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THE LION IN MEDIEVAL WESTERN EUROPE: TOWARD AN INTERPRETIVE HISTORY

BY NIGEL HARRIS

Several scholars have studied meanings attributed to the lion in the western European Middle Ages, but their accounts have tended to be partial and fragmentary. A balanced, coherent interpretive history of the medieval lion has yet to be written. This article seeks to promote and initiate the process of composing such a history by briefly reviewing previous research, by proposing a thematic and chronological framework on which work on the lion might reliably be based, and by itself discussing numerous textual examples, not least from German, Latin, and French literature. The five categories of lion symbolism covered are, respectively, the threatening lion, the Christian lion, the noble lion, the sinful lion, and the clement lion. These meanings are shown successively to have constituted regnant fashions that at various times profoundly shaped people's understanding of the lion; but it is demonstrated also that they existed alongside, and in a state of creative tension with, a "ground bass" of lion meanings that changed relatively little. Lions nearly always, for example, represented important, imposing things and people (for example, kings); and the New Testament's polarized presentation of the lion as either Christ or the devil proved enormously influential both throughout and beyond the Middle Ages. As such any cultural history of the lion — and indeed of many other natural phenomena — must be continually sensitive to the co-existence and interaction of tradition and innovation, stability and dynamism.

"The lion is everywhere."¹ This statement was intended by Jean Dufournet to refer specifically to the twelfth century, but it could apply just as well to the entire Middle Ages. Moreover, the lion was not just ubiquitous, but also embodied to a particularly high degree the essential polyvalence and variability intrinsic to medieval animal symbols — in part, no doubt, because in the natural world also "lions exhibit a remarkably wide range of behaviours" and "are not typecast, because, over millennia, they have acquired so many different strategies for

The following abbreviation is used in this article: *Emblemata* = Arthur Henkel and Albrecht Schöne, *Emblemata: Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1967).

¹ Jean Dufournet, "Le Lion d'Yvain," in "*Le Chevalier au Lion*." *Approches d'un chef d'œuvre*, ed. idem (Paris, 1986), 77–104, at 77: "Au douzième siècle, le lion est partout." No doubt Dufournet is himself alluding to Emile Mâle's celebrated characterization of Coucy-le-Château: "partout la figure du lion." This phrase and its implications have recently been discussed in detail by Richard A. Leson, "'Partout la figure du lion': Thomas of Marle and the Enduring Legacy of the Coucy Donjon Tympanum," *Speculum* 93 (2018): 27–71.

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survival.”² Factors such as these make it very difficult, perhaps indeed impossible, for scholars to do full justice to the many roles played by the lion over the course of western cultural history. This applies not least to the Middle Ages, in respect of which there remain many gaps in scholarly literature. Most of the publications that have appeared on the medieval lion have concentrated — hardly reprehensibly or surprisingly, given the abundance of material involved — on one aspect of its career, to the entire or partial detriment of others. This is true even of the fullest and perhaps most successful analysis of the beast’s medieval meanings, namely Dirk Jäckel’s 2006 volume on “the ruler as lion.”³ For all Jäckel’s coverage of an impressively wide-ranging corpus of primary texts, and indeed his references to Byzantine and Islamic cultures, his focus remains very much on the lion as a high-medieval political symbol. For his part, Andreas Kraß concentrates on the lion’s role as a companion animal to Androcles, St. Jerome, and Yvain, all representatives of a long-standing narrative tradition which has also been examined by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur.⁴ The various contributions of Michel Pastoureau, meanwhile, have been concerned mainly to propound his thesis that, between around the eighth and twelfth centuries, the lion came to replace the bear as the generally accepted “king” of the beasts.⁵ With regard to the pictorial and plastic arts, a series of three articles by Waldemar Déonna based around architectural features of St. Peter’s Cathedral in Geneva explore images of lions as infernal, androphagous creatures representing the forces of evil over which God in Christ has won a cosmic victory.⁶ Lastly, a valuable essay by Peter Seiler offers a history of certain specific uses of lions — on door-handles, church portals, and thrones — in the context of a persuasive polemic against earlier, somewhat lazy interpretations of lions as legal symbols.⁷

² Deirdre Jackson, *Lion* (London, 2010), 23–24.

³ Dirk Jäckel, *Der Herrscher als Löwe: Ursprung und Gebrauch eines politischen Symbols im Früh- und Hochmittelalter*, Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte 60 (Cologne, 2006).

⁴ Andreas Kraß, “Noble Doppelgänger: Der Löwe als Begleiter des Menschen in der Literatur,” in *Tiere: Begleiter des Menschen in der Literatur des Mittelalters*, ed. idem and Judith Klinger (Cologne, 2016), 163–82; and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, “The Grateful Lion,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 39 (1924): 485–524.

⁵ See Michel Pastoureau, “Quel est le roi des animaux?,” in *Le Monde animal et ses représentations au moyen âge (XI^e–XV^e siècles)*, ed. Francis Cerdan, Travaux de l’Université de Toulouse-le-Mirail A 31 (Toulouse, 1985), 133–42; and idem, “Pourquoi tant de lions dans l’Occident médiéval?,” *Micrologus* 8 (2000): 11–30.

⁶ Waldemar Déonna, “Les Lions attachés à la colonne,” in *Mélanges d’archéologie et d’histoire offerts à Charles Picard à l’occasion de son 65^e anniversaire* (Paris, 1948), 1:289–308; idem, “Chapiteaux de la cathédrale Saint-Pierre de Genève,” *Genava* 27 (1949): 47–74; and idem, “‘Salva me de ore leonis.’ A propos de quelques chapiteaux romans de la cathédrale Saint-Pierre à Genève,” *Revue Belge de Philologie et d’Histoire* 28 (1950): 479–511.

⁷ Peter Seiler, “Richterlicher oder kriegerischer Furor? Untersuchungen zur Bestimmung der primären Bedeutung des Braunschweiger Burglöwen,” in *Heinrich der Löwe: Herrschaft*

A final point to be made about research into the medieval lion is that it has yet to be transformed by work done within the recently burgeoning area known as Animal Studies or Human-Animal Studies — “an interdisciplinary field that explores the spaces that animals occupy in human social and cultural worlds and the interactions humans have with them.”⁸ Not that scholars working with this paradigm have ignored the lion altogether. As long ago as 2001 David Salter published a penetrating study of the complex role played by the lioness in the French and English *Octavian* tradition and, in the same volume, an interpretation of the relationship between St. Jerome and his lion, especially as depicted by Niccolò Colantonio.⁹

Salter identifies a blurring of “the traditional opposition between the notions of nature and culture, wilderness and civilization, and wild and tame” and sees this as threatening to “dissolve still further the conventional boundaries separating the human and animal worlds.”¹⁰ Such characteristic Animal Studies preoccupations also inform Peggy McCracken’s and Sarah Kay’s discussions of lions in the context of their influential recent volumes. McCracken’s interpretation of the relationship between Yvain and his lion stresses the extent to which the identities of the two can be seen to merge on various levels, and to which the episode involving Harpin in particular “stages several cultural shifts,” involving the courtly and clerical worlds, the lion’s arguable new-found supremacy over the bear, and the power of heraldic symbols.¹¹ Meanwhile, Kay’s analysis particularly of the “second-family” bestiaries shows that the lion is presented as possessing a sometimes exemplary “quasi-kinship” with human beings, and as such can at times evince a greater similarity to them than to its fellow beasts.¹²

Valuable though all this and other scholarly work has been, it has resulted in our knowledge of the medieval lion remaining somewhat fragmentary and uncoordinated in character. We have a number of stones, but little sense of a coherent mosaic. Such a mosaic, while very much a desideratum of scholarship, would be too extensive to accomplish within the confines of a single article. Nevertheless, the present essay will seek to make a substantial contribution to its design and construction, in three main ways. Firstly, it will lay a framework for an

und Repräsentation, ed. Johannes Fried and Otto Gerhard Oexle, *Vorträge und Forschungen* 57 (Stuttgart, 2003), 135–97.

⁸ Margo DeMello, *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies* (New York, 2012), 4.

⁹ David Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts: Encounters with Animals in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, 2001), 82–95.

¹⁰ Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts*, 11–24, at 16.

¹¹ Peggy McCracken, *In the Skin of a Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France* (Chicago, 2017), 70–78.

¹² Sarah Kay, *Animal Skins and the Reading Self in Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chicago, 2017), 101–6 and 119.

interpretive history of the medieval lion by establishing a set of thematic and chronological categories into which further examples and analytical initiatives can be fitted. Secondly, it will itself embark on the task of populating this framework by offering a coherent sketch history of the medieval lion — which, again, is intended to offer plenty of scope for future modification and expansion. Thirdly, it will do this with regular if not exclusive reference to Latin, German, and French texts whose importance for the cultural history of the lion has tended to be ignored or undervalued by previous scholars — in part, perhaps, because they have never appeared in modern translations or, in some cases, editions.

Fundamental to all the article's preoccupations is the belief that, as with so many other medieval symbols or images, perceptions of the lion existed in a state of permanent tension between stability and variability, tradition and innovation. On the one hand, the lion's meanings almost always involved someone powerful or important: Christ, kings, knights, or indeed the devil (along with, especially in the later Middle Ages, the deadly sins of which he was the source and instigator). Such a range of significances already implies, however, that the lion also possessed a marked degree of moral ambiguity, frequently interpreted as it was both *ad bonam* and *ad malam partem*. Moreover, the elements of stability in the understanding of lions were enriched and counterbalanced by more dynamic tendencies. In particular, interpretations of the beast were subject to certain trends, or more precisely regnant fashions, which at various times predominated over other meanings, while never eradicating these entirely or threatening the animal's fundamental polyvalence. In roughly chronological order, these fashions focused on the lion as an existential threat to society, as Christ or the devil, as an aristocratic knight or ruler, or as the embodiment of certain sins or virtues. Between them, I would argue, they constitute a convenient set of categories around which to structure a sound understanding of the medieval lion's significance and development. In what follows, therefore, we will examine and exemplify each of these categories in turn.

THE THREATENING LION

In seeking to trace the lion's cultural history in the West, the obvious place to start is the Old Testament, in which it is mentioned no fewer than 152 times. The Hebrew scriptures present several images of the lion which are positive or at least ambiguous: the animal already possesses a certain primacy in the animal kingdom, being "the mightiest among wild animals" (Prov. 30:30); and it can signify God and/or his voice (Isa. 31:4, Hos. 5:14), the nation of Israel (Ezek. 19:1–9), the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:9), or commendably brave warriors (2 Sam. 17:10). Even in verses such as these, however, the lion's power and strength is

often associated with a certain dangerous, even bloodthirsty ferocity.¹³ Frequently in the Old Testament, the lion, “as in the Greco-Roman context, symbolizes the sudden onset of disaster, danger or destruction.”¹⁴ This tendency is perhaps at its most marked in the Psalms. The author of Psalm 7, for example, asks God to rescue him from his pursuers lest “like a lion” they “tear me apart” and “drag me away;” that of Psalm 22 sees himself surrounded by the “strong bulls of Bashan,” who open their mouths at him “like a ravening and roaring lion;” and in Psalm 57 we read “I lie down among lions that greedily devour human prey; their teeth are spears and arrows, their tongues sharp swords.”¹⁵ Of greater long-term significance than these examples was Psalm 91, whose verse 13, “you will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot” was subsequently seen by theologians such as Cassiodorus and Bede as a prophecy of Christ’s victory over the devil. The potential visual appeal of this constellation was realized throughout Europe in the earlier Middle Ages, featuring prominently as it does on works such as a sixth-century Ravenna mosaic, the Anglo-Saxon Ruthwell Cross, and an eleventh-century Tau Cross from Alcester in Warwickshire, now in the British Museum.

As suggested above, the Old Testament writers’ strong sense of the lion’s formidable menace chimes with the animal’s presentation in other ancient cultures. It is striking that, in Wolfram Martini’s survey of appearances of the lion in Greco-Roman iconography, the majority of his examples involve a lion in combat — either with people or with domesticated animals, most notably cattle.¹⁶ It is as if the lion were conceived as a kind of shorthand embodying the forces by which ancient civilizations felt threatened. This does not mean, however, that it was seen as an emptily injurious agent. On the contrary, lions’ all too evident strength and courage ensured that defeating one was seen as an exceptional accomplishment that brought great glory to its vanquisher. Gilgamesh was a noted lion-slayer, often depicted as such in Assyrian and Mesopotamian visual arts;¹⁷ and so of course was Hercules, whose victory over the Nemean lion surely acted as a kind of blueprint for the exploits of such biblical heroes as

¹³ See Num. 23:24 and Jer. 25:38. Biblical references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

¹⁴ Aristides Stamatiou and Andreas Weckworth, “Löwe,” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (2009), 257–86, at 269: “[symbolisiert], wie im griechisch-römischen Bereich, plötzlich hereinbrechendes Unheil, Gefahr und Vernichtung.”

¹⁵ Like most modern Bibles, the NRSV uses the Masoretic numeration of the Psalms, rather than that of the Vulgate. There is no discrepancy with respect to Psalm 7, but the Vulgate numbers Psalms 22, 57, and 91 as 21, 56, and 90 respectively.

¹⁶ Wolfram Martini, “Die Magie des Löwen in der Antike,” in *Die Romane von dem Ritter mit dem Löwen*, ed. Xenja von Ertzdorff, Chloe 20 (Amsterdam, 1994), 21–62, especially 24–38 and 45–51.

¹⁷ See Jackson, *Lion* (n. 2 above), 98.

David and Samson. The Hercules legend is a good example also of victory over a lion conferring on the hero a supernatural level of invulnerability: having experienced for himself the imperviousness to attack of the Nemean lion's coat, Hercules decides to wear it, following the lion's death, as a form of armor affording an exceptional level of protection.¹⁸ This essentially apotropaic use of lions is reflected also in their frequent appearances (alone, in pairs, or occasionally in larger groups) at entrances, doorways, necropoleis and the like — a tradition which for certain also influenced the use of lions in Norman and Gothic architecture that was studied by Waldemar Déonna. All in all, as Deirdre Jackson puts it, “from the dawn of history people have conscripted lions to guard their gates. Warding off evil, stone lions have protected the thresholds of fortresses, palaces, shrines, temples, churches and public buildings, from Hittite citadels to modern office towers.”¹⁹

Quite apart from their function in heroic epics as worthy opponents whose defeat brings honor and sometimes protection to heroes, ancient lions were also important sources of imagery. In Homer's *Iliad* alone some thirty passages feature comparisons between the animal and various heroes, notably Diomedes, Achilles, and Sarpedon.²⁰ Virgil, meanwhile, employs lion similes primarily in his characterization of Turnus.²¹ The *tertium comparationis* is almost always the lion's furious aggression; but again, this does not come across as an entirely baleful quality, since the heroes to whom it is attributed generally emerge victorious over the forces of evil. Rather, for these and other classical authors it seems to be a given that the “supreme fighters” are compared to lions who have “in accordance with the poet's wishes (and hence not in and of themselves), transferred their strength indirectly to the hero.”²²

It is tempting to regard this motif of the transference of power between lions and humans as having lived on in inverted form in some early Christian writings. Numerous accounts of the Desert Fathers, for example, show lions, who in such instances might be seen as symbols of the instinct-bound wildness of nature,

¹⁸ For references to treatments of this motif in Pindar and elsewhere, see Knut Usener, “Löwen in antikem Mythos und Gleichnis,” in *Die Romane*, ed. von Ertzdorff, 63–93, at 68–69.

¹⁹ Jackson, *Lion* (n. 2 above), 131. The most incongruous contemporary examples of this trend must surely be the lions at the MGM Grand Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, NV.

²⁰ Homer, *Iliad* 12.298–309; 16.487–89; 18.316–22; and 20.164–75; ed. and trans. A. T. Murray and William F. Wyatt, Loeb Classical Library 170–71 (Cambridge, MA, 1924–25), 1:565; 2:200, 310, 312, and 564.

²¹ Virgil, *Aeneid* 10.454–56 and 12.1–9, in *P. Virgilii Maronis Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), 347 and 393.

²² Usener, “Löwen in antikem Mythos,” 91: “Ein Held, der im Rahmen eines solchen Gleichnisses mit dem Löwen verbunden wird, soll als überlegener Kämpfer gesehen werden. Der Löwe überträgt dem Helden mithin nach des Dichters Willen (somit nicht aus sich selbst heraus) und indirekt seine Stärke.”

being helped, cured, and tamed by holy men armed only with the love of Christ. The most celebrated example of this is St. Gerasimus of the Jordan (d. 475), whose removal of a thorn from the paw of an injured lion — often allegorically interpreted as the victory of Christ over sin — was influentially re-attributed in early and high medieval Europe to St. Jerome, and also became a staple of the fable tradition.²³

While by no means always presenting the lion in an irredeemably negative light, then, most of the examples mentioned hitherto are manifestly undergirded by the assumption that the animal represents much of what is dangerously untamed, indeed untamable in life. Nevertheless they show lions also as potential representatives of God, and as contributing, sometimes indirectly, to much that is good and orderly. Already in pre-Christian times, then, for all the predominance of their association with violent threat, the symbolism of lions can be seen as both complex and paradoxical.

THE CHRISTIAN LION

In the New Testament and the many patristic and medieval traditions that stem from it, meanings of the lion tend to be not merely paradoxical, but polarized. Not that the animal is anything like as common in the New Testament as in the Old: there are only some nine mentions, and none at all in the Gospels. Three passages, however, can be cited as particularly influential. The negative aspects of the lion we have just been considering are crystallized and intensified in St. Peter's reference, in 1 Pet. 5:8, to the devil as a "roaring lion" who "prowls around, looking for someone to devour." By contrast Christ himself is referred to, at least implicitly, in Rev. 5:5 as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David." Henceforth, for many authors in late antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages, the lion became first and foremost a symbol either of Christ or the devil.²⁴ Close to

²³ For the tradition of Jerome and the lion, see Herbert Friedmann, *A Bestiary for Saint Jerome: Animal Symbolism in European Religious Art* (Washington, DC, 1980); Norbert Werner, "Der Kirchenvater mit dem Löwen: Zur Ikonographie des Heiligen Hieronymus," in *Die Romane*, ed. von Ertzdorff (n. 16 above), 563–92; and Salter, *Holy and Noble Beasts* (n. 9 above), 11–24. An impressive range of relevant examples from fables, straddling many centuries, is given by Gerd Dicke and Klaus Grubmüller, *Die Fabeln des Mittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit: Ein Katalog der deutschen Fassungen und ihrer lateinischen Entsprechungen*, Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften 60 (Munich, 1987), no. 387.

²⁴ See, for example, Rabanus Maurus, *De universo*, PL 111, cols. 217–18 (Christ) and 219 (devil); Ps. Rabanus, *Allegoriae in universam sacram scripturam*, PL 112, col. 983 (Christ); Honorius Augustodunensis, *Speculum ecclesie*, PL 172, cols. 941 (Christ) and 934 (devil); Alanus ab Insulis, *Liber in distinctionibus dictionum theologicarum*, PL 210, cols. 834 (Christ) and 835 (Christ and devil); Ps. Hugh of St. Victor, *De bestiis et aliis rebus*, PL 177, col. 57 (Christ); Marcus de Orvieto, *Liber de moralitatibus*, ed. Girard J. Etzkorn (St. Bonaventure, NY, 2005), 5.31 (2:605–26, Christ); Joannes de Sancto Geminiano,

one of these poles came also the frequent association, especially common in pictorial representations, between the lions and demons or the demonic;²⁵ and close to the other came the common linking of the lion with St. Mark. This latter idea too is based on a passage in Revelation (4:6–7), in which St. John describes “four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind,” the first of which is “like a lion,” the second “like an ox,” the third “with a face like a human face,” and the fourth “like a flying eagle.” It is not immediately obvious why the lion should be attributed to St. Mark. Indeed, Dirk Jäckel reminds us that Irenaeus of Lyon thought it should represent John, whereas St. Augustine preferred Matthew.²⁶ By the early Middle Ages, however, St. Jerome’s view that the lion was Mark’s beast had become canonical, as had his somewhat flimsy justification that Mark’s very early reference (1:3) to “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” conjures up the image of a lion’s roar.²⁷

Exegetical interpretations such as these often, in practice, deviated very considerably from the bare bones of the biblical texts. This was particularly true of interpretations of the Marcan lion, the brevity and fragility of whose scriptural basis more or less obliged preachers and exegetes to fill in the gaps by using encyclopaedia or bestiary lore. An illuminating late example of this is provided by the Swabian Dominican Johannes Nider (ca. 1380–1438). Falling prey to the tendency toward prolixity that was so characteristic of his age, Nider not only focuses on the lion’s fabled generosity (or clemency), but also introduces *proprietates* such as its instinct to hide from people and — zoologically unproven — susceptibility to the quartan fever. Similarly characteristic of Nider’s approach (and that of many of his late-medieval colleagues) is a broadening of his material’s

Summa de exemplis et similitudinibus rerum locupletissima (Lyon, 1585), 5.94 and 7.36 (fols. 132rb and 206ra–b; Christ), 4.34 and 5.67 (fols. 107ra and 126va–b; devil); *Gesta Romanorum*, ed. Hermann Österley (Berlin, 1872), no. 200 (Christ) and nos. 191 and 199 (devil); Petrus Berchorius, *Reductorium morale* 10.57 (Venice, 1573), 402a–407a; Christ and devil); *Lumen anime seu liber moralitatum* (= *Lumen anime B*) (Augsburg, 1477), l. T (Christ); *Fasciculus morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher’s Handbook*, ed. and trans. Siegfried Wenzel (University Park, PA, and London, 1992), 64, 276, and 722 (Christ), 40 and 196 (devil); Conradus Holtznicker (Ps. Bonaventura), *Sermones de tempore et de sanctis* (Paris, 1521), nos. 279 (Christ) and 133 (devil); Armandus de Bellovisu, *Sermones de tempore et de sanctis* (Brescia, 1610), nos. 17 and 37 (Christ); Johannes Gritsch, *Quadragesimale de tempore et de sanctis* (Lyon, 1506), no. 50 (devil). For examples from pictorial art, see Peter Bloch, “Löwe,” in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum and Wolfgang Braunfels (Rome, 1968–78), 3:112–18.

²⁵ For examples, see Bloch, “Löwe,” 115–16.

²⁶ Jäckel, *Der Herrscher als Löwe* (n. 3 above), 147.

²⁷ Later references to the lion meaning St. Mark include Honorius, *Speculum*, PL 172, cols. 833 and 941; Soccus (Conradus de Brundelsheim), *Sermones de tempore et de sanctis* (Deventer, 1480), no. 308; Joannes, *Summa de exemplis*, 7.11 and 13 (fols. 188rb and 191ra–va); Jordanus von Quedlinburg, *Sermones de tempore* (Strasbourg, 1483), no. 411; and Holtznicker, *Sermones*, nos. 279 and 336.

application, which eventually encompasses “good prelates” as well as St. Mark himself:

In moral terms, Mark was similar to a lion. For, according to the naturalists, the lion’s generosity is kindled in four ways. First, in that spiritually it only attacks men, women or children when in the greatest hunger. Thus St. Mark did not pursue those who lived humanely and well, but only the beasts of vice. Secondly, it spares those who prostrate themselves, that is, those who humble themselves, and the poor. Thus St. Mark humbly stoops down to those who humble and prostrate themselves through penance. Thirdly, in that the lion, when it is in the woods, hides itself lest it be feared by men. Thus Mark, and a good prelate, must sometimes hide his rigor, lest he be feared rather than loved by the devout. Fourthly, even though it is very strong, the lion acknowledges its illness — the quartan fever, which it is forever suffering — lest it trust too much in its own boldness. Thus St. Mark and good prelates must often look upon their infirmity, rather than their power.²⁸

That, in spite of such excursions as these, the lion remained for many medieval authors primarily a symbol of Christ is due in large measure to the *Physiologus* (literally, “the naturalist”), an immensely widely read collection of nature exempla which originated in Alexandria probably in the second century CE, circulated throughout the early Middle Ages, and exerted considerable influence not least on the Latin and French bestiary traditions.²⁹ Moreover, Dietrich Schmidtke’s catalog of spiritual interpretations of animals in vernacular German texts between 1100 and 1500 shows, in spite of its late starting date, the pervasiveness of medieval associations between the lion and Christ: Schmidtke knows of thirty-five such interpretations, as against only eighteen for the next most frequent comparator, the devil; and twenty-three of these thirty-five examples are based on one or other of the three *proprietates* that originated in the early, second- or third-century versions of the *Physiologus* and remained in circulation for a millennium and more thereafter.³⁰

²⁸ Johannes Nider, *Sermones de tempore et de sanctis cum quadragesimali* (Cologne, 1480), *Sanctis*, no. 16: “Marcus leoni moraliter se assimilauit. Nam secundum naturales leonis generositas in quatuor accenditur. Primo quod homines spiritualiter, nec mulieres, nec pueros nisi in maxima fame non ledit, sed bestias. Sic beatus Marcus non humaniter viuentes bene, sed bestias viciorum persecutus est. Secundo parcit prostratis, id est se humiliantibus vel pauperibus. Sic beatus Marcus humiliter pauperibus condescendit et prostratis per penitentiam. Tertio, quod ne timeatur ab hominibus, abscondit se quando est in siluis. Sic beatus Marcus et bonus prelatus suum rigorem interdum debet abscondere, ne plus timeatur quam ametur a deuotis. Quarto, suam infirmitatem, licet sit fortissimus, agnoscit, videlicet quartanam, quam semper patitur, ne nimis de sua animositate confidat. Sic etiam beatus Marcus et boni prelati non semper potentiam, sed infirmitatem suam sepe debent inspicere.”

²⁹ The most reliable survey of these traditions remains Florence McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill, 1960), esp. 137–40 on the lion.

³⁰ Dietrich Schmidtke, “Geistliche Tierinterpretation in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, 1100–1500” (Ph.D. diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 1966), 331–47.

The first of these states that the lion, when hunted, erases his spoor behind him with his tail, an idea which might have originated in a desire to attribute a plausible practical purpose to the beast's apparently redundant tail tuft. The *Physiologus* relates this imagined behavior to the incarnate Christ defying the devil by hiding his divinity beneath the cloak (or rather, tail) of his humanity. A number of later authors follow this interpretation more or less exactly.³¹ In general, it proved less influential than its companions in the lion chapter of the *Physiologus* — not least, one suspects, because the accompanying *proprietates* seems if anything more naturally to invite comparisons with Christians wiping away their own sin through the medium of penance. This certainly is the line taken by Der Stricker and (on one of the two occasions he discusses the characteristic) Hugo von Langenstein.³² Moreover, Ulrich von Lilienfeld relates the lion's action to the penitence specifically of Mary Magdalene, and Thomasîn von Zirclaere to that of a ruler facing just criticism from his subjects.³³

Few comparable amendments were made to the *Physiologus*'s second lion characteristic, namely the conceit that it sleeps with its eyes open — an evident fiction given that, like all felines, lions possess eyelids. The standard interpretation again focuses on Christ's dual nature, this time with explicit reference to Song of Sol. 5:2, "I slept when my heart was awake." Similarly Christ was "asleep in the flesh when the Godhead called him, and he awoke again to sit at the right hand of his father."³⁴ One suspects that there was relatively little that subsequent authors felt they could do with so precise and heavily contextualized a moralization, and hence it is reproduced with little variation by figures as diverse as St. Ambrose, Rabanus Maurus, Aldhelm of Malmesbury, Peter Damian, and the authors of *Ruodlieb* and the *Glossa ordinaria*.³⁵ This is no doubt also the

³¹ For example, Rabanus, *De universo*, PL 111, cols. 217–18; Peter Damian, *De bono religiosi status*, PL 145, col. 767; *Glossa ordinaria*, PL 114, col. 720; and Hugo von Langenstein, *Martina* 174.45, ed. Adelbert von Keller, Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart 38 (Stuttgart, 1856), 439–40.

³² Der Stricker, *Verserzählungen II*, ed. Hanns Fischer, Altdeutsche Textbibliothek 68 (Tübingen, 1967), 122 (line 203); and Hugo, *Martina*, 174.85, ed. von Keller, 440–41. See also the *Lumen anime B*, 37. Ch.

³³ Ulrich von Lilienfeld, *Die "Concordantie caritatis,"* ed. Herbert Douteil (Münster, 2010), 1:298; and Thomasîn von Zirclaere, *Der wälsche Gast*, ed. Heinrich Rückert, Bibliothek der gesammten deutschen Nationalliteratur 30 (Quedlinburg, 1852), lines 12958–72.

³⁴ Christian Schröder, *Der "Millstätter Physiologus": Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar*, Würzburger Beiträge zur Deutschen Philologie 24 (Würzburg, 2005), 66: "wande er in dem vleisce entslief, diu gotheit in anrief. / do erwachot er aber ze der zeswe sines vader."

³⁵ Aurelius Ambrosius, *De benedictione patriarchum*, PL 14, col. 712; Rabanus, *De universo*, PL 111, col. 218; Aldhelm, *The Poetic Works*, trans. Michael Lapidge and James L. Rosier (Woodbridge, 2009), 78; Peter Damian, *De bono*, PL 145, col. 768; and "Waltharius," "Ruodlieb," *Märchenepen: Lateinische Epik des Mittelalters mit deutschen Versen*, ed. Karl Langosch (Basel, 1956), *Ruodlieb* 4.85; *Glossa*, 720.

reason why Ulrich von Lilienfeld seems able only to preserve the bare bones of the *proprietat* — namely, the motif of the lion sleeping with eyes open — when relating it to the humility of the apostles, who turn the “eyes of their heart” toward God even when asleep.³⁶

Greater levels of variation return with the third and best-known characteristic attributed to the lion in the *Physiologus* tradition. Lion cubs are said to be born dead, but to be revived after three days by one or other of their parents (generally the father, who either breathes upon or roars at them). No doubt some contamination with comparable *proprietates* of the bear and the pelican is at play here, but there is perhaps also an echo of the undoubted zoological fact of lion cubs being born blind — though in nature “within three to fifteen days their blue-grey eyes open” without benefit of parental or divine intervention.³⁷ The overtones here of Christ’s resurrection through the agency of his Father are so obvious as hardly to need pointing out, and hence the *Physiologus* report gave rise to a large number of essentially straightforward imitations.³⁸ Nevertheless it did not take a great imaginative leap for authors to focus, instead of on the relationship between members of the Trinity, on that between Christ and fallen humanity. Hence, especially in the later Middle Ages, with their enhanced emphasis on the importance of personal faith and morality, it is often Christ who takes on the role of the revivifying parent, with his original role being allotted instead to a member or members of the human race. In such contexts it is generally specifically the voice of Christ which acts upon fallen humanity, and above all his cry from the cross of “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” or “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). This motif is found, for example, in two treatments of this *proprietat* by Konrad von Würzburg, and a Marian song by Bruder Hans.³⁹

This section on the Christian lion can fruitfully be concluded by giving an illustration of a medieval moralizer of animals at work. In the chapter of his *Reductorium morale* devoted to the lion, Petrus Berchorius (1290–1362) offers his readers — most likely working preachers in search of ideas for their next homily — a

³⁶ Ulrich, *Concordantie caritatis*, ed. Douteil, 1:158.

³⁷ Jackson, *Lion* (n. 2 above), 36.

³⁸ For example, Peter Damian, *De bono*, PL 145, col. 767; Alanus, *Liber de distinctionibus*, PL 210, cols. 734 and 835; Thomasin, *Der wälsche Gast*, ed. Rückert, lines 13009–12; Konrad von Würzburg, *Die goldene Schmiede*, ed. Wilhelm Grimm (Berlin, 1840), lines 502–05; Bruder Hans, *Marienlieder*, ed. Michael S. Batts, Altdutsche Textbibliothek 5 (Tübingen, 1963), lines 2616 and 3913–14; and Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg, *Die Brösamlin*, ed. Johannes Pauli (Strasbourg, 1517), fol. 66vb.

³⁹ Konrad, *Goldene Schmiede*, ed. Grimm, line 506; Konrad von Würzburg, *Partonopier und Meliur — Turnei von Nantheiz — Sant Nicolaus — Lieder und Sprüche*, ed. Karl Bartsch (Vienna, 1871), 346; Hans, *Marienlieder*, ed. Batts, line 3911; and *Meisterlieder der Kolmarer Handschrift*, ed. Karl Bartsch, Bibliothek des Litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart 68 (Stuttgart, 1856), VI, lines 261–71; XXXIV, lines 37–42; and CXCI, lines 47–57.

selection of possible variants on the same theme. In doing so he shows a combination of imaginative inventiveness and pedantic punctiliousness that is highly characteristic both of him and of many other authors who developed the lion material found in the Bible and *Physiologus*. He has, for example, three versions alone of the story of the lion reviving its young, two of which feature God (or Christ) and the entire human race, and the third the original constellation of the divine Father and Son. The impression is confirmed, certainly, that these variants were seen as essentially interchangeable; nevertheless, it is interesting that, by this time (ca. 1340), those involving human salvation are accorded both priority and greater length, and that, to accommodate this, the original nature description has been subtly altered. Berchorius stresses — at least initially — that the lion cubs merely spend three days (or ages) sleeping *as if* dead. Moreover, he seems to see it as perfectly legitimate to speak of the salvation of the human race both as something that has happened and as something that will happen in the future:

The newly born son of the lion sleeps as if dead for three days, and then the lion roars and growls, so that the whole extent of the den shakes; and thus, by roaring, he is said to revive the sleeping cub . . . The lion is God, the cub is the human race, the three days signify the three ages of this life, that is, the age of nature, the age of the law, and the age of grace. Thus it is, dearly beloved, that the lion cub, that is, the human race, sleeps for three days, that is, the age of nature, the age of the law, and the age of grace, that is to say in the dust of its mortality. . . But after these three days, to wit in the day of judgment, the lion of the tribe of Judah, Christ, will roar very loudly with his trumpets and through the ministry of the angels, . . . and hence the whole space of the den, that is the world and hell, will tremble, for the lion will roar and the sons of the sea will be afraid. And then his cub, that is to say the entire human race, will be revived and will arise, some to life and some to death . . . Or you can say that this dead cub [*sic*] is the sinful soul, or alternatively the human race, dead in sin, because for certain it was revived at the time when Christ cried on the cross; “Eli, eli, etc.” For at that time the earth trembled, and the cub, that is, the human race, which was asleep in hell, was revived by grace and glory, most importantly when, in the space of three days, it was taken out of hell . . . Or apply it to Christ, who, after he slept for three days in the tomb, was at last aroused by God his Father, and on the third day was revived, that is to say, resurrected from the dead.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Berchorius, *Reductorium* (n. 24 above), 10.57 (p. 402a–b): “Leonis filius recens natus dormit quasi mortuus per tres dies, et tunc leo rugit et fremit, ita quod totus cubilis locus tremit, et sic rugiendo suscitare dicitur catulum dormientum . . . Leo est Deus, catulus est humanum genus, tres dies significant tria tempora huius vitae, scilicet tempus naturae, tempus legis, et tempus gratiae. Sic est igitur, charissimi, quod catulus leonis, id est humanum genus, per tres dies, id est tempore naturae, tempus legis, et tempus gratiae, dormit, scilicet in puluere mortalitatis . . . Sed post istos tres dies, scilicet in die iudicii, tunc leo de tribu Juda, Christus, rugiet altissime per tubas et ministerium angelorum . . . ,

THE NOBLE LION

The risen and ascended Christ is the King of Kings, and the lion is regarded in many contexts as the king of the beasts; so it is entirely natural that lions should have long been seen as emblems also of earthly kings and, by extension, of other highly placed members of many social orders. This was true not least in the western Middle Ages, where — especially between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries — the lion came to be associated with various kinds of ruler, as well as functioning as an aristocratic and chivalric emblem in a broader sense. The evidence for the link between lions and rulers has been expertly marshaled and assessed by Dirk Jäckel.⁴¹ In all he has assembled details of lion sobriquets, metaphors, and similes applied to some thirty-six rulers (or princes with aspirations to governance), of whom the earliest is Clovis I, King of the Franks (ca. 482–511), and the latest Henry II, Prince of Mecklenburg (1287–1329). The bulk of Jäckel's examples come from the period between 1050 and 1220, however, and this can clearly be seen as the time during which associations of the lion specifically with rulers were at their most widespread. Significantly, the lion was the only animal of which this was true: as far as other animal sobriquets are concerned, the assiduous Jäckel can point only to those of Albrecht the Bear of Brandenburg and Saxony (ca. 1100–1170) and Eric the Lamb, King of Denmark between 1137 and his abdication in 1146.

The lion of the high Middle Ages was often employed in attempts to establish a ruler's legitimacy, and could be, as it were, transferred down the generations of a particular dynasty.⁴² Above all, however, it seems to have betokened justice. A number of princes (such as Kings William I of Scotland and Louis VIII of France) were specifically labeled *leo iustitiae* or *leo pacificus* — appellations that were plainly intended to draw attention to their perceived moral probity, but did not exclude the exercise of considerable violence on their part. On the contrary,

et sic tremet locus cubilis, scilicet mundus et infernus, quia leo rugiet et formidabunt filij maris . . . Et ideo catulus suus, scilicet totum humanum genus, resuscitabitur et resurget, alii quidem in mortem, alii in vitam . . . Vel dic quod catulus iste mortuus est anima peccatrix, vel etiam humanum genus mortuum per peccatum, quod pro certo tunc temporis fuit suscitatum, quando Christus clamavit in cruce. 'Hely, hely, etc.' Tunc enim terra tremuit, et catulus, id est humanum genus, quod in inferno dormiebat, fuit per gratiam et gloriam suscitatum, potissime quando in triduo de infernis est extractum . . . Vel expone de Christo, qui postquam dormiuit in sepulchro per tres dies, tandem a Deo patre suo excitatus, die tertia est suscitatus, quia tertia die resurrexit a mortuis."

⁴¹ Jäckel, *Der Herrscher als Löwe* (n. 3 above), 21–121.

⁴² Benzo de Alba sought to establish the legitimacy of Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV in his *Ad Henricum imperatorem* of 1080–84, praising Henry as a lion who defeats a dragon representing Pope Gregory VII. See Jäckel, *Der Herrscher als Löwe* (n. 3 above), 36–39. For examples of this approach being applied to an entire dynasty, see Jäckel, *Der Herrscher als Löwe* (n. 3 above), 48–74 and 78–96.

one of the main ways in which a properly leonine justice could be administered was by the use of force to tame rebellion or extirpate unbelief. Louis VIII, for example, was celebrated not least for his campaigns against the Cathars in 1217–19 and 1223, and lion imagery was employed for the likes of Godfrey of Bouillon and the English King Richard I (“the Lionheart”) with quite specific reference to their exploits during the Crusades. Rather as was argued above of the apotropaic “guardian” lions of classical times, it seems that the lion’s innate propensity for fierce aggression was one of the qualities that made it a particularly apt symbol not only of forces that threatened to disrupt the divine order of things, but also of agencies that sought to maintain it.

The lions of the Bible and, to a lesser extent, of the *Physiologus* remained instrumental in high-medieval authors’ attempts to promote the claims and achievements of rulers. In such contexts one often reads, for example, of the comparison of Judas Maccabeus to a lion in 1 Macc. 3: 4–5: “He was like a lion in his deeds, like a lion’s cub roaring for prey. He searched out and pursued those who broke the law; he burned those who troubled his people.” In a similar way, Frederick Barbarossa is described by the so-called Archpoet in the following terms: “Meanwhile the king rose up at God’s command, terrifying his enemies like a wild lion; in battle he was like Judas Maccabeus.”⁴³ For its part, the *Physiologus* characteristic of the lion sleeping with eyes open is recalled by Ekkehard IV von St. Gallen. He describes a conversation in which the future Emperor Otto II says to his father Otto I: “No one ever had sharper eyes than yours, my lion,” before quoting himself, Ekkehard, as adding: “Indeed, one also reads of the lion that he sleeps with his eyes open.”⁴⁴

Sometimes such biblical and pseudo-zoological source material was merged in such a way as to be made productive for princely propaganda, for example in the little-known French romance *La Chevalerie de Judas Macabé*, produced for the Flemish court of Guy de Dampierre in or before 1285.⁴⁵ In this work, the story of Judas Maccabeus “becomes medieval propaganda advocating the

⁴³ Archipoeta, “Salve mundi domine,” in *Hymnen und Vagantenlieder: Lateinische Lyrik des Mittelalters mit deutschen Versen*, ed. Karl Langosch (Basel, 1954), 248–57, at 250: “Surrexit interea rex iubente deo / Metuendus hostibus tamquam ferus leo / Similis in preliis Iude Machabeo.”

⁴⁴ Ekkehard IV, *Casus sancti Galli* 16: “Numquam oculi perspicaciores, leo mi, errant quam tui . . . ‘Enimvero ita et de leone legitur,’ Ekkehardus ait, ‘quia oculis apertis dormit,’” in *St. Galler Kloster geschichten*, ed. and trans. Hans F. Haefele, *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters* 10 (Darmstadt, 1991), 254. See also Jäckel, *Der Herrscher als Löwe* (n. 3 above), 28–29; and Gerd Althoff, “Löwen als Begleitung und Bezeichnung des Herrschers im Mittelalter,” in von Ertzdorff, *Die Romane* (n. 16 above), 119–34, at 129–31.

⁴⁵ This is the date of the sole surviving manuscript. See Meradith T. McMunn, “Bestiary Influences in Two Thirteenth-Century Romances,” in *Beasts and Birds of the Middle Ages: The Bestiary and its Legacy*, ed. Meradith T. McMunn and Willene B. Clark (Philadelphia,

renewal of crusading efforts in the Holy Land.”⁴⁶ It functions also as a “mirror of princes” more broadly, Judas’s behavior being constantly upheld as an example for the author’s regal or ducal readers to follow. The lion features in what amounts to an excursus about its *proprietates* stretching from line 2115 to line 2308. Three of the five characteristics covered represent accretions to the original *Physiologus* material which had been developed in the course of the French bestiary tradition; but we also have familiar references to the lion erasing his tracks, and to the early life of lion cubs.⁴⁷ The *Chevalerie*’s moralization of the latter *proprietat* remains rather general, focusing on the nobility of Judas’s (and any good ruler’s) birth and on the exemplary contribution of Judas’s father Matathias to his son’s formation;⁴⁸ but its interpretation of the lion’s erasure of his spoor is interestingly creative. This is linked to Judas’s ability, even when under pressure, to recognize and correct any mistake he has made for the good of his people — a quality which, as the author reminds his “biaus sire rois” (line 2298), is a wise and a courtly thing to imitate.⁴⁹ The *Chevalerie de Judas Macabé* is a relatively late instance of the lion being clearly and verbally associated with a ruler or with kingship, a fashion which began to decline markedly in the early thirteenth century. One suspects indeed that it was in essence a victim of its own success: lion imagery “increasingly lacked the exclusiveness needed to characterize the excellent actions of a sovereign;” and hence by the fourteenth century “could potentially be assigned to any good Christian.”⁵⁰

Within the chivalric world, however, the lion’s role in conveying ideas and constructing identities was by no means limited to the specific circles and preoccupations highlighted by Jäckel. References to the lion in accounts of the Crusades were, for example, commonplace and in no sense restricted to the likes of Godfrey of Bouillon or Richard the Lionheart. As Natasha R. Hodgson has shown, numerous contemporary or near-contemporary accounts of the First

1989), 134–43, at 134–38. For the text itself, see *La Chevalerie de Judas Macabé*, ed. Jean-Robert Smeets (Assen, 1955).

⁴⁶ McMunn, “Bestiary Influences,” 136.

⁴⁷ McMunn, “Bestiary Influences,” 136–37: “The lion is not easily provoked, but when he is, he is relentless in devouring his enemy . . . the lion is singleminded once he has made a decision; the lion does not like to be looked at while he is eating his prey and will attack the man (the application to Judas concerns reactions to his victories and criticism which he will not allow) . . . It will be seen at once that bestiary material has been selected to conform to the need to describe the qualities of a military and political leader in stressful times. Strength, even harshness, and pragmatism are emphasized.”

⁴⁸ *La Chevalerie de Judas Macabé*, ed. Smeets, lines 2188–98.

⁴⁹ *La Chevalerie de Judas Macabé*, ed. Smeets, lines 2290–99.

⁵⁰ Jäckel, *Der Herrscher als Löwe* (n. 3 above), 329: “Ihr fehlte zunehmend die Exklusivität, um herausragendes herrscherliches Handeln zu kennzeichnen . . . Im 14. Jahrhundert schließlich . . . wurde die Löwenmetaphorik dann potenziell auf jeden guten Christen übertragen.”

Crusade made comparisons between the ferocity of lions (or lionesses) and that of individual knights, or indeed of the entire Christian army.⁵¹ She provides quotations to this effect from authors such as Raymond of Aguilers, Ralph of Caen, and Robert of Reims — whose *Historia Hierosolymitana* includes, for example, the graphic description (placed in the mouth of Soliman) of the crusaders “attacking as if they were lions raging with the hunger of starvation and thirsting for the blood of animals.”⁵²

High-medieval writers on the Crusades were of course able to draw on biblical and later Christian perceptions of the lion, as well as on earlier ones of its threatening rapacity. This meant that the animal proved invaluable not only in representing bellicose fury, but also in justifying it in religious terms. A relatively early example of this, again presented by Hodgson, is the description of the exploits of Wicher the Swabian (d. 1101) found in the *Historia Hierosolymitana* of Albert of Aachen.⁵³ Wicher is said to have encountered “a great and horrible lion, which used to devour men and cattle next to the mountains in the region of Jaffa, just as it was intending to pounce on a grazing horse.” This unequivocally devilish beast, however, is swiftly overcome by the Christian knight Wicher, who splits its head in two with his sword and “leaves the cruel and fearless animal dead on the plains.” The symbolism of the defender of the faith decisively dispatching the forces of wickedness and disorder could hardly be clearer.

When turning from such works of historiography to the more unequivocally fictitious world of *chansons de geste* and courtly romances, one finds, as far as the presentation of lions is concerned, no shortage of similarities or parallels. Already in the corpus of chivalric French epics — in the term’s very broadest sense — examined so painstakingly by Friedrich Bangert, lions appear on an extraordinarily regular basis,⁵⁴ and, even though the terms for “lion” in other medieval languages were not necessarily such potentially productive rhyme words as *lyon* in French, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that this frequency was mirrored in other vernaculars. In addition to many passing references included, for example, in attempts to fashion an “eastern” setting for crusading epics, Bangert lists lions as featuring in well over a hundred comparisons with knights of one kind or another. Again, the common ground specified is normally courage, anger (in the sense of a warlike *furor*), wildness or strength; and the ferocious gaze of an aggressive warrior is also many times referred to as leonine. Moreover, by my calculation Bangert has no fewer than eighty-two instances of

⁵¹ Natasha R. Hodgson, “Lions, Tigers, and Bears: Encounters with Wild Animals and Bestial Imagery in the Context of Crusading to the Latin East,” *Viator* 44 (2013): 65–94.

⁵² Hodgson, “Lions, Tigers, and Bears,” 77.

⁵³ Hodgson, “Lions, Tigers, and Bears,” 82–83.

⁵⁴ Friedrich Bangert, *Die Tiere im altfranzösischen Epos*, Ausgaben und Abhandlungen aus dem Gebiete der Romanischen Philologie 34 (Marburg, 1885), 183–92.

literally lion-hearted knights being awarded the epithet “cuer de lion;” and, of course, the lion is the pre-eminent heraldic beast also in fictional contexts. To Bangert’s list of over a hundred such examples one can add plenty from German literature, a field which has more recently been surveyed by Heiko Hartmann.⁵⁵ Given such ubiquity, and not least the fact that lion arms are often borne simultaneously by many knights, it is hard to imagine that such heraldic imagery was intended to construct a particularized characterization of individual combatants; but certainly there is a sense in which to be associated, even if only through one’s armor, with a lion, was to be upheld in a general way as a representative of chivalric valor and decency. Furthermore, and unsurprisingly given the beast’s *Physiologus* heritage and link with “real-life” crusading contexts, a lion-knight was also more than likely to be a good Christian: indeed the only “heathen” knight known to me whose mettle is associated with that of a lion is Feirefiz in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* — and he was born of a Christian father, is half-brother to the future Grail King, and in any event latterly converts, after a fashion, to Christianity.⁵⁶

In addition to their function as a kind of shorthand used in various ways to betoken knighthood, lions put in a number of personal appearances in heroic epics and courtly romances. These were by no means always constructive or welcome — though some of them constitute literary evidence that reinforces our awareness that lions were kept in menageries and/or given as presents in the Middle Ages.⁵⁷ In the romance *Berte aus grans piés*, composed after 1273–74 probably by Adenet le Roi, a lion who is being kept by Charles Martel escapes from his cage. He is described as “the fiercest beast that was ever spoken of,” and lives up to this reputation by killing his keeper, and two pages who cross his path — only to be killed himself very soon afterwards by the sword of Charles’s twenty-year-old

⁵⁵ Heiko Hartmann, “Tiere in der historischen und literarischen Heraldik des Mittelalters: Ein Aufriss,” in *Tiere und Fabelwesen im Mittelalter*, ed. Sabine Obermaier (Berlin, 2009), 147–79, esp. 147–49, 151, 155, 157, 159–60, 162, 164–68, and 171–73.

⁵⁶ See Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Karl Lachmann, 6th edition (Berlin, 1998), 737.21 and 738.20–23. This latter passage is yet another to contain an echo of the *Physiologus*: “the lion is born dead, and is made alive by its father’s roaring. These two [Feirefiz and Parzival, N. H.] were born in the noise of battle and chosen in the honour of jousts” (“den lewen sîn muoter tût gebirt / von sîns vater galme er lebendec wirt. / dise zwêne wârn ûz krache erborn, / von maneger tjost ûz prise erkorn”).

⁵⁷ Lions were owned, for example, by Charlemagne, several English kings, all the French ones from Philip II to Charles V, and several Italian cities. See Lisa J. Kiser, “Animals in Medieval Sports, Entertainments, and Menageries,” in *A Cultural History of Animals: The Medieval Age*, ed. Brigitte Resl (Oxford, 2007), 103–26, at 106: “to have under one’s dominion a beast that was itself dominant in the natural order surely constituted an exceptional display of worldly authority.”

son Pepin (later known as “the Short”).⁵⁸ This act — a “merveille” (line 71) — is presented as early proof of Pepin’s exceptionality, echoing the ancient notion that overcoming a lion represented a particularly notable degree of heroism. Meanwhile, in the *chanson de geste* known as *Aiol* (ca. 1200) a lion given to King Louis by the Romans wreaks havoc by killing not just his keeper but some hundred other people between Poitiers and Châtellerault. Like Pepin, Aiol takes the opportunity to establish his heroic status by killing the lion, cutting off one of its paws, and hanging it from his saddlebow as a token.⁵⁹ Plainly the ancient tradition of victory over a leonine foe lending lustre to the reputation of a hero remained alive and well in the high Middle Ages, as we can see also in Gawain’s famous victory over a voracious, horse-size lion in Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* and its French source, and — in a scene clearly influenced by romance — on the image of a lion-slaying knight that featured on the donjon tympanum of Coucy-le-Château (1225–42).⁶⁰

Such combats as these are counterbalanced in medieval romances — and indeed in crusading literature influenced by them — by numerous occasions on which lions befriend and accompany knights. These lions are no doubt the descendants of those who consorted with the Desert Fathers, and indeed of the wounded lion who is healed by Androcles and subsequently both saves and spends his life with him.⁶¹ With the possible exception of the episode in the *Poema de Mio Cid* in which the hero effortlessly tames a lion but does not thereafter consort with it, the best known medieval example of a lion–hero constellation is that involving a knight rescuing a lion from the death-dealing clutches of a dragon or snake.⁶² This feat was far from unique to, but particularly closely associated with, the Arthurian knight Yvain. Both Chrétien de Troyes’s *Yvain, ou Le Chevalier au lion* (ca. 1180) and its German adaptation *Iwein* by Hartmann von Aue (ca. 1200) relate, at the narrative’s central point, how the protagonist encounters a lion fighting — and nearly being killed by — a dragon. After some hesitation, caused not least by the fear that, if he were to save the lion, the latter might in

⁵⁸ *Li roumans de Berte aus grans piés par Adenés li Rois*, ed. Auguste Scheler (Brussels, 1874), lines 49–78, esp. line 50: “De plus crueuse beste ne fu parole oïe.”

⁵⁹ *Aiol*, ed. Jacques Normand and Gaston Raynaud (Paris, 1877), lines 1334–35: “Le poe del lion a retenue, / Si l’a a son archon devant pendue.” The lion incident begins on line 1177.

⁶⁰ See Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, ed. Lachmann, 571.1–572.21; Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*, ed. William Roach, Textes littéraires français 71 (Geneva, 1956), lines 7849–70 (without the horse comparison); and Leson, “‘Partout la figure du lion’” (n. 1 above), esp. 32–39.

⁶¹ This story goes back at least as far as the second century CE, when it was related by Aulus Gellius in his *Noctes Atticae* (2.14). Various texts that can be seen to represent intermediate stages between Aulus Gellius and Chrétien de Troyes are examined in Brodeur, “The Grateful Lion” (n. 4 above); and also Paule Le Rider, “Lions et dragons dans la littérature, de Pierre Damien à Chrétien de Troyes,” *Le Moyen Age* 104 (1998): 9–52.

⁶² *Poema de Mio Cid*, ed. Julio Rodríguez Puértolas (Madrid, 1996), lines 2292–300.

turn attack him, Yvain intervenes successfully on the lion's behalf, and kills the dragon. Thereafter the lion is Yvain's constant companion, grateful, loyal, and helpful both in combat and in more peaceful times. Indeed, so close do the two become that the rehabilitation Yvain undergoes following his early failings and subsequent madness takes place almost entirely within the context of their one-to-one friendship; and the emotional bond between the two of them is sufficiently strong for the lion to attempt suicide — admittedly with semi-comic consequences — when he believes his master to be dead.

Chrétien and Hartmann's lion is very much a romance figure in his own right. As such, he possesses complexities and ambiguities which have led to a wide variety of interpretations among scholars as to his true "meaning." The French lion alone, for example, has been variously seen as an exemplar of a new, essentially altruistic form of chivalry (implicitly contrasted with Gawain), as Jesus Christ, as an emblem of power and/or justice, or indeed as an astrological symbol.⁶³ Albert Gier and others have even interpreted him, with not insubstantial textual evidence and taking proper account of narrative irony, as a symbol of a devoted, Enide-like aristocratic wife.⁶⁴ None of these perspectives, however, has been able to establish itself as a consensus view — doubtless inevitably so, given that Yvain's lion is a multi-faceted literary symbol, as distinct from the subject of a systematic point-by-point allegory. On one level, indeed, his role is perhaps little more than a dynamic amplification, or indeed logical extension, of that of a heraldic lion on the shield of an actual or fictional knight either side of 1200. Literary symbols and heraldic devices are both, after all, means of conveying "open," sometimes indistinct or opaque, but nonetheless eloquent messages about knights and their values. That said, Yvain and Iwein's lion in a sense actually embodies, as well as merely signifying, late-medieval knighthood, and does so in a uniquely complex and sophisticated way: he is not just a static representation of chivalry, but rather a living, breathing, sentient, indeed highly emotional being, and one who himself, particularly after the attempted "suicide," undergoes a certain maturation process. The lion becomes, then, at once a dynamic symbol of a knight, his trusty companion, and indeed his alter ego.⁶⁵

⁶³ A convenient discussion of these and other interpretations is given by Dietmar Rieger, "Il est a moi et je a lui": Yvains Löwe — ein Zeichen und seine Deutung," in *Die Romane*, ed. von Ertzdorff (n. 16 above), 245–85.

⁶⁴ Albert Gier, "Leo est femina: Yvain, Enide und der Löwe," in *Mittelalterbilder aus neuer Perspektive: Diskussionsbeiträge zu amour courtois, Subjektivität in der Dichtung und Strategien des Erzählens*, ed. Ernstpeter Ruhe and Rudolf Behrens (Munich, 1985), 269–88.

⁶⁵ This term is fruitfully used to explain the literary relationship between Alexander the Great and his horse Bucephalus in Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch, "Bucephalus als Alter Ego Alexanders des Großen," in *Tiere*, ed. Klinger and Kraß (n. 4 above), 33–45. See also the discussion of Bucephalus and of Hartmann's *Iwein* in Nigel Harris, *The Thirteenth-Century*

However elusive his precise significance, there were certainly some aspects of Yvain's lion, or perhaps more particularly of his harmonious partnership with an excellent knight, that appealed powerfully to thirteenth-century writers on the Crusades. The lion is an instructive case of cross-fertilization between primarily "imaginative" literature and primarily "historical" sources not least in respect of the thirteenth-century practice of "grafting the *chevalier au lion* motif to the legendary profiles of historic crusaders" — to the extent that "such tales became essential markers of a hero's crusader pedigree."⁶⁶ Nicholas L. Paul has shown that "after 1200, lion-knight stories proliferated in texts associated with figures famed for their deeds in the Holy Land," such as Gouffier de Lastours, Gilles de Chin, and Robert de Mowbray.⁶⁷ It is for certain significant that these figures were predominantly associated with the First Crusade rather than any later ones; and presenting them retrospectively as knights in harmonious accord with a lion — and hence, implicitly, with nature, with Christ, and with the propensity for violence intrinsic to chivalric culture — manifestly performed an important function in the context of thirteenth-century cultural memory. It is as though lions, and productive fellowship between them and knights, came to be seen as key components in the retrospective construction of a "golden age" of crusading, set in stark but no doubt salutary contrast to the traumatic disasters that had characterized the Third Crusade of 1189–92 and to the "discourse of shame and blame" that had developed out of them.⁶⁸

Neither the chivalric lion of Yvain nor those of its thirteenth-century imitators have much to tell us about the specifically amatory elements in a knight's make-up; but our survey of noble lions must end with one that does, namely the feline protagonist of Guillaume de Machaut's *Dit du lyon*. This lion is a courtly lover in his own right, albeit one whose animal muteness hampers him in the verbal articulation of his love. The object of his affection is a beautiful, noble lady who resides in a *locus amoenus*, where she has raised the lion and cared for him since his infancy. She has trained him ("endocriné," line 1910) by the traditional pet-owner's method of controlling his food intake; but the lion's emotional response to this treatment has been explicitly influenced by "Amours" (line 1920), and he has become uniquely close to the lady — to a degree that has aroused the envy of all the other beasts of the forest. This hostility causes the lion great distress. Like that of a true courtly lover, his sorrow is repeatedly turned to peace and

Animal Turn: Medieval and Twenty-First-Century Perspectives (New York, 2020), 71–77 and 81–82.

⁶⁶ Leson, "Partout la figure du lion" (n. 1 above), 51.

⁶⁷ Nicholas L. Paul, "In Search of the Marshal's Lost Crusade: The Persistence of Memory, the Problems of History, and the Painful Birth of Crusading Romance," *Journal of Medieval History* 40 (2014): 292–310, at 306.

⁶⁸ Paul, "In Search of the Marshal's Lost Crusade," 305.

joy by a mere glance from the lady's "sweet eyes;"⁶⁹ but Machaut's poet-narrator nevertheless feels moved to help the lion by acting as his advocate and mouth-piece. He suggests to the lady that a wall be built to protect the lion from the hostility of the other beasts, and he also makes what amounts to a passionate declaration of love on the lion's behalf: "He is entirely yours and does, well and willingly, whatever he thinks will please you . . . For he can have no confidence without you, his right hand, his entire hope, his comfort, his sustenance."⁷⁰ The lady replies that the lion should simply ignore his envious rivals. To that extent, then, his vicariously made suit is unsuccessful; but the lion's status as a *bona fide*, if undeniably miscast courtly lover remains intact.

In many ways Machaut's conceit of a lion as a personified representative of courtly love is a bizarre one-off. No doubt it was inspired by the *Roman de la Rose* and, one suspects most powerfully, Nicole de Margival's *Dit de la panthère d'Amours*; but as far as I am aware it did not attract any direct imitators. This may well be due in part to the *Dit du lyon*'s undeniable strangeness, but is also for certain a function of its late date — according to internal evidence it was completed on 3 April 1342. By then the whole cultural edifice of chivalry, let alone the part played by animals in its propagation, was in terminal decline; and in consequence lion imagery also had moved on from facilitating the self-understanding and social expression of knights to — much of the time at least — furthering the moral and theological education of the broader laity.

THE SINFUL LION

Renewed attempts to train laypeople in righteousness and in the fundamentals of Christian belief were, of course, far from new in Machaut's time. Indeed, they had already become both prevalent and urgent in the immediate aftermath of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. This Council's twenty-first canon required all who had reached the age of discernment to receive the Eucharist and to make auricular confession at least once a year; and in practice it also led to a vast increase in vernacular preaching and in basic Christian instruction more generally. As one might expect, given their ability to engage and entertain a wide audience, animals — not least the lion — proved a useful tool in this process. Especially in the later Middle Ages it was a regular contributor to moral and didactic teaching, where its unusual breadth of possible meanings came in very useful.

⁶⁹ *Œuvres de Guillaume de Machaut*, ed. Ernest Hoepffner (Paris, 1908), vol. 2, lines 1831–34: "Mais la dame, ou toute pais a, / De ses dous ieus le rapaisa, / Si que tost en joie revint / Et de son deuil ni li souvint."

⁷⁰ *Œuvres de Guillaume de Machaut*, ed. Hoepffner, vol. 2, lines 2007–9 and 2015–18: "Car il est vostres tous entiers, / Et si fait bien et volentiers / Tout ce qu'il pense qui vous plaise, / . . . Car assés ne puet estre / Sans vous, qui estes sa main destre, / Qui estes toute s'esperence, / Ses reconfors, sa soustenance."

A particularly eloquent example of this can be found at the very end of the Middle Ages (ca. 1500) in Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg's lengthy vernacular sermon series known as *Von den vier Lewengeschrei*. Here Geiler examines the "roars" — meaning, to all intents and purposes, the characteristics — of four paradigmatic lions, one spiritual ("geistlich"), one worldly ("weltlich"), one heavenly ("himelisch"), and one infernal ("hellisch"). He does this at such length (some sixty-two column pages in the most readily accessible edition) that he is able to cover practically every aspect of doctrinal and, especially, moral theology he sees as relevant to his predominantly lay congregation in Strasbourg.⁷¹ It is striking even at first glance, though, that Geiler's evil lions interest him much more than do his good ones: the opening section on the spiritual lion occupies five pages (fols. 49r–51r) and that on the heavenly lion four (55v–57r), whereas the treatment of the worldly lion stretches for nine pages (51v–55r), and that of its hellish counterpart for over forty (57r–78v).

This is typical of the priorities of late-medieval didactic literature, in which interpretations of the lion *ad malam partem* tended considerably to outnumber those *ad bonam partem* — albeit not usually to the extent witnessed in *Von den vier Lewengeschrei*. This of course contrasts markedly with what we have seen earlier in the *Physiologus* tradition, as well as in the high-medieval preoccupation with the lion as ruler, knight or knight's companion. It is hard to account satisfactorily for the change of emphasis. We must not forget that the lion had always been one of the most fundamentally ambivalent of symbols, not least in the Bible, so perhaps authors such as Geiler are doing little more, at whatever level of consciousness, than correcting a perceived imbalance. On the other hand, the lion is probably destined always to be at its most effective as a positive symbol in a specifically aristocratic and/or martial context: when it moves away from the courtly world and is in a sense democratized, the lion tends to do less well. Pride, for example, swiftly changes from being seen as (within the bounds of courtly moderation) a desirable attribute, and becomes a sin — indeed the worst of them. Meanwhile a leonine *furor*, so valuable on the battlefield, can easily become, especially within the confines of increasingly urbanized communities, the dangerous, destructive sin of wrath.

Certainly when late-medieval moralists came to urge good Christian behavior on an increasingly wide and heterogeneous, usually vernacular audience, and to codify this behavior ever more frequently in schemes of vices and virtues, the lion almost always ended up on the devil's side. It became, above all, a stock emblem of *superbia*. Mireille Vincent-Cassy tells us that, of some forty fifteenth-century murals of the seven deadly sins known to her, no fewer than twenty-

⁷¹ Geiler, *Brösamlin*, ed. Pauli (n. 38 above), fols. 49r–78v. The collection is usefully surveyed by Roger L. Cole, "Beast Allegory in the Late Medieval Sermon in Strasbourg: The Example of John Geiler's *Von den vier Lewengeschrei*," *Bestia* 3 (1991): 115–24.

eight feature lions as emblems of pride.⁷² Nor were matters much different in literature. At the very beginning of Dante's *Inferno*, for example, the poet encounters a lion, "which appeared, and seemed to come at me, with raised head and rabid hunger, so that it seemed the very air itself was afraid of him."⁷³ This lion is invariably interpreted as pride, and the leopard and wolf that also appear as lust and avarice respectively. Later on in the fourteenth century there are many comparably brief if less poetic references to the lion of pride. The *Etymachia* treatise, from around 1332, has a crowned lion depicted on the tunic of *superbia*, "because just as the lion is the king and prince of the animals, so the devil was the first to introduce pride. And all proud men imitate the devil, and he is their king."⁷⁴ The slightly later, and closely related *In campo mundi* treatise motivates the association slightly differently, and transfers the lion to *superbia*'s shield; but its underlying thinking is the same: *superbia* "carries a crowned lion on its shield, because the proud man has the strength of all arrogance."⁷⁵ Similar things can be found in, for example, Heinrich von Vriemar, Joannes de Sancto Geminiano, Eutasche Deschamps, Ps. Johannes Veghe's *Wyngaerden der sele*, the English *Desputisoun bitwen Phe bodi and Pe soule*, Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and, rather later, Ripa's *Iconologia*.⁷⁶ It probably goes without saying that Geiler's

⁷² Mireille Vincent-Cassy, "Les animaux et les péchés capitaux: De la symbolique à l'emblématique," in *Le Monde animal*, ed. Cerdan (n. 5 above), 121–32, at 121.

⁷³ Dante, *Inferno* 1.45–48: "La vista che m'apparve d'un leone. / Questi pareo che contra me venisse / con la test' alta e con rabbiosa fame, / sì che pareo che l'aere ne tremesse," in *La Divina Commedia: Inferno*, ed. Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio (Florence, 1979), 9.

⁷⁴ *Etymachia*, §5: "Deinde dicitur [superbia] habere in tunica leonem coronatum, quia sicut leo est rex et princeps animalium, ita superbiam primo induxit dyabolus. Et omnes superbi imitantur dyabolus, et ipse est rex eorum," in *The Latin and German "Etymachia": Textual History, Edition, Commentary*, ed. Nigel Harris, Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen 102 (Tübingen, 1994), 110 (lines 36–38).

⁷⁵ *In campo mundi*, lines 5–6: "Fert coronatum leonem in clipeo, quia in superbo est omnis arrogancie fortitudo," ed. Nigel Harris and Richard Newhauser, "Visuality and Moral Culture in the Late Middle Ages: The Emblematic Conflictus and Its Literary Representatives," in *In the Garden of Evil: The Vices and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Newhauser, Papers in Mediaeval Studies 18 (Toronto, 2005), 234–76, at 265.

⁷⁶ See Heinrich von Vriemar, *Sermones de sanctis* (Hagenau, 1513), no. 30; Joannes, *Summa de exemplis* (n. 24 above), 5.93 (fol.131r–b); Eustache Deschamps, "Ballade 183," in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Gaston Reynaud and Marquis de Queux de Sainte-Hilaire (Paris, 1878–1903), 1:69 and 319; (Ps.) Johannes Veghe, "*Wyngaerden der sele*": *Eine aszetisch-mystische Schrift aus dem 15. Jahrhundert*, ed. Heinrich Rademacher (Münster, 1940), 9 (line 3); *Pe desputisoun bitwen Phe bodi and Pe soule*, ed. Wilhelm Linow and Hermann Varnhagen (Amsterdam, 1970), lines 18–23; William Langland, *Piers Plowman (B-Text)* 13.302 and 15.204, in "*Piers Plowman*:" *A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C, and Z Versions*, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (Kalamazoo, MI, 2011), 1:533 and 582; and Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Rome, 1603), 12 ("ambitione," the lion "dimostra che l'Ambitione non è mai senza superbia"). See also the examples listed by Vincent-Cassy, "Les animaux et les péchés capitaux," 129–31.

“hellischer lewe” is also associated with pride; and, albeit in characteristically simple terms, he makes more explicit than most the intrinsic link between pride and the devil:

The first property of the lion is that he is strong . . . The lion’s strength is in his tail, that is the last part of him; and the devil employs all his strength and art at a person’s end . . . The lion is strong, and the devil is stronger than all people on this earth. There is no power . . . that can be compared to his. He fears no-one, and he is king over all the sons of pride. It is pride that drove him out of heaven. That is why he is called the king of pride.⁷⁷

Elsewhere, the lion was occasionally accused of gluttony, for example by the fourteenth-century Dominican Jean Gobi, or of avarice, as in the *Fasciculus morum*.⁷⁸ In a sense these two sins of rapacious acquisitiveness come together in the fable tradition of the “Lion’s Share,” which was notably popular in the later Middle Ages.⁷⁹ For her part, the lioness came to be associated with lust — in consequence of the earlier medieval notion of her adultery with the so-called pard having resulted in the emergence of a separate “bastard” species, the leopard.⁸⁰ After pride, the sin to which the lion was most frequently compared was, however, wrath. There is some evidence to suggest that this was initially an English tradition. Already in the early thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse*, which was, according to Cate Gunn, “the first work in English to portray the sins as animals,” there are references to the lion, as well as to the wolf and the unicorn, as symbols of wrath — though the text also engages in a substantial moralization of the lion and its whelps as representatives of pride.⁸¹ Later in the same century, Roger Bacon associates the lion with wrath in his *Opus maius*.⁸² Some two centuries on, Spenser’s figure of wrath appears in bloodstained clothes,

⁷⁷ Geiler, *Brösamlin*, ed. Pauli (n. 38 above), fol. 58v: “Die erst eigentschafft des Leuwen ist, das er starck [ist] . . . Der Lew hat sein krafft in dem wadel, das ist das letst an ym, vnn der tüffel am end des menschen brucht er alle seine sterckin vnd künst . . . Der Lew ist starck, vnd der tüffel ist stercker dann alle menschen vff disem erdtreich seind. Es ist kein gewalt . . . der im gleichet mag werden. Er entsizet niemans, er ist ein künig vber alle sün der hoffart. Hoffart hat in verstossen vß dem himmel. Darumb würt er genant ein künig der hoffart.”

⁷⁸ Gobi is cited in Marie Anne Polo de Beaulieu, “Du bon usage de l’animal dans les recueils médiévaux d’exempla,” in *L’Animal exemplaire au Moyen Âge (V^e–XV^e siècles)*, ed. eadem and Jacques Berlioz (Rennes, 1999), 147–71, at 159. The reference to avarice is in *Fasciculus morum*, ed. Wenzel (n. 24 above), 375: the sin has “the mouth of a lion.”

⁷⁹ For full details, see Dicke and Grubmüller, *Die Fabeln des Mittelalters* (n. 23 above), no. 401.

⁸⁰ See, for example, Berchorius, *Reductorium* 10.58 (n. 24 above), 406b–407a.

⁸¹ *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Robert Hasenfranz (Kalamazoo, MI, 2000), 3.29 and 4.207–58. The quotation is from Cate Gunn, *Ancrene Wisse: From Pastoral Literature to Vernacular Spirituality* (Cardiff, 2008), 123.

⁸² See Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing, MI, 1952), 49 and 404.

with a flaming weapon, and riding on a lion “loth to be led.”⁸³ In the early modern period, indeed, perhaps informed by an increasing wish for allegorical interpretations to reflect a certain scientific verisimilitude, *ira* seems to have taken over from *superbia* as the sin to which the lion was most often compared. This was the case with Andrea Alciato (1550) and Julius Wilhelm Zinzgref (1619), who base their material on the idea, found in ancient authorities such as Pliny, that the angry lion worsens his mood by striking himself with his own tail.⁸⁴ Meanwhile when authors sought to revive the ancient concept of the four bodily humors, the lion sometimes did duty as an emblem of choler. Henry Peacham’s youthful choleric figure is accompanied by a “sterne ei’ed” lion, and Cesare Ripa’s by “l’iracondo leone;” Ripa also points out, though, that the lion has a “magnanimous and liberal nature,” and can become lavish in his generosity.⁸⁵

THE CLEMENT LION

Magnanimity and generosity were indeed the only virtues regularly associated with lions in the later Middle Ages. We have already seen Johannes Nider explicitly introducing these qualities into his allegory of the lion of St. Mark. More often, however, as in Ulrich von Lilienfeld’s *Concordantiae caritatis* (1351), such interpretations remained firmly rooted in the ancient notion of the lion as Christ:

Jacobus and Solinus say that the lion shares his food liberally with the other animals. Thus the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Christ, in his Last Supper most liberally shared not only his food, that is, the most generous infusions of his grace, but, still more, the food of his own most holy body and the sweetest tastes of his blood, with the other animals — that is, first of all with the apostles and thereafter with all the faithful.⁸⁶

Meanwhile, in Johannes Rothe’s *Lob der Keuschheit* (ca. 1380), a chaste lion is used as a symbol of “medeliden” (mercy or compassion), in that he takes pity on a dog who has been punished, but without letting the dog get too close to him. In the same way, chaste people should not scorn the unchaste, but equally should not

⁸³ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* 2.4.33, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London, 1977), lines 289–97.

⁸⁴ See Pliny, *Natural History*, 8.49, ed. Harris Rackham, Loeb Classical Library 353 (Cambridge, MA, 1940), 3:38. The Alciati and Zinzgref emblems are cited in *Emblemata*, 374.

⁸⁵ Henry Peacham, *Minerva Britanna* (London, 1612), 128; and Ripa, *Iconologia* (n. 76 above), 75: “Oltre di ciò metteusi questo animale per essere il Colerico simile à l’iracondo leone . . . Denota anco il leone esser il colerico di natura magnanima e liberale, anzi che passando li termini, diuine prodigo.”

⁸⁶ Ulrich, *Concordantiae caritatis* (n. 36 above), ed. Douteil, 1:148: “Leo cum ceteris animalibus liberaliter diuidit suas escas. Sic in cena sua leo de tribu Iuda Christus non solum suas escas, id est sue gracie infusiones largissimas, ymo verius sui sacratissimi et proprii corporis escas et sanguinis degustaciones suauissimas ceteris animalibus, id est primo apostolis et per consequens cunctis fidelibus liberalissime condisuit.”

have too much contact with them.⁸⁷ In this context the lion's merciful generosity is linked by Rothe to his kingly status, and comes very close to what in many early modern and other contexts was defined as clemency — that is to say, a compassionately mild and lenient attitude adopted by one in power toward one who merits punishment.

Certainly in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century emblem books, with their tendency to secularize and politicize earlier symbolic meanings and frequent indebtedness to royal courts and/or patrons, clemency was the virtue most often attached to the lion. This was true already, for example, of the first two authors of emblem books in French, Guillaume de La Perrière and Gilles Corrozet.⁸⁸ Their treatment of the theme recalls Johannes Rothe's in involving a dog. Corrozet's also features a griffin, who seeks to "tear the proud lion to pieces" after the latter has overcome the dog but decided against eating him.⁸⁹ La Perrière's lion, meanwhile, is strong ("fort") rather than proud, and, when confronted by a small dog, behaves like a "noble heart who does not use force against a bad, cowardly, and worthless person."⁹⁰ A similar later emblem by Petrus Isenburg is still more explicitly political, and not merely because it appears in a volume entitled *Emblemata politica*. Rather, the *subscriptio* of Isenburg's emblem "Parcere subjectis" ends with the words "great lords do not wish to harm the obedience of those they have defeated."⁹¹ The lion is clearly being politicized, but also restored to his earlier status as the ultimate high-medieval animal symbol of kings and rulers.

Indeed, in an age of increasingly absolutist royal power, the "lion king" came into his own if anything even more than he had in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Of course other medieval meanings also survived: some emblems still feature a leonine Christ; the lioness remains lecherous; the male lion, as in Machaut's *Dit*, can also still be dominated by Amor; and he has not lost his

⁸⁷ Johannes Rothe, *Das Lob der Keuschheit*, ed. Hans Neumann, Deutsche Texte des Mittelalters 38 (Berlin, 1934), lines 5506–18. This story also is based loosely on Pliny, *Natural History*, 8.48, ed. Rackham, 3:36 and 3:38.

⁸⁸ Guillaume de La Perrière, *Le Théâtre des bons engins* (Paris, 1539); and Gilles Corrozet, *Hecatographie* (Paris, 1540).

⁸⁹ Corrozet, *Hecatographie*, M.vb: "Le Chien est du Lyon vaincu, / Qui ne le veult pas deuorer: / Le Griffon cruel et becqu / Veult le fier Lyon deschirer," reproduced in *Emblemata*, 380.

⁹⁰ Guillaume de La Perrière, *Morosophie* (Lyon, 1553), no. 27: "Le fort Lyon ne veult montrer sa force, / Ne sa rigueur, contre le petit chien: / Semblablement noble coeur ne s'efforce / Contre vn méchant, lasche qui ne vaut rien," reproduced in *Emblemata*, 380–81.

⁹¹ Petrus Isenburg, *Emblemata politica* (Nuremberg, 1617), no. 22: "Der Vberwundnen grosse Herrn / Ghorsam zu schaden nicht begehren." Other examples of the lion representing clemency in emblem books — albeit to a man rather than a dog — include those by Pierre Cousteau (1555) and Julius Wilhelm Zinckgraf (1619), reproduced in *Emblemata*, 378–79 and 379–80, respectively.

bizarre age-old fear of cockerels.⁹² Nevertheless these meanings do not seem materially to have affected the new/old regnant trend. The lion, now seen predominantly *ad bonam partem* also in a moral sense, possessed the same salient virtues as an excellent early modern prince — courage, strength of body and mind, ferocity where appropriate, even the ability to deal sagely with flatterers (emblematisers such as Junius and Camerarius recycled in this context the old Plinian idea of the lion curing himself of illness by devouring an ape).⁹³ Authors recognized that the lion prince sometimes required the assistance, or inspiration, of other species: Guillaume de La Perrière, perhaps showing a knowledge of Machiavelli, stated that a prince needed to be both lion and fox. Meanwhile Sebastián de Covarrubias's *Emblemas morales* contain a fascinating picture of a lion with mane and crown, but an ox's body, standing with his right front paw on a globe adjacent to the banner "Imperat vt serviat" (he commands, that he might serve). The *subscriptio* tells us that "the king is in part a lion, able to instill great fear and before whom the whole world trembles, but from the hips down he is an ox, made for the yoke and born to labor."⁹⁴

In general, though, the lion rules alone; he does this ideally as a pious monarch, but emphatically as a secular one. A particularly good example of the mixture of continuity and change we have been discussing throughout is Zinzgref's emblem "Parte tamen vigilat." This takes the canonical *Physiologus* description of the lion sleeping with his eyes open, but applies it not to Christ, but to a secular "king, prince and lord," who "has a care for his subjects: his heart is alert, even if he sleeps a natural sleep."⁹⁵ For many based, like Zinzgref, in the vulnerably Calvinist Palatinate soon after the start of the Thirty Years War and only three years

⁹² The lion as Christ: Nikolaus Reusner, *Aureolorum emblematum liber singularis* (Strasbourg, 1587), 1:40, reproduced in *Emblemata*, 390; and Daniel Cramer, *Emblemata sacra* (Frankfurt, 1624), 20–21. The lecherous lioness: Alciati, *Emblematum liber* (Augsburg, 1531), D3 and B3b, reproduced in *Emblemata*, 374–75. The amorous lion: Alciati, *Emblematum liber*, A4b; and Jacob Cats, *Proteus* (Rotterdam, 1527), 10.1, both reproduced in *Emblemata*, 383–86. See also Daniel Heinsius, *Emblemata amatoria* (Amsterdam, 1608), no. 1. The lion and cockerels: Reusner, *Emblematum Liber*, 2.9, reproduced in *Emblemata*, 382. See also Johannes Hambroer, "Der Hahn als Löwenschreck im Mittelalter," *Zeitschrift für Religion und Geistesgeschichte* 18 (1966): 237–54.

⁹³ Courage: La Perrière, *Le Théâtre*, nos. 22 and 60, reproduced in *Emblemata*, 375–76 and 392. Strength: Ripa, *Iconologia* (n. 76 above), 165 ("Fortezza"), 426 ("Ragione di stato"), and 508 ("Virtù dell' animo e del corpo"). Ferocity: La Perrière, *Le Théâtre*, no. 3; and Julius Wilhelm Zinzgref, *Emblemata* (Frankfurt, 1619), no. 5, reproduced in *Emblemata*, 377–78 and 372, respectively. For examples of the lion swallowing an ape as a king disposes of flatterers, see *Emblemata*, 395–96.

⁹⁴ La Perrière, *Le Théâtre*, no. 22, reproduced in *Emblemata*, 392; and Sebastián de Covarrubias, *Emblemas morales* (Madrid, 1610), 1:84.

⁹⁵ Zinzgref, *Emblemata*, no. 1, reproduced in *Emblemata*, 400: "Ein König / Fürst vnd Herr sorg für die Vnderthanen tregt / Sein Hertz wacht / ob er schon den natürlichen Schlaff nimbt an."

before the siege of Heidelberg, a strong, watchful human protector no doubt seemed an even more urgent necessity than a divine one.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of our brief history of the lion we noted that its development in medieval culture — and indeed before and after it — was characterized by a potent mixture of continuity and discontinuity; and the examples we have surveyed very much confirm this. The lion nearly always represents something big, something important; and its meanings are often polarized, a phenomenon that can be traced back at least as far as the New Testament. Certainly, uses of the lion to mean, say, Christ, the devil, or rulers could easily be found in each of the last twenty centuries. Such predictable constants might perhaps be thought of as the ground bass of lion symbolism. Alongside and sometimes paradoxically within this bass, however, we can also observe a sequence of variations that become from time to time very prominent, before fading away again — albeit seldom to the point of complete inaudibility.

Over the course of our discussion we identified some five prominent variations, or regnant fashions, which can be attached with reasonable accuracy to particular historical periods. For pre-Christian societies, the lion seems to have constituted above all a dangerous existential threat. The early Christian centuries and early Middle Ages focused squarely on the lion as Christ, the devil, and to a lesser extent St. Mark. The high Middle Ages forged a particularly close bond between the lion and the chivalric world of the lay aristocracy. Starting already in the thirteenth century but continuing at least into the early sixteenth, the lion then took on the function of embodying certain sins, particularly pride and wrath, as part of those centuries' concerted attempts to exhort laypeople to more moral and more Christian behavior. Finally, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a renewed tendency to interpret the lion *ad bonam partem*, especially in attempts to highlight the important royal (and of course Christian) virtue of clemency.

The brush strokes of the foregoing paragraph are of course dangerously broad. Over-emphasizing such discontinuities or attaching them too inflexibly to particular time periods would result in a dangerously simplistic, and indeed distorted image of the medieval lion: we would be in danger of reducing it again, to use Deirdre Jackson's witty phrase, to the "King of Clichés."⁹⁶ The whole premise of this essay has been, however, that — as long as necessary caveats are heeded and appropriate categories created — it is possible to write a systematic account of the lion's role in medieval culture. Systematic, but of course never

⁹⁶ Jackson, *Lion* (n. 2 above), 7.

complete or free from subjective interpretation: literary lions, like their real-life counterparts, “exhibit a remarkably wide range of behaviours,” resist typecasting, and must always retain an element of feline inscrutability and enigmatic mystery.⁹⁷

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⁹⁷ Jackson, *Lion* (n. 2 above), 23.