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

Curtis Thomas

Dr. Emma Lipton, Thesis Advisor

ABSTRACT

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.