

Public Abstract

First Name:Curtis

Middle Name:Ronald

Last Name:Thomas

Adviser's First Name:Emma

Adviser's Last Name:Lipton

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term:SP 2016

Department:English

Degree:MA

Title:Courtly Anger, Beastly Violence, and the Animal-Affective Prosthetic

This project is an examination of four medieval romances that feature human-animal contact: Marie de France's *Lai of Bisclavret*, the Latin *Narratio de Arthuro Rege Britanniae et Rege Gorlagon lycanthropo*, Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain, le Chevalier au Lion*, and the Middle English *Richard Coer de Lyon*. In imagining the human-animal contact found in each of these texts as an animal-affective prosthetic, I argue that their human characters (and authors) appropriate animal bodies—and the affective "freedom" that is ascribed to them—as tools to temporarily alter human bodies and thus make accessible new ways of performing affect. Lion bodies and wolf skin become affective "limbs" with which the knights and kings in these romances can, through transgressively-performed anger, enact a fantasy of the perfect defense of normative identity. And yet, despite the careful attempt in these texts to draw a line between the human and animal, the courtly body and beastly limb, the two nonetheless blur into one another. These texts ultimately suggest that the transgressive performance of anger enacted by those animal bodies is in fact an essential part of chivalric—and, indeed, human—identity.

In examining the way affect and disability intersect in medieval writers' use of the animal, I argue for affect as not only connected to able-bodiedness, but also as an important category for medieval writers' efforts at delineating the differences between humans and the rest of creation. While animals might often be identified with kinds of affect also expressed by humans (anger, grief, hatred), the way those affects are embodied and performed are differentiated from human affective performance. In exploiting this difference to excuse human actions, the animal becomes a somatic tool, a way to temporarily transform a human's affective ability in the same way an artificial limb temporarily transforms a body's physical ability.