrator describes the potency of this venom, stating that it

> […] est de tel nature, se l'estoire ne ment,
> Que qant li hom le boit et el cors li descent,
> Des'qau nuevisme jor ne bien ne mal ne sent,
> Et qant vient au termine, adont li maus li prent
> Et au disime jor l'ame du cors li rent (III, l. 7825-7829)

> ['is of such nature, if the story is true, that when a man drinks it and it descends in his body, up until the ninth day he will not feel ill, but after this, he will be taken ill, and on the tenth day his soul will leave his body'.]

Once Alexandre drinks the poison, he endures a slow and painful death which is described over several laisses as he declares his long will to his companions and his wife. His wife, Roxane, is desperate for Alexandre to live and pleads that he remains with her and her unborn child. The detail of the pregnancy of Alexandre's wife (who is sparingly mentioned throughout the rest of the text) also resonates with the prophecy of the monstrous birth of the Saracen woman in her body being half-dead and half-alive in that, although Alexandre dies prematurely, his legacy will pass on to his twelve companions and his heir. The problem is that Alexandre shares his empire between the twelve companions which ultimately, results in political discord, as foreshadowed in the omen. Indeed, the alignment between the monstrous heads of the prophecy and Alexandre's companions is rendered all the more evident when one of the companions, Perdicas, faints on Alexandre's corpse after his passing and is described by the narrator as a beast deprived of sense ('Sor le cors chiet pasmés comme beste estordie,' l.1200). Finally, the twelve companions carry Alexandre in his coffin on their shoulders, and journey to his desired place of burial in Alexandria, Egypt. There, they bury him in an elaborate tomb made of silver and gold which has windows made of snakeskin – a circular narrative reminder on the narrator's part of Alexandre's first childhood prophecy of the serpent, which forewarned his death. The narrator's final elegy to Alexandre, after celebrating his success in life as conqueror of the world, regrets that 'Se il fust crestïens, ainc tells rois ne fu nes,/ Si cortois ne si larges, si sages, si menbrés' (IV, l.1556-7) **[**if [only] he had been a Christian, no other King like him was ever born, so courteous, generous, wise, illustrious]. In this way, the narrator leaves us with an underlying theological hesitation in honouring Alexandre's pagan sovereignty. This line is redolent of the narrator's message at

the very beginning of the text which declared that Alexandre was the 'best king that God ever let die' (I, l.10). Along with praising Alexandre as a model king and regretting that he was not Christian, the narrator also concludes with the aphorism which asserts that 'Nature et norreture demainent grant tençon, / Mais au loing vaint nature, ce dis ten la leçon' (l.1661-2) [Nature and education engage in a great battle, but nature eventually prevails]. Harrowing final words from the narrator, who ends the famous legend of Alexander the Great on the inevitability of death, which not even the most powerful king of history managed to escape. This proverbial aphorism links the two opposing phenomena of 'nature' with death, in the image of the serpent, and 'education,' the image of the learned Alexandre. In the end, the snakeskin on Alexandre's tomb serves as a *momento mori* token of the inescapability of death and, ultimately the eschatological limitation that death can present if the human-animal boundary is not sustained.

Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter, I have explored the hermeneutical synthesis between sovereignty, animality and mortality through analysing the sovereign portrait in the *Roman d'Alexandre*. I contended that the text holds a fundamental preoccupation with eschatological hermeneutics through the treatment of Alexandre's looming death. I argued in conversation with Agamben's theory on the sovereign as animal*,* that, animals, hybrids, and monsters in this text, both function as mirrors for Alexandre's sovereign power and violence, as well as prefiguring his death through apocalyptic prophecies. In the beginning of this chapter, I mapped out the influence of the 'dreamscape' which appears in Alexandre's prophetic childhood dream, and how it indicates an eschatological anxiety around fragmentation and disembodiment in the alignment between Alexandre and the serpent, as an omen of his fated death. The image of the serpent, in this way, becomes both Alexandre's rival and animal portrait, breaking the boundary in their shared human-animal mimesis, and which ultimately causes Alexandre's demise in the final branch through the serpent's venom. Despite being warned by various prophecies of his looming death allegorised through animal omens, Alexandre is determined to conquer the world and gain knowledge through witnessing animal marvels. The problem, made apparent through the narrator's hermeneutical comments, is that Alexandre fails to see the eschatological signs present in God's Creation and because of this he becomes the *best king that God ever let die* (l.10), for had he been a Christian, he would

recognise his own mortality in the animal marvels sent by God, and the hope of resurrection that is to come. Nature ultimately, prevails, as the narrator asserts in the final lines, but it is only God who has sovereign power over nature as the one who sent the marvel prophecies to forewarn Alexandre's death. In the end, a medieval Christian reader, unlike Alexandre, would recognise the apocalyptic animal marvels on the page as revelations of God's saving presence.

2

The Anthropological Cage: Sovereignty and Gameplay in *Le Conte du Papegau*

In my last chapter, I argued that the apocalyptic portrayals of animality in *Le Roman d'Alexandre* allegorise the uncertain fate of Alexandre's sovereign embodiment. In his feat to conquer the world, Alexandre slays monsters and enemies, but, despite the warning of the serpent prophecy, he slips into animality causing his demise. Animals, in *Le Roman d'Alexandre,* as well as serving as spectacular marvels, foreshadow Alexandre's death and allegorise the text's hermeneutical preoccupation with the pagan king's legacy through Christian eschatology. My last chapter, therefore, focused on reading monstrous beasts and hybrid animals as mirrors of Alexandre's unstable sovereignty which anticipate his death. In this chapter, I will be exploring the fifteenth-century Arthurian romance, *Le Conte du Papegau*, and its depictions of animality, monstrosity and hybridity. My analysis of the animal portraits in this text will form part of my theory of the 'anthropological cage', which builds on Agamben's idea of the 'anthropological machine' (2004: 33) and Virginie Greene's theory of the parrot's cage as an allegory for the court (2013: 126). The anthropological cage, as I propose, demarcates the boundaries in which Arthur is placed in the game of chivalric quest. Jane Taylor argues that the game elements of the text do not trivialise courtly culture, as earlier scholarship on the *Papegau* often contended, but in fact, emphasise the seriousness behind chivalric gameplay, something which manifests most visibly in the tournament (1994: 543). I build on these ideas by reading the animal encounters of the text as part of Arthur's chivalric gameplay which allows Arthur, as sovereign, a state of exception to give and take life as he pleases. Although Arthur reins in animals into his dominion, he also animalizes himself in undertaking violent acts within the boundaries of the chivalric game and becomes, like his talking parrot, the animal locked in the cage.

The *Conte du Papegau* begins with the feast of Pentecost at Camelot with the coronation of a young King Arthur. During the feast, a female messenger arrives, asking for the help of a noble knight in assisting her lady in snuffing out a monstrous knight who is terrorising her land and people. Arthur agrees to help and nominates himself as the knight, leaving Lot to rule over Camelot whilst he is away. Arthur sets off with the messenger towards her land. On

route, Arthur battles against various adversaries, with one such duel landing him the prize of a talking parrot who is well-versed in courtly tales and sings praises of Arthur's chivalry. When Arthur finally arrives in the land of the messenger, he is confronted by a large and monstrous knight. Arthur fights him nobly on his steed, though the monstrous knight proves to be a challenging adversary. Eventually, Arthur defeats him, and the knight falls dead. When Arthur tries to remove the knight's helmet, he realises that the knight's body, armour and horse all form one body – a strange occurrence which I will be exploring later on. This is because the knight has a strange, snake-like skin surrounding it all. After this, Arthur takes part in a tournament set by the lady, the Dame aux Cheveux Blons, to compete for her love. The Dame instructs Arthur to perform poorly in the tournament to prove his love for her, to which he accedes, then, after realising her mistake, the Lady allows Arthur to perform well again the next day, and subsequently, Arthur wins the tournament. Soon, Arthur is led onto a series of other quests involving various hybrid and monstrous figures – one such hybrid being is the ghost stag-knight who was a king but was killed by his rebellious marshal. The ghost stag-knight gives Arthur advice as a former king himself, as well as giving him a magical flower which will save him from death, later on, when Arthur battles against a large, monstrous serpent in a lake. At the end of his quests, Arthur is given a ship by a queen to sail back home to Camelot, but a sea storm blows him and his crew off course and they alight on an unknown wild land. There, he discovers a dwarf and his giant son who became isolated there many years ago after the dwarf's wife died in childbirth. Arthur rescues them, and they all return to Camelot where the giant is baptised and knighted and celebrations ensue until the court disperses, with Arthur giving the nobles gifts at their departure.

Overall, Arthur's parrot provides instances of exoticism to the courtly landscape of Arthur's adventure and, as Marilyn Lawrence argues, the parrot also 'both fosters in the narrative a general sense of cheer and helps the plot progress towards a happy end. In so doing, the parrot functions as the primary purveyor of the comic (2002: 135). However, other creatures in this romance, such as the ghost stag-knight and the giant serpent of the lake in the story, I propose, have strong eschatological connotations and warn against the potential consequences of a sovereign's failed dominion over the life of the polity. In other words, they hint at what might happen if Arthur does not succeed in the gameplay of chivalric quest. *Le Conte du Papegau* plays out as a game in which the central hero is a young king whose year-long quest culminates with the defeat of the evil fish-knight, along with other adversaries on the way, landing him the prize of a talking parrot and its dwarf-master. On his adventures,

Arthur also encounters monsters and hybrid knights – some of which end up killed, skinned, or left in an earthly limbo after death like the monstrous fish knight or the ghost stag-king. These depictions of animal bodily uncertainties provide a glimpse into what Arthur could fall into if he goes beyond the limitations of the anthropological cage which marks out the boundaries of chivalric gameplay. Arthur remains unmalleable in the face of monstrous death as he wields the power to distinguish between human life and bare life either by admitting those he deems 'human' enough into courtly society, or slaughtering those who will not submit to his sovereign differentiation. In his successful completion of the quests, ever suspended close to the proximity of death in the form of hybrids and monsters, Arthur preserves his sovereignty through the anthropological cage.

Indeed, this unusual text is (quite literally) unique in that it only has one surviving manuscript left, dating from around the fifteenth century (Charpentier and Victorin, 2004: 9), rendering it a literary jaunt which is somewhat off the beaten path. Earlier scholarship tends to dismiss the text from the Arthurian romance genre for its apparent bizarre and decadent tone, but Jane Taylor has since debunked earlier scholarly assumptions that the tale is a mere satire of courtly values arguing, instead, that the text represents a strong manifesto for the value of the courtly tournament (1994: 533). Along with the themes of chivalry and tournaments, *Le Conte du Papegau* exhibits a textual zoo of both monstrous and marvellous creatures. By the end of the romance, Arthur returns to Camelot with a parrot, a giant and a dwarf gathered around his court – nonhuman figures who had formerly been outcasts of human courtly society, now integrated into the civil life of the court. In the end, as I posit in conversation with Agamben on the *zoe*/*bios* distinction (1998: 5), Arthur redeems fragments of bare, animal life (*zoe*) and brings them into his political community, (*bios*), the borders of which are mapped out by the rules of the chivalric game.

At the beginning of the text, during the festivities of Arthur's coronation, when the maiden on horseback arrives in Camelot asking for help to deliver her lady's land from the violence of an enemy, she explains that this brutish knight is known as the 'Chevalier Poisson', who is rumoured to have emerged from the sea. Arthur decides to nominate himself to undertake the quest. Before encountering the monstrous Chevalier Poisson, Arthur first meets a human adversary when he hears a distressed cry from nearby (§4). He soon confronts a treacherous knight trying to kill a maiden who refuses to reciprocate his love since she is in love with someone else. Arthur promptly defeats the murderous knight in a duel and, as the newly crowned king, spares his life at the last moment after his enemy pleads for mercy. Being

compassionate to a defeated knight follows the medieval literary tradition of the merciful knight, who functions on behalf of the sovereign in administering mercy or death to his opponent. Indeed, in this case, Arthur is both the knight *and* the sovereign and must decide the murderous knight's punishment, and, as an act of justice for the suffering that the victim has endured, Arthur allows for the victim to determine the knight's sentence. The maiden claims that the only punishment for such an uncivilised creature would be prison, accusing the boorish knight of 'euvres mesmes' (l.58, §4). As is conventional of Arthurian romance quests, the imprisoned is sent to the court at Camelot to remain under Arthur's rule. Arthur reproaches the knight, claiming that 'ce n'est pas honneur a chevalier qui rien vaille d'occire dame ne demoiselle en tel guise' (l.17-18, §4). This knight is the first of a series of evil opponents whom Arthur defeats during his year-long journey and whom he must punish in the name of sovereign law. For Virginie Greene, the romance's leitmotif of imprisonment becomes a playful narrative tool since there are 'two instances of "as if" at play in the story: the court as if it were a cage and the knight as if it were an animal species' (2013: 126). Indeed, this scene of Arthur's first defeated opponent demonstrates how Arthur, as the chivalric hero of the quest, imprisons his adversary in the cage of the court. Through his sovereign decree, Arthur deprives the knight of his violent power and imprisons him like a caged animal. This first victory showcases Arthur as the burgeoning sovereign who domesticises the barbaric violence of the knight by submitting him into the anthropological cage. Agamben posits the sovereign as a threshold figure in both maintaining and remaining outside of the law since

> sovereign violence opens up a zone of indistinction between law and nature, outside and inside, violence and law. And yet the sovereign is precisely the one who maintains the possibility of deciding on the two to the very degree that he renders them indistinguishable from each other' (1998: 64).

This first encounter with an adversary shows an instance where Arthur spares an enemy's life which delineates a paradoxical moment of violence, in Arthur almost killing his adversary, and a moment of law, when Arthur spares his life in accordance with the chivalric code of the merciful knight. However, as Agamben argues, because of the paradox that comes with enacting sovereignty, Arthur embodies a boundary threshold for as we will see in later episodes, he will kill creatures who do not submit to his mercy.

In a similar scene depicting Arthur's role as punisher, an additional tangential quest leads Arthur to another boorish knight known as the 'Lion sans Mercy', who obtained territory by force and claims that his lady is the most beautiful woman when in fact she is quite ugly (l.21, §5). The Lion sans Mercy is a ruthless knight who has been in power for fifteen years killing any man who will not submit to him, taking women, children, and possessions as he pleases. He also keeps a caged parrot who is looked after by a dwarf. After a successful duel against the Lion sans Mercy, Arthur wins the knight's talking parrot along with his dwarf master. Despite the knight's overt arrogance, Arthur shows mercy to the Lion sans Mercy provided that he submits to punishment by being humiliated in a cart (§6-7) as a *contrapasso* for his tyranny. The cart punishment is redolent of the famous scene in the *Chevalier de la Charrette* in which Lancelot is forced to ride in a cart (a humiliating feat for a noble knight) to prove his love for Guinevere (Méla [ed.], 1992: l.374). Jane Taylor also notes the *Papegau*'s similarities with the *Charrette* with the disguise of Arthur's true identity by adopting the epithet of the 'Chevalier du Papegau' and Lancelot's '*nom de guerre*' in the *Charrette* (1994: 530). After sanctioning the knight's penance for his tyranny, Arthur then strips the Lion sans Mercy of his exalted epithet by declaring that the knight does not deserve the name of 'lion' since a lion is merciful to any creature which shows humility (l.30-33, §7). Lions regularly appear in bestiaries as Christological metaphors which promote 'qualities expected of a human king or warrior, gentle to the weak but unsparing of aggressors' (Kay, 2017: 102). Lion sans Mercy is another human foil for Arthur to prove himself as the true emblem of the sovereign figure of the lion. Yet, interestingly, in this scene, whilst Arthur strips a knight of his animal epithet, Arthur simultaneously gains his own as the Knight of the Parrot. His new alliance with the parrot emphasises that whilst Arthur's sovereign violence as the true figure of the courtly lion is unmatched, he also adheres to the rules of the courtly game which imprisons the knight in the anthropological cage, and restrains his animal qualities. Yet, if Arthur fails in asserting his dominion within the courtly game, he risks losing his human qualities, allegorised through the anthropomorphic parrot, and risks becoming a monster, like those he will later encounter.

After Arthur punishes the Lion sans Mercy, the parrot immediately recognises Arthur as the fulfilment of Merlin's prophecy by declaring 'C'est celuy de qui Merlin parla tant en sa prophecie qu'il dist que le filz de la brebis devoit soubzmectre le Lion sans Mercy plain d'orgueil et de felonie et d'ire' (l.8-10, §8) [it is he who Merlin talked about in his prophecy who said the son of the ewe will subdue the Lion sans Mercy full of pride, felony, and

anger']. The parrot then commands the dwarf to bring him to Arthur 'car il m'a conquis' (l.12, §8) [for he has won me]. The parrot calls Arthur 'le meilleur chevalier du monde' (l.17, §8) and insists upon Arthur taking him as his companion. Although Merlin is absent in this romance, his prophecy is regurgitated through the mouthpiece of the parrot when he recognises Arthur. Laura Chuhan Campbell casts Merlin as an authorial figure who 'like the writer, […] is aware of the entire past and future of the narrative, its intended outcome, and the sum of its significance' (2017: 18). The parrot's invocation of Merlin's prophecy indicates that this bird too knows the outcome of the narrative, yet it also draws attention, albeit briefly, to Merlin's absence in death as if the comical bird has replaced the mysterious enchanter. Meradith T. McMunn notes that 'the parrot is often called an *enchanteur* (wizard), and he is explicitly compared to Merlin as he recites Merlin's prophecies and predicts Arthur's future' (1999: 71). The parrot remains caged throughout the tale despite having linguistic abilities like his human counterparts. In spite of knowing the outcome of the story, the anthropomorphic parrot remains imprisoned in the human-built realm of the cage and is made somewhat redundant in his agency. Yet, Merlin is also, like the parrot, a caged figure despite his seemingly omniscient and omnipresent supernatural qualities. Miranda Griffin contends that Merlin is a metamorphic creature who 'flickers between the human and the inhuman, and shimmers between shapes' yet, by the same token, is also locked up within his own fate as the 'embedded fictional author of his own tale' (2015: 176). In this sense, the parrot and Merlin's alignment is not only rendered palpable in the parrot's recital of Merlin's prophecies, but also in their shared imprisonment within the prophetic outcome of the stories in which they are embodied. In the case of this particular text, therefore, Merlin's prophecy becomes entwined with the outcome of Arthur's chivalric gameplay, enclosing Arthur within his own cage.

Arthur's encounter with and newfound custody over a talking parrot is perhaps a surprising choice of animal as an emblem for one of literature's most celebrated courtly kings. Often associated as sources of comical relief, parrots are no ferocious lions or graceful falcons, more common emblems of the court. Exotic and rare as they were in medieval Europe, parrots did of course, symbolise wealth and nobility, but they were not the only species to embody such courtly virtues. For Meradith T. McMunn, 'hawks were the usual avian prizes in such contests' and suggests, therefore, that the narrator's inclusion of this particular bird could be an 'instance of authorial irony since fictional parrots were narrators and messengers, not hunters' (1999: 71). As McMunn suggests, a parrot is the only animal which is capable of

language – or, at least, which can mimic human speech. Yet, the parrot's voice in this story is not mimetic but autonomous since the bird speaks of his own accord, often providing advice and comical jibes. Indeed, later, when Arthur and the female messenger ride alongside each other, the parrot's narratorial knowledge is emphasised further when the parrot tells Arthur and the messenger that they would make a beautiful couple since the maiden is of high nobility and is called 'Belle sans Villenie' (l.23, §9). The messenger asks the parrot how he could possibly know who she is, and the parrot tells Belle that he has heard of her beauty and nobility from the time that she was educated at the court of the Chastel d'Amours (l.15, §9). This short repartee between the parrot, Arthur and Belle reveals the parrot's omniscience of courtly networks amongst the nobility since he identifies not only Arthur's lineage from Merlin's prophecy as the 'filz de la brebis' (l.9-10, §8), but also Belle's nobility from her courtly upbringing. Often in romances, history is told as genealogy, so the parrot's knowledge of past and future relates to knowledge about who is related to who. The parrot, in disclosing details about Belle's lineage to both Arthur and the readership, facilitates Arthur's romantic courtship as if the parrot is able to read Arthur's desires and verbalise them, emphasising his role as the facilitator of the courtly game. More than once, he shows his ability to recount tales of old and, crucially, is able to recite Merlin's prophecies. Language is a clear marker of distinction for the anthropomorphic character of the parrot compared with other nonhuman creatures of the text and often, functions, I contend, as both an allegory and a mouthpiece for rules and boundaries of the chivalric game. For if Arthur is ever to wander off course from the boundaries of his own anthropological cage as the courtly hero, the parrot facilitates Arthur's quest through his song and speech and in a sense, becomes the umpire who oversees the outcome of the chivalric game through his alignment with Merlin and the narrator.

After revealing the messenger's noble status, the parrot claims that he is cold and asks the dwarf to cover his cage

> 'qui estoit la plus belle et la plus riche que mais veist nul homs, car elle estoit toute d'or fin pertusee et entaillee a bestes et a oyseaulx de toutes manières, et si n'y ot oncques oyseau ne beste qui n'eust .xix. des plus fins rubis que nulz veist mais. Et plus, aux quatres angles de la caige avoit quatre escharboucles qui valoient ung grant tesor' (l.32-37, §9).
>
> [which was the most beautiful and rich [cage] anyone has ever seen, because it was entirely made of gold openwork and chiselled with all sorts of beasts and birds, and on each of these birds and beasts were at least nineteen of the finest rubies ever seen.

> Additionally, at each of the four corners of the cage were four gems which were worth a great fortune.]

Virginie Greene describes this opulent cage as a 'portable throne' (2013: 128) with its gold and jewelled lavishness. Although its opulence is redolent of a king's throne, the cage also restricts its occupant (the parrot) to that one fixed place. The parrot's mobility, therefore, relies on his master who is the one to dictate where the cage (along with the parrot inside it) should go. In this particular scene, the cage also becomes an extension of the parrot's body for when he is cold, he asks the dwarf to cover it with silk (l.29-31, §9) and later when the parrot is frightened, he asks his cage to be covered so that he should not see the chaos unfolding before him (l.24, §74). The silk fabric which covers the cage denotes the bird's vulnerability – not an animal vulnerability, but a human one, since animals do not cover themselves with fabric as humans do when cold or frightened. Interestingly, however, the parrot's anthropomorphic vulnerability acts as a foil to Arthur's heroic bravery who often responds to the parrot's request to cover the cage with reassurance that he will protect the parrot from peril. The contrast between Arthur's worldliness and bravery and the parrot's captivity and anxiety paints Arthur almost as the instinctual animal in his natural environment whilst the parrot wishes to disengage from the environment around him by requesting for his cage to be covered. Indeed, the cage, as an extension of the parrot's body, as well as a signifier for the parrot's anxiety over his environment, become a foil for Arthur's potentiality and his refusal to remain restricted to the world he explores on his quests. However, Arthur too is limited within his own cage, since he is bound by the code of chivalric gameplay, as he is about to encounter his next adversary, the Chevalier Poisson, and must fight him in order to preserve his sovereign dominion.

After a night's rest at a nearby castle, the female messenger brings Arthur to her lady's land which is in grave peril from the evil knight who lives in the sea. When they arrive, they hear many cries from the people fleeing from a horse as big as 'ung olifant' (l.29, §10) and its foreboding rider, a brutish knight large enough to ride it. The knight's booming cries shake the earth and trees around Arthur and his companions. Witnessing this terror, the dwarf and messenger immediately abandon the parrot, leaving him in his cage whilst they flee from the monstrous knight. Despite knowing the outcome of this encounter with the Chevalier Poisson, the parrot seems to forget Arthur's heroic destiny and becomes frightened at the monster. The parrot calls to Arthur to free him from the cage so he can fly to a tree for safety. Arthur, instead reassures the parrot of his protection, reminding him of the prophetic song he

had sung that morning of Arthur delivering them from the evil knight (l.43-46, §10), showing Arthur's awareness of his own prophesised destiny within the boundaries of the narrative. As the monstrous Fish Knight attacks, Arthur hits the knight's shield and witnesses the strange spectacle of blood pouring from the shield itself. Arthur marvels at this occurrence since he does not believe to have struck the knight's body. Each time Arthur strikes the knight on his armour or weaponry, more blood gushes forth to a point which Arthur is surprised that the knight is still able to endure such gory wounds without fainting (l.80-81, §10). Eventually, the monstrous knight tries to flee but Arthur pursues him closely and strikes him until the knight falls, causing the land to reverberate (l.95-96, §10). Arthur then goes to observe the corpse of his dead opponent

> Et quant il a tout regardé, si le preist parmy le heaulme pour veoir com il estoit legiers, pour ce qu'il le vist si grant, si le trouva chaut. Et après le cuida osterm mais il ne pot, si se merveilla moult pour quoy ce fu. Et quant il ot bien serchié, si trouva que il se tenoit en la teste et que tout estoit une chose, mais elle est faicte comme ung heaulme, tour ront, et le cuyr dehors, estoit noir ainsi come le cuyr d'un serpent […] il trouva que le chevalier et le destrier et le haubert et le heaulme et l'escu et l'espee et la lance fut tout une chose (l.6-12, 15-16, §11).
>
> [And when he had observed everything, he seized the helm to see how light it was, because he saw it was large, and found it warm. He tried to remove it but could not, he marvelled at what occurred. After he had examined it enough, he discovered that the head was attached and was all one thing. The head which was all round was like a helm and the skin on the outside was black like the skin of a serpent […] he found that the knight, the horse, the hauberk, the helm, the shield, the sword and the lance were all one thing.]

Peggy McCracken contends that the fish-knight's 'monstrous nature is defined not by a combination of animal and human, but the lack of a distinction between them' (2017: 21). I believe this 'lack of distinction', between fish and human knight is an example of Agamben's concept of the 'caesura' which 'passes first of all within man' and which he proposes is the articulated division between human and animal, yet that this division falls within the human being itself (Agamben, 2004: 79). However, in the case of the fish-knight, this 'caesura' has resulted in a visible and monstrous hybridity in the absence of taxonomical distinction. This monstrous and hybrid fish-knight acts as a point of resistance against Arthur's sovereignty which kills and spares lives according to his adversary's willingness to submit to his mercy. In applying Agamben's terms, I argue that the monstrosity of the Chevalier Poisson can be seen as resistance against the 'anthropological machine' (2004: 33) which functions through Arthur's sovereignty and divides that which is human and that which is animal. Agamben talks about the sovereign 'state of exception' (1998: 90) being established through the

banishment or eradication of sacred life which 'is possible only because the relation of ban has constituted the essential structure of sovereign power from the beginning' (1998: 111). For Agamben, 'sacred life' is only sacred when, in the face of sovereignty, 'can as such be eliminated without punishment' (1998: 139). Since the Chevalier Poisson shows no sign of mercy, the state of exception within the gameplay of the chivalric quest, I contend, allows Arthur to kill the knight through his sovereign decree of just punishment without repercussion. In this way, Arthur overcomes the problematic 'lack of distinction' (McCracken, 2017: 21) and purges the land of the monstrous resistance against his sovereign dominion. From the death of the monstrous fish-knight who has been unremittingly haunting and pillaging the land, a sense of catharsis ensues.

When the lady of the land hears that the evil fish-knight has been vanquished, she wishes to greet the heroic knight who killed him. She calls the whole city to meet the best knight in the world and celebrate Arthur's success with a procession. The lady, who is called the Dame aux Cheveux Blons, and her party then return with Arthur at her court and hold a great feast. The following morning the lady wishes to examine the body of the fish-knight and so, riding along with her, Arthur leads the lady to the corpse of the monstrous knight. They examine it with repulsion and awe before concluding that

> c'est la plus orrible chose a veoir qui soit en tout le monde. Et lors commanda la dame a leur mareschal que il le face escourchier et porter le cuir en l'Amoureuse Cité et luy face mectre en tel lieu et porter ou il soit tousjours veu pour merveille […] Et quant il l'ot fait escourchier, si ne trouva fors ung cuir du destrier et du chevalier. Et ce ne fu pas merveille, car c'estoit toute une chose. Car l'en trouve en livre qu'on appelle Mapemundi qu'il est ung monstre qui en mer a sa conversion que l'en clame Poisson Chevalier (l.18-27, §17).
>
> [it is the most horrible thing to witness in the whole world. Then the lady ordered her marshal to have it skinned and to bring the hide to the Amorous City and to leave it in a place where it can be admired as a marvel thereafter […] When they had skinned it, they had only produced one hide from the horse and knight. This was not by some marvel, but because it was one whole thing. Found in the book which they call *Mapemundi,* it is a monster whose habitat is in the sea and is called the Fish Knight.]

McCracken links the reference to the 'Mapemundi' either to medieval encyclopaedias or 'more likely […] the fourteenth-century *Perceforest*, which itself cites a famous adventure from the earlier *Roman d'Alexandre*' (2017: 23). The *mapemundi* implies geography, too – Arthur, like Alexander, has travelled somewhere distant and encounters the boundaries of humanity. Yet, what is interesting about the ambiguous reference to the 'Mapemundi' here is that the narrator refutes the idea that the fish-knight is a 'merveille' since it has been

documented within this work, which emphasises the zoological (as opposed to mythical) authority of the *mapemundi* text. The fact that the lady wishes to extract the skin from the corpse, similar in a way to the craft of taxidermy, shows her desire to categorise the monster within a defined *taxonomy*.[9] Through this 'taxidermic' act, the Dame aux Cheveux Blons refuses to provide what would have been the knight's Christian burial and, instead, leaves his remains in a fragmented state by extracting the skin from the entrails so that it can be admired as a marvel. In this way, the hide produced from the corpse places the fish-knight under the nonhuman category by refusing him a burial rite and reducing him to animal carrion as one continuous piece of hide. The medieval theologian, Peter Lombard, in his *Sentences*, when responding to the quodlibetical proposition as to 'whether the wicked have then all the deformities which they had here [on earth]' (Silano [trans.], 2010: 241) in death asserts that

> Augustine makes no assertion as to this, but leaves it in doubt, saying as follows "[…] But whether they shall rise again with all the defects and deformities of their bodies, whichever they were that they bore here, why waste the effort of inquiring into it? For the uncertainty of the appearance or beauty of those whose damnation is certain and eternal ought not to weary us" (Lombard; Silano [trans.], 2010: 241).

The refusal of a dignified burial is a second act of violence as it reinforces, as Lombard and Augustine indicate, the impossibility of salvation after death for 'those whose damnation is certain and eternal' (Ibid.). By the same token, if bodily fragmentation should not be a theological concern for those cut off from salvation, then bodily fragmentation and deformities *should* be of a concern for those who wish for their bodies and souls to be saved at the Resurrection, as is shown through Arthur's more reverent burial of the half-giant later in his quest. This episode of the extraction of the Chevalier Poisson's hide indicates Arthur's divine-like jurisdiction over life and death, by placing adversaries who are redeemable under his dominion by imprisoning them in his court, and placing adversaries who do not submit to mercy, under the category of bare life, deformed and deprived of a dignified burial.

After the episode of the fish-knight, Arthur is soon called to pursue another quest by a different female messenger who arrives at the Chastel d'Amours. Moved by jealousy, the Dame aux Cheveux Blons wants to keep Arthur for longer and organises a tournament to

[9] Although the term 'taxidermy' originates from the 19th century combining the Greek *taxis* 'arrangement' and *derma* 'skin' (Lexico: accessed 4th June 2020) it is a useful term to describe the extraction of the hide from the fish-knight's corpse when read in conjunction with its etymological variant *taxonomy* as the act of categorising or 'arrangement' of biological life.

persuade him to stay. She announces the prize of the tournament – whoever wins has permission to kiss her in front of the entire court and be her lover for a year. Arthur agrees to postpone his new quest in order to compete in the tournament for love of the lady. The lady orders a private, luxurious bedroom to be built in the viewing area of the tournament which is decorated with opulent ornaments, such as gems in the shape of a falcon and fragrant balms (l.31, §19). In this room, redolent of the parrot's opulent cage (Charpentier and Victorin, 2004: 99), Arthur and the Dame aux Cheveux Blons confess their love for one another before the tournament begins. The narrator discloses that the lady would have lost her chastity in that moment had they not heard another maiden approaching (l.26-28, §20). Then the Dame asks Arthur to read the engraving carved on a tablet in the falcon's talons. The tablet reads: 'Tu, chevalier qui es desoubz moy, octroye liement ce que te dira la dame a qui tu parles' ['you, knight, who is at my command, obey willingly the commands which the lady you are speaking to will say'] (l.34-36, §20). The lady then asks Arthur as part of this binding oath, to perform badly in the tournament to prove his love for her. Arthur agrees, though with reluctance, expressing his preference to perform well. Nevertheless, the parrot convinces Arthur, through his song, to do as the lady pleases through his insistence that he should repress his anger towards the Lady's bidding ('Vous osterés l'ire que vous avez a grant honneur, si que nul ne le saura,' l.58-59, §20). Here, the parrot speaks from the authority of his 'portable throne' (Greene, 2013: 128) almost as if echoing Arthur's own stream of consciousness whilst Arthur is placed in the form of a cage himself – physically within the Dame's opulent bedroom, and symbolically as the lady removes Arthur's autonomous agency. Indeed, the alignment of these two 'cages' in which both Arthur and the parrot are imprisoned, in this scene, suspends their ontological differences as human and bird, highlighting, instead, their shared captivity within the courtly world around them. Within the courtly game, Arthur must adhere to his Lady's humiliating request, similar to Guinevere's expectation of Lancelot to humiliate himself in the cart without hesitation in the *Charette*. Yet in doing so, the Lady is also ruining the illusion of the game by restricting Arthur's knightly performance and thus becomes a 'spoilsport' for the chivalric game (Taylor, 1994: 542). As sovereign, Arthur is, in this way, rendered momentarily inoperative from within the boundaries of the anthropological cage through the courtly lady's restriction of his knightly performance. Agamben explores the concept of inoperative sovereigns by referring to the Fisher King which appears in Chretien de Troyes's *Perceveal* and describes him as 'the paradigm of a divided and impotent sovereignty' (2011: 433) read in relation to medieval ideas of the 'useless' king (Ibid.). The Fisher King appears in the story as a wounded and

impotent king fishing from a boat and serving as a keeper of the grail (ed. Méla, 1990). As Agamben argues, since sovereignty is such a great power, societies occasionally render inoperative their sovereigns to avert the danger of tyranny (2011: 459). In this way, any sovereign is haunted by the spectre of their own powerlessness. This scene indicates that although Arthur can be powerful and violent, he also averts the potential for tyranny through being bound by the rules of chivalric code.

When Arthur does perform badly at the tournament, the spectators begin to question how such a knight could have defeated the large, monstrous fish-knight. Yet when Count Doldays subsequently wins the tournament, Arthur challenges him to another duel if it pleases the lady (l.47-48, §21). The parrot tells the Dame aux Cheveux Blons that she has placed Arthur in the 'pire prison que oncques mais eust homme' [the worst prison for any man] by making him fight poorly and stripping him of his valour (l.70-71, §21). The Dame is remorseful and regrets her having confined Arthur in a metaphorical prison as she did not believe that Arthur would have gone through with it. That evening, Arthur goes to the Dame's bedroom and the narrator describes how Love commanded him to do with her what he pleased (l.64, §22) and so Arthur treats her poorly by pulling on her hair, hitting her, kicking her, and calling her 'Maulvaise putain' [evil whore] (l.66, §22). In this strange turn of events, Arthur subjects the Lady to the animal status which she originally subjected him to by holding dominion over his performance and placing him in a 'pire prison' (l.70, §21). The Dame aux Cheveux Blons is upset by his violent behaviour but still loves him since Arthur is only following her order of being a terrible knight (l.51-52, §22), whereas Count Doldays, as the narrator further comments, would have been a less favourable lover since 'Amours veult souffrance et mesure, de laquelle n'a point le conte Doldois' [Love requires suffering and measure, neither of which Count Doldois has] (l.14-15, §25). Within the symbolic cage of the lady's bedroom, the lovers explore a (seemingly consensual) violent relationship – first through the Lady's command for Arthur to perform badly and then through Arthur's physical violence. In this scene, their sadomasochistic roles are reversed in Arthur punishing the Lady. The parallels between the parrot's cage and the lady's bedroom, I believe, serve to reassert the lady's position as the submissive animal at Arthur's dominion through his subsequent aggression towards her. Arthur proves himself as a loyal lover and honourable knight by adhering to the lady's command, even to the point where he is violent with her. Indeed, when Arthur performs well in the tournament against the count, the parrot tells the lady that Arthur is no longer in a prison (l.20, §26) since is able to fight 'comme le loups entre les berbis quant il a

gran fain' [like a hungry wolf among sheep when he is very hungry] (l.15, §26) and consequently, Arthur wins the tournament and attains his prize of the lady's love. Arthur's animal-like performance as the 'loups […] quant il a gran fain' in contrast with his previous repressed performance which the lady imposed on him, emphasises Arthur's role as the sovereign animal who can enact violence as long as it is within the boundaries of the courtly game. For Agamben, the symbol of the wolf symbolises both the sovereign and his opponent by the fact that

> just as sovereign power's first and immediate referent is, in this sense, the life that may be killed but not sacrificed, and that has its paradigm in *homo sacer*, so in the person of the sovereign, the werewolf, the wolf-man of man, dwells permanently in the city (1998: 90).

On account of this, the act of transformation into the wolf-man, as Agamben further posits, 'corresponds perfectly to the state of exception, during which (necessarily limited) time the city is dissolved and men enter into a zone in which they are no longer distinct from beasts' (1998: 90). Arthur's state of exception is demarcated by the boundaries of the chivalric game – boundaries which manifest physically around the grounds of the tournament and the margins of the lady's bedroom. Now that Arthur is granted his full power to enact violence by the Lady within the tournament, he transforms into the 'loups' who can enact violence without repercussion.

The following morning, after the Lady and Arthur have reconciled, Arthur asks for leave so that he can complete his next quest which the Lady reluctantly gives him. On his next quest, Arthur soon encounters another large knight whom he fights, eventually chopping his leg off until the knight begs for mercy (l.17, §34). Arthur asks the knight about his origins and the knight explains that his mother was raped by a giant whom she then married which is why he is named the 'Chevalier Jayans' (l.9, §35). Knowing that he will soon die, the giant asks for Arthur to hear his confession of sins, to which Arthur agrees, and soon dies after confessing. Arthur prays for the knight's soul, covering him with branches and grass since he is too large and heavy to bury fully (l.25-26, §35). The burial of the Chevalier Jayans is a stark contrast to the death of the fish-knight earlier at the Chastel d'Amours. After killing the fish-knight, Arthur and the lady deny him a proper burial by flaying his skin and, therefore, as Peggy McCracken observes, 'the strange [fish]knight's body is treated more like an object or animal to be marvelled at than a corpse to be buried' (2017: 22). By contrast, Arthur treats the

Chevalier Jayan's death with more reverence by listening to his confession, praying for the salvation of his soul and sprinkling earth over his corpse (l.25-26, §35). The reason behind this difference in burial between the half-giant and the fish-knight is that we learn of the half-giant's origins and taxonomy when Arthur asks him who is parents were with such detail that we even learn exactly how he was conceived. As well as this, the Chevalier Jayan submits to Arthur's sovereignty at the end when he is defeated in battle and seeks God's mercy through confession, whereas the fish-knight remained mute until death and never once asked for mercy from either God or Arthur. The burial of the Chevalier Jayans indicates how mercy towards Arthur's dominion becomes a signifier for an adversary's humanity, regardless of whether he is fully human in appearance. Here, Arthur recognises the Chevalier Jayan's humanity as redeemable not only for his appeal to Arthur's mercy but also in revealing his mother's suffering through rape which renders the Chevalier Jayans humanity more complex. Accordingly, Arthur offers him justice in reparation for the violence the giant's mother suffered. Not only does this scene demonstrate Arthur's honour in offering mercy to those who seek it from him, but also how Arthur's violence as a sovereign can only be exercised as far as the rules of the chivalric game allow. For Agamben, being at the mercy of the sovereign is intricately tied with the exposure of the subject's life to the violence of sovereign law, noting that

> it is possible to understand the semantic ambiguity […] in which "banned" in Romance languages originally meant both "at the mercy of" and "out of free will, freely," both "excluded, banned" and "open to all, free." The ban is the force of simultaneous attraction and repulsion that ties together the two poles of the sovereign exception: bare life and power, *homo sacer* and the sovereign (1998: 110)

The point at which the adversary begs for mercy or reveals their suffering is when their humanity is restored, yet, paradoxically, in being at the mercy of Arthur, the Chevalier Jayan is also exposed to Arthur's power over life and death.

Another portrayal of a hybrid being is the magical stag who leads Arthur to his next quest. After defeating a rebel marshal, Arthur is led by the Queen of the land to a meadow near a keep where there is a beautiful beast who is described as

> aussi grande comme ung toriaux, et avoit le col soutil ainsi comme ung dragon, et avoit le chief petit et fait ainsi comme ung serf, et avoit deux cornes en la teste plus

> blanches que neges a barres de fin or, et sa pelleure estoit plus vermeille que nulle graine[10] (l.19-23, §51).
>
> [as big as a bull, and had a slender neck like a dragon, and had a small head like a deer's, and two horns on its head whiter than snow striped with gold, and its fur was redder than scarlet.]

When the beast sees Arthur, he bows before him 'sagement comme si ce fust ung home qui eust raison en soy' [wisely as if he were a man of reason] (l.25, §51). This anthropomorphic gesture is redolent of the same gesture made by the werewolf in *Bisclavret* when the king recognises the wolf as a man stuck in a wolf's body (Micha [ed.], 1994: 418). In the cases of Bisclavret and the hybrid stag, this act of submission by the metamorphosising animal figure not only affirms their hidden humanity, but also emphasises their recognition of sovereignty, which in this text, is held by Arthur as the young king. The hybrid creature looks at Arthur as if wanting to speak and then walks away with small steps. Arthur follows the animal, and they travel together for some time until the beast leads Arthur to rest near a beautiful, fragrant tree next to a ruined castle. Soon after, Arthur encounters a handsome knight who is old and dressed in white (l.57-58, §51). When Arthur asks the knight who he is, the old knight explains that he is the beast who led him there, named King Belnain, who was killed in a tournament by one of his marshals. In his will, he wrongfully left his kingdom to the treacherous marshal who killed him. Arthur then asks him where he currently lives and King Belnain claims that he is

> 'en ung bel lieu et seray tant que sera la prophecie Merlin achevee, et puis si seray en ung aultre moult bel lieu plus delicieux, tant que Damedieu rendra le guerredon a ses amys, ou ilz autont tant de gloyre que nul ne le pouroit conter' (l.76-79, §51).
>
> ['in a beautiful place and will remain there until Merlin's prophecy will be fulfilled, and then I will be in another beautiful place, even more delightful, such as God will give as a reward to his friends, where there will be so much glory that no one will be able to describe it.']

The metamorphic body of King Belnain flickers between two forms in this strange and otherworldly encounter – one being his animal, mute form and the other his resurrected human form dressed in white. Belnain explains in this extract that he will remain in his current state 'tant que sera la prophecie Merlin achevee' (Ibid.) which emphasises, I contend, how the boundaries of the narrative are demarcated by Merlin's prophecy which outlines the outcome of the courtly game. Belnain's flickering human-animal state embodies the dual nature of the sovereign within the anthropological cage which ties him to the chivalric code.

[10] 'graine' here refers to the specific dye of red produced from the cochineal insect (Charpentier and Victorin, 2004: 197), (Greimas, 2007: 297).

Because Belnain lost to his adversary in a tournament, he also lost his sovereign dominion and thus slips into an unstable hybrid form. King Belnain's explanation of his tragic death during a tournament by one of his own marshals serves as a warning to Arthur of the consequence of a sovereign's incompetence within the courtly game. After his death, King Belnain is stuck between his two embodiments as king. The 'bel lieu' which Belnain claims to remain until Merlin's prophecy is fulfilled, as well as being a possible reference to Avalon, perhaps also alludes to a purgatorial space since he explains that he will remain there in his hybrid state until God will grant him entrance to the 'aultre moult bel lieu plus delicieux' at the end of time as a euphemism for Heaven. For now, Belnain's animal and human natures remain unreconciled as a consequence of his failed dominion.

Belnain also resonates with the Arthurian figure of the Fisher King whom Agamben posits as the paradigmatic figure of the *rex inutilis* (2011: 459). Luke Sunderland contends that the Fisher King's 'lack of mobility stands metonymically for his kingdom, which suffers in the same way, whereas his wounds, and the broken sword he carries symbolize discontinuity and disinheritance' (2017: 50). In a similar way, King Belnain, although he does not lack mobility, or carry a broken sword, stands as an old defeated king, and is rendered mute in his animal form as a diminished version of his sovereignty. Ernst H. Kantorowicz likens the concept of the sovereign's '*dignitas non moritur*' (1957: 383) to the image of the phoenix which

> disclosed a duality: it was once Phoenix and Phoenix-kind, mortal as an individual, though immortal too, because it was the whole kind. It was at once individual and collective, because the whole species reproduced no more than a single specimen at a time (1957: 389-390).

Arthur standing as the youthful king in front of the ghost hybrid king resonates with Kantorowicz's portrait of the immortal phoenix rising from the ashes of its dead predecessor. Arthur is the renewed embodiment of the sovereign's *dignitas*, unmalleable and consistent throughout the narrative. It is up to Arthur to fulfil King Belnain's legacy by overthrowing Belnain's enemy, the rebellious marshal, save Belnain's daughter and bring justice to *Ile Fort* as the younger reincarnation of Belnain's sovereignty.

Before King Belnain leaves Arthur, he instructs him to remain under a fragrant tree and gives him a flower to place on his chest as a form of protection. The older king explains that during the night a tournament will appear, and that Arthur must not participate in it otherwise he will

be fatally injured and must instead, remain under the tree for the entirety of the night. When night falls, a tournament does appear, just as King Belnain forewarned, where ladies and maidens ‘moult richement vestues’ (l.9-10, §53) and knights and barons ‘mieulx atournez’ (l.12, §53) appear in front of him. These ghostly noble men and women insist upon Arthur joining them in the tournament and Arthur is at one point tempted despite King Belnain warning him not to, but as he is about to leave the safety of the fragrant tree, the church bells ring nearby for matins and the tournament magically disappears, almost as if it were a mere dream (l.14-17, §53). Despite the lack of explanation of the ghostly tournament on the narrator’s part, Belnain’s warning against Arthur participating in the tournament suggests that it somehow re-enacts, or at least echoes, Belnain’s tragedy in losing in a tournament which resulted in his death. Somehow, the ghostly tournament provides a vision for Arthur of the threat of dying in a tournament and emphasises the high stakes of the chivalric game. For Arthur to preserve himself against death within the game, he must stay within the boundaries of his allegorical cage which are demarcated by the narrative’s fated outcome which in this scene, manifests in King Belnain’s prophetic warning – that if Arthur remains under the tree he will survive, but if he participates in the tournament he will die.

The next day, freed from the confinement of the fragrant tree, Arthur sets off and comes across a damsel who cries out that her lover has been carried off by a ‘ung serpens’ (l.10, §56) and fears that he is dead. Arthur finds the serpent who is ‘le plus grant serpent qui oncques fust veu, et le plus orible’ [the largest and most horrible serpent anyone had ever seen] with the armoured knight in its mouth (l.13-14, §56). Arthur saves the knight by striking the serpent’s heart and, subsequently, Arthur and his horse are thrown into the lake and poisoned by the serpent. Nevertheless, Arthur manages to pull himself out of the lake and rides on for a while until he faints from the serpent’s venom, falling to the ground (l.3-4, §57). A fisherman later finds him unconscious and leads the damsel and her lover to him in order to take him to the castle to recover. Arthur is soon revived after three days thanks to the flower in his breastplate given to him by King Belnain. Following his encounter with the ghostly King Belnain, Arthur has come close to death in several occasions. Yet, by adhering to Belnain’s advice, who has an apparent prophetic knowledge of Arthur’s destiny, Arthur saves himself from the fatal consequences of the chivalric game.

Once recovered, Arthur reunites with his parrot and returns to the Queen who gives him a ship along with twenty other knights so that he can finally return home to Camelot after his year-long quest. However, on route, the ship almost suffers a shipwreck and Arthur and his

crew end up alighting on an unknown land. During the sea storm, the parrot asks the dwarf to open his cage so that he might fly back to land to ensure that even if they die in a shipwreck, the parrot would be able to preserve and recount their story at Arthur's court and ask the land to pray for their souls (l.17-19, §74). In this stormy scene, the parrot has the potential to be more mobile than his human companions when he begs Arthur to release him from his cage so that he can fly back to Camelot and recount his noble deeds. Here, the parrot identifies the importance of the survival of Arthur's honour as the chivalric hero but also his *dignitas* as the sovereign (Kantorowicz, 1957: 424). Instead, however, Arthur commands the dwarf to cover the parrot's cage since the waves scare him and ignores the parrot's pleas to be freed (l.31, §74). Luckily, the wind pushes the ship onto a wild land, and they are saved from drowning. Arthur tells the crew to guard the ship while he investigates the island.

As he explores the wilderness, Arthur discovers a poorly built tower with a dwarf inside, and soon the dwarf's son, a large giant, appears. The dwarf explains to Arthur that many years ago, his wife died in childbirth, and that he took refuge with his son inside a hollow tree, but inside the tree was a beast with her young. The beast had a large horn on its head and was breastfeeding her young. At the sight of the frightening beast, the dwarf drops the child in fright, and the dwarf recounts to Arthur the marvel that occurred when

> la beste lors pitié et entra au creus de l'arbre et je, qui estoie caché derrière la racine de l'arbre, regarday que la beste feroit de l'enfant. Et adonc la beste print l'enfant a son musel, si entra ens et se coucha devant luy, et fist tant par son engin que l'enfant ot sa mamelle en sa bouche. Et quant l'enfant senti la molece de la mamelle, ainsi comme Nature luy enseigna, si alaita fort et bien' (l.24-29, §77).
>
> [the beast pitied them and entered the crevice of the tree, hidden behind the tree's root, I watched what the beast did with the child. Then the beast took the child by her muzzle as she entered inside and lay in front of him ensuring that the child had her teat in his mouth. And when the child felt the softness of her teat, he latched on to it securely just as nature taught him to do.]

The fact that the beast shows pity towards the dwarf and the child shows how the humanity of the beast lies in its ability to show mercy. What is more, 'engin' implies deception, or at least ingenuity which draws attention to the reality that the beast somehow has to make an extra effort through her ingenuity so that the child will trust her enough to latch on to her for milk. Nevertheless, as the narrator explains, once the child feels the softness of her teat, he immediately trusts her 'comme Nature luy enseigna.' Nature, in this way, teaches the recognition of forms, which might be common to different bodies, momentarily destabilizing opposition between species. What this cross-species breastfeeding scene ultimately reveals, I

argue, however, is that the pity and mercy that the beast shows towards the dwarf and the child mirrors Arthur's pity and mercy towards them as sovereign – for he too will later take them into his dwelling and nourish them at his court.

The dwarf further explains to Arthur that he purposefully built the tower with no doors to protect himself from other beasts so that, instead, his son lifts him from the hole in the roof. The dwarf's son is called the 'Jaiant sans Nom' [Giant without a Name] (l.4, §78) since he has not been baptised. The unicorn still visits the giant once or twice a day and loves him like a son. When the giant sees Arthur on his horse, he believes him to be an animal and almost kills Arthur before his father stops him. Along with this tale of the breastfeeding unicorn, there are various other medieval tales which describe exceptional situations in which an abandoned or orphaned child is nursed by an animal often resulting in the child inheriting some animal qualities later as they grow into an adult. As Peggy McCracken comments, 'intimacy with nursing animals seems to require isolation from human society' (2013: 59). Indeed, this story explores the cross-species intimacy which develops from isolation yet whilst also exploring the notion of confinement. Not only is the dwarf isolated from human society, but he also isolates himself from the wilderness outside by building a tower with no door so that he is not eaten by other beasts – similar to the confinement within the unicorn's hollow tree. These enclosed spaces indicate that the cross-species bond with the unicorn is unique and only occurred through the intercession of maternal instinct within a small, confined and exceptional space. This exceptionality is also signified through the description of the unicorn breastfeeding her own young. In the confinement of the hollowed tree, the dwarf's infant learns to drink milk from the unicorn until eventually his father does the same ('et si l'alaictay et trouvay le meilleur lait et le plus doulx que oncques mais eusse mengé [l.41-41, §77]) in order to survive the three weeks they are cooped up in the crevice.

As an adult, the dwarf's son grows into a giant, and despite that the narrator does not explicitly disclose the fact that the unicorn's breastmilk caused his gianthood (even though his father is a dwarf), certainly the description of the giant's strength and cannibalistic tendencies suggests the animality which the giant has inherited through the unicorn's breastmilk, as well as being isolated from human society. For Sylvia Huot, giants 'embody a primal savagery […] that makes them the living remnants of that which must be excluded in order for civilization to take hold' (2008: 243). Indeed, the Jaiant sans Nom is the portrait of human savagery through his wild upbringing and cannibalistic diet and is one of many examples in the text of the 'remnants' of something primal. Yet, Arthur is the one to reinstate

the giant back into civilization by bringing him back to Camelot along with his father and having him baptised and knighted. In other words, for Arthur to include the giant back into courtly society, he excludes the giant's primal remnants by transforming him into a Christian knight, stripping him of his previous cannibalistic and savage identity. This is because Arthur symbolises, as I argue through Agamben's terms, 'a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man, *physis* and *nomos*, exclusion and inclusion' (1998: 89). The tale ends with the celebrations of the giant's knighthood and membership into Arthur's court. At first glance, the giant is portrayed as a violent savage who kills and eats humans. His barbarity is emphasised further through the fact that he is able to roam freely around the wilderness where he grew up without peril, whereas his father builds an enclosed tower to protect himself from other beasts of the wild. Arthur's reformed giant echoes Arthur's encounter with the half-giant earlier whom he defeated in combat, yet, whose humanity is restored after he recounts his origins and seeks Arthur's mercy before his death. The sovereign figure then, restores justice to boundary figures he encounters on the margins of civilisation by enacting violence or mercy according to the binding rules of the chivalric game.

Conclusion

Arthur returns to Camelot, along with the parrot, the dwarf, the giant and the unicorn, exactly a year after his adventure first began on the feast of Pentecost during which the giant is baptised and then knighted along with the other companions from the sea voyage (l.14-15, §82). The Lion sans Mercy is also there at Arthur's court, who relays 'devant la baronnie l'aventure et se mist en la mercy au roy' (l.11-12, §82) [the adventure in front of the barony and swore under the mercy of the king]. Charpentier and Victorin believe that Arthur's tangential adventure to the wild land where the dwarf and giant reside, 'a ressuscité la figure immuable du roi, qui n'a plus qu'à rentrer à sa cour, comme si rien, ou presque, ne s'était passé' (2004 : 33). Indeed, Arthur remains consistent and unmalleable when faced with hybridity and animality throughout his quests. Yet, when he returns to Camelot, Arthur has gathered around him figures who were previously outcasts of courtly society and whom he admits and reintegrates into the court of Camelot through his sovereign jurisdiction. The Lion sans Mercy acquires readmission into courtly society through his punitive correction on Arthur's part and by the fact that he is now under 'la mercy au roy' (l.12, §82). The giant too,

becomes humanised by the end of the romance, after his feral and cannibalistic upbringing by the maternal unicorn, through his baptism and knighthood by Arthur and we come to assume that through this, the giant's cannibalistic tendencies have been erased. The parrot, on the other hand, began the story within a cage, and returns to Camelot in the same state in which Arthur first encountered him – similar in a way, to Arthur's consistency within the boundaries of chivalric gameplay and sovereign embodiment, which, as I have argued, building on Giorgio Agamben and Virginie Greene's respective models, are pillars of the anthropological cage.

In this way, no matter how far Arthur wanders in the world, he is always enclosed within the anthropological cage which allows him to enact violence or mercy in accordance with the binding rules of the courtly game. The narrator, imprisoned himself within the allegories of Merlin and the parrot, imprisons Arthur by limiting his sovereign violence within the chivalric code and providing him a state of exception to enact violence onto those who do not submit to his sovereign rule. When the courtly festivities disperse, Arthur returns to his throne and resumes his sovereign mode of 'inoperativeness,' similar to Agamben's theory of the Fisher King (2011: 433) once the game of the quest finishes – that same mode of inoperativeness which converges with that of the caged parrot, the ghost-stag king, the rehabilitated Lion sans Mercy and the converted Jaiant sans Nom who all dwell within Arthur's courtly cage. In the course of this chapter, I have explored Arthur's sovereign embodiment through the animals and hybrids he encounters along his year-long journey in the hope to demonstrate how ideas about the courtly game and sovereign dominion converge through the confinement of the anthropological cage. This human-animal convergence culminates, then, with the alignment of the caged parrot and Arthur's inoperative mode at the end of the narrative, in his return to the sovereign throne. As the hero of the courtly game, Arthur enacts violence and punishment to assert his dominion over all forms of life, humans and nonhumans alike, but he himself is locked within his own cage whose boundaries are demarcated by the courtly game.

3

No Longer Human: Monstrosity and Monasticism in the *Roman de Mélusine*

In Chapter One, I argued that in the *Roman d'Alexandre,* the honouring of a pagan king's heroism after his death catalyses an anxiety around eschatological hermeneutics. In my reading, the apocalyptic animal portrayals of the *Alexandre,* inherited from earlier Alexander literary traditions, dramatize the sovereign contradictions of Alexander as a pagan king and proto-Christian hero. Chapter Two analyses, instead, the portrait of a Christian king, young Arthur, in the *Conte du Papegau*, on his year-long quest which sees him encounter a variety of creatures both human and nonhuman. I contended that the text's 'anthropological cage' of chivalric gameplay compels Arthur to undertake punitive and barbaric acts when faced with animality in order to preserve his sovereign dominion. Overall, in both of these chapters I argued that medieval animal portrayals are used to dramatize the eschatological resonances of the portrait of the sovereign – Alexandre's instability as a pagan sovereign and Arthur as the embodiment of sovereign justice. In this chapter, I will be analysing the monstrous portrait of female sovereignty in the *Roman de Mélusine*. In my readings, I will be arguing that Mélusine's female, hybrid body maps out the shifting eschatological narrative of the text which begins with the 'genesis' of the Lusignan lineage with Mélusine as the serpent, and ends with the 'apocalypse' of the Lusignan ancestry in Mélusine's dragon form. Ultimately, Raymondin's penance as a monastic hermit will attempt to purge the lineage of the animality which has plagued them from their foundation. In this section, I will be considering, then, the male monastic figure as a form of resistance against female monstrous sovereignty.

Jean d'Arras's *Roman de Mélusine* tells the origin story of the Lusignan lineage, supposedly descended from the hybrid fairy, Mélusine, who is the daughter of King Elinas of Scotland and the fairy, Presine. The text also describes at length the many battles and campaigns against Saracens abroad which Mélusine and Raymondin's sons undergo during their conquests. The tale is mostly known for its supernatural lore around Mélusine's bodily curse which renders her into a hybrid serpent-woman every Saturday and, by the end, into a fully transformed dragon when her curse manifests fully. Indeed, the term 'dragon' for medieval writers is a slippery category since 'dragon' and 'serpent' are often used interchangeably,

even in the *Book of Revelations*. In bestiaries, the dragon is often described as the 'greatest of all serpents on earth' (Badke, 2011, bestiary.ca). Many scholars have written on the thematic parallels between *Mélusine* and *Genesis* – particularly the popular medieval *Genesis* illuminations of the 'woman-headed serpent' (Burns, 2013: 195), often drawn as a snake with a woman's head, mirroring Eve's own face which, as Peggy McCracken argues, 'invites Eve to recognize herself as queen of the world' (2017: 99). Indeed, Peggy McCracken's work on the notion of self-sovereignty within *Mélusine* is influential on my analysis of Mélusine's monstrous sovereignty and highlights the text's parallels with agency in *Genesis*, arguing that

> Like the Eden story, *Le roman de Mélusine* and *Le bel inconnu* interrogate the relationship between self-sovereignty and sovereignty over others, and they represent the desire for knowledge and mastery in an encounter with a snake woman in which self-sovereignty is at stake. But in these stories, the desiring gaze on the snake woman is that of a knight, not another woman, and this regendering redefines the relationship of recognition to agency and sovereignty' (McCracken, 2017: 113).

This chapter builds on this analysis of the gendered sovereignty within Mélusine by examining more specifically the eschatological implications of female sovereignty allegorised through an unstable, monstrous body which becomes juxtaposed with monastic figures.

Whilst the parallels with *Genesis* are certainly prominent in the *Roman de Mélusine*, less attention has been paid to the eschatological themes of the narrative which emerge through the apocalyptic image of Mélusine's dragon transformation, as well as the text's curious alignment of Mélusine's monstrosity with Fromont and Raymondin's monasticism, which mark the collapse of Mélusine's sovereign rule. The tale of Fromont's monastic vocation, which indirectly leads to Mélusine's full monstrosity and Raymondin's hermitic penance, becomes a vehicle for exploring ideas around female sovereignty, monasticism and eschatology. In conversation with Giorgio Agamben, Caroline Walker Bynum, as well as key medieval figures of the monastic reform movement such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Hildegard of Bingen, I will be arguing that the text presents monasticism as a solution to the problem of monstrous sovereignty. In the end, monstrosity and monasticism become two sides of the same coin as both are paradoxical states of exception which involve the renunciation of sovereignty.

Before I turn to my analysis, it is worth briefly summarising the plot of the *Roman de Mélusine*. In the prologue, Jean d'Arras discusses the existence of supernatural, 'invisible' beings and draws on ancient and contemporary authors such as the prophet David, Aristotle, St Paul and Gervase de Tilbury for authority (p. 114-116). The story proper begins when one day, King Elinas of Scotland, out hunting in the forest, becomes thirsty and soon encounters a fountain next to which a beautiful woman, called Presine, is singing a lovely melody. The King is enchanted by Presine's song and beauty, and eventually pursues her and persuades her to marry him. Presine agrees to marry Elinas, on condition that if they are to have any children, he must never see her in her childbed. Elinas promises to keep this oath and Presine and Elinas soon marry. They have three daughters together named Mélusine, Melior and Palestine. However, Elinas's son from his previous marriage becomes jealous and convinces him to see how beautiful his new-born daughters are, to which Elinas concedes, momentarily forgetting the original promise he made to his wife. Presine is furious with the disloyalty of her husband and flees from him with their three daughters to Avalon. As the daughters grow up in Avalon, Presine takes them up a mountain to see the kingdom which would have been theirs had it not been for their father's treacherous act. Mélusine plans to get revenge on their father with the help of her sisters. Using their fairy powers, the three sisters enclose Elinas within a mountain in Northumberland where he will spend the rest of his life in misery. When their mother discovers what they have done, she punishes them with lifetime curses. Mélusine receives the curse which transforms her into a serpent from her navel down every Saturday. If Mélusine ever marries, her husband must never find out about her hybridity nor must he ever seek her out on a Saturday or tell anyone of her curse otherwise she will transform into a dragon and remain that way until the Last Judgement. The curse inflicted on Melior encloses her within a castle along with a sparrowhawk – any knight who discovers the castle can partake in a boon whereby he must keep a three-day vigil without sleeping. If the knight successfully completes the boon, he may receive any fortune he wishes from Melior but he must not ask for her body or her love lest the knight and his descendants be left in ruin and tribulation until his ninth generation. Finally, Palestine's curse traps her within the same mountain of her father along with their treasure until a knight of their own lineage shall deliver her from the mountain and use the treasure to conquer the Holy Land.

The narrative then shifts to Raymondin who will later become Mélusine's husband. Raymondin and his uncle, Count Aimery of Poitiers, are out hunting one day and come across a ferocious boar. They pursue the beast and soon, the Count and Raymondin end up

separated from the rest of the hunting party. In an attempt to defend them from the vicious boar who suddenly reappears, Raymondin accidentally stabs his uncle, the Count, killing him along with the boar. On his return to Poitiers, Raymondin, distressed at having committed manslaughter of his uncle, comes across a fountain and three beautiful women. One of them is Mélusine, who knows what has happened to Count Aimery and promises to help Raymondin if he marries her. Raymondin agrees and Mélusine gives him a set of instructions about how to avoid suspicion at the court by leading the noblemen to believe that the Count was killed by the boar. Mélusine and Raymondin soon marry and Raymondin's fortune flourishes thanks to Mélusine's magical abilities, which are used to found Lusignan. They have ten sons together, and eight of them have distinctive animal-like hybrid qualities, such as a lion's paw birthmark or abnormally large ears. Many of the sons go on to conquer foreign lands and marry noblewomen whose kingdoms they inherit through their marriage. The tale ends tragically, however, when Raymondin's brother, the Count of Forests, convinces Raymondin to spy on his wife on a Saturday to see if she is having an affair. When Raymondin peeps through a hole in Mélusine's door, he sees her hybrid serpentine form whilst she is bathing. Raymondin immediately regrets having mistrusted his wife and does not mention her hybridity to her or anyone else. Nevertheless, later, when one of their son's, Geoffroy, commits fratricide against their other son, Fromont, who became a monk, Raymondin blames Mélusine's hybridity for their son's murderous crime. At Raymondin's second transgression of revealing his wife's secret, Mélusine transforms into a dragon and flies from the window ledge, never to see her husband Raymondin again. She has since been spotted by citizens of Lusignan, wailing and screeching in her dragon form in her grief. After the tragic loss of his wife, Raymondin makes penance by undertaking a pilgrimage to Rome and then becomes a monastic hermit in Montserrat until his death. The legend concludes with the folklore tale that whenever the castle of Lusignan is to change hands, Mélusine reappears in her dragon form before them.

There are three main parts to *Mélusine*, according to Kevin Brownlee, 'figured by means of Mélusine's three bodies: 1) a woman's body; 2) a mixed body, half-woman and half-snake; and 3) the body of a flying snake' (1994: 19). The prologue which deals with the nature of 'invisible things' as well as Mélusine's origins through King Elinas and Presine is the section which Brownlee categorises as 'a woman's body' (Ibid.). For most of the tale, Mélusine remains a hybrid. Then, the final section deals with Mélusine's metamorphosis into a dragon after Raymondin's transgression. Brownlee's tripartite division of the text is useful, I believe,

not only in mapping out Mélusine's corporeal evolution, but for articulating how her monstrosity correlates to the theme of penance – the text begins with her own transgression with her father, followed by Geoffroy's murdering of the monks and, finally, Raymondin's penance through his hermithood. Mélusine's body is fluid and shifts in form throughout the narrative, coming to signify different forms of penance and sovereign instability. E. Jane Burns writes that

> Mélusine emerges not as a deceptive force, a delusion, or a transitory, devilish apparition, but rather as a body in process: a "woman" who can move between the states of human and animal, land and water, and later, when she flies away, between land and air' (2013: 203).

As Burns contends, Mélusine's hybridity evokes to some extent, a sense of fluidity and autonomy. However, I believe that along with this fluidity comes a limitation in her agency – her transitory state is temporally chained to her Saturday penance until the curse manifests fully, when she will remain as a dragon. In this way, although Mélusine's hybridity is fluid, it will also remain immanent in her final monstrous form, becoming a signifier for sovereign instability whenever the castle of Lusignan changes owner.

The prologue of the text begins with explaining the nature of fairies within the Aristotelian taxonomy of 'invisible things' created by God, and that these invisible things are not wholly revealed to humanity as they once were to Adam in *Genesis.* The narrator cites Aristotle as an authoritative interpretation of the supernatural marvels which occur in this text, such as Mélusine's fairy powers and her hybridity, and as evidence of God's power and presence, stating that 'La creature de Dieu raisonnable doit entendre, selon que dit Aristote que des choses invisibles, selon la distinction des choses qu'il a faictes ça jus, et que par leur presence de leur estre et nature le certifie' (p. 114) ['According to Aristotle, the rational creature of God should realize that invisible things, according to the distinctions among the entities created here below, attest to Him by their nature and manifestations' (trans. Maddox and Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 20)]. Jean d'Arras appropriates Aristotle into his Christian understanding of supernatural marvels by linking 'invisible things' to God's omnipotence in Creation. The reference to 'visible' and 'invisible' also alludes to the Nicene Creed, influenced by Aristotle, which asserts that God created 'all things visible and invisible' (Maddox and Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 135). The narrator further claims that there are 'tant de merveilles' (many marvels) within Creation revealing the 'jugemens de Dieu' (God's

judgements) which are ‘abisme sans fons et sans rive’ (p. 114). This denotes three things: 1) the vast number of ‘merveilles’ within Creation; 2) that marvels, both visible and invisible, reveal the ‘jugemens de Dieu’; and, 3) that we will not be able to know the full extent of these judgements until the Second Coming since they are as immense as an ‘abisme sans fons’ (Ibid.). Despite the vastness of divine symbology within Creation, the narrator claims that he has chosen to recount this particular tale of the marvel of Mélusine since it pleases God (‘au plaisir de Dieu mon Createur,’ p. 116) implying that the story of Mélusine will reveal to the reader, at least in part, God’s vast and wondrous judgements through the marvel of Mélusine. We begin, then, in contemplating the beginning and the end of time – a similar looming prefiguration at the beginning of the *Roman d’Alexandre*. The marvels of God’s Creation, as the narrator indicates, will expose in part, God’s judgements, which will be revealed in full at the Last Judgement during the Apocalypse, when Mélusine would finally be free of her monstrous curse.

Later in this hermeneutical manifesto, the narrator cites Gervase of Tilbury, who wrote an encyclopaedic treatise on marvels, *Otia Imperialia*, as an authority on the nature of fairy women (p. 116). The category of fairies which Mélusine falls under describes them as beautiful women who marry mortal men but with some form of a condition which the husband must obey. The narrator cites one of Gervase’s accounts within *Otia Imperialia* which tells the story of a knight, known as Rogier du Chastel de Rousset, who married a fairy with the condition that he never sees her naked. One day, curiosity gets the better of him and he spies on her whilst she is bathing, only for her to plunge herself underwater never to be seen again, and, subsequently, the knight’s fortune and prosperity turn to ruin (p. 118). The invisibility of fairy women is not something that manifests consistently, since the fairy women appear as mortal, visible women to their husbands, but their invisible nature manifests once the oaths are broken by their husbands, at which point they disappear. Mélusine and Raymondin share one common trait: they have both committed transgressions against a parental figure. Mélusine, at the beginning of the text, wrongfully takes on the role of punisher towards her father who broke his oath to Presine and because of this, she must live out her penance as a transitory hybrid being. When Raymondin first meets Mélusine, he has just accidentally killed his uncle whilst trying to defend them against a boar. The boar hunting scene marks the end of Raymondin’s youthful innocence and denotes Raymondin’s lack of awareness of the human-animal boundary, that is the boundary between his uncle and the boar. The difference for Mélusine, however, is that her penance for her familial

transgression is immanent leaving a visible mark on her body which she tries to render invisible in hiding it, whereas for Raymondin, the consequences of his sin are suspended as he is able to delay his penance through Mélusine's fairy intercession. Consequently, the human-animal boundary is, in this text, inextricably bound to time and embodiment through Mélusine's eschatological penance.

The chain of events which leads to Mélusine and Raymondin's first encounter begins when Count Aimery and Raymondin are out hunting with the rest of the party and confront a vicious boar which attacks their hounds and horses and manages to escape. Despite the beast's ferocity, Raymondin is determined to pursue the boar, and his uncle, the Count, goes with him. Susan Crane argues that medieval hunting treatises

> delineate a universe that is ordered through ritual structuring rather than taxonomy – through the stylization, mimetic power, and cosmic scale the treatises ascribe to the most celebrated kind of aristocratic hunting, the all-day hunt "with strength of hounds" (2012: 102).

The 'ritual structuring' of hunting must be re-enacted in order to keep boundaries in place which is why the stakes of hunting are on a 'cosmic scale' as Crane puts it. Indeed, Raymondin feels an intense sense of guilt as soon as he commits the transgression which breaks the pattern of ritual structuring, but we learn that the uncle had already foreseen the accidental killing and even embraced his tragic fate for he knew that it would lead to the increase of Raymondin's fortune. The cosmic drama of the hunt culminates when the Count observes the stars and the cosmos above him and foresees both the death of the boar and his own death at the hands of his nephew. The boar hunt scene depicts a moment in which the 'universe that is ordered through ritual structuring' (Crane, 2012: 102) collapses in the breaking down of power structures when Raymondin kills his own human kin in the same place as the boar. The cosmic scale of the boar hunt is also emphasised through the contrast between the uncle, who is slow and contemplative in looking towards the stars, and Raymondin, who is quick and anxious to fight the boar when

> Le conte, qui moult savoit d'astronomie, regarde ou ciel et voit les estelles cleres et l'air pur, et la lune estoit moult belle, sans tache ne obscurité […] « Vrays Dieux! Comment sont les merveilles, que tu as laissiees ça jus en la vertu de ta chamberiere Nature, merveilleuses et diverses en leur expedicion, se tu n'y espandoies ta grâce divine! » (p. 150).
>
> ['The count, learned in astronomy, contemplated the stellar gleam and the vivid moon devoid of spot or shadow […] "O One True God, the marvels Thou hast left under the

> aegis here below of Thy handmaiden Nature would be so fearful and harmful were it not for the divine grace Thou hast bestowed on them!"' (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 29).]

When Raymondin recognises the danger as the boar reappears, he tells his uncle to climb the nearby tree so that he is out of harm's way and is able to take on the savage boar himself. However, the uncle refuses to heed Raymondin's instruction since he believes that his destiny has been preordained, as he exclaims 'Par foy, dist ly contes, je ne plaise a Jhesucrist que je te laisse en ceste adventure' (p. 154). The uncle's repeated invocation of God during this hunt scene amplifies the 'cosmic scale' (Crane, 2012: 102) of this boar hunt and manslaughter scene as the uncle resigns himself to God's will. In this way, the taxonomical boundaries between man and beast become pierced. The Count accepts his fated demotion from hunter to hunted prey, allowing Raymondin to gain sovereign dominion over man and beast.

The activity of hunting relies on the hunters being in control of the collective instincts of hunter, horse and hound which converge at the point of the chase of the targeted prey, often a stag or boar. The danger in this scene arises first when the boar attacks the hounds – or, in other words, reverses the dynamics of violence – and then when Raymondin and the Count become separated from the others. The fact that the hunting goes wrong from the beginning prefigures the cosmic consequence of their failed dominion. Crane further posits that the hunt à force is a ritual since the 'ceremonial forms frame the ritual temporally and spatially, setting it apart from everyday life and giving it rules or ways of proceeding that make it repeatable and make its unfolding predictable' (2012: 104). Yet, the boar hunt in *Mélusine* is *unpredictable* as several factors go wrong, eventually resulting in the accidental death of the Count. The hunting accident becomes a renegotiation of boundaries, whereas a predictable ritual would reinforce them. The cause of the tragedy, however, is somewhat ambiguous as it is due either to the hunters' failure in dominion over the boar from the start, or from divine intervention as the Count discerns in the stars. The predictability of the hunt is disrupted when the taxonomical boundaries are suspended – suddenly the boar becomes the violent hunter as it kills hounds and then tries to attack Raymondin and the Count. Raymondin defends himself by stabbing the boar, but because now the boar is on the same taxonomical level of the hunter, Raymondin ends up killing both the boar and the Count in their shared category as hunter. The taxonomical alignment between the Count and the boar endures in their shared violent death in the illumination seen in Figure 3, in which the corpses of the boar and the Count are depicted in the same position – lying on their backs with bloody wounds to their sides.

This hunting scene reveals that when dominion is suspended in what should have been a predictable ritual, the hunter can easily slip below his taxonomical boundary and become hunted animal flesh before being slain. Sarah Kay, writing about the animality of the parchment manuscript, notes the shared vulnerability of the animal skin of the page and the human figures in illuminations as she writes that 'skin's essence is to be vulnerable and to expose to injury the body which it covers' (Kay, 2017: 87). Indeed, on fol.17 from the MS Harley 4418, the boar and the Count's shared vulnerability is rendered more palpable through the depiction of similar wounds painted onto their corpses.

Figure 3, British Library MS Harley 4418, fol.17r, British Library, London, http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_4418, accessed 15th July 2020.

The bright red used in painting their blood solidifies their alignment in death. What is more, the same colour of red is also used to inscribe the text below the illumination on fol.17 as if written in the Count and boar's blood suggesting that the story of Raymondin's fate thereafter is determined by the bloody sacrifice of the boar and his uncle. There is a parallel also between cuts on the page and sacrifice in bestiaries, notably with the tradition of the pelican father that pierces its own skin to revive his young which he accidentally kills in a fit of rage (Kay, 2017: 92). Kay summarises the microcosmic image of salvation history within the pelican image as 'a 'lightning-fast allegory of the creation and fall of man, the crucifixion,

and the redemption' (Kay, 2017: 91). The pelican bestiary depiction resonates with Count Aimery's sacrificial act and helps to illuminate the theological implications of the Count's death, who appears almost as a Christological slaughtered lamb. Another layer of animality is added to the Count as seen in Figure 3 since the skin of the human figures is left largely unpainted so that the skin of the animal parchment becomes one with the Count's own skin in the same 'vulnerability of shared skin' which Kay talks about in the context of bestiaries (2017: 96). Although the bodies of the Count and the boar are different, they share the same colour of blood in death. The Count, mirroring the boar as we see both corpses laying on their backs as if both were contemplating the stars, becomes the sacrificed animal along with the boar.

The death of the Count exposes the fragility of the power dynamics behind the hunting ritual as a human being is accidentally killed alongside the hunted prey. The corpses of the Count and the boar are juxtaposed in a way that animalises the Count and humanises the boar in their shared violent deaths. As Agamben argues, 'the animal-man and the man-animal are the two sides of a single fracture, which cannot be mended from either side' (2004: 36). For Raymondin, now that the 'fracture' of the boundary has been exposed, it will continue to tear throughout the rest of the narrative. This boar hunt scene functions as an omen which exposes the superficiality of the boundary between human and animal as the boar and the Count lay lifeless in their joint sacrifice for Raymondin's future. The Count's death marks the beginning of Raymondin's fortune by marriage through his encounter with Mélusine, but also anticipates Raymondin's sovereign downfall in cutting through the human-animal boundaries (quite literally) as Mélusine's body is cut through in her hybridity. The earlier description of the savagery of the boar shows how Raymondin's violence is capable of going beyond the strength of the boar in not only killing the savage beast but also his uncle, the hunter. Karl Steel explores the ontological alignment between the boar and King Arthur in *The Avowying of Arthur* which tells the story of Arthur hunting a feisty boar which manages to kill several hounds and argues that it is a 'clear evidence of the boar's animal savagery [which] also heightens the ambiguity of the boar's resemblance to Arthur, for it invokes the consequences of martial dominion gone wrong' (2011: 193). The 'martial dominion gone wrong' which Steel refers to in this particular Arthurian text involves the hounds which the violent boar has killed during the hunt scene. Although the texts have different outcomes, Arthur's portrayal in the boar hunt scene from the Arthurian text which Steel analyses resonates with the figure of Raymondin in *Mélusine* as both heroes manage to defeat a vicious boar. As Steel later

concludes, 'the success, however, can only ever be temporary, because Arthur's lawmaking against the boar, like human lawmaking against the animal, and thus the human creation of itself, cannot cease' (2011: 203). Steel's point resonates with Agamben's theory of the anthropological machine which claims that the human-animal boundary is a production which must function unceasingly (2004: 33). In the case of the *Roman de Mélusine*, there is a cosmic, human cost when Raymondin matches the boar's violence as it prefigures the monstrous cruelty that is yet to come through his son, Geoffroy. From the very beginning, then, the sovereignty of the Lusignan lineage is founded on an unstable human-animal boundary which has been pierced by Raymondin's sword and bleeds on to the rest of the narrative.

Meeting Mélusine and Founding Lusignan

After accidentally murdering Count Aimery, Raymondin mounts his horse and laments in grief to God. In his distress, Raymondin decides that he will leave the court of Poitiers and go elsewhere to undertake penance for his sin. However, as he is riding on horseback he falls into a half-slumber in his grief and is unaware of his surroundings. The horse begins to wander on its own accord and, at midnight, Raymondin rides past a fountain known as the 'Fontaine de Soif' (p. 158) with three beautiful maidens next to it (one of whom is Mélusine) and, still in anguish, does not notice the women. The narrator explains how in this encounter, Mélusine already knows who Raymondin is and what has happened to him during the hunt. Despite knowing everything about him, Mélusine feigns anger at Raymondin's discourtesy in not greeting her and the ladies so that she has a reason to speak to him. Approaching him, Mélusine asks Raymondin whether he is too proud or naïve to greet three young ladies. On hearing Mélusine speak, Raymondin at first, cannot locate the source of her voice and reaches for his sword, but Mélusine reassures him that she is not an enemy. Then when Raymondin sees Mélusine in her beautiful form he is finally startled out of his slumber. Mélusine asks what has befallen him but Raymondin is reluctant to divulge the sin he has just committed. Mélusine is frustrated and eventually reveals to Raymondin that she knows everything that happened with the killing of the Count and promises to turn his misery into great fortune if he marries her:

> Remondin, ne t'en esbahiz pas, car je le sçay bien. Et saiches que je sçay bien que tu cuides que ce soit fantosme ou euvre dyabolique de mon fait et de mes paroles, mais

> je te certiffie que je suiz de par Dieu et croy en tout quanque vraye catholique doit croire (p. 164).
>
> ['"Don't be astonished, Raymondin," she said. "Just accept the fact that I do indeed know it. I know, too, that you believe my words and deeds result from some phantasm or diabolical power, but let me assure you: I am on God's side and believe everything a true Catholic must believe."' (trans. Maddox, Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 33).]

In this speech, Mélusine denies being a 'fantosme' – a reference made to her several times within the romance, particularly in the prologue in which Jean d'Arras discusses at length the nature of invisible things within Creation such as fairy women.[11] The reference to phantasmal or diabolical power denotes how Mélusine's unusual knowledge is considered illicit and beyond the boundaries of natural human capability if it is not contextualised within Christian prophetic understanding. Her denial of her phantasmal nature is an ironic jibe in reaction to Raymondin's being unable to perceive her physical form when he first hears her speak moments ago. What is more, Mélusine seems to have the reverse effect on Raymondin to sirens who would lull victims into a slumber through their beautiful voice which bypasses reason – Raymondin is instead brought back to his rational senses through Mélusine's speech and beauty. The extract above reveals the narrative's preoccupation with Christian hermeneutics, because the narrator affirms that Mélusine's fairy powers come from God and not the devil and that she believes everything that a 'catholique doit croire' (p. 164). On the Christian alignment of fairies with devils, Richard Firth Green writes that 'devils, of course, cannot die, so another difficulty faced by those who wished to demonize fairies was the fact that although popular tradition certainly regarded them as long lived, it did not regard them as immortal' (2016: 59). In this moment, the narrator refutes the phantasmal and diabolical association with fairies by affirming Mélusine's religious orthodoxy. Yet, we know from Presine's curse that should Mélusine's husband betray her, she will live out her monstrous penance for the rest of time, which would render her immortal. Despite denying a phantasmal and diabolical origin when she first meets Raymondin, what she does not disclose to him is that she holds the potential to become diabolical if her future husband commits a transgression. In their first encounter, however, Raymondin has already committed a chivalric transgression in not greeting the young ladies for which Mélusine reproaches him. Already, Raymondin proves his predisposition towards transgression, not only in killing his uncle during a boar hunt, but in his rudeness towards the ladies and Mélusine.

[11] The phantasmal nature of fairies originates from the classification of 'incubi' fairies which Gervase of Tilbury describes in the *Otia Imperialia*, yet Gervase warns that incubi are 'unclean spirits' (Green, 2016: 78).

After asserting her knowledge of Raymondin's identity and transgression, Mélusine instructs Raymondin to return to the court of Poitiers and pretend that he is unaware of what happened to the Count. A search party follows, and the noblemen of the court discover the Count's body beside the boar and conclude that he was killed by the beast. The people of Poitiers are in such a state of grief after discovering this, that they burn the body of the boar in the square in front of the church ('En chaude cole prindrent le porc et le porterent en la place devant la dicte eglise et l'ardirent en un four qu'ilz firent de motes de terre,' [p. 172]). The location of the animal cremation gives a religious note to the vengeful gesture, perhaps as a reassertion of the boar's status as a dirty beast which lacks a soul for resurrection and can thus be incinerated. The dramatic irony aligns the boar which the noblemen call a 'filz de truye' ([son of a pig], p. 172) with Raymondin since, in reality Raymondin should be the one to receive punishment. Thanks to Mélusine's providential instructions, Raymondin has avoided a gruesome punishment as the boar comes to replace him in his penance. From the success of this plan, Mélusine convinces Raymondin to marry her since, as Miranda Griffin notes, 'it enables them both to conceal the animality underpinning their identity: Mélusine's weekly serpentine shape-shifting and Raymondin's porcine violence' (2015: 157). Mélusine uses deception on another occasion when she helps Raymondin gain land in order to found Lusignan. She instructs him to ask Count Bertrand the favour of granting him the possession of the land on the crag as big as a stag's hide. The Count willingly complies to the request since it would only seem a tiny plot of land. However, through Mélusine's ingenuity, they are able to found Lusignan by acquiring land which is as large as two leagues since she orders the stag's hide to be cut thinly. Peggy McCracken notes the parallels between Mélusine's stag hide trick and the trick performed by Dido in the *Roman d'Eneas,* arguing that these stories of trickery 'emphasize [Dido's] agency and imperial ambitions' (2017: 25). For Mélusine, I believe that as well as figuring her imperial ambitions (which also manifests in her sons through their imperial conquests), her trickery also indicates Mélusine's instinct for intervention, first shown when she punishes her father, as a sovereign agent and fairy punisher, and now in intervening for Raymondin after his manslaughter, by helping him found Lusignan. Griffin sees this 'reimagining and reconfiguring of skin' as a 'demarcation between inside and outside' that both shows Raymondin's status as a landowner and associates him with the animal (2015: 151). Griffin's reading portrays the stag's hide as an animal demarcation for sovereign boundaries in which Raymondin is placed, yet the animal here is not just the dead stag, but Mélusine, in terms of her hybridity, as well as in terms of her sovereignty. Mélusine's instructions to cover up the events of the boar hunt and the trick

of the stag's hide demonstrates her deceptive skills as well as her agency as a female sovereign – the problem is that both are founded on several layers of animality rendering Mélusine's sovereignty hybrid and unstable.

The rest of the text mostly focuses on the feats and conquests of Raymondin and Mélusine's sons. The infamous demise of their marriage and the discovery of Mélusine's hybridity take place after they have been married for many years and have had ten sons together. Raymondin receives a surprise visit from his brother, the Count of Forests. Since it is a Saturday, Mélusine is absent and the Count tempts his brother, Raymondin, to investigate his wife's strange weekly absences, taunting that

> la commune renommee du peuple court partout que vostre femme vous fait deshonneur et que, tous les samedis, elle est en fait de fornication avec un autre. Ne vous n'estes si hardiz, tant estes vous aveugliéz d'elle, d'enquerre ne de savoir ou elle va. Et les autres dient et maintiennent que c'est un esperit faé, qui le samedy fait sa penance' (p. 658).
>
> ['It is rumored hither and yon that every Saturday your wife dishonors you by lying in carnal sin with another man. Nor are you bold enough, so blinded are you by her, to find out where she goes! Some say she's an enchanted spirit who does penance on Saturdays' (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 181).]

The brother claims that Raymondin is blinded by Mélusine in his love for her ('tant estes vous aveugliéz d'elle') and tempts him to unveil the truth since the Count believes Mélusine to be promiscuous, or at least, puts this idea into his brother's mind by claiming that there are rumours within their community. The hyperbolic accusation that Raymondin is 'aveugliéz' resonates with *Genesis* where the serpent tempts Eve to eat the Forbidden Fruit claiming that 'you will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it *your eyes will be opened*, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil' (Genesis, 3:4-5, my italicization). In *Genesis*, the serpent tells a half-truth in that Adam and Eve's eyes are opened after they take the fruit – not in acquiring the knowledge of God, but in seeing the shame of their nakedness and sin. The claim that the 'commune renommee du people court partout' also brings into question Raymondin's sovereignty on a sexual level with the possibility that he has lost dominion over his wife's body. Raymondin's brother also tells a half-truth since, as well as insinuating that Mélusine is having an affair, he claims that there are rumours that Mélusine is an 'esperit faé' who does penance on a Saturday which is precisely what she is doing. Although this is true, this second rumour is somewhat euphemistic since it describes Mélusine's serpentine hybridity as a 'penance' rather than naming its precise animal nature. The juxtaposition of the two rumours emphasises Mélusine's loyalty both as a Christian and as a wife, since the reader

knows that she is doing penance, yet, also emphasises Raymondin's blindness towards her animality. Raymondin grows angry at his brother's taunts and

> prent son espee […] Et treuve un fort huis de fer, moult espé, et sachiez de vray que oncques mais n'avoit esté si avant. Lors, quant il apperçois l'uis, si tire l'espee et mist la pointe a l'encontre, qui moult estoit dure, et tourne et vire tant qu'il y fist un pertuis (p. 658, 660).
>
> ['He seized the sword […] and found himself confronted by a very thick iron door. He unsheathed his sword, thrust, and turned the point into it until he had hollowed out a small opening' (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 181).]

The description of the 'fort huis de fer' emphasises the precaution which Mélusine has taken in order to protect herself from her husband's curiosity when she transforms into a hybrid serpent every Saturday. Yet, despite the thickness of the iron door, Raymondin is still able to cross the seemingly impenetrable boundary by piercing the door with his sword. Inside, he sees the hybrid Mélusine

> qui estoit jusques au nombril en figure de femme et pignoit ses cheveulx, et du nombril en aval estoit en forme de la queue d'un serpent, aussi grosse comme une tonne ou on harenc et longue durement, et debatoit de sa coue l'eaue tellement qu'elle la faisoit saillir jusques a la voulte de la chambre (p. 660).
>
> ['Here, combing her hair, was a woman who from the navel down took the form of a massive serpent's tail, extremely long and as thick as a herring keg, and splashing the water so hard that it splattered the vaulting of the chamber' (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox: 2012: 181).]

Immediately, Raymondin regrets his decision to spy on his wife as he recognises her serpentine form as a confirmation of her penance. Wracked with guilt for breaking his oath, Raymondin fills the hole he made in the iron door with a wax seal from a letter and does not mention the incident to Mélusine. Bernard of Clairvaux warns in the *Apologia ad Guillelmum Sancti Theoderici Abbatem* against *curiositas* as 'distraction, or, worse, as descent into "likeness" to the "unlikeness" of beasts' (quoted in Bynum, 2001: 118). Indeed, it is Raymondin's *curiositas* sparked by his brother which leads him to discover Mélusine's hybridity and descend himself into the 'likeness' of the deceitful serpent. In the end, however, it is Mélusine who bears the eternal consequence of his *curiositas* after her full transformation. Bernard of Clairvaux's observation resonates with the *Genesis* narrative since it is Adam and Eve's *curiositas* which led humanity to become more beast-like in following the serpent's temptations, allowing for sin to enter the world. In his remorse, Raymondin calls himself a deceitful asp – a creature part of the serpent family in bestiaries whose moral allegory 'represents the worldly and wealthy, who keep one ear pressed to earthly desire, and

whose other ear is blocked by sin' (Badke, 2011: bestiary.ca). He then describes Mélusine as an innocent unicorn ('je sui le faulx crueux aspis et vous estes licorne precieuse, je vous ay par mon faulx venin trahie', [p. 664]) which paints Mélusine as Christ-like in its bestiary connotation. Peggy McCracken argues that Raymondin's 'faulx venin' is 'all the more unjust […] since Mélusine earlier saved him from his own venom, a metaphorical reference to the accidental murder of his lord that Mélusine helped him to hide' (2017: 116). The reference to the 'faulx venin' is what McCracken links to bestiary traditions which claim that the unicorn can purify water that is poisoned by serpent venom by dipping its horn in the water (Ibid.). The resonances with the unicorn bestiary tradition illuminates the water leitmotif associated with Mélusine – in her appearance next to the Fountain of Thirst when she first encounters Raymondin, and now as she is bathing. On the subject of bathing in the Middle Ages, Debra L. Stoudt discusses Hildegard of Bingen's less-known medical-scientific work, *Cause*, which prescribes bathing as an effective remedy for heavy menstruation (2017: 203). This, of course, connotes Eve's prelapsarian curse, which is also, like Mélusine's own bodily penance, entwinned with time. What is more, the detail of water is emphasised in the description of the largeness of her serpent tail which is compared to the weight of 'une tonne ou on met harenc' which thrashes violently in the water ('et debatoit de sa coue l'eaue tellement qu'elle la faisoit saillir jusques a la voulte de la chamber,' p. 660). On the reference to the fish keg, Miranda Griffin argues that 'this comparison of her tail to a barrel of fish induces a reaction of squeamish disgust more than amusement: yet another unattractive animal turns up to haunt Mélusine's scaly body' (2015: 154-5). I believe that along with the reaction of disgust, the fish parallel also incites a sense of sympathy for Mélusine, by emphasizing the horror behind her penance, but also by the same token, the purging effects of her monstrous penance, as if her monstrous body and the cleansing water of the bathtub are an allegory for purgatorial purification.

Certainly, the water motif also draws parallels with siren imagery with the depiction of Mélusine's fish-like tail splashing in the water and her combing her hair.[12] In Canto XIX of Dante's *Purgatorio,* the speaker encounters a 'femmina balba' (stammering woman) (l.7) in one of his dreams who is a siren trying to lead him astray from his path to salvation. He describes the siren as 'ne li occhi guercia, e sovra i piè distorta, / con le man monche, e di colore scialba (l.8-9) ['crosseyed and lopsided on her feet, / With maimed hands, and all her

[12] E. Jane Burns describes how 'we might imagine a fishlike appendage, giving the sense that Mélusine could be some sort of siren or mermaid. Emphasis on her haunting voice later in the narrative further reinforces the resonance with mythic sirens' (2013: 193).

colour washed out' (trans. C.H. Sisson, 1980: 279)]. When the sun shines on the disfigured woman, the speaker recounts how the woman becomes beautiful and almost irresistible as she begins to sing sweetly to him. Dante's beloved Beatrice and Virgil rescue him from the temptation of the siren in the dream by revealing her deceptive nature, and Dante carries on with his ascent of the mountain of Purgatory to Heaven. I believe the siren passage from the *Purgatorio* can provide a useful comparison to Mélusine's bathtub scene in reading the eschatological connotations of sirens – particularly seductive ones who can lead men astray in idolatry, or even to their deaths. Dante's depiction of the siren is unique compared to more traditional portrayals of sirens since in his version her deathly association manifests physically on her zombie-like body. Instead of focusing on her fish-like qualities, Dante portrays the siren as a corpse-like hybrid who can metamorphosize between a dead woman (with eyes crossed, disfigured limbs and a 'washed out' complexion [trans. C.H. Sisson, 1980: 279]) and a lively, beautiful one. As soon as the siren uses her charming melody her ugly, decaying features become beautiful, and mask her deathly attributes. Amidst this purgatorial journey, Dante is almost led astray by the siren's temptation as she changes from monstrous to beautiful. To return to the bathtub scene, Mélusine is also a hybrid portrait of ugly, deathly attributes (through her snake tail) and a beautiful woman, but instead of the onlooker being in a purgatorial state, it is Mélusine herself who undergoes a purgatorial penance in her hybridity. Zoë Enstone argues that for Mélusine, 'there are clear correlations between this immersion in water, the idea of baptism, and the fiery immersion that forms part of purgatory' (2017: 267). As Mélusine bathes, she undertakes her purgatorial penance for her transgression as she cleanses herself physically and spiritually of her monstrosity that lies below the surface of the water.

In Dante's *Purgatorio*, the illusion of the siren's enchantment is broken when Virgil rips open the siren's clothing and reveals the stench of death that emerges from the siren's belly (XIX, l.31-33). The reference to the siren's belly ('l'ventre' l.32) evokes the monstrosity of the woman's maternal body – in the case of the siren, instead of providing life, her *ventre* reeks of a deathly odour, awakening the speaker from his bewitched slumber. Sirens' charms work to emphasise their eroticism but when stripped of their deceptive layers, there lies beneath a monstrous femininity with a horrific, deathly stench redolent of the genital 'abject' (Griffin, 2015: 146). In the *Roman de Mélusine,* the restrictions set about by fairy women towards their husbands in the prologue all relate, in some way, to restricting access or viewing of their wives' genitalia. Mélusine's mother, Presine, did not want to be seen by her

husband, Elinas, in her childbed. In the prologue, Jean d'Arras cites Gervase of Tilbury who recounts the story of a different fairy who made her husband promise never to see her naked. Later, when the fairy's husband inevitably breaks the promise, she plunges underwater never to be seen again, and, finally, Raymondin's transgression is witnessing Mélusine's body from the navel down whilst she is bathing only to find a large serpent tail in the place of her genitalia and legs. The monstrosity revealed on the female body both in the *Purgatorio* and in *Mélusine* present a deadly threat to the male onlooker. The female body, in this way, is coded as monstrous and unstable, which can threaten the male onlooker as it shifts between its grotesque and beautiful form, yet in the case for Mélusine, this monstrosity signifies her penance for her sovereign role as fairy punisher.

Medieval portrayals of the eschatological abhorrence of female monstrosity appear not only in literary texts but in apocalyptic literature such as in the mystic accounts of the German Benedictine abbess and monastic reformer, Hildegard of Bingen. In one of her apocalyptic visions, Hildegard describes a voyeuristic encounter with a hybrid monster when witnessing

> the figure of the woman whom I had previously seen in front of the altar that stands before the eyes of God; she stood in the same place, but now I saw her from the waist down. And from the waist to the place that denotes the female, she had various scaly blemishes; and in that latter place was a black and monstrous head. It had fiery eyes, and ears like an ass', and nostrils and mouth like a lion's; it opened wide its jowls and terribly clashed its horrible iron-colored teeth (Hart and Bishop [trans.] 1990: 493).

Although Mélusine's bathing scene is not a birth scene like we see in Hildegard's apocalyptic vision, there are certainly some parallels between the two portraits of monstrous, hybrid women – for one thing, both Mélusine and the woman in Hildegard's vision give birth to monstrous, hybrid children who are capable of violence as we see later with Geoffroy's fratricide. There is even a parallel between the gnashing teeth emerging from the woman's vagina in Hildegard's vision and the teeth of Mélusine's son, Orrible, who kills two of his wet nurses by biting their breasts (p. 688), as well as Mélusine's son Geoffroy who is known by the epithet 'Gieffroy au grant dent' (p. 552). Hildegard's vision of a hybrid monster emerging from the woman's vagina with gnashing teeth evokes an unsettling image of a *vagina dentata*. Miranda Griffin explores the possible euphemism behind serpentine female figures which invoke this genital horror by positing that 'sex in the wyvern world is a terrifying prospect, and the fate met by the male resonates with the description […] representing women as being hedgehogs on the inside: both these images hint at the topos of the *vagina dentata*' (Griffin, 2015: 150). In the specific cases of Hildegard's vision and

Mélusine, however, the threat of the *vagina dentata* comes not solely from the woman's body in of itself, but what emerges – that is, the prospect of a monstrous child with gnashing teeth. Susan Zimmerman links the concept of the *vagina dentata* to the Mouth of Hell and the Harrowing of Hell through the images of the hydrus in bestiaries since

> the womb was widely depicted as another kind of devouring maw, like the mouth of hell, and the placenta an agent of suffocation and absorption. In my view, the bestiary narrative of the hydrus […] inadvertently enlists this cannibalistic view of the female reproductive process while offering an allegory of Christ's descent into hell after the resurrection (2013: 47).

The Harrowing of Hell is traditionally associated with Saturdays as Christ made his descent into the realm of the dead between his Crucifixion on Good Friday and his Resurrection on Easter Sunday and it is thus celebrated liturgically on Holy Saturday. Mélusine's penance resonates with these liturgical roots as she is cursed to hide away on a Saturday from her husband ('qui le samedy fait sa penance,' p. 658). Below the surface of the water in which she bathes is Mélusine's monstrous and demonic form, similar to the Mouth of Hell sitting below the surface with its genital-like agent of 'suffocation and absorption' (Zimmerman: 2013: 47). Penance, then, animalises the maternal body inherited through Eve's curse, which holds the allegorical power to turn the onlooker into a venomous asp, as in the case of Raymondin through his transgression. Mélusine's purgatorial state denotes a temporary suspension of the human-animal boundary – a concept which Agamben believes is perpetually produced by the anthropological machine (2004: 33). This suspension is what Agamben believes to occur only when the production of history ceases (2004: 36), but here, the suspension can occur temporarily through penance. Penance, in fact, is somehow connected to the Apocalypse, or in Agamben's terms – the end of historical production (2004: 36), for it anticipates and negotiates the fate of the soul at the Last Judgement. Yet, in contrast to Agamben's argument, the suspensions of boundaries here are also to do with bodies and space as penance effectuates the purgatorial state. What Raymondin witnesses in this bathing scene is Mélusine's purgatorial condition as she bathes in her hybrid form through his sympathetic gaze, yet, he also beholds her unbridled monstrosity, signified by her thrashing tail which spills beyond the boundaries of the purging water of her penance and, ultimately, threatens their lineage.

Fromont's Death

After Raymondin's transgression of spying on his wife in the bathtub, the story turns to the tragic event which occurs to one of Mélusine and Raymondin's sons. Out of the ten sons that they have together, eight of them have peculiar animal-like physical traits but two of them, Geoffroy and Orrible, also seem to have behavioural animal traits. Orrible, the youngest, has a violent nature from an early age since, as mentioned earlier, he 'apporta trois yeux sur terre, de quoy ly uns fu ou front, et fu si crueulx et si mauvais qu'il occist, ains qu'il eust quatre ans, deux de ses nourrices' (p. 294) ['He was so monstrously large, had three eyes, one of them on his forehead, and was so wicked and cruel that before the age of four he had killed two of his nurses' (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox [trans.], 2012: 71)]. The detail of the wet nurses' deaths suggests an unnatural reaction to lactation, something that is an instinct not only in human infants but in other mammals. As Peggy McCracken notes, 'lactation is a bodily characteristic that human mothers share with other mammals' (2013: 61) and, indeed, as McCracken argues, there are several literary examples of the reverse phenomena in medieval texts of animals breastfeeding human children. The problem with Orrible is that he has inherited animal qualities from his mother's *serpentine* hybridity – a category of animal that does not lactate as mammals do. Whilst we know that Mélusine is capable of lactating despite her hybridity (we see this in the epilogue when she visits her children after her metamorphosis to comfort and breastfeed them), this detail indicates that the animal part of Orrible's hybridity is too dominant for human upbringing as it can even surpass the inclination towards maternal nurture. Geoffroy also inherits a monstrous quality from his mother since he is known as 'Gieffroy au grant dent' (p. 552) as he was born with a tusk jutting out of his mouth. Geoffroy's deformity is redolent of the tusk of the boar at the beginning of the text which equally suggests that this animal quality could, in fact, be inherited from Raymondin rather than Mélusine. Similar to Orrible, Geoffroy is described as cruel and fierce ('Cil fu grans, haulx et fourniz et fort a merveilles, hardiz et crueulx,' p. 296). He is one of the few sons, along with Fromont, who have not married or conquered lands abroad. At the time that Geoffroy is battling against a giant called Gardon, Mélusine and Raymondin are living at Mervent. It is the birth of these three sons, Geoffroy, Fromont and Orrible, which mark the beginning of Mélusine and Raymondin's demise.

One of their younger sons, Fromont, asks permission from his parents, Raymondin and Mélusine, to become a monk at Maillezais. His parents accede to his request and soon after, Fromont takes his monastic vows and becomes a monk at the abbey. Geoffroy at the time of

his brother's admission into the monastery, had just successfully slayed a giant named Gardon in Northumberland, and sent the giant's decapitated head as a gift to his mother, Mélusine, who was delighted by the trophy and had it displayed at La Rochelle. Already, this detail of Geoffroy slaying the giant demonstrates his desire to eradicate beings who represent a collapse of boundaries. At this point, Geoffroy receives the news via a letter that his brother, Fromont, has become a monk. Geoffroy soon becomes enraged and begins to lose his senses. He travels to Maillezais and when he arrives at the abbey, he is brandishing his sword in front of the monks. In his fit of rage, the abbot of the Maillezais abbey protests that Fromont had made the decision to become a monk of his own accord without the influence of the brothers. Unfortunately, Geoffroy does not believe the abbot and continues his aggressions, even blaspheming God's name on several occasions in his enraged speech by swearing on 'les dens Dieu' (p. 680). Then he turns to his brother, Fromont, and interrogates him on his decision:

> Et comment! Monseigneur mon pere et madame ma mere n'avoient ilz pas asséz pour Frommont, mon frere, faire riche et donner de bons paÿs et de bonnes forteresses et de lui richement marier, sans le faire moyne? Par les dens Dieu, ces lecheours moynes de Mallerés le m'ont enchanté et attrait leans pour mieulx valoir! (p. 680).
>
> ['What! Did not my father and mother have the wherewithal to make Fromont rich – to give him good lands and good fortresses, and marry him well – instead of making a monk of him? By God's molars, those lecherous monks of Maillezais have cast a spell on him, and lured him in there to advance their own interests!' (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 187)].

Geoffroy is enraged at Fromont's decision and cannot understand why he would choose a life of poverty over the inheritance that their parents would provide him. Monasticism is posited as a form of political resistance in *The Highest Poverty*, in which Agamben describes the tension between Pope John XXII and the early Franciscans who took the controversial position of disassociating 'use' from 'property' (Agamben, 2013: 114-115). Pope John XXII's criticism of the Franciscan's renunciation of the right to property contended that 'use without right was an animal condition, suitable only for prelapsarian mankind' (Sunderland, 2018: 90). In a similar way, Geoffroy's appalled reaction at his brother's monastic vows sees the monks' way of living almost as an 'animal condition' (Ibid.) and an insult to his family in Fromont's renunciation of their inheritance. In this way, when Geoffrey sees his biological brother, Fromont, dressed in a habit as a religious brother, now outside the boundaries of his lineage's sovereignty and law, Raymondin sees him equated with an animal 'from the point

of view of the law' in Agamben's terms (2013: 111) which renounces lawful ownership over 'bons pays,' 'bonnes forteresses' (p. 680) and a noble bride ('richement marier' [Ibid.]).

After Geoffroy's enraged speech, the abbot tries to reassure Geoffroy that Fromont decided to become a monk and made his vows freely. Geoffroy, on the other hand, is now beyond the point of reason and soon, calls for a violent besiegement of the abbey by sealing all the exits. Finally, he orders the servants to bring wood and hay and sets the abbey on fire. The narrator heightens the pathos of the scene further by describing the horror of the screaming monks as they burn to ashes:

> La peussiéz oïr et veoir grant pitié, car, si tost que les moines sentirent le feu, ilz commencierent a faite piteux criz et tresamers et doulereux plains. Mais ce ne leur vault riens. Ilz réclament Jhesucrist et le prient devotement qu'il ait mercy des ames d'eulx, car des corps esr doresenavant neant (p. 684).
>
> ['What ghastly horrors you would have seen and heard! The moment the monks felt the flames they began to moan piteously, then scream in agony, but all in vain. As the fire was consuming their bodies, they fervently beseeched Jesus Christ to have mercy on their souls' (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 188)].

The narrator never gives an explicit reason for Geoffroy's decision to burn his brother's abbey and murder the monks, other than losing his senses at the thought of Fromont not receiving his inheritance. However, according to the history of the real abbey of Maillezais, this horrific tale of the burning of the monks has a historical basis. As Michelle Szkilnik writes:

> au xiiie siècle, un Geoffroy de Lusignan qui revendiquait un certain nombre de privilèges sur l'abbaye de Maillezais eut maille à partir avec le père abbé. Ce dernier alla se plaindre des exactions du seigneur poitevin auprès du Pape. Furieux, Geoffroy tua plusieurs moines et fit incendier l'abbaye. Il fut frappé d'excommunication et dut se rendre au Saint-Siège pour se faire absoudre (2005: 29).

This tragedy, then, has a biographical basis which Jean d'Arras has chosen to appropriate from the Lusignan history into the story of *Mélusine* and which also exists in Coudrette's version too. There never seems to be any discord between Fromont and Geoffroy – the anger and hostility is first directed at the abbot, whom Geoffroy believes to have deceived Fromont into joining their brotherhood, and then at the monastic life itself which rejects possession over property and wives. Geoffroy's murder of the monks is what triggers the chain-reaction of transgressions on Raymondin's part eventually leading to Mélusine's own renunciation of sovereignty and law in her transformation into a dragon.

Geoffroy's violence is prefigured before he even arrives at the abbey to confront the monks, when he was busy slaying the giant, Gardon, in Northumberland. Gardon is another portrait of a creature, like the monks of Maillezais, who lives outside the conventional boundaries of laws of possession. Geoffroy liberates the people of Guérande from this savage giant who has been lawlessly demanding tribute money from his father's people. The citizens warn Geoffroy that the giant is so fierce that they have never seen him defeated even after sending a thousand men to fight him. The giant's otherness is emphasised more in his death after Geoffroy decapitates him and the citizens of Guérande observe the corpse with similar reactions of repulsion and wonder as seen in *Le Conte du Papegau* after the fish knight's death

> Et quant ceulx apperceurent le corps du jayant d'un costé et la teste d'autre, si furent tous esbahiz de sa grandeur, car il avoit .xv. piéz de long. Et dirent a Gieffroy qu'il avoit fait grant oultraige et s'estoit mis en grant adventure et en grant peril d'avoir osé assaillir un tel deable (p. 674).
>
> [When they beheld the giant's headless body, they were astounded by the size, for it was fully fifteen feet long. They told Geoffroy he had been exceedingly bold to rise assailing such a devil (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 185)].

The decapitation of the large, alien-like giant is contrasted with Geoffroy then burning the monks' abbey with the monks inside, as if they too are somehow 'other' in renouncing the law through living out their monasticism. Ironically, however, after committing this sacrilegious crime, Geoffroy is then subsequently animalised himself when Raymondin blames Mélusine's hybridity for Geoffroy's rampant violence. Indeed, Geoffroy even asserts his epithet is 'Gieffroy au grant dent' (p. 670) before taking down the giant – a reminder of his animal trait, inherited from his hybrid mother. The narrator refers to Geoffroy's subsequent fit of rage and burning of the abbey as a 'moult merveilleuse adventure' (p. 676) as an extraordinary incident to occur in Creation rather than explicitly referring to it as a sacrilegious crime perhaps to paint the historical incident in a positive light for Jean d'Arras's Lusignan patron. The adjective 'merveilleuse' connotes the idea of a marvel – something which occurs in the nature of God's vast handiwork of 'things visible and invisible' (Löhr, 2012)[13] but which cannot always be explained. It is as if, then, Geoffroy's rage and subsequent murderous act are part of the marvel of his hybridity (signified through his 'grant

[13] From the Nicene Creed which begins: 'we believe in one God, Father, Almighty, the Maker of all things visible and invisible' – see Löhr (2012).

dent,' p. 552) which he inherited from his mother in a reaction against his brother's, Fromont, decision to leave his parents' sovereign realm.

Not long after, Raymondin and Mélusine receive the tragic news that their son Geoffroy has burnt down Fromont's abbey, along with all of the monks inside. Raymondin rides to the abbey to confirm the news. When he sees the ruins of the abbey, Raymondin blames Mélusine's serpentine hybridity for their son's treachery in an impassioned soliloquy:

> Par la foy que je doy a Dieu, je croy que ce ne soit que fantosme de ceste femme ne ne croy pas que ja fruit qu'elle ait porté viengne a perfection de bien. Elle n'a porté enfant qui n'ait apporté quelque estrange signe sur terre. Ne veéz la Orrible qui n'a pas .vii. ans acompliz, qui a ja occiz deux de mesescuiers et, avant qu'il eust trois ans, avoit il fait mourir deux de ses nourrices par force de mordre leurs mamelles ? Et ne vy je leur mere, le samedy que mon frere de Forests m'acointa les males nouvelles, en forme de serpente du nombril en aval ? Se fiz, par Dieu! C'est aucune esperite ou c'est toute fantosme ou illusion qui m'a ainsi abusé. Premiere foiz que je la vy, ne me sçot elle bien a dire toute ma mesaventure? (p. 688).
>
> ['By my faith in God, I believe that that woman is nothing but a phantom, and that no fruit born of her womb can reach the perfection of goodness. Every one of her children was born with some strange mark. And what of Horrible, who is not yet seven years old and has slain two of my squires? Even before he was three, he killed two of his wet nurses by biting their breasts! And their mother, the Saturday my brother told me about the bad rumours circulating, did I not see her in the form of a serpent below her navel? I did, by God! Some evil spirit, or some apparition or illusion, has abused me this way. And the very first time I laid eyes on her, did she not already know and recount to me all my misfortune?' (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 189)].

At this point in the narrative, Mélusine has not heard this speech as she is absent. When she is summoned back to her home after hearing the news, she tries to console her husband in his grief for his son's crimes by claiming that the burning of the abbey was likely God's just punishment for the sin of the monks:

> Vouléz vous arguer contre la voulenté du Createur des creatures, qui tout a fait et deffera a son plaisir, quant il lui plaira? Sachiéz qu'il n'a si grant pecheur ou monde que Dieu ne soit plus grant pardonneur et plus debonnaire, quant le pecheur se repent et lui crie mercy de bon cuer et de bonne voulenté. Se Gieffroy, vostre filz, a fait son oultraig par son courage merveilleux et fort, sachiéz que de certain c'est pour le pechié des moines, qui estoient de mauvaise vie et desordonnee (p. 692).
>
> ['Do you wish to challenge the will of the Maker of all things, who also unmakes them when it pleases Him? Nowhere is there such a great sinner that God does not extend him even greater, more willing pardon if he repents and cries out to Him for mercy, sincerely and from the heart. If your son Geoffroy committed this outrage on account of his extraordinarily fierce temperament, you can be sure it happened because of the sinfulness of the monks, whose ways were so lax and dissolute' (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 190)].

The contrast between Raymondin's anguished soliloquy and Mélusine's rational moralisation of Geoffroy's crime emphasises Mélusine's predisposition to her fairy role as punisher. In her speech, Mélusine seems to argue that God uses his creatures as agents for his judgements during their earthly life almost on the same level as the agency of angels, believing that the monks' way of life was not pious enough. On account of their 'pechié', which entailed a 'mauvaise vie' and 'desordonnee,' the monks met their just end through Geoffroy's violent agency. This resonates with Geoffroy's earlier abhorrence at the monks' way of life which entailed a complete rejection of property and possession. The monks' lifestyle in this way applies the ascetic practice of *vivere sine proprio* which flourished particularly in the Middle Ages with the early Franciscan movement (Agamben, 2013: 129). However, it was crushed by the juridical attack by Pope John XXII as Agamben argues,

> the critical moment in the history of Franciscanism is when John XXII's bull *Ad conditorem canonum* once again calls into question the possibility of separating ownership and use and in this way cancels the very presupposition on which Minorite *paupertas* was founded (2013: 129).

Pope John XXII thus uses Canon Law as a sovereign instrument to dismantle the Franciscan rejection of property. In this text, Mélusine positions Geoffroy as the sovereign who renders God's justice on earth and decides boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable forms of life. The problem, of course, that this logic creates is arguing that God uses one creature's sin (Geoffroy's murderous rage) to punish another's sin (the monk's apparent 'mauvaise vie'). Mélusine's speech on the wayward life of the monks also resonates with sentiments regarding ascetic life from the monastic reform movement such as Bernard of Clairvaux's *Apologia* which denounces 'slackness' amidst monks which 'has become so general that it is accepted as the normal thing' (Casey [trans.], 1970: 54). However, Caroline Walker Bynum highlights Bernard of Clairvaux's peculiar preoccupation and condemnation of hybridity in his treatise on monastic revitalisation of the Benedictines (2001: 113). For Bynum, Bernard was not only outspoken in his distaste for hybrid figures in opulent artwork hanging in monasteries which could 'divert the attention of monks from prayer and to squander wealth better spent in care of the poor' (Bynum, 2001: 117) but also warned against the problem of a hybrid 'mixture' of social roles (2001: 119). Bynum further posits that for Bernard,

> what is at stake, however – what disturbs Bernard so deeply – is not merely reordering or disordering high and low but *confusion*. Combining separate entities creates a

> monster, an incoherence with no name, a nothing. There is no way of mixing or grafting parts together to create a new being; the hybrid or confusion *neutrum sit* (Bynum, 2001: 120).

Mélusine was cursed as a hybrid when she rose outside of her social status as a mortal woman in punishing her father and committed the sin of 'crossing of role boundaries' which 'like crossing of species boundaries, is dangerous and invariably involves loss' (Bynum, 2001: 119). Mélusine's original sin was that she went beyond her social role as daughter and acted as a punisher for her father's transgression, defying her immanence as a mortal daughter to the king. Bynum's reading of Bernard's treatise as positing the hybrid monster as 'nothing' in its confusion (Ibid.) resonates with Raymondin's accusation of Mélusine being both a monstrous hybrid and a 'fantosme' (p. 688), made after discovering the news of Geoffroy's fratricide. Raymondin, hearing his wife's claim that it was God's will that made Geoffroy burn down the monastery on account of the monks' sin, becomes enraged and blames her hybrid nature for the cause of their son's crimes:

> Hee, tresfaulse serpent, par Dieu, ne toy ne tes fais ne sont que fantosme ne ja hoir que tu ayes porté ne vendra a bon chief en la fin. Commen raront les vies ceulx qui sont ars en grief misère ne ton filz qui s'estoit renduz au crucefix ? Il n'avoit yssi de toy plus de bien que Fromont. Or est destruit par l'art demoniacle, car tous ceulx qui sont forcennéz de yre sont ou commandement des princes d'enfer […] (p. 694).
>
> ['"Ah! you deceitful serpent, by God, you and your deeds are nothing but phantoms, nor will any heir you have borne come ever come to a good end! How can those who perished in agony have their lives restored to them, including your own son who had found solace in religion? Fromont was the only good being to issue from you. Now he has been destroyed through the malice of the devil, for anyone who is overcome by wrath acts at the behest of the princes of hell […]"' (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 191)].

At this, the narrator describes Mélusine losing consciousness in a strange and dramatic moment when she loses her pulse and breath (p. 694). Whilst witnessing his wife unconscious, Raymondin's anger immediately turns to grief as the narrator describes how he regrets his words and accusations. The servants and noblemen manage to revive Mélusine with cold water and the gesture is perhaps an allusion to Mélusine's siren-like affinity with water. She then explains to her husband that he would have been forgiven for his first transgression of spying on her in the bath by undertaking penance during his natural, earthly life ('Et Dieu le t'eust pardonné, car tu en eusses fait la penitence en ce monde' (p. 694) [and God would have pardoned you for it, for you would have done penance for it in this world' (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 191)]). Mélusine's assertion puts into question the

penance which Raymondin undertakes after the transformation scene by making a pilgrimage to Rome, confessing to the Pope, and becoming a hermit until death. Perhaps Mélusine is also alluding to the fact that she has herself, lost the possibility of completing a penance in her natural, earthly life once she transforms into an immortal dragon until the Last Judgement. She then laments at the loss of her future natural death, burial and last rite sacraments, exclaiming that

> se tu ne m'eusses fausse je estoye gectee et exemptee de paine et de tournment. Et eusse vescu cours naturel comme femme naturelle et feusse morte naturellement et eu tous mes sacremens, et eusse esté ensevelie et enterree en l'eglise de Nostre Dame de Lusegnen, eu eust on fait mon unniversaire bien et deuement. Or me ras tu embatue en la penance obscure ou j'avoye longtemps esté par ma mesaventure et ainsi la me fauldra porter et souffrir jusques au jour du Jugement et par ta faulseté (p. 694, 696).
>
> [Alas! If only you had not betrayed me, I would have been redeemed, exempted from pain and torment, and I would have lived out the full course of a mortal woman's lifetime and died naturally. I would have received all the sacraments, and been buried in the Church of Our Lady in Lusignan, and every year mass would have been celebrated in my memory. Now you have cast me back into the dark abyss of penance that had held me hostage for so long on account of one misdeed. And now I must endure and suffer it until Judgment Day, all because of your betrayal (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 191-192)].

In *The Resurrection of the Body*, Bynum explores the allegory of the 'seed' as an eschatological image of the buried dead body waiting for the Last Judgement as 'the oldest Christian metaphor for the resurrection of the body' (1995: 3) which figures the 'restoration and redemption of the person as a psychosomatic unity' (1995: 5). Mélusine's lamentations at the loss of her natural death and burial reveals that it is not death in of itself that she longs for, but the hope of the resurrection through her Christian burial rites in the loss of her 'sacrements' and being 'enterree en l'eglise.' Instead, Mélusine's body and soul will remain restless until Christ's Second Coming of the Apocalypse whilst she is thrown back into her 'penance obscure' in her dragon form. Mélusine's penance transforms, then, from being a partial embodiment to becoming her full bodily identity. Medieval eschatology, as Bynum reiterates, asserted the equation of body with identity in refuting the heretical positions of Cathars since 'scholastic and monastic discussions of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries saw an embodied self as locus of identity with triumph over change' (2001: 79). By this logic, Mélusine's metamorphosis is no longer a transitory penance but now becomes her full identity and threatens her body's 'triumph over change' (Ibid.) in the Resurrection of the Dead, for she will never die and will instead remain a restless, monstrous body.

Not only does Mélusine's monstrous metamorphosis threaten her salvation but it also manifests in her political body as sovereign of the Lusignan lineage. As Agamben argues, through the metaphor of the sovereign wolf, the polity is susceptible to the animal threat of the sovereign who embodies the threshold between human and animal (Agamben, 1998: 107). The penance which manifests in this sovereign bodily alignment is rendered palpable when she claims that from thereon the Lusignan heritage will begin to decline after her transformation into a dragon ('Sachiéz que après vous jamais homs ne tendra ensemble le pays que vous tenéz et auront moult voz hoirs apréz vous a faire,' p. 698) ['Know that after you no man will ever hold all the land you now hold, and your heirs will face many difficulties' (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 193)]. As John Carmi Parsons argues, the 'bodily integrity' of medieval queens 'is equated to the integrity of their husbands' rule' (2003: 243). The more animal and monstrous Mélusine becomes, the more the Lusignan lineage suffers, determining Mélusine's monstrosity as a signifier for sovereign instability. Parsons further argues that 'a medieval queen's body perpetuated the link between realm and royal lineage, but the power implicit in her motherhood was sufficiently threatening that political society sought to curtail it' (2003: 243-4). As Mélusine is about to undergo her dragon transformation and renounce her sovereign rule, the powerful elements of the Lusignan lineage will begin to decline, as she foretells in this extract, through the removal of the 'power implicit in her motherhood' (Parsons, 2003: 243-4) which bore the threat of her monstrous children, Geoffroy and Orrible.

Indeed, Mélusine's final words, before she transforms, are her instructions to Raymondin to kill their son, Orrible discreetly by suffocating him with smoke in a cave, since his monstrosity is too violent for him to grow up fully. She tells Raymond that if he does not kill Orrible, their son will cause the death of twenty thousand men and destroy everything she has spent her mortal life building (p. 700). Raymondin promises to follow through with her last wish but begs her to stay, nevertheless. Her instructions to kill their son, who has three eyes and earlier killed two wet nurses with his teeth, marks the end of the reproduction of Mélusine's maternal monstrosity within the realm of the Lusignan lineage. However, Mélusine reassures Raymondin that there is no need to punish Geoffroy for his crime, since Geoffroy is destined to become an honourable man and will later restore the abbey of Maillezais through his penance. At Raymondin's desperate pleas for her to stay, Mélusine regrets that it is not by her choice that she has to leave him, implying that her expulsion has been decreed through God's judgements ('se ce feust chose que je peusse faire je le feisse,

mail il ne puet estre,' p. 700). Then, after bidding Lusignan farewell, Mélusine leaps onto the window ledge and transforms into her dragon form as she takes flight:

> Et lors fist un moult doulereux plaint et un moult grief souspir, puis sault en l'air et laisse la fenestre et trespasse le vergier, et lors se mue en une serpente grant et grosse et longue de la longueur de .xv. piéz (p. 704).
>
> [Whereupon Mélusine, uttering a very doleful cry and then a heavy sigh, leapt from the window into the void, and as she swept across the orchards she metamorphosed into a massive dragon some fifteen feet in length (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 194)].

The description of her bodily metamorphosis is accompanied by the description of her voice's cries which still remains human, emphasising her suffering humanity which stays intact even in her monstrous body. The detail of the 'vergier' as the place in which she transforms and flies over is somewhat redolent of Adam and Eve's banishment from the Garden of Eden after the Fall. After she flies over the enclosure of the castle and its orchard, she leaves the skin of her humanity behind and dons her penitential clothes of dragon skin. I speak of donning skin in this instance, since as the narrator makes clear by the end, that despite her bodily transformation into the flying serpent, Mélusine's human person remains caged within the dragon's body. In the tragedy of her final scene, the people of Lusignan listen to the pitiful cries of a woman, only to look up and witness a monstrous dragon above them.

Raymondin's Hermithood

In the final sections of the text, after Mélusine's dragon transformation and exile, there is a lengthy description of Raymondin undertaking penance after having betrayed Mélusine by going on a pilgrimage to Rome. Raymondin gives the ring which Mélusine had left him to his son Thierry before he leaves for his pilgrimage, to mark the beginning of his hermit vocation in giving away the only material object linked to his wife. During this pilgrimage, Raymondin confesses to the Pope, and discusses with him his newfound devotion to becoming a hermit in Montserrat to pray for Mélusine in the hope of relieving some of her suffering ('la prieray Dieu qu'il lui plaise faire alegement a ma moilier,' p. 730). The Pope encourages him henceforth to undertake sincere devotion as a penance. After this, Raymondin makes his journey to Montserrat and sends letters to Geoffroy and the nobles of his land announcing that Geoffroy will now take over as their lord. After sending the letters to Geoffroy and the noblemen, Raymondin dismisses the companions who accompanied him

during his pilgrimage to Rome, apart from his chaplain and cleric, and makes the last leg of the journey to Montserrat. When he arrives, he has monastic habits made for him and removes his secular clothing ('ses robes de siecle' [p. 732]) after confirming his vocation with the abbot. There, he finds seven hermitages on the craggy mountain of Montserrat and discovers that the third one is empty since the hermit who was last there had recently died. The narrator explains how there is a unique system established amongst the hermits of Montserrat which distributes their food and daily provisions equally:

> Et la cause de celle permutacion est telle que le premier trait amont le vivre pour eulx .vii. et en prent sa refeccion pour la journee et cellui qui lui est plus prouchain dessus lui, la trait amont en pareille maniere (p. 732).
>
> [According to the system normally in use, the hermit lowest down would receive the provisions for all seven hermits, take from them his own allotment for the day, and then carry the rest up to the next man above him, who would do likewise, and so on up the link, (trans. Maddox; Sturm-Maddox, 2012: 203).]

This hermitic system of food distribution resonates with the early Franciscan disassociation between 'possession' and 'use' particularly in terms of consumable goods – a concept also explored by Francis di Ascoli, which Agamben describes as 'the use of consumable goods (which, with a significant term, he also calls *usus corporeus*) belongs to the "successive" kind of things, which one cannot have in a simultaneous and permanent way (*simul er permanenter*)' (2013: 132). This marks a limit to sovereignty since the Franciscans were trying to form a community without sovereignty (Agamben, 2013: 109). The hermits of Montserrat, in sharing out their consumable daily provisions as each hermit carries the food to the next hermitage above on the mountain and so forth, create a form of use which renounces possession or dominion.

The final scenes of the text, in this way, depict Raymondin's remarkable change in his way of life through his penitential hermithood. Peggy McCracken maps out Raymondin's overall character arc by arguing that

> Raymondin acts to gain knowledge about his wife, and although he initially describes himself as reflected in the snake, his subsequent recognition of his wife as a "false serpent" separates him from Mélusine, exiling the snake woman while preserving his dominion over the lands she has won (2017: 124).

However, I believe that the epilogue of Raymondin's hermithood reveals a different outcome to the one that McCracken describes. Once Raymondin becomes a monastic hermit, he renounces all remnants of his sovereign dominion over his lands through several ritual

gestures. First, he gives Mélusine's ring to his son before he sets off for his pilgrimage; the second, when he sends the letters to Geoffroy and the noblemen announcing the succession of Geoffroy as their lord; the third is when he removes his secular clothing and dons his monastic robes; the fourth sign occurs in his renunciation to the right of possession in his admission into the hermitic system of daily provisions of food; and the final sign of Raymondin's monastic initiation occurs after he has been established as a hermit for a while and many noblemen visit him hearing rumours that he was of former noble lineage, but despite their enquiries, Raymondin refuses to disclose his former noble identity (p. 734). In this crucial section at the end of the text, through these monastic rituals, the narrator affirms Raymondin's renunciation of his sovereign dominion over Lusignan once and for all. Raymondin ultimately strips away many of the signs of human, social life which is irretrievably stained with sovereignty and, therefore, with animality according to Agamben's theory on the sovereign wolf (1998: 107). In the end, the only way to escape this sovereign stain is to create a new mode of humanity outside the boundaries of law and possession.

Mélusine appears once more in her dragon form in front of Geoffroy and Thierry, many years later when they visit Lusignan. She is heard wailing in her human voice before flying to Montserrat where the monks of the abbey witness the marvel of the dragon. At this point, Raymondin, severely ill, is approaching the end of his natural life. Geoffroy and Theirry soon hear the news of their father's subsequent death and assume that their mother's apparition was an omen of Raymondin's passing (p. 770). This is confirmed when the brothers hear from a local noble who was present at the time of Mélusine's departure and transformation into a dragon that Mélusine had told the people of Lusignan that she would reappear in her dragon form in two instances – when an heir of the lineage was about to die and when the castle is to change lord. Mélusine's final apparitions in dragon form thus signify sovereign instability within the Lusignan lineage, announcing death or the change of ownership. After the death of Raymondin in the hermitage of Montserrat, Geoffroy is inspired by his father's piety to make penance for his past mortal sin and rebuilds the abbey at Maillezais which he had previously burnt down along with the monks inside (p. 748, 750). The monks at the newly built abbey of Maillezais are then assigned the task of praying for Mélusine, Raymondin, and the rest of the Lusignan lineage. With Geoffroy's penance complete, his violent nature is, at last, defeated and his monstrous sin revoked. The Lusignan lineage continues to flourish with their past monstrosity purged through Raymondin and Geoffroy's

penance as Jean d'Arras concludes, listing the noble ancestors and heirs of his Lusignan patrons.

Conclusion

Over the course of this chapter, I have explored the portrait of Mélusine's female sovereignty which, as I have argued, is coded as hybrid and unstable. In essence, the *Roman de Mélusine* depicts the perpetuation of familial transgressions which animalise sovereignty, beginning with Mélusine imprisoning her father and Raymondin killing his uncle, and can only be resolved through penance. Ultimately, however, the gendering of penance forms different outcomes within sovereign rule – either monstrous maternity which can be passed onto heirs or male monasticism as a point of resistance against sovereign power. Penance is what aligns the two characters together, but it is also what separates them, in the end, when Raymondin discovers the truth of Mélusine's bodily penance which renders her into a half-serpent. After Raymondin's second transgression of revealing his wife's serpentine hybridity following Geoffroy's burning of the abbey, Mélusine transforms into a large dragon and is banished from her sovereign realm in her eternal punishment. In the final sections of the text, both Mélusine and Raymondin bear their penance by renouncing their sovereignty in their respective penitential garments – Mélusine's dragon skin and Raymondin's monastic robes. Yet, on account of her monstrous metamorphosis, the mortal state of Mélusine's soul is left ambiguous as she is condemned to her dragon form until the Last Judgement, just as the possibility of resurrection for animal bodies remains a contested ambiguity within medieval eschatology. The text, in this way, presents two possible modes of being which reject the perpetual sovereign mode: a full monstrous transformation or monasticism as forms of life which exist outside the boundaries of sovereign rule. Raymondin's first transgression and Mélusine's monstrosity riddles the Lusignan lineage with animality, further destabilising their sovereignty through their sons, Geoffroy and Orrible's monstrous violence. In the end, it is penance, moulded on the male monastic figure, which purges the Lusignan lineage of animality which has haunted them from the very beginning.

Mélusine, therefore, plays out monasticism as a potential solution to the perpetual problem of human sovereign power. We see this through the rise and fall of Raymondin as a sovereign figure alongside Mélusine. Raymondin's fate from the beginning is stained by the collapse of boundaries having pushed his own kin, his uncle, into the category of animal by accidentally

killing him alongside the boar. Yet whilst Raymondin's penance is temporally suspended, Mélusine's penance for her transgression against her father manifests physically and in this way, she becomes a boundary figure, and embodies the monstrous stain of sovereignty. Mélusine's feminine caesura – that is, the proximity of her animality and sovereignty which manifests onto her body as something both reproductive and destructive (similar to the sirens in *Le Roman d'Alexandre* I analysed on pages 22-23) – is something which also marks her children with a monstrous and sovereign stain, and ultimately causes Raymondin's sovereign downfall. The giant, whom Geoffroy, slays is another boundary figure and prefigures the murder of the monks who also live beyond the limits of the sovereign's jurisdiction. *Le Roman de Mélusine* is a unique medieval text in its treatment of animality since it provides a solution to the problem of sovereignty. Raymondin's hermithood, in his renunciation of his secular clothing, possessions and even his noble title, shows a possible escape route from the perpetual violence of human sovereignty in forming a new way of life.

Conclusion: Last Things

Over the course of this dissertation, I hope to have mapped out a new approach to reading animal portrayals in medieval texts by considering their eschatological resonances with the portrait of the sovereign. The field of medieval animal studies has recently paved the way for examining the parallels between sovereignty and animality in more recent studies, such as those carried out by Miranda Griffin (2015), Peggy McCracken (2017) and Sarah Kay (2017), which have brought Giorgio Agamben's theory on the anthropological machine into discussions on medieval human-animal encounters. However, I believe, that to examine the portrait of the sovereign as *animal* we must consider the eschatological implications which an animal or hybrid body imposes on the sovereign as we have seen play out in each of these texts. I looked at three different medieval French texts; *Le Roman d'Alexandre, Le Conte du Papegau* and finally *Le Roman de Mélusine* which all present different profiles of medieval sovereigns who either encounter, or embody themselves, animality, hybridity or monstrosity as twin entities. The alignment of sovereignty with animality present in these texts, as I argued in conversation with Agamben, creates a fragmented portrait of the sovereign in its destabilisation of the human-animal boundary. The animal, essentially, provokes an uncertainty around embodiment and death in its fluid and monstrous body. Sovereignty thus becomes destabilised when faced with the threat of a fragmented embodiment which animality, hybridity and monstrosity impose.

As I outlined in my introductory chapter, for medieval scholastic thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas and Peter Lombard, the resurrection of the body and salvation is reserved exclusively for the purified human soul. On account of this, animal and hybrid portrayals bring about an eschatological anxiety or uncertainty around the bodily continuity of the sovereign – for the sovereign too is an animal who lives outside the boundaries of human law as Agamben contends (1998: 107). Often, on account of this, animals are used as apocalyptic allegories for the certainty of death, but a death that is void of the possibility of continued existence through resurrection if the ontological boundary between man and beast is not sustained. This is played out in John of Patmos's vision in the *Book of Revelations* with the beast and the kings who worshipped him being thrown at last, into the Lake of Fire, in their complete separation from God. In this section, I sketched out a brief theological survey of the developing influential debates of the Middle Ages around eschatology, and how these

discussions illuminate the eschatological implications of medieval writers' treatment of animal portrayals. As well as looking at medieval theologians, medieval studies scholars who have worked on various aspects of embodiment such as Sarah Kay, on the animality of reading parchment (2017), and Caroline Walker Bynum, on 'material continuity' (1991: 254) have also been useful interlocutors for ideas on medieval embodiment whilst I expanded this discourse into ideas around monstrosity and apocalypticism alongside the particular qualities of the texts.

In my first chapter, I argued that animal bodies are used to dramatize the uncertainty around Alexandre's sovereign stability in the *Roman d'Alexandre* as Alexandre's death is forewarned through the prophecies of the serpent, and the hybrid monster born from the Saracen woman. The narrator of the *Roman d'Alexandre*, along with other medieval writers of the Alexander legend, hails Alexander's conquest as a model king who pushes the human limits of sovereign triumph to the edges of the world. Yet in the legend's shifting hermeneutics, the narrator allegorises the pagan leader's paradoxical heroism in his imperial conquest through monstrous and marvellous fauna which also prefigure his fated demise. In Chapter Two, I sketched out my theory on the 'anthropological cage' – building on Agamben's concept of the anthropological machine – which, as I argued, demarcates the boundaries of chivalric gameplay, encompassing human and hybrid creatures alike. Compared to the *Roman d'Alexandre* which largely explores Alexandre's sovereign violence in a monstrous light, the sovereign figure in *Le Conte du Papegau*, who is the young King Arthur, maps out a positive outcome for the sovereign as long as he remains within the boundaries of his anthropological cage of chivalric code. The sovereign, in this text, is allowed an exceptional space within the courtly game to restore or reject an adversary's humanity. Ultimately, however, the destined outcome of the courtly game binds the sovereign, like his parrot, within his own cage to preserve his sovereign embodiment. My final chapter on *Mélusine* explores monstrosity and monasticism as two modes of being which eclipse sovereignty. Bernard of Clairvaux's *Apologia* provided an insight into the monastic reform movement which grapples with the problematic notion of hybridity. For Bernard, hybrids and monsters pose a threat to monastic identity and obedience in their blurring of ontological and social roles. Another monastic reform thinker, Hildegard of Bingen, provided a theoretical lens for thinking about monstrosity as a problematic force within sovereignty in her apocalyptic vision of the woman giving birth to a monster when I analysed Mélusine's reproductive hybridity. Sovereignty, in the *Roman de Mélusine,* is

perpetually stained with monstrosity and proliferates through the hybrid female body. Raymondin's hermithood at the end of the text provides a possibility for resistance against monstrous sovereignty in his rejection of political life. In this final chapter, I based my analysis on Agamben's lesser known work, *The Highest Poverty* (2013), to propose how the monastic form of life, which rejects property and possession, provides a possible way out of sovereign power. I hope, then, that my examination of the particular features of this text, will not only widen the discussion of our understanding of the *Mélusine* literary tradition, but also of medieval animal portrayals in considering the problematic figure of the hybrid sovereign.

The mirroring portrayals of animals and sovereigns in these texts reveal an anxiety about bodily continuity, or in other words, the theological concern over embodiment after death, but in particular for literary texts, this concern revolves primarily around sovereign embodiment. Animal bodies are used to dramatize the uncertainties around eschatology and sovereign continuity through textual and visual themes of prophecy, monsters and apocalypse within medieval French texts. Ultimately, the hybrid portrait of the sovereign becomes more fragmented the further he or she slips into the category of the animal and risks, like the kings who worshiped the beast in the *Book of Revelations*, a fractured salvation at the end of time.

Conversely, when we think about animals today, it is unlikely that we would directly associate animality with death, apocalypse, or eschatology in the same way that I propose medieval texts do. But in fact, animals still bring about apocalyptic anxieties in the twenty-first century. The deadly virus pandemics which have swept across nations over the years such as bird flu, swine flu, Ebola and Covid-19 are largely believed to have originated from animal sources as some of their names indicate, particularly in geographical areas with a higher density population (Chughati, 2020). Moreover, forests being destroyed for palm oil production, floods and forest fires all cause species to become endangered or in worse cases, extinct. According to a BBC report, it is estimated that at least 480 million animals died in the early 2020 Australian bushfires (BBC Reality Check Team, 2020), with one such news piece entitled 'Australia Fires: 'Apocalypse' comes to Kangaroo Island' (Khalil, 2020). As a consequence, extinction disrupts food chains which earthly life is dependent upon including our global human world. Animals can symbolise human vulnerabilities even in our post-modern society as we battle global pandemics and watch the cogs of our bionetwork begin to vanish. The visions of John of Patmos in the *Book of Revelations*, in this way, could now be as harrowing for us as they were for medieval readers, and serve as a reminder that the human-animal boundary is more fragile than we might realise.

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