How to Make a Human

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DOMESTICATING BEASTS

Cynocephali, The Wild Herdsman, and Prudentius’s Indomitable Sheep

I.

Cynocephali: How a Dog Becomes Human

A ninth-century Carolingian ivory plaque, perhaps produced in Corbie, depicts in bas-relief Adam and Eve, several monsters, and various animals.¹ The plaque is divided into seven vertically arranged groups: Adam and Eve appear at the top; immediately below them are anthropocephalic monsters with animal bodies: satyrs, centaurs, and harpies; next, zoocephalic monsters with human bodies; and finally, below them, four sets of animals. A foundational text in medieval teratology, Isidore of Seville’s Etymologies XI.iii.3, warrants an interpretation rather than just a description of the plaque’s monsters, for Isidore explains that the word “mon-

¹. Entourage of Charles the Bald, Plaque known as The Earthly Paradise, Ivory, H. 34 cm; W. 11 cm; D. 0.9 cm, circa 870–75, OA 9064, Musée du Louvre. I was first directed to the plaque by Venetia Newall, “The Dog-Headed Saint Christopher,” in Folklore on Two Continents: Essays in Honor of Linda Dégh, ed. Linda Dégh et al. (Bloomington, IN: Trickster Press, 1980), 245, which cites several medieval images of cynocephali, including this one and a carving of cynocephali over the town gates of Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne, at Corrèze, France, where they represent the souls of the damned. For the hypothesis of production of the Earthly Paradise plaque in Corbie, see Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, “Les trésors de Neustrie du VIIe au IXe siècle d’après les sources écrites:orfévrerie et sculpture sur ivoire,” in La Neustrie: les pays au nord de la Loire de 650 à 850, ed. Hartmut Atsma, vol. 2 (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke, 1989), 279–84.
strum” derives from “monitus” (admonition), “demonstrare” (indicate), or “monstrare” (show). An Isidoran symbolic reading of the monsters might begin by observing that the human head is reason’s capital, and the bipedal human body a materialized form of reason: Adam and Eve might then be understood as modeling the perfect harmony of reason with the body; the anthropocephalic creatures nearest Adam and Eve, reason’s ascendancy over unruly animal desires; and the zoocephalic monsters, the upright, rational, bipedal form of the human governed by animal lusts and thus made morally monstrous, as in Gregory the Great’s *Moralia*, where he comments, “carnali affectioni succumbunt, non jam homines, sed jumenta nominantur” (they who succumb to carnal moods are not men but are called beasts of burden; *PL* 76: 294C). In medieval as in modern studies, monsters of course can do much more than teach such traditional lessons. In the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux famously found cloistered depictions of monsters, so “mira diversarum formarum . . . ubique varietas” (plentiful and astonishing a variety of contradictory forms), to be intolerable rather than instructive because, among other reasons, they inspired the terrible vice of curiosity. Mesmerized, a monk would rather “totumque diem occupare singula ista mirando, quam in lege Dei meditando” (spend the whole day wondering at every single one of them than in meditating on the law of God). The curious monk’s fascination suggests a kind of postsymbolic symbology, whereby the monsters of the carving embody the resistance to and indeed the freedom from both classification and the Law, secular and otherwise. When humans allow themselves to be captivated by monsters, the polar categories of human and animal may, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes, “yield to the pull of dreamier horizons and unforeclosed possibilities.” Humans lost in wonder may fantasize about another way of

2. Isidore, *Etymologies*, 244.


being, one unconcerned with identity and a struggle to remain perched at the apex of creation.

Joining with Isidore, Cohen has termed “the monstrous body . . . pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read [and] signifies something other than itself.” As signifying subjects, monsters serve as moral lessons on the proper role of reason; as models of new ways of being; and, per other teratological interpretations, as tools for Christians to generate, imagine, and contain the threat of religious and ethnic difference, or as symptoms of a disordered world. But monsters need not be only signifying subjects. If they are thought to exist, as they were often thought to exist, they possess beings, like those of any other, inaccessible to signification, beings that do not mean but are. So long as the category of the human persists, with all that this implies about the unique worldly supremacy of humans and the uniquely human immunity to death, the actual being of monsters renders them liable not just to interpretation, but to judgment, which will either admit or deny them entrance to political and indeed eternal life.

Recall Gerald of Wales’s shifting reactions to animal-human hybrids and bestiality in a block of stories in his History and Topography of Ireland. To the story of a “semibos vir,” a creature partly ox and partly human, sheltered by the Marcher lord Maurice fitzGerald and killed by Irish natives, Gerald responds with what Cohen terms an “uncharacteristic undercurrent of melancholy, ambivalence, and regret.” Gerald does not judge the nature of this, the section’s first hybrid: he lists its bovine face and extremities and its speechlessness; he condemns its death; but he is reluctant to categorize it (“an extraordinary man was seen—if indeed it be right to call him a man”). Notably, in the History’s second recension, as if responding to critics, Gerald extends his consideration of the ox/man: he admits the peculiarity of classifying the death of the “semibos vir” as a homicide, points to its upright posture as justification for considering it a human (here quoting the Ovidian tag I discuss in my first chapter), and finally suggests that the strange excursus might be excused as simply representing nature having its revenge.

8. Cohen, Difficult Middles, 88. For this section, see Gerald of Wales, “Geraldus Cambrensis in Topographia Hibernie”: 145–47 (first recension); Gerald of Wales, Topographia hibernica, 108–11 (second recension); Gerald of Wales, History and Topography of Ireland, 73–76 (English translation of first recension, used above, with some small modifications).
rather than as offering a topic for disputation.\footnote{Gerald of Wales, \textit{Topographia hibernica}, 109: “Sed excursus hujusmodi sunt excusandi: potiusque timenda est naturae vindicta, quam disputatone discutienda.” In this section, the two recensions are identical in structure and, in almost all cases, in language, apart from this new conclusion and Gerald’s six-line extension to the antinovelty lyric, “Omnia jam,” concluding the goat passage: in the second recension, its last lines are “criminis infandi, prodigiosa creans” (creating freaks of unspeakable crime). For the translation, and a discussion of the poem within the context of Gerald’s other Neoplatonic poetry, see Thomas C. Moser, \textit{A Cosmos of Desire: The Medieval Latin Erotic Lyric in English Manuscripts} (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 188–89.} Gerald thus, very briefly, suspends debate over the nature and privileges of the human: he would rather the ox/man be thought about some other way. He cannot relax his judgment for long. The next hybrid he considers, yet another ox/man, he classifies as having “plus hominis quam pecoris” (more of the man than of livestock); he then describes a cow/stag as being more like livestock than like wild animals. In both these cases, he gathers them closer to himself: one is nearly human, one nearly domestic. He concludes with two cases of bestiality, both committed by women, one with a goat, the other with a lion. Though bestiality produced the hybrids of his previous stories, though Gerald praises the goat, perhaps aesthetically, perhaps erotically, as being “remarkable . . . for the length of its coat and height of its horns,” humans drawn by this beauty to “yield to the pull of dreamier horizons and unforeclosed possibilities” must, Gerald reports, be consigned to death, because a rational being must not submit itself “to such shameful commerce with a brute animal.” Despite this judgment, Gerald does not quite know what to do with the final incident: he first blames the lion for habitually “bestiali amore amplecti” (embracing in bestial love) a “fatuam” (foolish woman), then blames the woman for “muliebribus ipsum demulcens illecebris” (caressing it with womanly enticements), and then exclaims, “O utramque bestiam turpi morte dignissimam” (Each one a beast, most worthy of a shameful death!). Having allocated responsibility to both human and animal, he then recalls that even the ancients committed bestiality. He quotes Leviticus 20:16, “The woman that shall lie under any beast, shall be killed together with the same,” and glosses the verse to explain that the beast is killed “non propter culpam, a qua bestialitas excusat” (not because of its guilt, from which it is excused because of its bestialness). Hiding himself within doctrinal Christianity, Gerald makes the lion only an object of the woman’s lust and subjects the lion to death but not to execution: in short, Gerald tries to reactivate the temporarily inert system of the human. But his attempt goes awry: when he justifies the condemnation of the lion to death “propter memoriae refractionem, quae ad mentem facinus revocare solet” (to irritate the memory again, by recalling to the mind the crime), he may be describing not so much a deterrent (directed
at whom or what, one wonders) as his own collection and display of stories. His own mind irritated, in the second recension he could not help but add another story, a brief reference to Pasiphaë, the Minotaur’s mother, who slept with a bull.

At least two countervailing urges drive Gerald’s bestiality recollections: to keep irritating his mind with such stories to see where they might take him, and to preserve the particularity of human dignity. The stories, like the arrangement of the Carolingian carving, suggest for a time the existence and continued production of medial categories, but Gerald tries his best to let nothing linger in the middle. He betrays the deracinating potential of monsters by trying to confine them (and himself, it should be said) to categories of either human or animal. Who knows where he might have ended up had he not felt compelled to judge? So long as the exclusive categories of either human or animal are thought to exist, the logic of both salvation and worldly justice will demand a resolution of the middle, monstrous state into being either human or animal. Per the schema of Psalm 8:7–8, monsters will be placed on the side of humans with God, or on the side of the dominated, with “all sheep and oxen: moreover the beasts also of the fields. The birds of the air, and the fishes of the sea, that pass through the paths of the sea.”

Gerald provides no sure determination for how to judge a monster as human or animal. If he relies on anything, it is the arbitrary interpassive state in which one death is judged an execution (as with the woman) and the other merely an extrajudicial elimination (as with the lion). His resolution suggests, once again, that modes of violence provide the surest determination of the distinction between human and animal. This is as true for other teratological works, two of which I concentrate on below: first, a set of works concerned with the cynocephali, creatures with human bodies and canine heads, and then the Wild Herdsman of Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain.*

10. Note that the commentary tradition on these verses by and large allegorizes them; see, for example, Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* (1–32), ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. 3 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 137, which includes what would become the standard reading of the swimming fish as the *curiosos,* the excessively curious and worldly (e.g., Remigius of Auxerre, *Enarrationem in Psalms,* PL 131: 186C). Aquinas’s Psalm commentary is an exception; he writes, “And man, with respect to his soul, is not subject to any natural corporeal creature, whether in the beginning or in continuance, because he is not produced by a creature, and he acts freely: he does not perish with the body; and in this the honor of man consists. . . . Consequently, when he says, ‘Thou hast made,’ he writes of the mercy of God to man by comparison to the things which are below man, because He wanted man to have dominion over all those things below him: and regarding this he does three things. First, he sets forth the dominion. Second, the faculty of dominating. Third, the number of things subordinated. Second, therefore, ‘Thou hast subjugated all things.’ Third, therefore, ‘sheep and oxen’” (“Psalm 8 and Commentary,” trans. Gregory Sadler, The Aquinas Translation Project, http://www4.desales.edu/~philtheo/loughlin/ATP/Psalm_8.html).
the proof by domination is entirely in keeping with my previous arguments, monsters pose such forceful challenges to the human claim to unique possession of reason that the proofs establish the structure of the human with much more than usual force and clarity. At the same time, even though they rely on animal domestication to prove their monsters human, the teratological works also hesitate over the untrammeled exercise of human dominion over animals. In this chapter, I argue that this hesitance about violence against animals emerges precisely because the proof itself lays bare the process, and hence the contingency, of the human.

I concentrate on the cynocephali because of their popularity in teratologic catalogs and because they are remarkably ambiguous monsters, being partly human and partly animal in form. Giants and pygmies, however bloodthirsty their appetites or strange their customs, are still wholly anthropomorphic; the sciapod, which hops about on one enormous foot and, in the noonday sun, uses it as a parasol, otherwise has a human shape; the same can be said for the headless blemmyae, whose faces are in their chests; still other anthropomorphic “monsters” are notable only for their odd appetites, such as those that subsist only on milk, apples, or delectable odors. Nor is the cynocephalus just a hypertrophic animal, like the dragon or monstrous boar or wolf fought by so many chivalric heroes. The cynocephalus has the human’s bipedal and erect body, conducive to nonappetitive, celestial thought, and thus the material form of reason; yet its body terminates in an animal head, suggesting governance by bestial instincts and filthy desires. Furthermore, even when considered among other zoomorphs—the crane-headed archers of Herzog Ernst, for example—the cynocephalus is especially resistant to classification, because of its canine attributes. The dog is “the animal pivot of the human universe,” as David Gordon White remarks, “lurking at the threshold between wildness and domestication and all of the valences that these two ideal poles of experience hold,” or, as Laura Hobgood-Oster puts


12. Voisenet, Bêtes et hommes, 20–21, interprets the cynocephalic body in much the same way, but reads their disordered bodies as decisively barring the cynocephali from humanity.
it, “the ultimate example of the excluded other who is and always has been present.”13 The wolf’s carnivorousness presents, as Alexsander Pluskowski termed it, a “cosmological dilemma” to humans by challenging their dominance over the natural world.14 So too with the dog. The dog is the animal most intimately associated with humans, its trusted companion in violence and within private domestic spaces; at the same time it closely resembles a wolf: recall the French idiom for twilight, “entre chien et loup,” when each becomes uncanny.

Augustine’s influential answer to the question of the humanity of monsters, which I discussed in my first chapter, is perhaps the most generous one of the Middle Ages.15 In *City of God* XVI.8, Augustine responds to the question of whether monstrous races descended from Adam, since, if they did, then they are as human as any of Adam’s nonmonstrous descendants. Augustine first lists several monsters from the Plinian tradition: cyclops, hermaphrodites, pygmies, sciapods, blemmyae, and then finally the cynocephali, about which he professes himself a bit stymied: “What shall I say [Quid dicam] of the cynocephali, whose dog-like head and barking proclaim them beasts rather than men?” Wisely, Augustine suggests incredulity as the proper response: “we are not bound to believe all we hear of these monstrosities.” It might be expected that Augustine, like Aristotle’s contemporary the rationalist demythologizer Palaephatius, would then insist on the impossibility of monsters’ existence or else offer naturalistic explanations for them: cynocephali are really apes, while pygmies are not as short as legend would have it.16 Instead, having concluded his list of monsters with a single zoomorph, he offers a heuristic for distinguishing between human and nonhuman life, namely that any creature descended from Adam is also a “rational and mortal” and thus is human, “no matter what unusual appearance he

15. Here I accord with Valerie Flint, “Monsters and the Antipodes in the Early Middle Ages and Enlightenment,” *Viator* 15 (1984): 73, where she characterizes Augustine’s arguments as urging “humans beings [to] an extension of their tolerance and sympathy.”
16. Palaephatus, *On Unbelievable Tales (Peri apiston)*, 30, for example, “What is said about the Centaurs is that they were beasts with the overall shape of a horse—except for the head, which was human. But even if there are some people who believe that such a horse once existed, it is impossible. Horse and human natures are not compatible, nor are their foods the same: what a horse eats could not pass through the mouth and throat of a man. And if there ever was such a shape, it would also exist today.” The section on monsters in Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies* (XI.iii.28, 245) suggests, for example, that Geryon, the legendary king with three bodies, was actually three brothers in such agreement that they were thought of as having one soul. Albert the Great suggested that the cynocephali were probably great apes; see Friedman, *Monstrous Races*, 24–25.
presents in color, movement, sound,” including, presumably, barking, “nor how peculiar he is in some power.” Then, after considering individual cases of monstrous births, and after observing that apes, monkeys, and sphinxes might be thought human if they were not already known to be beasts, Augustine concludes XVI.8 by summing up the three options: “Wherefore, to conclude this question cautiously and guardedly, either these things which have been told of some races have no existence at all; or if they do exist, they are not human races; or if they are human, they are descended from Adam.” If Cyncephali exist, they must be determined to be either human or animal, but nothing in Augustine’s heuristic excludes the cyncephali from being human (for that matter, nor does it prevent the denial of humanity to anthropomorphomorphic creatures far less ambiguous than cyncephali).17 In allowing cyncephali the possibility of being rational, Augustine at least implicitly participates in a teratologic strain that stresses the civilized quality of these monsters. This widespread tradition begins with Ctesias of Cnidus (5th–4th century B. C. E.), whose work was transmitted into the Middle Ages by the Bibliotheca of the ninth-century Byzantine patriarch Photios: in Ctesias, although the cyncephali eat raw flesh and can communicate with their clearly human neighbors only by baying or gesture, they wear clothing (linen for the rich, leaves for the poor), hunt with weapons, and domesticate animals.18 Some Christian thinkers imagined that cyncephali might be, like humans in general, the beneficiaries of salvation. The sculptures of the center tympanum in the narthex of the Church of the Madeleine at Vézelay, France (begun 1124) concretize the injunction of Acts 2:39 that demands that the apostles preach even to “all that are far off” by including monstrous races, including cyncephali, within the ambit of the evangelistic mission.19 One cyncephalus, born “Reprobus” and renamed “Christopher” upon his


18. For this background, see Lecouteux, “Les Cynocéphales”: 118, and, at greater length (and for a translation of Photios’s letter from Greek to French), Lecouteux, Les monstres dans la littérature allemande, 21.

19. For a discussion of the cyncephali in a Pentecostal context, see Friedman, Monstrous Races, 61, 64–66, and 68.
conversion to Christianity, was even venerated as a saint.20 Such images and stories materialize a double lesson: God’s dominion extends to the furthest reaches of the world, and, if God can reach monstrous people, then nearer humans whose ensouled status or aptness for missionary efforts may have been in doubt become far more assuredly human.21

A contrasting medieval tradition emphasizes the monstrosity of the cynocephali, at least implicitly excluding them from the community of the human. In his *Etymologies*, Isidore initially follows—but later, silently, disowns—the Augustinian model by asserting that “just as, in individual nations, there are instances of monstrous people, so in the whole of human-kind [in universo genere humano; *PL* 82: 421A], there are certain monstrous races,”22 which, in his short list, includes giants, cyclops, and cynocephali. After a brief discussion of giants, Isidore then quotes Augustine’s initial assessment that cynocephalic barking “reveals that they are rather beasts than humans.”23 What Augustine introduces with a statement of wonder—“quid dicam?” (what should I say?)—Isidore states as a bald fact. The order of discussion is also significant: where Augustine moves from a portrayal of the cynocephali as less than human to describing a heuristic that would allow them to be human if they were descended from Adam, Isidore, by rearranging Augustine, first includes the cynocephali among humanity, but then judges them to be beasts. Notably, Isidore classifies no other monster as more beast than human: not the blemmyae; not the panotians, whose ears cover their bodies; not even the other zoomorphs, such as the artabatians, who “are said to walk on all fours, like cattle”; or the hippopodes, who “have a human form and horses’ hooves.” Despite their odd forms, even despite their inability to walk upright, Isidore never doubts that these mon-


22. Isidore, *Etymologies*, XI.iii.12, 244; cf. Augustine, *City of God*, XVI.8, 532, “Accordingly, it ought not to seem absurd to us, that as in individual races there are monstrous births, so in the whole race [as in Isidore, “in universo genere humano”]; Dombert, *Civitate Dei*, vol. 2, 137] there are monstrous races.”

sters are human. Significantly, when Isidore begins to offer demythologizing explanations for wonders—the barking of Scylla, for example, is simply the noise of violent waves and a loud whirlpool (in which case both Scylla and Charybdis create whirlpools!)—he characterizes the dog-headed Cerberus as having much in common with “irrational living creatures,” implicitly underscoring his judgment of the cynocephali as more animal than human. Several other teratologic works follow Isidore in emphasizing cynocephalic animality or at least savagery. Rabanus Maurus’s De universo simply quotes Isidore (PL 111: 195C–198A); Paul the Deacon’s eighth-century History of the Lombards tells a story in which the Langobards trick their enemies by convincing them that their army includes cynocephali who “drink human blood and quaff their own gore if they cannot reach their foe”; the seventh- or eighth-century Cosmographia characterizes the cynocephali as a “gens scelerata” (accursed people); and the mid-seventh- or mid-eighth-century Liber monstrorum characterizes cynocephali as imitators “not of humans but the beasts themselves in eating raw flesh,” whose speech is “contaminated” or “perverted” by barking.

Given so many options, it is no surprise that narratives that extend salvation to cynocephali prefer not to imagine a creature both saved and monstrous. Most texts concerning the cynocephali do not refine or theorize their classificatory systems to decide absolutely whether the creatures are

24. Ibid., 245.
28. David Williams, Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996), 295; Lecouteux, “Les Cynocéphales,” 127, references a story in which “touché par la grâce divine, ce géant cynocéphale retrouve un visage humain” (touched by divine grace, this giant cynocephalus regains a human face). For examples of such narratives, see “Passio sancti Christoperi Martyris;” Analecta Bollandiana 10 (1891): 395–96, and Acta Sanctorum 32.6, July 25, I.2. A similar process is at work in Horrall, Cursor Mundi, where the True Cross transforms the monstrous bodies of adoring Saracens into “riʒt kynde” (correct nature; 8124). I discuss cynocephali in more detail in an essay in the Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous.
animal or humans. Their general response is to obfuscate cynocephalic monstrousness, or, at best, to resort to Augustine’s deferral of the responsibility for determination onto genealogical tracing to Adam and Eve. Without any recourse to cynocephalic genealogical records, the problem would remain unsolvable until Judgment Day. Not until then would the cynocephali be burned up and abandoned like the rest of the nonhuman world, or else, having been resurrected into “proper” human forms like other humans considered inadequate or excessive by dominant standards for the body, would they finally be known as human. One study distinguishes itself amid the uncertainties and deferrals of all these other texts. This work, Ratramnus of Corbie’s *Letter on the Cynocephali* (written before 865), is remarkable for its focus on a single creature (in contrast to the teratological miscellanies of Augustine, Isidore, and the *Liber monstruorum*, among others), for its certainty about cynocephalic humanity, and for its eschewal of deliteralizing moralization in favor of practical missionary concerns. The letter responds to Ratramnus’s fellow monk Rimbert, a missionary among the Scandinavians, who had apparently written to ask whether he should preach to the cynocephali. Claude Lecouteux and Ian Wood, like other scholars who have worked from records in Otto Höfler’s *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen*, hypothesized that Rimbert had heard about a Norse warband who totemically associated themselves with dogs either through donning animal masks or through taking on the name *hundingr*. As evidence for such practices, Wood cites medieval Nordic animal masks made of felt, discovered in the harbor of the former Danish city of Hedeby (now Haithabu, in present-day Germany), and the Torslunda plaques, which show a wolf-man wearing clothes and shoes. Ratramnus’s response therefore may provide indirect evidence of cultic hound practices among the Norse, or of Rimbert’s credu-

29. On this point, see, for example, Augustine, *City of God*, XXII.19, 841–43, and “Enchiridion,” 87, 324.


31. Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, 452, suggests that Rimbert had written this letter because he had displaced his uncertainty about the humanity of the people he worked among onto these creatures, or, perhaps, because the unruly peoples and climes of the North inspired him to turn his mind to analogous creatures. See also Lecouteux, *Les monstres dans la lit-
lous anthropology. Regardless, because Ratramnus still responded as if he were considering actual cynocephali, his letter possesses enormous value for studies in medieval teratology and especially for the history of the question of the human.

In the letter, Ratramnus compiles a cynocephalic ethnography, muses on an Isidoran fashion on portents, and, finally demonstrates incontrovertibly that the creatures possess reason. To do so, he combines a study of cynocephalic customs with two distinct Augustinian heuristics: from the *City of God* on descent from Adam, and from *On Free Will* on the human domination of animals as proof of human reason and animal irrationality. First, Ratramnus examines the cynocephalic voice and form, features that might have excluded the cynocephalus from humanity, according to the tradition Ratramnus had inherited. He observes:

\[\text{forma capitis et latratus canum non hominibus, sed bestiis similes ostendit. Hominum denique est rotundo vertice caelum conspicere, canum vero longo capite rostroque deducto terram intueri, et homines loquuntur, canes vero latrant. (155: 24–27)}^{32}\]

the form of their heads and their canine barking shows that they are similar not to humans but to animals. In fact, the heads of humans are round and on top in order for them to see the heavens, while those of dogs are long and drawn out in a snout so that they can look at the ground. And humans speak, while dogs bark.

Although Ratramnus invokes both stereotypical human and animal forms, and the Augustinian and Isidoran differentiation of human voice from animal noise, he raises both points only to counter them with a list of behaviors that demonstrate cynocephalic humanity: the cynocephali live together in towns and engage in agriculture; they show themselves modest by wearing clothing; and they live together under a law: “Haec enim omnia rationalem quodammodo testificari videntur eis inesse animam” (all these things seem to demonstrate that some kind of rational soul is in them; 155: 34–35). Ratramnus also observes, “Homo vero a bestiis ratione tantummodo dis-

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32. My citations are keyed to the MGH edition by page and line number. In most cases, I follow the translation in Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization*, 452–55.
cernitur. Quae quod videtur inesse his de quibus loquimur, homines potius quam bestiae deputandi videntur” (the human can be distinguished from beasts only by reason. From these things, reason would seem to be in those of which we speak; they would seem to be regarded as humans rather than beasts; 156: 13–14). Finally, Ratramnus asserts that anyone who doubts the link between these behaviors and reason must himself lack reason (156: 9).

As convincing as these arguments might be, they do not entirely convince Ratramnus. He frequently resorts to the word *videri* (to seem): “videtur eis inesse animam,” “videtur inesse his,” “homines . . . videntur.” The cynocephali may have “rationalem *quodammodo . . . animam*” (some kind of rational soul; my emphasis). Neither the behaviors he has cited nor the teratologic traditions of Christopher and monstrous births to which he next refers provide him with a sure method for determining whether a worldly creature is reasonable and thus human. At this stage of his letter, all that Ratramnus tentatively allows is that to deny reason to the cynocephali would be irrational. Nothing allows him to transform his uncertain *videri* to the active, confident *videre* (to consider or to see) until he arrives at this, his definitive proof:

> Accedit ad haec, quod scripta vestra testantur, domesticorum omne genus animalium, quae nostris in regionibus habentur, apud illos haberi. Hoc vero fieri posse, si bestialem et non rationalem animam haberent, nequaquam *video*; siquidem homini animantia terrae fuisse divinitus subjecta Genesios lectione cognoscimus. Ut vero bestiae alterius a se generis animantia, et maxime domestici generis, curent et eis diligentiam adhibeant suisque cogant imperiis subjacere et usibus parere, sicut nec auditum ita nec creditum cognoscitur. (157: 10–15; my emphasis)

It is added to these things, to which your letter bears witness, that all the kinds of domesticated animals that are kept in our regions are kept among them. *I see* that this could in no way be if they had a bestial and not a rational soul, since the living things of the earth were subjected to men by heaven, as we know from reading Genesis. But it has never been heard or believed that animals of one kind can by themselves take care of other animals, especially those of a domestic kind, keep them, compel them to submit to their rule, and follow regular routines.

Ratramnus thus takes three steps, of which only the third certainly establishes these creatures as human and worthy of Rimbert’s missionary effort. First, he silently eliminates their anthropophagy. Next, like Ctesias of Cnidus, he grants them agriculture, clothing, modesty, and other stereotypically human cultural
characteristics, but, unlike Ctesias, he gives them clothing not of leaves or linen, but of animal skins, which supports his third and clearest proof: that the cynocephali keep and subjugate domestic animals, “suis cogant imperii subjacere.”\textsuperscript{33} It is the total assurance of this clause, overstuffed with three synonyms for command, that confers humanity upon its actors.

Something nevertheless still continues to trouble Ratramnus, for he goes on to observe, “At vero cenocephali, cum domesticorum animalium dicuntur habere multitudinem, eis minime convenit bestialis feritas, quorum animalia domestica lenitate mansuefiunt” (but since the cynocephali are said to keep a multitude of domestic animals, then animal fierceness does not fit them, because they tame their domestic animals gently: 157: 15–18). His claims for the gentleness of the cynocephali may be ascribed to his vocational habits: as a monk, he was trained to adopt a stance perhaps best expressed by Saint Martin of Tours’ declaration to the Roman emperor Julian: “Up to now I have fought for you; allow me now to fight for God . . . I am a soldier of Christ, I am not allowed to fight.”\textsuperscript{34} Ratramnus may also be recalling the moral tradition that characterized violent humans as beastlike: Ambrose’s \textit{Hexameron} warns, “If you revel in ferocity, the dominant trait of savage beasts for which reason they are slain, see that you, too, may not become a victim of your own atrocious cruelty,”\textsuperscript{35} or, to cite an example roughly contemporary to Ratramnus, the poem “Contra Judices” (Against Judges) by Theodulf of Orléans, pleads:

\begin{quote}
O genus, exemplum fugito, mortale, ferarum,
Nec homo sit homini quod fera torva ferae (911–12)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} Others readers of Ratramnus’s letter have also observed the importance it places on animal domestication: Dutton, \textit{Charlemagne’s Moustache}, 46; Lecouteux, \textit{Les monstres dans la littérature allemande}, vol. 1, 162–70; Lecouteux, \textit{Les monstres dans la pensée médiévale européenne}, 189–94.


\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Hexameron} VI.3.10 in Ambrose, \textit{Hexameron}, 233–34.
O mortal race, flee the example of the wild beasts
and let no man be to a man what a cruel beast is to a beast.  

Understood within this moral tradition, Ratramnus’s characterization of the cynocephali as gentle keeps the cynocephali from reverting to the animality from which he had just rescued them. He has, after all, defined violence as animal, as “bestialis feritas,” having the support of Isidore’s Etymologies: “They are called beasts (bestia) from the force (vis) with which they attack.” But Ratramnus’s claims for his humanized monsters can work only partially, as the cynocephalic domestication of their animals straddles the divide between gentleness and violence: the cynocephali wear hides; the excessiveness of the clause “suis cogant imperiis subjacere” itself presents their rule as precarious and despotic; and, caught in such overwhelming dominion, their domesticated animals cannot escape their condition, no matter how gently Ratramnus claims it is enforced. Ratramnus has not purged violence from the subjugation of animals: he has in fact preserved its aspects of mastery for his newly named humans, while attempting to displace the violence from the enactors onto the “fierce” victims. To recall Žižek’s distinction again, Ratramnus’s attention to the subjective violence of the domesticated animals masks the objective violence of cynocephalic—and, by extension, human—ascendancy. Typically, the mask is a symptom, in this case, of Ratramnus’s wish to elude his own knowledge of the impossibility of being human. The cynocephalic head, terrifying, carnivorous, yet in the place of reason, materializes the ineluctable and dehumanizing violence of the human condition. Like any human, the cynocephali must dominate animals; but to do so, and thus to claim reason for themselves and deny it to animals, requires violence; but to be violent means acting like a beast. Without “bestialis feritas” there is no claim to possess reason, and thus no claim to be human; but neither is there a human with it.

36. Dutton, Charlemagne’s Moustache, 48, directed me to this poem. The Latin is from Ernst Dümmler, ed., Poetae latini aevi carolini, MGH Poetae, 1 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881); the translation is from Nikolai A. Alexandrenko, “The Poetry of Theodulf of Orleans: A Translation and Critical Study” (PhD. diss., Tulane University, New Orleans, LA, 1970), 200.

37. Isidore, Etymologies, 251. Note that the introduction to this translation observes, xii, that the “b” sound had become for many indistinguishable from a “v.” See also Aquinas ST 2a2ae, q. 159, a. 2, “Whether cruelty differs from savagery or brutality,” where he observes, “‘Savagery’ and ‘brutality’ take their names from a likeness to wild beasts which are also described as savage.” An early articulation of this point appears in Lucius Annaeus Seneca, De Clementia, ed. and trans. Susanna Braund (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25.1, 137, “That frenzy of enjoying gore and wounds and of rejecting humanity and turning into a creature of the forest is the frenzy of a wild beast.” I thank Erica Fudge, “Two Ethics: Killing Animals in the Past and the Present,” in Animal Studies Group, Killing Animals, 99–119, at 101, for directing me to Seneca.
II.
The Wild Herdsman

Early in *Yvain*, Calogrenant tells his fellow knights about the humiliating defeat dealt him by Esclados, the Knight of the Fountain. Calogrenant discovered the fountain through the help of a hideous peasant, whom he encountered in a woodland clearing thronged with noisy and equally terrifying animals. The peasant, commonly known to scholars as the Wild Herdsman, may be human, but is marred by its polymorphic animality. Scholars have often remarked on the Herdsman’s pedigree in the exemplars of ugliness in various foundational rhetorical works, such as a letter by the fifth-century nobleman and bishop Sidonius Apollinaris describing a glutton, Gnatho, who has “elephantine” ears and a nose “large in its openings and constricted at its bridge, gaping wide enough to give you the creeps,”38 or, from Chrétien’s own era, the rhetorical manual of Matthew of Vendôme, which describes a slave, Davus, as “a clod of excrement, nature’s disgrace, a burden to the earth, / a glutton at the table, a disgusting house of dung,” and a hideous woman, Beroe, whose “ears flow with filth” and whose “flat” nose “vomits lethal gusts.”39 Marcolf, the peasant satirist in the widespread disputation literature of Marcolf and Solomon, also resembles the Herdsman; in one fifteenth-century version though Marcolf is “curta et grossa” (short and fat), he, like the herdsman, “caput habebat grande [et] frontem latissimum”40 (had a huge head and a very wide forehead). But for all the

similarities between Chrétien’s Herdsman and his rhetorical ancestors (and possible descendants), the Herdsman stands apart. The animal features of Gnatho and Davus function primarily as moral symptoms, as warnings to others to moderate their appetites or to value their own elite social status more highly. In contrast, the Herdsman is no moral monster; we know nothing of his sexual or alimentary habits, nor does he even mock social codes, as Marcolf does. Unlike the features of Gnatho and the others, the Herdsman’s mean far less than they are; his features do not symbolize some moral state, but rather are aspects of what the Herdsman is, even while never quite indicating the precise nature of his being.

When Calogrenant says that the Herdsman “resambloit mor”\(^\text{41}\) (286; resembled a Moor), he evokes the animalistic Moors of chivalric narrative, such as those of the \textit{Chanson de Roland}: those of Ociant, who “braient e henissent” (bray and whinny; 3526); those of Arguille, who “si cume chen i glatissent” (yelp like dogs; 3527); and those of Micenes, who are “seient ensement cume porc” (hairy just like pigs; 3523).\(^\text{42}\) But for all their animality, the \textit{Chanson}’s Moors also fight with knights as knights. The Herdsman, on the other hand, wields a club\(^\text{43}\) rather than a sword or lance and wears not armor but “deux cuirs de nouvel escorchiés, / de .ii. toriaus ou de .ii. bués” (two hides newly skinned from two bulls or oxen; 311–12); in other words, he compounds his difference from Calogrenant by possessing none of the essential equipment of chivalric culture. The Wild Herdsman only partially resembles Moors, who in turn partially resemble animals, but at first glance, he is neither clearly: thus Calogrenant’s comparison reaffirms rather than resolves the Herdsman’s ambiguity. The Herdsman’s face, a farrago of animal forms—owl, cat, wolf, elephant, and wild boar—offers a

\(\text{41. All Old French citations from Chrétien are from Chrétien de Troyes, } \textit{Romans}, \text{ ed. Michel Zink (Paris: Le Livre de poche, 1994). The Yvain edition in this volume, which uses Paris, BN fr. 1433, is by David F. Hult; I have compared Hult’s edition to the uses of Paris, BN fr. 794, the “Guoit Manuscript,” in Chrétien de Troyes, } \textit{Le Chevalier au Lion (Yvain)}, \text{ ed. Mario Roques (Paris: H. Champion, 1999), and Chrétien de Troyes, } \textit{The Knight with the Lion or Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion)}, \text{ ed. and trans. William W. Kibler (New York: Garland, 1985). There are no significant differences between BN fr. 1433 and BN fr. 794 for the points I make here. I have been guided by Kibler in my translations, making alterations where necessary.}


\(\text{43. A caveat, although not one applicable in this case: though the club is a stereotypically savage weapon, it could also be used in judicial duels and thus also could represent civilization: see Faith Lyons, “Le baton des champions dans Yvain,” } \textit{Romania} \text{ 91 (1970): 97–100.}
resolution by presenting him as more animal than human, as does his initial silence, in which the Herdsman mutely stares at the knight, saying “nient plus c’une beste feïst” (no more than a beast would; 322). The apparent lack of language, perhaps even more than the Herdsman’s visage, causes Calogrenant to remark that “je quidai quë il n’eüst / Raison, ne parler ne seüst” (I believed that he did not have reason and did not know how to speak; 323–24). The conundrum here is not one of morals, or even of aesthetics, but of species.

It is no surprise, then, that Calogrenant first asks a taxonomic question: “Va, cor me di / se tu es boine chose ou non” (Go on, tell me if you are a good thing or not; 326–27). The Herdsman simply replies that “je sui uns hom” (I am a man; 328). Calogrenant persists by asking the Herdsman what kind of man he is. The Herdsman replies: “tes com tu voi. / Je ne sui autres nule fois” (just as you see. I’m never anything else; 330–31). His statement argues against his own apparently monstrous ambiguity and in favor of his natural, that is, nonwondrous existence as a human. The conversation then turns to the “tors salvages” (wild bulls; 277) that accompany the Herdsman. Frightened by the animals’ wild energy and noise, Calogrenant marvels that they should be tamable: “ne cuit qu’en plain ne an boscage / puisse an garder beste sauvage, / n’en autre liu, pour nule cose, / s’elle n’est loïïe u anclose” (I don’t believe anyone can keep a wild beast on the plain or in the woods, nor anywhere else, in any way, unless it is tied up or fenced in; 335–38). The Herdsman explains that he keeps the beasts in submission by battering them with the “poins que j’ai et durs et forz” (strong and hard fists that I have; 346), while they “de paour tramblent / et tout en viron moi s’asamblent, / aussi com pour merchi crier” (tremble in fear and gather around me as if to cry for mercy; 347–49). Then he demands that Calogrenant tell him, in turn, who he is and what he is doing. Calogrenant responds


45. Hult describes the line’s second half as a “vers très problématique.” He reads it as “tors sauvages et esperars” (wild bulls and excited bulls); Roques as “tors salvages, ors, et lieparz” (wild bulls, bears, and leopards); and, because Yvain otherwise references only the Herdsman’s bulls, Kibler as “tors sauvages et espaars” (wild bulls at large; 280), which contrasts with “loïïe u enclose” (338). Brian Woledge, Commentaire sur Yvain (Le Chevalier au Lion) au Chrétien de Troyes (Genève: Librarie Droz, 1986), 75–76, observing that the Welsh Owein depicts its Herdsman among deer, lions, serpents, and other animals, proposes that the line derives from a source, shared by Owein, in which the Herdsman husbands a great variety of otherwise untamable animals.
that he is “uns chevaliers” (a knight; 356) seeking either “aventures, pour esprouver / ma proeche et mon hardement” (adventure to prove my prowess and hardiness; 360–61) or at least a “merveilles” (364). The Herdsman gives Calogrenant the marvelous itinerary the knight seeks, but explains that “d’aventure ne sai je rien, / n’onques mais n’en oï parler” (I know nothing of adventures, nor have I heard talk of it; 366–67). And with that, Calogrenant departs, to be defeated by Esclados, who will himself be defeated and killed, years later, by Calogrenant’s vengeful cousin, Yvain, the true focus of Chrétien’s romance.

Critics have typically analyzed the encounter between Calogrenant and Herdsman as a meeting of opposites: the knight represents the “plus haute perfections” of “les valeurs humaines et sociales” (the highest perfection of human and social values), while the bestial peasant “représente le point bas où l’humanité se dégage à peine de l’animalité”46 (represents the lowest point at which humanity barely separates itself from animality). These interpretative schema underlay appraisals such as those of Penelope Reed Doob, who declares the Herdsman “utterly alien to the rules of men”; or Eugene Vance, who sees in the Wild Herdsman and Calogrenant a “clearcut opposition between city and the forest” in which the former signifies “law or reason” and the latter “bestial passion”; or Donald Maddox, who somewhat differs from Vance in calling the Herdsman a member of “a twilight zone between nature and culture” whose violence aligns him with brutal animals, which submit only to force.47 Readings concentrating on the brutishness, primitivism, or purported appetitive excess of the Herdsman suggest in turn the readings of medieval giants by critics such as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Geraldine Heng. Cohen and Heng argue that chivalric narratives included giants in order to fantasize about conquest and to project onto giants those qualities of sexual, corporeal, and alimentary excess that the texts pretended were alien to the dominant culture. In these interpretations, giants are not just marvels, adversaries, or uncivilized barbarians: they also function oppo-

46. Dubost, “Merveilleux,” in Dufournet, Approches, 74. Also see Jean Frappier, Étude sur Yvain ou le Chevalier au Lion de Chrétien de Troyes (Paris: Société d’édition d’enseignement supérieur, 1969), 148, who suggests that “Sous le couvert de l’humour et de la verve caricaturale, n’a-t-il pas voulu rappeler à son public qu’il existait une humanité dehors des cours chevaleresques et des salon courtois?” (Under cover of humor and spirited caricature, didn’t he wish to remind his public that a humanity existed outside the chivalric courts and courtly halls?).

47. Penelope Reed Doob, Nebuchadnezzar’s Children: Conventions in Madness in Middle English Literature (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 137; Donald Maddox, The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 55; Eugene Vance, From Topic to Tale: Logic and Narrativity in the Middle Ages (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 59 and 64.
sitionally as bad or inadequate humans to contrast with the heroic humans foregrounded by chivalric narrative as corporeally normal and as paragons of self-control. These readings work, since the Herdsman does distort, exaggerate, or reverse many of the fundamental values and behaviors of chivalry. His body, “grans et hideus a desmesure” (exceedingly large and hideous; 287), parodies that of Calogrenant, which is “mout avenans” (very handsome/well-proportioned; 58). His face, a mass of animal shapes, transforms the human head into a sign of irrationality, while the mounted Calogrenant embodies the rhetorical cliché of “horse and rider” used in moral literature to portray the mastery of the rational soul over the corporeal vices. The Herdsman’s methods of governance are likewise a grotesque parody of chivalric culture. As Joseph M. Sullivan remarks, the Wild Herdsman on his stump, holding a club, resembles a king on a throne holding a mace; he even imitates court fashions by wearing a cloak—admittedly, made of uncured hides—fastened at the neck. The Herdsman is a ruler in fact as well as appearance, for, as he brags, he calms the “grant bruit” (280; great noise) and fighting of the animals of his “court” by battering them, all the while ignoring their cries: “Ainsi,” he concludes, “sui de mes bestes sire” (353; thus I am lord of my beasts). In comparison, near the romance’s end, after Gawain and Yvain have stopped fighting by each claiming to be defeated, Arthur “oï les” (listens to them; 6357) and is moved to ratify the peace because the two knights are “enpirié en pluseurs lex” (wounded in several places; 6361). In sum, the Herdsman is a material representation of the excessiveness of those who refuse to accept the self-governance imposed

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48. Heng, Empire of Magic, 35–45, argues that the giant of Mount St. Michel embodies in the very heart of pilgrim Europe memories of crusade anthropophagy. Cohen, Of Giants, distills his insights in several places, e.g., 82, “The knight defeats in the giant those nonteleological desires that, when read back through the cultural matrix of chivalry, represent every vice that must be evacuated to construct both the orderly Socius and the properly gendered hero.” See also, for example, Martha Nussbaum, Disgust, Shame, and the Law (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 219-20: “by casting shame outwards, by branding the faces and the bodies of others, normals achieve a type of surrogate bliss; they satisfy their infantile wish for control and invulnerability... the normal is a thoroughly normative notion, and a kind of surrogate perfection or invulnerability.”


50. See Voisenet, Bêtes et hommes, 43.


by chivalry, “a control mechanism,” as Cohen describes it, “masquerading as a code of ethics.”53

Having raised the possibility of a (distorted) noble herdsman, the romance then redraws the class distinction between Herdsman and knight even more firmly when the Herdsman asks Calogrenant to identify himself. Although the Herdsman claims a likeness between himself and Calogrenant by declaring himself “uns hom,” the knight declares in turn that he is “uns chevaliers” seeking “avantures, por esprouver / ma proeche et mon harde-ment.” Significantly, Calogrenant’s answer befuddles the Herdsman, who despite his costume, majesty, and court cannot comprehend the chivalric jargon, and who compounds his ignorance by misidentifying the gold of the magic basin as iron, mistaking a noble substance for a base one.54 In his failure of comprehension, the Herdsman now fully emerges as a peasant, useful only for tending animals and for ineptly directing knights toward the main plot line of a noble narrative. This sharp contrast between Calogrenant and Herdsman may be understood as a way for Chrétien to test a declaration he made early in Yvain: “encor vaut mix, che m’est a vis, / un courtois mors c’uns vilains vis” (it seems to me that a dead noble is worth much more than a living peasant; 31–32). Initially Calogrenant has little value even as a “cortois vis”: he wanders “seus comme païsans” (alone like a peasant; 176); can only inadequately describe the beauty of a vavasor’s daughter; is terrified by a herdsman; is humiliated by Esclados; and then slinks back to court “honteusement” (shamefully; 558) without his armor.55 But regardless of Calogrenant’s ineptitude, or the strength and indeed the affability of the Herdsman, Calogrenant still shows himself to be better proportioned, culturally superior, and if not brave then at least willing to fight: thus, even as a terrible knight, Calogrenant has greater worth than a “vilains vis.” More-


54. I take this observation from Christine Ferlampin-Acher, Merveilles et toipique merveilleuse dans les romans médiévaux (Paris: Champion, 2003), 123 and 422. Her reading of the Herdsman, 32, as a “créature monstrueuse proche de l’animalité” (monstrous creature close to animality) is typical.

55. The analysis of Calogrenant in Leigh A. Arrathoon, “Jacques de Vitry, the Tale of Calogrenant, La Chastelaine de Vergi, and the Genres of Medieval Narrative Fiction,” in The Craft of Fiction: Essays in Medieval Poetics, ed. Leigh A. Arrathoon (Rochester, MI: Solaris Press, 1984), 281–368, at 311–12, inspires my attention to the knight’s incompetence; in comparison, Yvain, a superior knight even before his transformation into the Knight with the Lion, does not neglect to remark on the great beauty of the vavasor’s daughter, “que n’ot conté Calogrenans” (782; which Calogrenant had not recounted). Marie-Luce Chênerie, Le Chevalier errant dans les romans arthuriens en vers des XIIe et XIIIe siècles (Geneva: Droz, 1986), 123, calls my attention to an explanatory line in Chrétien’s Erec et Enide, where King Lac declares that “ne doit seus aler filz de roi” (a king’s son should not go alone; 2706); Jean-Marie Fritz, ed., in Chrétien de Troyes, Romans.
over, Chrétien considers Calogrenant’s story to be worth telling, and builds that value into the narrative itself when Calogrenant’s fellow knights listen to his story and Guinevere retells it to Arthur; but no one ever wonders how the Herdsman came to be in the woods or what happened to him after Calogrenant leaves him. The difference between *courtois mors* and *vilains vis* is that even a bad knight merits memorialization in narrative, while a peasant, living or dead, is beneath notice except to remind knights of what they should not be. This distinction lays the groundwork for *Yvain*’s critique and renovation of chivalric violence:56 having sluiced the excesses of chivalry into the Herdsman, and then sealed this excess up in the Herdsman’s peasantry, Chrétien is able to consider Yvain, the murderer of Esclados, as guilty not of low-class violence but rather of acting *too much* like a knight.

The dynamic suggests a still more complex understanding of the contrast between Herdsman and Knight. Abjection attempts to dissociate the most repulsive aspects of a subject’s self from the subject by dumping them onto some derided other. What is abjected is thus a sign of shame rather than a simple sign of difference. The brutishness of giants is not simply different from chivalric violence, but rather is a desublimated manifestation of the traits lurking at the heart of chivalric selfhood. By defeating giants, knights attempt to sever the link between their ideal chivalric selves and their own appetites, thus attempting to present themselves post facto as never having needed to abject anything. The paradigm of this dynamic for both Cohen and Heng is the Giant of Mt. St. Michel. In the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* the giant eats a meal of seven children “chopped in a chaurge of chalk-white silver, / With pickle and powder of precious spices, / And piment full plenteous of Portingale wines”57 (1026–28); his belt, festooned with the beards of conquered kings, and his wealth and appetite attest to his imperial might. He is no simple monstrous “other,” but rather mirrors back to Arthur the normative economic and military exploitations of the elite, per the operations of Lacan’s formulation of communication, as repeatedly summarized by Žižek, “in which the sender gets back from the receiver-addressee his own message in its inverted—that is, true—form.”58 For Arthur to defeat this “intimate

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56. It is customary to understand Yvain as learning over the course of the romance to redirect his violence in more socially beneficial directions: e.g., Maddox, *Arthurian Romances*, 51–81, and Robert W. Hanning, “The Social Significance of Twelfth-Century Chivalric Romance,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* n.s. 3 (1972): 14.


58. For example, Žižek, *Parallax View*, 341 and 365, and *Violence*, 118.
stranger”⁵⁹ just before he himself “swallows” Gaul by absorbing it into his empire and conquers its kings allows Arthur to abject his own violent appetites onto the giant and then to emerge from the conflict as a hero, now putatively disassociated from the constitutive excess of kingship and chivalry; so too with Yvain’s defeat of the giant Harpin de la Montagne. Harpin murders knights, fights with a club, and threatens to have a noblewoman gang-raped by his servants, but, like the juventus Yvain, he devastates land and seek to acquire a wife.⁶⁰ Like these other giants, the Herdsman is too reminiscent of knights. He may rule over his animals only through merciless force, but the same might be said for Arthur’s court in Yvain’s opening scene. Contention erupts among the knights almost as soon as Chrétien has introduced them: Calogrenant is telling his story when he leaps to his feet to honor the queen; Kay lambastes him for his ostentatious courtesy; Calogrenant in turn likens Kay to a dungheap (116). The squabble ends only because Guinevere commands Calogrenant to ignore’s Kay’s insult and to keep talking. Calogrenant obeys her command, but not until he has declared that he finds it “mout grief” (very painful; 142), less preferable, in fact, to having one of his eyes torn out (144): nothing but his fear of the queen’s anger compels his obedience (146); only later will Arthur’s milder rule of legal trickery substitute for Guinevere’s diktat. In this regard, like the giant of Mt. St. Michel and Harpin de la Montagne, the Herdsman appears not as chivalry’s opposite, nor as its uncontrolled excess, but as its repulsive and violent inner truth, demystified.

Apart from his size and appearance, though, the Herdsman has little in common with the anthropophagous giant of Mt. St. Michel, or with other twelfth-century giants in French literature, such as William of Orange’s savage, comic companion Rainoart⁶¹ or the Herdsman’s closest analogue, the similarly animal-featured ox-driver that Aucussin meets in the forest.⁶² He does not attack women or Calogrenant, nor does the gore of his victims stain his face; he does not proclaim his allegiance to Islam, nor does he convert to Christianity upon his defeat; and unlike Aucassin et Nicolette’s giant, he requires no assistance from the knight who meets him. Moreover, far from

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⁵⁹. See, for example, the discussion of extimité and the “intimate stranger,” in Cohen, Of Giants, xii.


being an agent of disorder and rapine, the Herdsman behaves industriously by tending his animals in an “essars” (clearing; 277), which suggests that the Herdsman, like many other twelfth-century peasants, has transformed a section of forest into a pasture: this is less a zone of wildness than a zone of the emergence of human culture from the woods.\(^6\) The most signal difference, however, is that no fight takes place. Although Calogrenant expects to be attacked when the Herdsman leaps to his feet (314–19), the Herdsman radically departs as much from critical as from narrative expectations: he behaves as neither brute, buffoon, nor suppliant; he is content just to talk and to explain his way of life. Calogrenant will eventually distinguish himself from the Herdsman through his cultural superiority, but for now, he recognizes the Herdsman as like him, not as his own abjected selfhood, but simply as a fellow “hom.”

In focusing on the two extremes of humanity represented by Calogrenant and the Herdsman, on the Herdsman’s appearance rather than his actions, and on the possibilities or indeed the impossibilities of the properly chivalric, the criticism has ignored how the scene prompts a consideration of the human, first and foundationally, and how the Herdsman’s declaration of humanity depends on his boast of dominating fierce beasts without fear of harm, a dominion over animals witnessing to the presence and operations of a capacity that can be called, following Augustine, “reason.” Despite Calogrenant’s initial misapprehension, the Herdsman is neither a voiceless animal nor only a monstrous counterpart, whether internal or external, to chivalric culture; he is human, and human by virtue of his mastery of animals. He declares when he beats his animals that they respond “aussi com pour merchi crïer” (as if to cry for mercy; 349; my emphasis). He hears his animals as imitating the pleas of humans, who alone among worldly creatures have the right to protest ill treatment. The animals’ cries can only cement the distinction the Wild Herdsman draws between them and humans; so long as their cries are recognized as being only imitative and inauthentic, the animals’ suffering, unlike that of Calogrenant, Esclados, or Yvain, will not be mourned or redressed by anyone.\(^\) The Herdsman commits an anti-prosopopiea—the trope which gives


\(^6\) The critics tend to admire the Herdsman precisely for this subjugation. Tony Hunt, “Le Chevalier au Lion: Yvain Lionheart,” in Norris J. Lacy and Joan Tasker Grimbert, eds., *A Companion to Chrétien de Troyes* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 159, is typical: “Far from being an evil shape-shifter, as the knight fears, he is both benign and efficient in fulfilling his role in the social order” (this restates his earlier reading in Tony Hunt, *Chrétienn de Troyes: Yvain (le Chevalier au lion)* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1986), 26). Also see Pierre Jonin, “La révision d’un topos ou la noblesse du vilain,” in *Mélanges Jean Larmat: regards*
an imagined or absent person, animal, or object a voice—for he denies his oxen a voice by refusing to recognize that they too have a face (*prosopon*); at the same time, by confining them in the “as if” his speech produces, the Herdsman also presents both Calogrenant and himself as possessing authentic voices, which need not be rendered through a *prosopopiea* to be heard. *Yvain* notably does not present this humanist refusal to listen as an inevitability, for it provides a counterexample of human-animal companionability when Yvain’s lion, like the Herdsman’s animals, pleads for peace and companionship. While Yvain recognizes the lion’s gestures as meaningful—“Mesire Yvains par varité / set que li leons l’en merchie” (my lord Yvain indeed knew that the lion thanked him; 3403–4)—and actionable, since Yvain makes the lion his companion, albeit one whose appetites are subordinate to his human master, the Herdsman refuses to “know” that his animals can communicate any desire for mercy. Yvain’s lion’s pleas show that the Herdsman’s beasts lack speech not simply because they are animals, but because the Herdsman refuses to hear them. As in *Sidrak and Bokkus* the Herdsman uses animal subjugation to declare himself human, to degrade his beasts as only beasts, and to posit reason—here evidenced as headable speech—as an exclusively human trait. Therefore, the Herdsman’s declaration that the oxen’s sounds are only “ausi con” they were pleas is as much an act of subjugation as is his beating them: one is simply more obvious than the other. Having established his position, the Herdsman finally can declare, “Ainsi sui de mes bestes sire” (thus I am lord of my beasts; 353), a phrase that serves not only as a distorted echo of the lordship exercised by *Yvain*’s nobles, but also as a reiteration of his opening declaration, “je sui uns hom.”

65. The chief difference between Yvain and the lion in these gestures is anatomical: the lion uses its paws, whereas Yvain, before Laudine, uses his hands.

66. I am inspired here by Butler, *Frames of War*, 51, where she remarks that “the tacit interpretative scheme that divides worthy from unworthy lives works fundamentally through the senses, differentiating the cries we hear from those we cannot, the sights we can see from those we cannot, and likewise at the level of touch and even smell.”


65. The chief difference between Yvain and the lion in these gestures is anatomical: the lion uses its paws, whereas Yvain, before Laudine, uses his hands.
Yet the Herdsman’s violent efforts fail to fully extricate him from animality or identify him with Calogrenant, since other heuristics for humanity and culture, also based around the technologies and cultures of violence toward animals, operate against him.\textsuperscript{68} The Herdsman’s violent expropriation of another creature’s skin for clothing distinguishes him as a human and as possessing a minimal culture, even if it is one utterly opposed to the sartorial splendor proper to the martial elite.\textsuperscript{69} But his hides also recall those worn by Benedict of Nursia in Gregory the Great’s \textit{Dialogues}, which cause shepherds to mistake him for a wild animal.\textsuperscript{70} The Herdsman’s skins are, moreover, “nouvel escorchiéz” (310), newly skinned, raw, not yet subjected to technology; they look too much like what they are, skin, whether that of an animal or of the Herdsman himself, as if they were yet another one of the animal characteristics of the Herdsman’s body-menagerie.\textsuperscript{71} He also subjugates his oxen not with the “grant machue” (huge club; 291) he carries but rather by grappling them with his fists. No other human in \textit{Yvain} fights without a weapon: Calogrenant sets out on his adventures “arméz de totes armeüres / si com chevaliers dovoit estre” (entirely armed as a knight should be; 178–79) and fights the spring’s guardian with a lance; \textit{Yvain} hunts with bow and arrow even at the nadir of his madness;\textsuperscript{72} and both the giant Harpin

\textit{est, c’est un homme, car il peut parler et il a de la raison, même si elle est fruste. Bien plus: c’est parce qu’il est un homme qu’il est capable de maîtriser les bêtes sauvages” (original emphasis; as monstrous as he is, he is a man, because he can speak and he has reason, even if it is unsophisticated. Moreover, it is because he is a man that he can master wild beasts). He might have better concluded by reversing his final statement.

68. Vance, \textit{Topic to Tale}, 67–68, “the man-beast’s grades in the mechanical arts are also very low. Instead of wearing artifacts of woven textiles, he wears skins that have been torn from freshly killed animals and then not even cured or tanned. Instead of bearing a sword, he either fights with his fist like a primitive human, or he wields a club that, in the chivalric perspective, is the ‘minimal’ weapon and is linked to the iconographic convention of the wild man. Instead of laboring in the agricultural world of field and pasture, the man-beast inhabits the forest.” Since Calogrenant encounters the Wild Herdsman in an “essars,” he in fact is creating “the agricultural world of field and pasture.”

69. For an introduction to noble costume and its regulations, see Joachim Bumke, \textit{Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages}, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1991), 128–40. For hide-clothed wild men, see, for example, Cartlidge, \textit{Owl and the Nightingale}, where the Scottish “goþ biti Ʒt mid ru Ʒe velle” (go clad in rough pelts; 1013).

70. \textit{Dialogues}, II, chapter 1, 7.

71. In addition to Vance, \textit{Topic}, 61 n48, Alice Planche, “Les Taureaux et leur maître: sur un episode discuté de l’\textit{Yvain} de Chrétien de Troyes,” \textit{Pris-MA} 4 (1988): 13, also makes (but does not elaborate upon) this point: “on imagine les peaux non tannées, encore humides d’un sang qui accentue l’osmose entre le maître et les bêtes” (one imagines the skins not tanned, still damp with blood, which accentuates the osmosis between master and beasts). Planche also identifies the species of bulls the Herdsman masters—Aurochs; the exact size of the Herdsman’s forehead; and finally suggests that he may be modeled after a Neanderthal.

72. This is, incidentally, not a peasant but a hunting weapon, a point I will treat at greater
de la Montagne and the two demons Yvain later fights use clubs. The only other characters in Yvain who fight without technological assistance are animals, Yvain’s lion and its dragon opponent. Consequently, even though the Herdsman’s violence is constitutively human, it is not characteristically human; his violence gives him dominion over and thus distinguishes him from his animals, but insofar as his mode of violence is itself “bestial,” it simultaneously identifies him with those very animals.

It would be easy at this point to observe that the scene is yet another witness that only elite humans are fully human, that elites often characterized peasants as animals, or even, as Paul Freedman wisely notes, that in these encounters between elites and monstrous peasants, “images of humanity and animality were not fixed.” The scene may better be understood, however, as representing the human at both at its most primitive and most fundamental. In costume, technology, and appearance the Herdsman is the very paradigm of the bestial peasant, but when Calogrenant asks the Herdsman to direct him to a marvel (362–64), he acknowledges that the Herdsman has ceased to be a marvel and become a fellow human. He does so only after he is satisfied by the Herdsman’s declaration of mastery over his animals. His recognition of the Herdsman as human, then, makes Calogrenant complicit in the Herdsman’s violence. Calogrenant cannot emerge unscathed from this encounter. Inasmuch as he recognizes the Herdsman as human, he must admit how the human—and he himself—comes to be, that the acts by which humans distinguish themselves from animals identify them with animals all the more strongly. While Calogrenant recognizes that the Herdsman stands in, as Marie-Luce Chênerie remarks, a “cercle étroit d’une domination brutale” (narrow circle of brutal domination), he must also recognize that if this domination is brutal, so is the human itself.

III.

Sympathy’s Consolations

Any human encounter with an animal potentially confounds the human sense of difference, but in most medieval texts and practices, the challenge is only implicit. Humans normally appeal to tautologies to prove their dis-
tinction from animals: humans know they are reasonable because they are not animals, and they know animals are not human because they are irrational. Monsters such as the cynocephali and Wild Herdsman break the tautological circuit—which, at any rate, never functions perfectly—since they require that humans explicitly consider the rules by which they claim the human for themselves. Annie Cazenave observed that since teratology really speaks about the human relation to the universe, understanding of the world, or fear of death or sex, “le discours sur le monstre est, en réalité, un discours sur l’homme” (the discourse on the monster is, in reality, a discourse on Man), a point to which Jacques Voisenet adds, “Sous cet aspect, le rôle du monstre ne se différencie en rien, sauf en intensité, de celui de n’importe quel animal”75 (in this aspect, the role of the monster differs in nothing, except in intensity, from that of any given animal). True: it is not, however, that the discourse of monsters is, like that of animals, anthropocentric, but that teratology compels humans to confront the conditions of their humanity more intensely than does the confrontation with more quotidian beasts. Monsters compel humans to confront directly the “founding crime” of the human; to repurpose Žižek’s discussion of Israel’s “founding crime” as only more recent than that of other states, “what the [monster] confronts us with is merely the obliterated past of every [human] power.”76

At the seam of a dog’s ravening head joined to a human body, in the “essars” where a Herdsman, his face a mass of animal shapes, beats his vainly protesting beasts, the human confronts the fact that there is nothing to them as human except this only ever partial emergence from the animal. Faced with this self-recognition, the human seeks to protect its sense of essential identity from its own constitutive violence. If that violence becomes someone else’s responsibility, then humans can reassure themselves that their own humanity is not founded through violence, that it is not founded at all, but simply is. Thus even while employing the subjugation of animals as his heuristic for humanity, Ratramnus deflects the violence onto the inherently unruly beasts, who require the “gentle” mastery of the cynocephali; Chrétien deflects violence onto both the Herdsman and his beasts and away from the knights, who instead learn to govern themselves through love, contracts, and the redirection of their own, murderous violence toward protecting the weak.

The deflection of violence against animals helps explain traditional warnings about the callousness and bloodthirstiness of humans accustomed to violence against animals. Plutarch urged, “If for no other reason than for

75. Cazenave quoted and replied to in Voisenet, Bêtes et hommes, 26.
76. Žižek, Violence, 117.
practice in kindness to our fellows we should accustom ourselves to being mild and gentle with animals,” and the third-century Neoplatonist Porphyry approvingly cites the maxim that “thieves and fighters do not come from eaters of barley-bread; but informers and tyrants come from meat-eaters.”

John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (d. 407), in commenting on Proverbs 12:10, “The just man takes care of his beast, but the heart of the wicked is merciless,” allowed that while it might seem demeaning to care for animals, “he who has pity upon animals tends to have much more pity upon his brothers.” In a commentary on Genesis 9:4, in which God allows humans to eat animals but forbids them to eat animal blood, the twelfth-century Parisian scholar Peter the Chanter warned that executioners and butchers posed a danger to the body politic, because they were more prone to shedding blood than other people were. In his *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas wrote:

> Indeed, if any statements are found in Sacred Scripture prohibiting the commission of an act of cruelty against brute animals, for instance, that one should not kill a bird accompanied by her young, this is said . . . to turn the mind of man away from cruelty which might be used on other men, lest a person through practicing cruelty on brutes might go on to do the same to men.

Aquinas returns to this issue in his *Summa Theologica*, 1a2ae q. 102, a. 6, “Whether there was any reasonable cause for the ceremonial observances,” reply objection 8, which concerns the Mosaic Law’s Deuteronomic commands in light of Paul’s assertion that God takes no care for oxen. Here he


79. Quoted in Philippe Buc, *L’Ambiguïté du Livre: prince, pouvoir, et peuple dans les commentaires de la Bible au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1994) 219 n37, from Paris, BN Arsenal 44, 19v, “Unde periculosum lictorum officium et carnificium, quia quadam usuali frequentia ad effundendum sanguinem fiunt pronoires.” Buc translates “carnificium” as executioner, dangerous because he is accustomed to shedding “le sang humain” (human blood), but Peter’s commentary speaks only of blood in general: “carnificium” should therefore be understood, more straightforwardly, as “butcher.”

80. Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, vol. 3, III.112.13, 119. Aquinas obscures this point with two additional explanations which rely on, respectively, a defense of property rights—the animal, like any possession, should not be harmed unnecessarily—and the Pauline exegesis on Deuteronomy 25:4, which I discuss in chapter 3.
reiterates the central point that humans need not be troubled by the suffering of animals, since “God has subjected all things to man’s power,” but then restates, at greater length, his explanation that human gentleness toward animals fosters gentleness toward other humans. This argument continued to have currency through the early modern era and persists into the present day: in Thomas More’s *Utopia*, “the slaughtering of livestock and cleaning of carcasses is done by slaves. They don’t let ordinary people get used to cutting up animals, because they think it tends to destroy one’s natural feelings of humanity”; in his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant praised the English for forbidding butchers from jury duty, “because they are accustomed to the sight of death and hardened”; and in the 1980s, the butchers who spoke to Noëlie Vialles of their squeamishness about human blood were laboring under the weight of a tradition that regarded them as professionally inured to murder.81 While the warnings may be commended for curtailing human cruelty to animals as well as human cruelty to humans, and also for simply encouraging humans to acknowledge animal suffering, they should ultimately be understood as yet another strategy of the human. It is not only that none of the warnings worry that humans habituated to violence against animals might become great, indifferent killers of animals. It is also that the warnings also burden individual humans with personal responsibility for kindness to animals, while deflecting attention from any critique of the objective violence of the human itself.82 Among the warnings, only Plutarch and Porphyry’s

81. Thomas More, *Utopia*, trans. Paul Turner (New York: Penguin, 1961), 81; Kant quoted in Linzey and Clarke, *Animal Rights*, 127; Noëlie Vialles, *Animal to Edible*, trans. A. Underwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 78–79. For premodern and Early Modern warnings against animal cruelty that attended, not to the suffering animals, but to the dangers humans underwent by allowing their passions to become disordered, see Erica Fudge, “Two Ethics: Killing Animals in the Past and the Present,” in *Animal Studies Group, Killing Animals*, 99–119; for two medieval examples likely belonging to this tradition, see “Symon’s Lesson of Wysedome for all Maner Chyldryn,” in Frederick James Furnivall, ed., *The Babees Book*, EETS o. s. 32 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1868), and Frederick James Furnivall, ed., *Caxton’s Book of Curtesye*, EETS e. s. 3 (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1868), which, respectively, advise “Loke þou cast to no mannes dogge, / with staff ne stone at hors ne hogge” (23–24), and “cast not wyth stone or styke at foule ne beste, / And where ye walke be ware that ye ne rage” (64–65). Note, however, that Fudge observes that Early Modern thought was not monolithic: other thinkers, most notably Montaigne, did empathize with animal suffering itself.

82. I draw my inspiration from Mark Fisher, “‘ . . . Without Any Consequences for the Individual Villains,’” K-Punk, May 18, 2009, http://k-punk.abstractdynamics.org/archives/011132.html, where, while discussing the film *The Parallax View*, the recent banking crisis, and the police shooting in London of Jean Charles de Menezes, mistaken for a terrorist, Fisher writes, “we shouldn’t rush to impose the individual ethical responsibility that the corporate structure deflects. This is the temptation of the ethical which, as Žižek suggested at the Birkbeck Communism conference, the system is using in order to protect itself—the
treatises can be considered free of hypocrisy, for, being unencumbered by Christianity’s insistence on the worldly singularity of humans, they can challenge the supposed naturalness of the human domination of other worldly beings and so undercut the human itself. Not one of the other thinkers questions or relinquishes human superiority.

Ratramnus’s position is exemplary in its assurance that his leather-clad cynocephali can somehow eschew “feral,” “bestial” violence while still subjecting animals to their commands. Meanwhile, under Ratramnus’s leadership, ninth-century Corbie employed people to fatten swine, geese, and chickens for slaughter, kept three leather workers on its permanent staff, and collected tithes of rams, lambs, goats, suckling pigs, and bacon.83 Corbie thrived, and Ratramnus too thrived, on the killing of domesticated animals. Without the wealth generated by the expropriation of animal lives, without parchment, made from the skins of animals, Ratramnus could not have enjoyed Corbie’s famous library or have been able to research or write his letter on the cynocephali. To recall Benjamin’s well-worn maxim, once we cease to empathize with Ratramnus and other human “victors,” we recognize that his texts are quite explicitly at once documents of civilization and of barbarism. In this case, to “brush history against the grain” means to pay as much heed to the material of the manuscript itself as to the writing; to see the remnants of follicles on a parchment’s hair side as an alternate punctus, a palimpsestic reminder of what the letters of human reason obscure; or indeed to see this skin, put to use, and not dissimilar to human skin, as a call to humans to put off the arrogance of burial, which, like the system of the human itself, attempts to preserve the individual, corporeal materials of human existence from its constitutive involvement in the world.84 Ratramnus allowed himself to feel no such thing. Looking at the skin on which he wrote, imagining the hides on the backs of the cynocephali, he must have

83. See the summary of the statutes of Adalhard (issued 822) in David Ganz, Corbie in the Carolingian Renaissance (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1990), 26–27.

84. Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 256, “Without exception, the cultural treasures [the historical materialist] surveys have an origin which he cannot contemplate without horror. . . . There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.” Insofar as it is possible, I have tried in this book, as Benjamin urged, “to brush history against the grain.” For further discussion about the “ethical complexity of mass animal slaughter for the purpose of literary production,” with particular attention to the “baffling failure” of both modern scholarship and medieval writing to acknowledge the centrality of animal death to medieval textuality, see Holsinger, “Of Pigs and Parchment,” 619–22. Mary Kate Hurley suggested to me the point about burial.
considered his writing and their clothing so “gentle” that he could confidently refer to violence as a particularly animal characteristic. Through his cynocephali, Ratramnus imagines a “gentle” mass slaughter of animals, as if the human were not being continually and imperfectly generated by its own systemic, “objective” violence. Needless to say, Ratramnus’s hope is false, self-serving in fact. As I argue in my epilogue, such an innocent humanity, if such a thing could ever be achieved, would require the complete abandonment of human and animal as two binary and hierarchical rather than multitudinous and overlapping categories. But by indulging in his fantasy of a gentle humanity, Ratramnus protects the equally fantastic notion of an essential human identity distinct from that of animals.

The concern about violence against animals of Ratramnus, Aquinas, and the rest should be likened to that of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Parzival, whose hero weeps for the songbirds he himself has killed,85 or to that of Francis of Assisi’s limited, often misunderstood solicitude for animals. Thomas of Celano describes Francis’s care for his fellow creatures, how he removed “from the road little worms, lest they be crushed under foot”;86 but he also records how Francis replied to one of his fellows who asked whether meat should be eaten on a Christmas that happened to fall on Friday, a customary day of abstinence: “You sin, Brother, calling the day on which the Child was born to us a day of fast. It is my wish . . . that even the walls should eat meat on such a day, and if they cannot, they should be smeared with meat on the outside.”87 This dubious sympathy for animals may also be likened to that of the thirteenth-century Dominican Ralph “Bocking”’s life of Richard de Wyche, thirteenth-century Abbot of Chichester, which includes this anecdote:

In tantum vero castrimargie vitium solebat condempnare quod cum agni vel edi seu pulli, ut assolent coquine, inferrentur, dicere solebat quasi mortem innocentum plagendo. “O,” inquid, “si rationales essetis et loqui poss setis, quantum ventres nostros male dicere. Nos quidem mortis vestre causam sumus; vos, qui innocentes estis, quid morte dignum commissistis?”

[Richard] used to condemn the sin of gluttony in such severe terms that

85. Wolfram von Eschenbach, Parzival and Titurel, trans. Cyril W. Edwards (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), Book III, 51. There is no such scene in Chrétien’s version, Perlesvaus, Bliocadran, or the Middle English Sir Perceval of Galles, although they all tend to present Perceval as a great hunter.

86. Thomas of Celano, Second Life, trans. Placid Hermann, chapter 124, section 165, in Habig, St. Francis of Assisi, 495.

when the cooks brought in lambs or kids or chickens, as they often did, he would cry out, as if mourning the death of the innocent, “O if you could reason and were able to speak, how you would curse our appetites! For in truth it is because of us that you died. You are the innocent ones; what have you done to deserve to die?”

As with Parzival and Francis, Richard’s sympathy goes only so far. Parzival, for all his sadness, remains a devotee of hunting, admired by Wolfram for his prowess in bringing down the stags of the Forest of Soltane; Francis, a devotee of holiday carnage, should be understood, as David Salter argues, not as an advocate for animals but as a restorer of the prelapsarian dominion of humans over the natural world; and if Richard feels slightly ashamed of the injustice of human domination over animals, he does nothing to prevent the slaughter that sustains it. Instead, while continuing to oversee the routine deaths of animals, he offers them only the slightest acknowledgment that if


89. Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts*, 32, which encapsulates his argument that “instead of instituting ‘a democracy of God’s creatures,’ Francis was thought to have reasserted humanity’s original authority over the animal kingdom—a return to the state of primal innocence that caused the wolf to abandon his wild and savage behaviour, and adopt a life of dutiful obedience.” This argument is as applicable, for example, to the account of Edith and her menagerie in Goscelin’s *Life of Edith* (trans. Michael Wright and Kathleen Locar), in Stephanie Hollis, ed., *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin’s Legend of Edith and Liber confortatorius* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 41–42, which despite deploying a number of verses to praise care of animals (e.g., Psalm 144:9 and 16, “The Lord is sweet to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. . . . Thou openest thy hand, and fillest with blessing every living creature”), concludes by stressing that Edith could calm the fiercest beasts: holy domination rather than generosity is finally the point.
they were rational, if they could speak, he might hear their complaints—but he makes no promise that he would act on them.

For Parzival, Richard, and the medieval Christian tradition more generally, no doctrine permitted any direct concern for animal lives. Social practices that seemed to value animals over humans, as in laws against poaching, were meant not to protect animals, but only to protect the privilege of certain dominant humans to kill them. Within this system, calls for sympathy toward animals urged changes only in the behavior of individuals, and therefore atrophied any possibility of systemic change; ultimately they protected not only human ascendancy, but also the good conscience of humans occupying that position. Such incidental acts of kindness to animals allowed humans to believe themselves rational rather than brutal without giving up the prerogatives of the human; they allowed humans to profit from the constitutive violence of the human while screening their complicity in it; they allowed humans to cultivate their beautiful souls, amid a slaughter for which they were responsible, encouraging them, allowing them, to do no more than weep.

IV. The Good Conscience of a Sheep: Prudentius’s “Ante Cibum”

I conclude the chapter by turning from the limit cases of teratology and the self-serving uses of sympathy to a 205-line poem, “Ante Cibum” (Before the Meal; written between 402 and 404), the third hymn in the Cathemerinon.

90. I am inspired to these critiques by the critique of charity work by leading capitalists, whom he derides as “liberal communists,” in Žižek, Violence, e.g., 22. “In liberal communist ethics, the ruthless pursuit of profit is counteracted by charity. Charity is the humanitarian mask hiding the face of economic exploitation. In a superego blackmail of gigantic proportions, the developed countries ‘help’ the undeveloped with aid, credits, and so on, and thereby avoid the key issue, namely their complicity in and co-responsibility for the miserable situation of the undeveloped.” My use of “good conscience” echoes Derrida’s many scornful uses of this phrase; for example, Jacques Derrida, Aporias, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 19, “How to justify the choice of negative form (aporia) to designate a duty that, through the impossible or impracticable, nonetheless announces itself in an affirmative fashion? Because one must avoid good conscience at all costs. Not only good conscience as the grimace of an indulgent vulgarity, but quite simply the assured form of self-consciousness: good conscience as subjective certainty is incompatible with the absolute risk that every promise, every engagement, and every responsible decision—if there are such—must run.”

91. I thank Patricia Dailey for bringing this work to my attention. For a comprehensive commentary attending particularly to its echoes of other works, patristic and classical, see
of the Iberian Christian poet Prudentius. Prudentius was enormously important for medieval Christianity, both for his famous *Psychomachia*, in which the virtues and vices struggle for victory over a human soul, and for the *Cathemerinon*, whose hymns, along with those of his *Peristephanon*, served as raw material for forming liturgies. The articulations of belief in “Ante Cibum”—on Creation, the Fall, the Virgin Birth, Incarnation, Redemption, and Resurrection—are so typical of what would become medieval Christianity as to constitute in their aggregate a kind of Credo. For all these reasons, but especially because of the unquestioned human status of the ascetic subjects of “Ante Cibum” in comparison to Ratramnus’s cynocephali or Chrétien’s Herdsman, the hymn exemplifies the dynamics I have tracked in this chapter under what might be understood as another marginal case, this concerning not humans who were too bestial but rather those who, as ascetics, avoided some key tasks of animal domination. The most pressing problem for ascetics is a fundamental necessity of life itself, namely eating. “Ante Cibum” therefore considers several kinds of food, including olives, bread, and wine, but is dominated by questions of the proper ascetic relation to the slaughter of animals. Drawing idiosyncratically on ascetic traditions, Prudentius concocts answers that can be understood as either profoundly sophisticated or profoundly contradictory: “Ante Cibum” initially praises God for granting humans complete domination over the natural world, but then limits humans from consuming any meat but that of fish or fowl. Then, after condemning the slaughter of livestock, the hymn finally portrays Satan and his minions as wolves, lions, eagles, and tigers, and Jesus and Christians in general as doves and sheep. Carnivorousness, at first a God-given sign of human superiority, has become by the end of the hymn, in at least some instances, infernal.

In the first thirty-five lines the hymn requests that Christ attend the impeding communal meal of the ascetics; then it invokes a muse, whom

Prudentius commands to abandon profane poetry for the sacred mysteries. Having set the stage, Prudentius, in the next twenty-two lines, characterizes the Creator and his gifts:

Ipse homini quia cuncta dedit,
quae capimus dominante manu,
quae polus aut humus aut pelagus
Aëre gurgite rure creant,  
haec mihi subdidit et sibi me.
Callidus inlaqueat uolucre
aut pedicis dolus aut maculis,
inlita glutine corticeo
uimina plumigeram seriem
inpediunt et abire uetant.
Ecce per aequora fluctuagos
texta greges sinuosa trahunt,
piscis item sequitur calamum
raptus acumine uulnifico,
credula saucius ora cibo.
Fundit opes ager ingenuas
diues aristiferae segetis,
hic ubi uitea pampineo
brachia palmite luxuriant,
pacis alumna ubi baca uiret.
Haec opulentia christicolis
seruit et omnia subpeditat. (36–57)

God gave all things to mankind, which we take with a sovereign hand; that which the sky, earth, or sea creates in the air, ocean, or fields, these he subdued to me, and me to him. Cunning craft entangles birds in a snare, net, or twigs smeared with bark-glue; it stops a line of feather-bearers in a row and forbids them to go. Lo, through wavy water sinuous nets trap the herds; thus is the fishing pole followed by the fish, seized by the wound-making hook, its mouth wounded, trusting in food. The field flows with natural works in the riches of the grain crop; here where branches covered with vines and foliage grow luxuriously, and the berry, the nursling of peace [the olive], flourishes. All this opulence serves Christians and supplies their every need.93

Prudentius begins with the technologies of dominating and killing animals and only afterwards turns to edible plants, treating plant food with far more brevity. Moreover, although grain, grapes, and olives are the emblematic fruits of agriculture, Prudentius does not speak of the human agency necessary for their production; instead, the plants seem to spontaneously spring from the earth’s innate luxury. That Prudentius discusses animals first, gives them the most sustained attention, and praises the human agency required to kill them, while omitting the agency required for agriculture, suggests that animals are God’s chief alimentary gift to humans, the food “we take with a sovereign hand,” whose consumption best represents humans’ worldly dominion and their specialness to God.

However, although Prudentius approves the consumption of the birds of the “aëre” and the fish of the “gurgite,” he forbids Christians, whom he characterizes as masters of farms (39–40), to eat the animals of the “rure”:

absit enim procul illa fames,
caedaibus ut pecudum libeat
sanguineas lacerare dapes.
Sint fera gentibus indomitis
prandia de nece quadrupedum;
nos holeris coma, nos siliqua
feta legumine multimodo
paverit innocuis epulis.
Spumea mulctra gerunt niveos
ubere de gemino latices,
perque coagula densa liquor
in solidum coit, et fragili
lac tenereum premitur calatho. (57–70)

Far be from us the appetite pleased to slay cattle and to hack them for bloody feasts. Let fierce meals of the killing [or “murder"] of four-footed creatures be for unruled peoples; for us, the salad green, for us the pod full of many kinds of beans, that feeds us with a harmless feast. Foaming pails bear the snow-white milk drawn from a pair of teats; and by means of thickening rennet the liquor solidifies, and the soft curd is pressed in a frail wicker basket.

Prudentius imagines the farm as a place where farmers raise livestock (pecores) for milk and cheese, but he elides the production of meat from animals such as pigs, which are raised only to be eaten, and also from working and dairy animals, which are customarily eaten when they can no longer
be of any other use. Prudentius instead tropes the eating of livestock as *fera*, that is, as proper to wild beasts. He implicitly warns Christians that if they eat their own animals they risk being aligned with or even transformed into the bestial enemies of their own agrarian desmesne, but not, however, before he has praised the human domination of the world and, in particular, the human consumption of the wild animals of the sea and air.

Though Prudentius was a career civil servant rather than professionally religious, “Ante Cibum” has certain features in common with other Christian ascetic guides. While Iberian and Gallic monastic rules from Prudentius’s own day, such as the *Codex regularum* (*PL* 103: 423B–428B) and the *Regula Orientalis* (*PL* 103: 477B–484B), specify ways and times of eating but do not specify what foods should or should not be eaten, Prudentius’s rejection of the flesh of quadrupeds and enthusiasm for the meat of fish and fowl could be understood as anticipating the restrictions of later monastic rules, or as promoting practices that the later rules would codify. Some sixth-century rules, such as Caesarius of Arles’s *Regula ad Virgines* and Aurelian of Arles’s *Regula ad Monachos*, forbade all meat to their communities, allowing fish for certain holidays and fowl for the sick (see, respectively, *PL* 67: 1120B–C and *PL* 68: 388D). The thirty-ninth chapter of the Rule of Benedict, also written in the sixth century, demanded that all monks abstain from the flesh of quadrupeds, but, by debatably allowing the sick to eat birds, was somewhat laxer than other rules. The fifth chapter of the rule of the seventh-century Iberian Archbishop Fructuosus of Braga forbids meat, allows fowl to the sick, and punishes monks who violate these strictures by confining them to a diet “solis oleribus, et leguminibus, raroque pisciculis fluvialibus, vel marinis” (*PL* 87:1102C; only of vegetables and beans, and rarely freshwater or saltwater fish). But Prudentius, after proscribing certain forms of meat-eating, does not resume his praise of the consumption of wild birds and fish, nor does he try to reestablish the modes of human dominance he has now characterized—at least in part—as sinful, and, more to the point, feral. Rather, in the subsequent lines he praises a diet of “harmless” greens, milk, honey, and apples (66–80) characteristic of the classical Golden Age, philosophic otherworldliness, and stricter Christian asceticisms, such as that

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95. For discussions and translations (into French) of early Monastic rules, see Vincent Desprez, trans., *Règles monastiques d’Occident, IVe–Vle siècle, d’Augustin à Ferreol* (Begrolles-en-mauges: Abbaye de Belle Fontaine, 1980).
promoted by Ambrose’s *Hexameron*, in which Ambrose argues that “we ought to be content to live on simple herbs, on cheap vegetables and fruits such as nature has presented to us and the generosity of God has offered to us,”\(^\text{96}\) or Jerome, who, in a letter to Marcellus, contrasted Roman eating—at once too delicate and too sensually animal—to the philosophical rigour supported by a sparse rural diet: “Ibi cibarius panis, et olus nostris manibus irrigatum, et lac deliciæ rusticanæ, viles quidem, sed innocentes cibos præbent” (There such country dainties as milk and household bread, and greens watered by our own hands, will supply us with coarse but harmless fare).\(^\text{97}\)

Prudentius’s revised diet may thus seem to recall the simple “innocentes cibos” of wilderness ascetics or to resuscitate the vegetarian paradises of the classical Golden Age or the Christian prelapsarian existence—or it would have, had “Ante Cibum” not already imagined a fundamentally antagonistic human relationship to at least some animals.

After setting out alimentary rules that praise at least some meat-eating before promoting a vegetarian diet, “Ante Cibum” concludes by articulating the orthodox position on the resurrection of the body, “viscera mortua . . . post obitum reparare datur” (it is granted to dead flesh [or “internal organs”] to be renewed after death; 191–92). The structure suggests another explanatory context for the poem, namely mainstream Christian negotiations between orthodox asceticism and heresies that reject rather than tame the body. Prior to the composition of “Ante Cibum,” the precepts of the early-fourth-century Council of Ancyra (now Ankara), which largely concerned the readmission of lapsed Christians into the church, had begun to appear in Latin translation. The Council’s fourteenth canon provides an instance of Christian deliberation analogous to that in “Ante Cibum”:

\[
\text{Qui in clero sunt praesbyteri vel hii qui ministraverunt, et abstinent a carnis bus, hoc placuit ut eas contingent quidem et si voluerint ab hic comedendis abstineant. Quo si in tantum eas abominabiles iudicauerint ut nec olera quae cum carnisbus cocuntur existiment commedenda, tamquam non subditi huic regulae, cessabant a ministerio ordinis sint.}^{98}
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\(^{96}\) Ambrose, *Hexameron*, III.vii.28, 88.


\(^{98}\) Cuthbert Turner, ed., *Ecclesiae Occidentalis Monumenta Iuris Antiquissima: Canonum et Conciliorum Graecorum Interpretationes Latinae* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), vol. 1, part I, 86s, from the “Isidori antiqua” version, Canon XXXIII here, but XIV in the original. For the afterlife of the council’s canons, see John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and*
Those who are in clerical orders or priests or serve the church, and abstain from meat should at least taste of it and then, if they wish, they may abstain from eating it. If they judge this to be so abhorrent that they decide not to eat vegetables cooked with meat, inasmuch as they have not obeyed the rule, expel them from their office in which they were ordained.

Religious professionals could not eat an entirely meatless diet without exciting charges of Dualism. Dualists accounted for the corruption and evil of the world by believing in two creators: one responsible only for the incorruptible, unchanging world of spirit, and one responsible for the material world with all its ills. They revered the former and rejected the latter; many showed their contempt for the world and its master by rejecting both sex and meat-eating. A fourth-century Iberian bishop of Avila, Priscillian, and his followers were accused of this heresy, by, among others, the First Council of Toledo, held in 400, whose seventeenth canon assails the Priscillianists for avoiding meat for the wrong reasons. It reads:

\[
\text{Si quis dixerit vel crediderit carnes avium seu pecudum [sic], quae ad escam datae sunt, non tantum pro castigatione corporum abstinendas, sed exsecrandas esse, anathema sit.}^{100}
\]

Anyone who says or believes that the flesh of birds or livestock, which are given for eating, should be abstained from not only for the castigation of the body, but because it is detested, let him be anathema.

For the purposes of my argument, the truth of the charge of Dualism against the Priscillianists does not matter, nor does it matter that the canon itself may be a mid-fifth-century interpolation; what matters is that contempo-

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raries of the “heresy,” such as Augustine, believed in the charge, or chose to believe in the belief of the charge. They may have believed in it for political advantage or perhaps to solidify orthodox ascetic practices at a key moment of doctrinal and ritual development; but this too is evidence that questions of proper asceticism were important in early-fifth-century Iberia, and that “Ante Cibum” may be understood as one of the texts engaging—perhaps unfairly—with Priscillianism. To distinguish Christian asceticism from heresy, and no doubt to establish a category of heresy, the Council of Ancyra and the community of the faithful it represented required the death of animals; the first Council of Toledo mitigated the rule but required that good Christians understand the avoidance of meat as abstention not from something repulsive but from something desirable. Likewise, the Cathemerinon’s frequent promotion of asceticism stresses that “vorandi . . . libidinem” (Cathemerinon VII, “Hymnus leiuantium,” “Hymn of Fasting,” 199; the pleasure of eating; my emphasis) should be avoided by free choice to mortify the body and its desires, not, then, as something disgusting to be avoided by all good people. Like the Council of Ancyra’s dietary legislation and the First Council of Toledo’s dictum on heretical vegetarianism, “Ante Cibum” lauds the killing and eating of animals before praising a Christian meatless diet. Like these other works, “Ante Cibum,” before recommending an ascetic diet, must first must display a willingness to kill and consume (some) animals, and, countering the antimaterialist eschatology of the Dualists, must then go on to stress its expectation of a bodily resurrection.

To identify—admittedly rather imaginatively—this canon and other related laws as structurally analogous to “Ante Cibum” provides additional context for understanding Prudentius’s combined praise and hesitation over full practice of the domination of animals. The poem’s conclusion, however, still remains, which cannot be accounted for by the context of negotiations with heresy. Here Prudentius describes the world of Christ’s new dispensation:

Quae feritas modo non trepidat
territa de grege candidulo?
Inpavidas lupus inter oves
tristis obambulat et rabidum
sanguinas inmemor os cohibet.
Agnus enim vice mirifica
ecce leonibus imperitat,
exagitansque truces aquilas
per vaga nubila perque Notos
sidere lapsa columba fugat.
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Tu mihi, Christe, columba potens
sanguine pasta cui cedit avis,
tu niveus per ovile tuum
agnus hiare lupum prohibes,
subiuga tigridis ora premens. (155–70)

What wild beast does not now tremble, terrified by the gleaming flock? The sad wolf walks among the fearless sheep and, forgetful, curbs his wild, bloody mouth. Behold, by a wonderful change, the lamb commands lions, and, gliding down through the roving clouds, the harrying dove routs fierce eagles. Christ, you are to me that potent dove to which the blood-fed bird submits; you are the snowy lamb who forbids the wolf to gape over your sheepfold; you subjugate and close the tiger’s mouth.

In this passage, Prudentius further proscribes the consumption of pecores by identifying Christ as, so to speak, the pecus pecorum. The traditional image of sheep representing both Church and Christ here identifies both with the rus. Opposing the Christians, once again, are feral carnivores. Prudentius repeats the hymn’s central quandary: meat-eating is an exercise of the rights that God granted to humans as humans, but in “Ante Cibum,” Christian eaters who subjugate and consume domestic animals symbolically and paradoxically become the Satanic enemies of their own faith. Having forbidden the unconstrained eating of animals, Prudentius does not abandon human mastery; rather, he presents his Christians, members of the gregus candidulus, as bloodlessly terrifying wolves, lions, eagles, animals that numbered among the most potent carnivores. Though the gregus effects its mastery without the bestial savagery of the devil and his minions, Prudentius’s military language describes what is, if anything, a more certain domination by a “columba potens” (powerful dove) and a flock that “imperat” (commands) lions. As with the “gentleness” of Ratramnus’s cynocephali, the total assurance of command preserves the human both by ensuring its complete domination of animals and by deferring the responsibility for the violence of domination onto the subjugated beasts.

Prudentius’s complicated advocacy for asceticism in “Ante Cibum” diverges sharply from typical early Christian arguments for avoiding meat and in fact from his own arguments in his “Hymn of Fasting.” These cautioned against the lust that certain meats inspired; or separated the dietary needs of Christian ascetics from those people, whether Christian or not, who served in worldly professions; or promoted training the body to serve the spirit by depriving it of the pleasures of meat; or called for a resumption of the vegetarian diet of the Edenic paradise; Augustine’s one dietary
rule was that food, of whatever sort, should be eaten in moderation while charitably keeping in mind the spiritual well-being of one’s fellow Christians. Although Prudentius’s imperative in “Ante Cibum,” “absit enim procul illa fames” (and let these hungers be far from us), may recall the phrase “procul sint a conviviis tuis Phasides aves” (and let pheasants be far from your banquets) from Jerome’s seventy-ninth letter, Jerome’s ascetic program differs radically from that of “Ante Cibum.”

A typical passage from Jerome’s letter is, “Let those feed on flesh who serve the flesh, whose bodies boil with desire, who are tied to husbands, and who set their hearts on having offspring”; by contrast, because Prudentius confronts in “Ante Cibum” not only the question of proper asceticism but, in considering the human dominion of animals, that of the human itself, Prudentius speaks not of self-control, not of lusts, but of avoiding the horror of the violence of a human appetite. But even after he has expressed his horror at the savagery over animals necessary to human supremacy, he retreats from his own condemnation of human violence, blaming gentes indomitas, untamed peoples, and feral beasts for committing the worst violence against animals—without, however, ever repudiating his initial enthusiasm for killing and eating fish and birds. Like Ratramnus, like Chrétien, Prudentius insulates himself from the implications of being human. Imagining themselves surrounded by the bloody appetites of a savage and animal world, Prudentius’s farmers stand serene and innocent, their human supremacy and ravening appetites cloaked in sheep’s clothing.

102. For the development of Christian dietary asceticism, see Gillian Feeley-Harnik, The Lord’s Table; Grimm, Attitudes to Food in Late Antiquity (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994); and Teresa M. Shaw, The Burden of the Flesh: Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998). Porphyry, On Abstinence from Killing Animals, compiles the whole range of justifications for dietary asceticism pertinent to his coterie of late-antique Neoplatonists except—for his polemical anti-Christianism—that those that specifically have to do with Christianity. For a revision of the longstanding opposition between feasting and fasting in early Christianity, see Effros, Creating Community with Food and Drink, especially 31, where she observes that although the “ascetic champions” of the stories of the fasting desert fathers “were viewed with wonder and had earned a reputation for performing healing miracles, they were not often promoted as models for early medieval clerics to imitate due to their rejection of the company of their brethren even at meals.” Prudentius accords with Effros’s model in his praise of eating in general and of epula in general, which were, as feasts, public and communal by definition.

103. I thank Becker, Kommentar zum Tischgebet des Prudentius (cath. 3), 108, for calling my attention to this echo.