Reading Beasts:

A Speculative Phenomenology of Two Medieval Parchment Bestiaries

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Fine Art, Painting

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Introduction

Medieval thought was fraught with competing theories about human exceptionalism within nature. As we do today, medieval thinkers repeatedly defined humanity through attempting to draw clear boundaries between what was human and what was animal; as Keith Thomas in his study on man and the natural world observes : “it is impossible to disentangle what the people of the past thought about plants and animals from what they thought about themselves” (quoted in Ham and Senior, 2014). This tension and confusion between the boundaries of the human and the animal are played out on the pages of medieval bestiaries, which, also known as a "book of beasts," are a type of illuminated manuscript that was popular in the Middle Ages.

A bestiary consists of a collection of descriptions and illustrations of various animals, both real and mythical, along with moralizing commentary on their supposed characteristics and behaviors. Often disregarding any scientific accuracy, the animals described were chosen for their allegorical or symbolic value. The manuscripts often contained descriptions of animals that were not native to Europe, such as elephants and crocodiles, and also included mythical creatures like dragons and griffins. The illustrations in bestiaries were elaborate and ornate, and during the medieval period the manuscripts were highly prized for their beauty and rarity (Kay, 2017). Despite often being dismissed as merely a moralised “encyclopedia of animals” (Anderson, 2014, p. 1), bestiaries were made for humans, by humans and about humans. The bestiary continuously works to construct man’s dominance over other animals, both through its very nature as a naming and categorisation the animals - which mirrors Adam as king, bestowing names upon the beasts - and through the illustrations found within which often depict

brutal hunting scenes of humans dominating and asserting their right to kill other animals. However its contents also play with and trouble this distinction. Something which complicates bestiaries' relationship to the beast is the page itself: parchment, so carefully prepared for the transcription of the text, is itself of the animal: the skin of a beast.

The starting point of this essay is the historical fact that during the medieval period, books, and therefore bestiaries, were copied on parchment, and parchment is the processed skin of an animal - usually a goat, sheep, or calf (Britannica, Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2014). While today we may consider books inorganic objects, or even virtual, electronic ones, the whole of medieval book production operates using what were once living things. Bestiaries were produced with the touch of human skin on animal skin, “goose feather pen in hand, oak gall ink in a horn inkwell close by” (Kay, 2011, p.14), and reading a medieval codice is a renewed encounter of skin on skin. However refined, parchment still bears a striking resemblance to the living skin of the animal from which it was derived. Each page has a distinguishable flesh side and hair side, tiny veins run throughout, as well as the random discolourations, scars and insect bites that marked the animal in life. Unlike leather, parchment is very lightly treated and still feels like skin, and an animal odor emits from surviving folios even still. Reminders of the process behind its production also remain: even high quality vellum has holes, scars and tears in the surface, obtained in the process of flaying, stretching, drying and scraping the hide. Perhaps the first to highlight the role played by the parchment itself in the communicative system of medieval codices was Durling in *Birthmarks and Bookmarks* (2004), where she observes how scribes used the holes and tears in parchment pages to highlight specific themes or engage in visual play, creating a “*mise en page”* (p. 83). While her essay is attentive to the materiality of the book and the potential impact on the reader, in focusing on how imperfections in the parchment may have been used to evoke wounds in human skin she makes an enormous leap: in focusing on human skin, she skips over the animal. It is in fact much easier to find medieval parchment texts

which focus on the skin of animals than that of humans, most stories involving human skin come from antiquity, and thus originated in an age before parchment. The use of parchment books however coincides with a proliferation of texts about animal skins; the twelfth to fourteenth century vernaculars were filled with narratives about human animal hybrids, werewolves, centaurs, satyrs, beast fables and bestiaries. There was an increase in texts depicting creatures on the border between human and animal, revealing a change in mindset that began to return medieval peoples closer to the classical view that saw humans and animals along a continuum (Ham and Senior, 2014). This essay will focus on two such animal-centric texts, *The Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc,* and *The Bestiary of Philippe de Thaon,* exploring the relationship between the parchment material and the content of the page, and how together they might have impacted the reader's sense of identity.

This essay is not concerned with the bestiary manuscripts as isolated objects, but rather the encounter between reader and manuscript, and how this encounter might intrude in the reader's sense of themselves as separate or above animals. It presents this encounter as what in the philosophy of Delueze and Guattari is described as an "assemblage": a diverse and interconnected set of elements or components that function together as a whole (Nail, 2017, p. 22). This theory is useful in understanding how the isolated actors of manuscript and reader interact and conjoin; the assemblage of the encounter with a parchment bestiary is not simply a collection of isolated elements, but rather it is characterised by the relationships and conections between those elements. These assemblages are seen as constantly changing and dynamic, and elements of this assemblage might include the reader, the page, the animals whose skin make up that page, the scribes, ideas about animals, religion, the butchers who killed the animals for their skin, the beasts depicted, ect.

Both of the texts discussed are examples of vernacular bestiaries. Phillippe's, written some time after 1121 is the oldest known example of a French bestiary and exists in only three copies (Thaon, 1841, p. 5). He writes in the opening lines that he translated it (from the Greek text *Physiologus*) in honour of the queen of England, wife to King Henry I:

> Philippe de Thaun into the French language
> has translated the Bestiary, a book of science,
> for the honour of a jewel, who is a very handsome woman,
> Aliz is she named, a queen she is crowned,
> queen she is of England, may her soul never have trouble! (Thaon, 1841, p. 49)

The bestiary written by Guillaume le Clerc (1) is the most artistically composed and longest of the French bestiaries at 3426 lines. Little is known about Guillaume himself, but the bestiary was written around 1210 or 1211, a date derived from a comment in the text that it was written two years after England was put under interdict, which happened by order of Pope Innocent III on March 23, 1208 (McCulloch, 1962, p. 58). Its popularity can be seen in the fact that there exist at least 23 manuscript copies, dating from the third to the fifteenth centuries.

(1) Guillame composes his bestiary, fr. 14969 (Bestiaire of Guillaume le Clerc), folio 1r

What follows are four parts, each corresponding to a chapter from the bestiaries: ‘The Hydrus and the Crocodile’, ‘The Unicorn’, ‘The Hyena’ and ‘The Onocentaur’. Each part will present examples of how the scribes and illustrators of the bestiary manuscripts played with and composed their work around the skin qualities of the parchment, creating a mise en page that serves to illustrate, highlight and play with themes and subjects within the corresponding text. Drawing on Deleuze and Guetari’s concept of “assemblages” and psychoanalyst Dieder

Anzenue's theory of skin ego, they will examine how the manuscript pages, with their animal origins and human appearance, may intrude on the reader's experience in ways that may seem now human, now non-human. Together this essay will sketch a speculative phenomenology of the parchment bestiary, inquiring what it might mean for a medieval reader or writer to encounter and engage with a page that "faces him like a reflection of his own bodily surface, marked as his might be with pores, veins, scuffs or scars" (Kay, 2014), how it might intrude on and trouble his sense of himself as distinct from the animal from which it came.

While observations about the organic qualities of parchment are not new, they take on new relevance in light of the recent animal-turn - an increasing scholarly interest in animals, the relationship between humans and and other animals, and in the status and role of non-human animals in human history - in the humanities. Several researchers have already invoked critical animal studies as a reason for exploring how the human-animal border is blurred in the medieval bestiary, a trend first established by Dorothy Yamamoto in her 2000 book *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature*. Historian Sarah Kay writes that "the circumstances of medieval literacy undo any clear separation between concern for animal suffering on the one hand, and the constitution of humanity as a genus apart on the other" (2011, p. 14). Books are at once the product of animal exploitation - one codice would have necessitated the slaughter of hundreds of animals - and the pinnacle of human cultural achievement. While the fact of the book could be seen to symbolise all that distinguishes humanity from the rest of the animal kingdom - reading, language, history, culture - this distinction can be troubled by the ways we read. By bridging post-humanist inquiry and concern with animals' place and treatment in medieval society, this essay is concerned with how and in what way the human-animal boundary is troubled by the medieval bestiary, and the ethics of reading that an encounter with parchment bestiaries involves. The combination of methods and sources found herein, borrowing from psychoanalysis, literary criticism and philosophy, as well

as art history and medieval studies, perhaps makes this essay a hybrid as monstrous as its subjects.

The Hydrus and the Crocodile

In his 2001 book *The Fright of Real Tears*, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek uses the term “suture” to describe the way film creates a sense of unity and coherence for the viewer (p. 32). Suture is the way in which the viewer - or, in our case, the reader - is “sewn” into the narrative, creating a sense of identification with and immersion in the text. Because of the bestiaries’ focus on nonhuman animals, the act of reading can create a feedback loop between its animal contents and the animality of the page: the distinction between medium and content on which reading normally relies is temporarily suspended. In addition, because the parchment so closely resembles human skin and its contents aim to instruct humans rather than describe animals, this implicates the person consuming the text too, the human reader momentarily caught up in this collapsing of distinctions between human, page, animal: a moment of suture. The bestiary chapters almost always focus on the bodies of their creatures, and often on their skin: “a Hoopoe loses its feathers, a Serpent sloughs its skin, a Hyena alternates between male and female, an Asp blocks both its ears: all these are corporeal events with obvious parallels in the experience of humans similarly ageing, craving renewal, impossibly desiring, or deaf to beguilement” (Kay, 2017). The scribes who copied the work of le Clerc and de Thaon appear to have been aware, to some extent, of the potential relationship between the medium and the message: they composed these chapters around the naturally occurring holes, slits and marks

in the parchment in ways that suggest a relationship between the vulnerability of the parchment to the vulnerability of the skin.

A bestiary chapter which focuses heavily on the skin and on the vulnerability of the skin is the hydrus and the crocodile. The tale of the hydrus and the crocodile is a constant across the bestiary tradition. Philippe de Thaon describes the crocodile as:

> (…)a very vile beast;
> {Four feet has the beast, and is of a very fierce kind;}
> he lives on land and on water, as Isidore says,
> twelve yards (?) long is found the largest;
> it has great teeth and claws, hard is the skin that it has;
> it will not be burst by stone, however hard it shall be struck;
> if it can devour a man, when it has eaten him it cries. (Thaon, 1841, p. 56)

According to the bestiaries there is another animal in the Nile which is the enemy of the crocodile: the hydrus. “Upon seeing a crocodile sleeping with its mouth open, the hydrus rolls in mud in order to glide more easily down its jaws. It enters the crocodile's mouth, is swallowed, and having torn the crocodile's viscera so that it dies, the hydrus comes out” (McCulloch, 1962, p. 129).

In depictions of the hydrus from the le Clerc and de Thaon bestiaries it is pictured with its tail emerging from the crocodile’s mouth and its head emerging from the side of the same crocodile, tearing through it’s “hard” skin which “will not be burst by stone” (Thaon, 1841, p. 56). Allegorically this signifies the popular medieval belief in Christ’s harrowing of hell, the hide of the crocodile is the pit of hell which Christ enters in order to destroy death’s rule. As Philippe de Thaon writes, the hydrus “in truth signifies God” and the crocodile signifies “the Devil”:

> when he sleeps with his mouth open, then he represents hell and death;
> hell rests with mouth open, not closed;
> when the Son of God took humanity,
> he took openly to save all mankind,
> hell took up God and swallowed him alive;
> that is, he entered hell, and threw out his own people,
> according to his godhead, not in humanity; (Thaon, 1841, p. 56)

Central to this story is the skin: the rough hide of the crocodile being torn open by the godly hydrus. In illustrations the tears in the crocodile's skin are frequently highlighted and emphasized by bright red blood, and it is striking how many bestiary manuscripts copy their hydrus and crocodile chapters on damaged folios - the allegory coincides with some of the most spectacularly damaged leaves in the manuscripts of *The Bestiary of Guillamume le Clerc*. In at least two copies of his bestiary (BnF fr. 902, fo. 155v, and Bodleian, MS Bodley 912, fo. 6r) the chapter is immediately next to holes or splits. This is particularly significant in the case of fr. 902, as it is an unillustrated copy, and so without the imagery of the penetration and tearing of the crocodile's skin, the tear in the skin of the page alone serves to illustrate the trauma of the event, a parallel to the hole bored by the hydrus in the crocodile, drawing attention to the fragility of the flesh of evil in contrast to its eternal alternative.

In the copy of *the Bestiary of Phillippe de Thaon* held at the Royal Danish Library, *GKS 3466 8°*, the artist has threaded the hydrus through the crocodile with care and deliberation. *GKS 3466 8°* is the most carefully and intricately illustrated of the three existing copies of Phillipe de Thaon's manuscript, with full colour illustration appearing not at the beginning of chapters, but at the point of the allegory appearing in the text, and despite the red blood painted as dripping from the points of the body where the hydrus has emerged, the overall effect of the illustration is more decorative than it is gorey. What truly serves to drive home the trauma to the skin of the crocodile is the large tear in the right hand corner of the page, producing an emphatic parallel to the holes bored by the hydrus through the hide of the crocodile (2). By placing the allegory here, the scribe draws a clear connection between the skin of the parchment and the skin of the crocodile, and asks the reader to do the same.

(2) Hydrus and Crocodile, *GKS 3466 8°*

By highlighting the corruptibility of the page, placing the hydrus and crocodile chapters on scarred and damaged leaves works to construct a second, immortal skin (the skin of the hydrus) in contrast to the mortal animality of the crocodile and of the parchment. The consideration made by the scribes as to the placement of the chapters around the cuts and scars of the page creates a mise en page, which adds to the immersion of the reading experience and draws a parallel between the vulnerability of the parchment and the vulnerability of living skin: of the animal's skin, but also potentially of the reader's own skin, momentarily made one with the skin of the page and the skin of the beast through the collapse of distinctions that occurs in moments

of suture. It is the skin of the parchment, this mortal, animal skin, which “faces [the reader] like a reflection of his own bodily surface”, (Kay 2017), which he touches, skin on skin. While the text of the chapter constructs a second, higher moral and godly skin in contrast to the animality, the material reality of reading the page means that it is the mortal, beastly skin that he relates to and engages with.

The Unicorn

The kernel of this essay concerns boundaries: boundaries that create distinction between inside and outside, between reason and madness, man and beast, the soul and nature. The site of these bounders is the skin: the skin of the parchment, of the reader, of the beast, and the touch of skin on skin that an encounter with a manuscript in the medieval period would have involved. Skin is the original boundary of the self, the surface of the body and how we first come to understand ourselves as distinct from everything outside ourselves. As Andrej Werbart so poetically puts it, “the skin is the cradle of the soul” (2018. P. 37). Building on Freud’s idea of the ego first and foremost as an embodied ego, a projection of the psych onto the surface of the body, psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu first conceptualised the skin’s psychic function. In his seminal book *The Skin-Ego* he proposes that the skin plays a central role in the development of the ego and the sense of self, as it serves as a boundary between the self and the outside world. It is through the skin that an individual experiences pleasure, pain and touch, and, according to Anzieu, the skin helps individuals to establish their own identity, serving as a “psychic envelope” (2016, p. xiv) that separates the self from the rest of the world.

In the copy of *The Bestiary of Phillippe de Thaon* held at the Royal Danish Library, *GKS 3466 8°* as well as later copies of *The Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc*, the scribes’ work becomes more

intricate and they begin using colour in their illustrations. The illustrators predominantly used blues, greens and of course red, which can be seen issuing forth from the wounds inflicted on animals (3). These painted wounds echo the scars on the page, recall the process by which the parchment was made, the history and prehistory of the parchment folding in on itself, the page in touch with its production, so that at the point of encounter the reader is sutured to those who came before him, “as if the reader’s role was conjoined with those of butcher, parchmenter, and rubricator” (Kay, 2017); the reader is no longer a detached, separate entity, by engaging with the manuscript he becomes part of the assemblage.

(3) Hydrus and Crocodile, from The Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 14964, folio 142r

The sense of a layering of histories and prehistories on the page is further accentuated by the bodies of pale animals in the colour illustrated copies of Guillaume le Clerc, such as the unicorn in fr. 14970 (4). The scribe has filled in the surrounding landscape and figures, but left the body

of the unicorn unfilled so that the bare parchment serves as its skin, drawing attention to the animal origins of the page by acknowledging its similarity to living skin. The only colour the scribe has added to the body of the unicorn is the red blood coming forth from the wound in its side, an echo of the bloody origins of the page. The hands and faces of the humans are also left unpainted, the parchment at once serving as human skin, animal skin and as page. This illustration is an example of how the bestiary suggests a shared skin between man, animal and page, which viewed through the psychoanalytic lens proposed by Anzieu, troubles the reader's sense of identity by breaching the skin ego, which constructs an identity distinct from the world outside one's body, and creating a shared "psychic envelope".

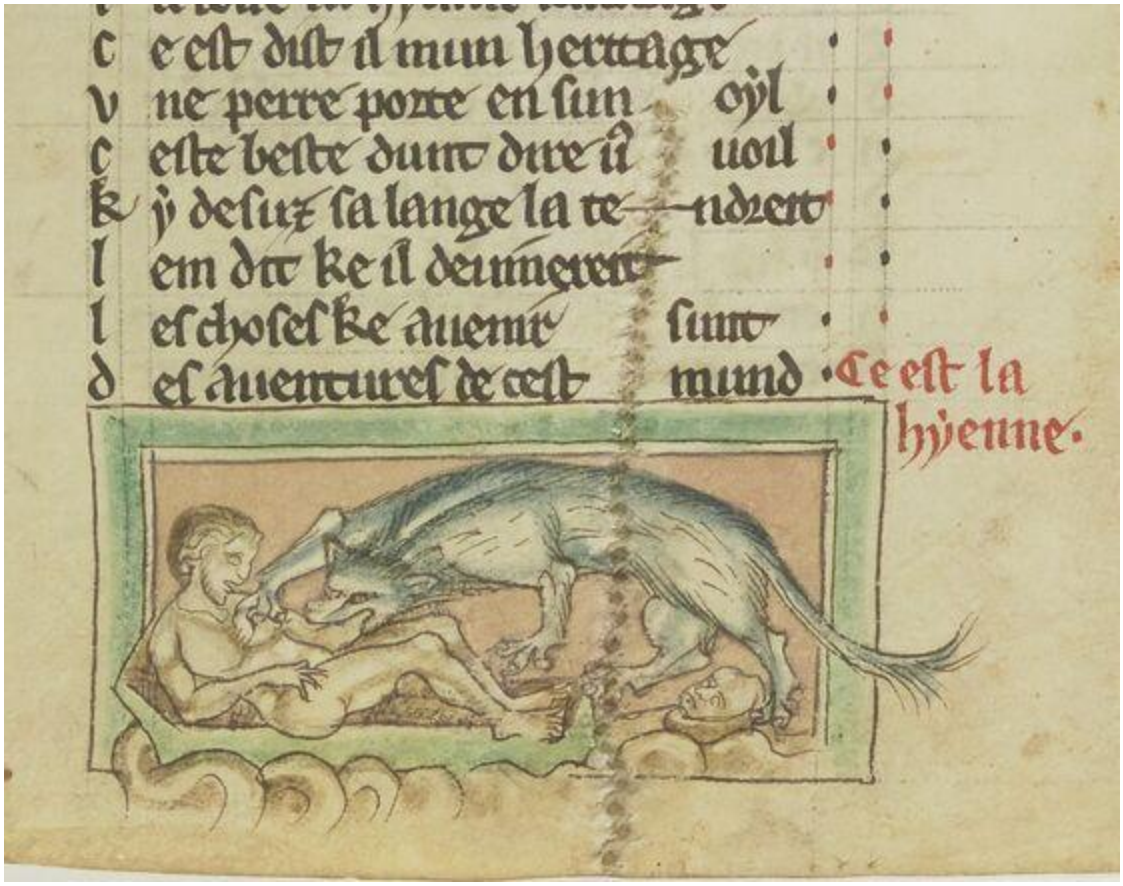
(4) Unicorn, Bibliothéque Nationale de France fr. 14970, folio 12v

The Hyena

In nearly all of the illustrations in the copies of Guillamaume le Clerc and Phillipe de Thaon, the skin of the humans is left bare of pigment. Even where the narrative of the allegory works to

assert mans dominance over animals, as in chapters where he is depicted as asserting his right to kill non-human animals - the unicorn, the beaver, the ape, ect - the fact of the page works to subvert and trouble this dominance by suggesting a shared skin between man, book and beast. The parchment's imagined role as human skin is most clear in chapters where the human becomes the hunted. The bestiaries include a great many human bodies brutally fragmented and masticated within the jaws of animals. As discussed in the introduction, the bestiaries' primary role was as a moralist encyclopedia of animals, where rather than offering scientific instruction on the nature of the beasts, "the horrifying characteristics of the animals (gluttony, greed, lust, deceit, mortality, etcetera) are rejected, only to be found to be within the human self" (Anderson, 2014, p. 58). One could become bestial, or a beast, through engaging in certain animalistic behaviors. The horror produced by this all too permeable threshold results in the violent scenes of human dominion seen throughout the bestiaries. Killing animals established and maintained the God-given dominion over the animal kingdom. However what then, about the animals that prey on or eat human flesh? This happened both in real life and on the pages of the bestiaries of Guillamue le Clerc and Phillipe de Thaon, deadly creatures populated the medieval reader's real-world landscape and naturally the people were afraid, despite decrees by state and church that one should not live in fear of beasts. As Anderson explains: "...they were afraid. This is in spite of God's declaration that "the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth…" (Gen 9:2). The fear even violates 11th century ecclesiastical law which proclaimed, due to the fact that humans have dominion over animals, that animals should not have any advantages over humans and therefore, people were to be feared by animals, not to fear them" (2014, p. 58). Many of the bestiary chapters work to reinforce man's distinction and superiority within God's kingdom, however as the pages of Guillame le Clerc and Phillipe de Thaon show, the troubling fact remains that there exist beasts who can undo theological barriers with the swipe of a paw.

We turn then to one such terrifying beast, the hyena. One of the most reviled animals within the manuscripts, in latin bestiaries it is described as having two natures, switching sexes between male and female. Guillaume le Clerc develops this idea, writing of the hyena resembling two-faced, untrustworthy people. Philippe de Thaon does not include the traditional allegory, but does briefly mention that the hyena signifies an avaricious and lustful man (McCulloch, 1962, p.131). In both bestiaries the hyena is portrayed eating a human corpse, such as the hyena illumination in fr14969 (5), where a man is shown pinned to the ground by the scribe's approximation of a hyena as it consumes his arm. Here the bare parchment once again acts as human skin, and the nudity of the corpse serves to further reflect his passivity and helplessness in the face of the beast he is meant to govern. Man is no longer the clothed Adam, “sitting upright and observing the animals he names with certainty” (Anderson, 2014, p. 67). He has become passive and helpless, overpowered by the animal. This loss of dominion is further reinforced by the large scar dissecting the image: here the scar is decidedly reflecting injury to human skin, an emphatic mirror to the man’s torn flesh, the vulnerability of the parchment is the vulnerability of man’s skin and not of the hyena’s Thus the man is closer with the animal whose skin was used as parchment than the hyena is, he has become less human than the animal.



(5) Man being eaten by hyena, Fr. 14969. Folio 30r

The Onocentaur

As the human skin recedes into the mouth of the non-human animal, as the human becomes more animal, the carnivorous animal must become more human: “it must become more human in order to save the human from being “slaughtered” like an animal” (Anderson, 2014, p. 77). The border between the human and the animal is something permeable, humanness is a role, something gained and maintained through one’s actions. The relationship between doing animal acts and becoming animal plays into the bestiary hybrids and monsters containing human parts, such as Phillipe de Thaon’s Onocentaur. (6)

(6) Onocentaur, GKS 3466 8º folio 29

De Thaon describes the onocentaur as a creature “which has the shape of a man down to the waist, and behind has the make of an ass,” (Thaon, 1841, p. 61). The onocentaur is a creature split in two, both morally and physically. He maintains a human torso as he is still at times good and godly, but his lower half signifies his villainy and unholiness:

> Man, when he says truth, is rightly named man,
> and ass, signifies, when he does villany;
> wherefore David says, that man did not attend to himself, 545
> little he valued himself when he left the honour;
> who denies verity, let him be called an ass;
> the authority says that God is verity;
> and that is the signification of this quality of beast (Thaon, 1841, p. 62)

The capacity for struggle between humanity and its animal underside, between human nature and animal instincts is not limited to the characters in the manuscript. Any reader of the bestiary may have their own animalistic desires or impulses, and may either choose to succumb to or reject them. *The Bestiary of Philippe de Thaon* does not cleanly divide one nature from the other, and suggests that all humans are at risk of losing their humanity should they not be careful of their impulses. In the illustration of the onocentaur in GKS 3466 8º it is depicted with a thick belt dividing lower and upper body; effectively the reader is encouraged to ""belt up" or gird himself in his turn, resolving inner turmoil by figuratively dividing upper from lower, "man" from "beast"" (Kay, 2017). This lesson is further accentuated by the pose of the creature, who points a finger towards its human head and one towards the heavens, encouraging the reader to focus on his humanity in order so that he might be closer to god.

In the case of the onocentaur depicted in MS 249 (7), where the illustrations are left uncoloured, just an outline, the skin of the page serves as the skin of the human torso and of the animal lower half. The parchment that acts as the lower half of the creatures in the manuscript represents both the potential animalization of humans and the inherent animal nature of all beings. The parchment, as a single skin, presents the image of "the human" as a representation, while the words suggest that the animalistic tendencies within each creature are a threat to "the human." The conflict between the outer appearance and inner meaning of the parchment causes the viewer to question their own humanity and animalism, and their anxieties are reflected both in and by the page.

(7) Onocentaur, MS 249 folio 5l

Conclusion

This study of *The Bestiary of Phillipe de Thaon* and *The Bestiary of Guillaume le Clerc* was undertaken to explore how the widely read and influential texts may have influenced and shaped the medieval reader's sense of the distinction and relationship between themselves and other animals. The above chapters and examples given proposed that the bestiaries had a twofold impact, both through the ideas they presented in the texts and through the physical form in which they were transmitted, as parchment books. The connection between these two factors is emphasized through the use of references to skin in the texts and the fact that the pages of the books are made of skin. The chapters explored the way that Phillipe de Thaon and Guillame le Clerc wrote about skin, how the scribes were aware of and composed their work around the skin qualities of the page, and how this may have influenced the way that human readers thought about their relationship with other animals.

The idea of readers consuming animals through the medium of a book is complicated when that book is made from animals. The surface on which the bestiaries of Guillame le Clerc and Phillipe de Thaon are transcribed is a skin, and all skins, whether they come from animals or humans, are unique. We can see this uniqueness in the color and texture of the parchment, as well as in any imperfections on the page such as holes, tears, or cuts. These imperfections are usually ignored, but as discussed above they can actually be very significant and can reveal a lot about the codexes when closely examined. Through exploring how the texture and surface of the parchment may have impacted the reading experience, this essay has shown that understanding the phenomenology of the parchment page may be just as vital in reconstructing and understanding how the bestiaries of Guillaume le Clerc and Phillipe de Thaon impacted their medieval readers, and in reconstructing the medieval encounter with the bestiaries, as the text and illustrations on that parchment. The chapter on the hydrus and the crocodile demonstrated that although the text of the allegory works to construct a second, holy skin in contrast to the evil animal hide of the crocodile, by virtue of the moment of suture created by the relationship between content and page it is the animal skin of the crocodile which the reader is connected to in the act of reading. The chapter on the unicorn discussed how the use of color and the depiction of wounds and scars on the pages and animals serve to connect the reader to the page and to those who came before them, breaking down the boundaries between the self and the outside world and joining him to what Delueze and Guattari might call “an assemblage”. The use of the bare parchment as skin for the animals and humans in the illustrations further emphasizes the connection between skin, the page, and the animal origins of the parchment. “The Hyena” showed how the bare parchment used as the skin of humans in the illustrations serves to reinforce the idea that humans can be made vulnerable and helpless in the face of the beasts they are meant to govern, and suggests to the reader that the distinction between human and animal is permeable and that the roles are ever shifting. The final chapter discusses the

onocentaur, a creature that is half-human and half-ass, as a symbol of the struggle between humanity and animal instincts.The illustrations of the onocentaur reinforce the idea that humans and animals are closely connected and that all beings have an inherent animal nature. The conflict between the outer appearance and inner meaning of the parchment in these illustrations causes the viewer to question their own humanity and animalism and to reflect on their own struggles with their animalistic tendencies.

The vernacular bestiaries of de Thaon and le Clerc offer a unique insight into the medieval understanding of the relationship between humans and animals. While they were often used as a way to assert human dominance over animals through moralizing commentary and depictions of hunting scenes, the very material of the bestiaries themselves - parchment made from animal skin - complicates this relationship, creating what Macgregor describes as “moments of entwinement” between humans and animals (2021, p.152). The parchment serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness and interdependence of humans and animals, as well as the physical connection and similarities between the two. The use of imperfections in the parchment by scribes and illustrators further challenges the hierarchy between humans and animals, suggesting a more fluid and complex understanding of the boundary between the two. Overall, the bestiaries of Guillame le Clerc and Phillipe de Thaon reveal the tension and confusion present in medieval thought about human exceptionalism within nature, and demonstrate the ongoing struggle to define and understand the relationship between humans and the natural world.

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