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QUEER/POSTHUMAN IN MARIE DE FRANCE'S ELIDUC: SANCTUAIRES À RÉPIT, FEMALE COUPLES, AND HUMAN/ANIMAL/BARE LIFE

In Marie de France's *Eliduc*, the heroine Guildeluëc witnesses the actions of two female *musteiles* (weasels). Imitating them, she is able to resurrect her (seemingly dead) female rival, Guilliadun, using a plant pharmacon. This recalls the tradition of bringing children back to life, tied to *sanctuaires à répit,* or respite shrines. Although I did not find the specific Christian form of this tradition attested as early as Marie de France, or in her geographical province, it seems to have existed in other forms since pre-Roman times in throughout the East of today's France, from Flanders to Provence and Savoie, from Auvergne to Alsace. First, I will show how the tradition of *sanctuaires à répit* casts light on *Eliduc,* a lai whose at times elliptic narrative betrays a palimpsest-like composition or abbreviation of a more ample *récit*. Second, I will touch on the controversy concerning the two *musteiles,* whose gender (to my surprise) can be a point of contention central to the interpretations of the *lai*. At a recent conference, the 9th Annual Symposium of the International Medieval Society on "Human/Animal" (Paris, 28–30 June, 2012), where I presented an earlier version of this essay, some members of the audience objected to the idea that the two *musteiles* constitute a female couple – a rather obvious conclusion in my mind, given that they are designated as *compagnes,* but for some, a troubling prospect indeed. Finally, and importantly, as Jane Gilbert suggested at that meeting, we should ask how the form of the *lai* aids, inflects and informs meanings particular to women, as opposed to other genres.[1)] While I do not directly address this question, it constitutes the necessary end point of lines of my inquiry, from the devotion to the Virgin to lesbian animal species to female solidarity, and from Celtic to Roman to Christian rites of mourning.

1. SANCTUAIRES À RÉPIT

The hero, Eliduc, becomes estranged from his *seigneur* and is forced to leave his wife Guildeluëc and seek exile in England. He arrives at Totness, and heroically helps a local king. Guilliadun, the daughter of Eliduc's new *seigneur,* falls in love with him and he reciprocates. Eliduc's first seigneur recalls him in need, and Eliduc decides to come to his defense and later return to Totness and abduct Guilliadun, his lover. Eliduc successfully regains the kingdom's peace and his king's favor, but

1) Jane Gilbert discusses the question of gender and genre throughout her work, esp. Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature (2011) and other works (see Bibliography).

the abduction is complicated by a storm during the crossing. The boat's skipper suggests the storm is a punishment for Eliduc's infidelity and wants to sacrifice Guilliadun to calm the seas. This is how Guilliadun first learns that Eliduc is married, and the shock causes her to fall into a death-like sleep. Eliduc kills the skipper, steers safely to port, and leaves Guilliadun in a sylvan chapel that he frequents. His wife Guildeluëc, who has some suspicions but never insists on knowing the truth (unlike the bad wife in *Bisclavret*), discovers the cause of Eliduc's distress when she follows him. Thanks to the *musteiles,* she discovers a cure that awakens the maiden. The wife retires to a convent she founds with Eliduc's property, while Eliduc marries the maiden. Eventually the two lovers follow the first wife's example: Eliduc becomes a monk and places his second wife in the care of the first.

The resurrection motif participates in the folkloric tradition *(la Belle au bois dormant,* Sleeping Beauty, Snow White) as well as in a vibrant literary tradition of Mediterranean novel of late Antiquity.[2)] Among fictional antecedents where resurrection plays an important role, perhaps the most popular are the *Clementine Recognitions* (over 250 copies in Latin and numerous vernacular variants and correlates) and *Apollonius of Tyre*.[3)] Thus, bringing the maiden back to life in *Eliduc* can be related to a vast literary tradition that includes Hellenistic Mediterranean novel and Burgundian dynastic legend *(Belle Hélène de Constantinople),* hagiography and folklore. The analogue that allows me most forcefully to experience the imaginary space of *Eliduc* is the haunting Anglo-Saxon lament "Wulf and Eadwacer," inserted in the Exeter book between *Deor* and the *Riddles*. The situation of the characters in "Wulf" echoes *Eliduc:* "Wolf is on an island, I on another" – a similarity that did not escape scholars' notice (Schofield 1902). As William Henry Schofield points out, the situation of Eliduc is "as old as Apollodorus, Hyginus and Pliny. Reinhold Köbler … cites nearly thirty examples," and one Scandinavian analogue, the story of Sigmund and Sinfjotli, also includes the weasel episode/resurrection (Schofield 1902: 282–3). Schofield also cites a passage from *Topographica Hibernica (Topography of Ireland,* ca. 1188; I, 27) of Gerald of Wales (ca. 1146–1223; born Gerald de Barri, he claimed descent from "the Princes of Wales and the Barons of the marches," i.e., Welsh and Norman, and was active at the court of Henry II; his passage on werewolves constitutes another analogue to Marie's work). Gerald relates how weasels bring the dead back to life with the help of plants, a scene identical to *Eliduc* – down

2) For other narrative traditions connected to Eliduc, such as Griselidis and "the man with two wives," see John E. Matzke, who discusses and provides references to numerous analogues, including the fifteenth-century prose Roman de Gillion de Trazegnies, Griselidis,Ile et Galeron by Gautier d'Arras, the Anglo-Norman Horn et Rimenhild, Bueve de Hantone and Tristan, Mainet (enfances part of Charlemagne cycle), among others; see also Ann W. Trindade. For folklore parallels, see Alfred Nutt. See also Sharon Kinoshita and Peggy McCracken, and Glyn S. Burgess.

3) Bowersock usefully distinguishes between resuscitation and resurrection and, correspondingly, between Scheintod (false or apparent death) and death proper. See also Elizabeth Archibald.

to the excessive cruelty of humans putting the little pups to death, without compassion due to all living creatures: [4]

"De mustelis, earumque naturis": Item fetus haec teneros, laesione quacunque mortificatos, crocei cujusdam floris beneficio, refocillare solet et vitae restituere. Ut enim perhibent qui viderunt, et catellos peiculi istius causa morti dederunt, primo laesurae, postmodum ori et naribus quasi inspirando, ceterisque per ordinem corpusculi fenestris omnibus allatum ore florem apponit. Et sic demum tam floris illius quam oris spiraculo, vel potius herbae virtuosissimae tactu, qui penitus exspirasse videbantur, aliquo forte vitae vestigio adhuc manente licet occulto, respirare compellit.

[Chap. 27] "About weasels and their nature": also tender young ones that have been killed by some wound, this one [haec] is accustomed to revive and restore to life, thanks to a certain saffron [crocus] flower. As they say who have witnessed it, and who have put to death little pups for the sake of this experiment [istius causa], [the weasel] applies the flower, brought in his mouth, first to the wound, then to the mouth and nose as if breathing in, next in order to all the other windows of the little body. So at length, by the breath [spiraculo] of that flower as much as of the mouth, or perhaps by the touch of the most powerful plant, s/he [the weasel] forces to breathe those who seemed to have expired inwardly, yet perhaps with some trace of life still remaining, although hidden. (Gerald of Wales, 1867, 60–61) [5]

Gerard's description of weasels' redemptive powers is not isolated. Another analogue comes from Alexander Neckham (1157-1217, theology instructor at Oxford). In De naturis rerum (ca. 1190), Neckham praises the weasel for her knowledge of herbal remedies "taught by nature," since the furry physician "neither studied in Salerno, nor enrolled in the Montpellier school." [6] Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) also records a variant of the story: she credits the weasel's urine and breath for rendering the herb so potent as to restore life. [7] Bartholomeus Anglicus (ca. 1203–1272) attributes to Pliny the belief that the weasel cures or resurrects (*suscitat*) with an herb its young, be they hurt or dead. [8] Brunetto Latini's (ca. 1220–1294) *Livre du trésor* (1260–66?) and Albertus Magnus (1193/1206–1280) also subscribe to that tradition (Moulinier 228). [9] Keep in mind Gerald's image of a saffron (flame-like red and yellow) flower that the weasel touches to the mouth, compelling the dead pup to breathe, as we focus on another analogue to the resurrection scene from *Eliduc: sanctuaires à répit,* where infants were returned to life, allowing the administration of baptism. As

4) The belief is also represented in Pierre de Beauvais's picard Bestiaire (13th c.). For a convenient summary on belette in the bestiary tradition, see Zucker 2004: 150-155, and Moulinier 1995: 228–30.

5) My grateful thanks to Steve Nimis for deciphering this paragraph and fixing my mistakes; any shortcomings are mine. Gerald of Wales, 1867: 60–61, qtd. Schofield 1902: 283 n2.

6) Alexander Neckham, De naturis rerum libri 2, chap. 123, "De mustela," p. 201: "Virtutem herbarum novit, natura docente, etso nec Salerni in medicina studuerit, nbec apud Montem Pessulanum in scholis militaverit," qtd. Moulinier 1995: 229 n131.

7) Hildegard von Bingen 2002 (vol. 2): 231–2, qtd. Moulinier 1995: 229 n132.

8) "Filios suos casu aliquo in latibulo laesos vel mortuos quadam herba sanat, imo, ut dicitur, suscitat ut dicit Plinius," qtd. Moulinier 1995: 228 n127: Bartholomeus Anglicus, De geminis rerum coelestium et inferarum proprietatibus (Frankfurt, 1601), 1093.

9) Albertus Magnus, De Animalibus 21:11, qtd. Moulinier 1995: 229 n129.

archeological record shows, this practice connects Christian ritual with pagan and prehistoric infant burial sites. Thus, we witness a complex travelling of a function across culture while anchored to a specific regional site. At the same time, we face a fascinating identity between animal and human worlds in the imagining of life at the most basic level, what Aristotle may have called *bios* and *zoon,* and Giorgio Agamben (1998) has translated as "bare life," with the weighty consequences that Agamben attributed to that distinction between dignified life and bare life, especially as it applies to the right to kill, but also, by corollary, to the domain of human rights. Bare life is stripped of human rights. If we follow Jacques Rancière's concept of *dissensus* (2004), democracy is a process through which the definition of human rights is being extended over time to include groups and individuals that previously were not comprised in it or not fully comprised. To become a citizen is to become the subject of human rights. Christian version of this distinction was, among others, the special status accorded to humans, the only form of earthly life subject to promise of eternal life, based in ethical choices they made during their life, which functioned as an extended moral test or probation. Given that only baptized humans went to Heaven, and that only live humans could be baptized, this system encouraged the survival of *sanctuaires à répit* as a way to reconcile theology with the situation of parents whose babies died before baptism.

The source of French *respit* is Latin *respicio, respectus* (refuge, consideration; to look back, round, gaze about). English "respit" is a postponement of death or legal sentence. My first encounter with the Church tradition of *répit* was an encounter with a singular and arresting place near the wealthy town of Beaune in Burgundy. Located on an isolated small promontory (*tertre*) by the Roman road between Beaune and Dijon, the chapel of Notre-Dame du Chemin in Ladoix-Serrigny includes a structure financed by Philip the Good in 1434, and parts of an eleventh century chapel renovated in the twelfth century.[10)] It was originally a pagan site, as attested by a Celtic fountain with a square basin. As a general rule, sanctuaries associated with therapeutic springs are prevalent among those using pre-Christian sites, testifying to an intensely resistant rural ecology and topography of ritual (Martin 2002: 466). This region was relatively densely settled since Neanderthal times, and in Roman times was a principal corn-exporting and winemaking region. Merovingians left important marks here (as attested by Gregory of Tours' chronicles, among others), and later

10) Jérôme Mercier and Christian Sapin, "La chapelle Notre-Dame du Chemin à Ladoix-Serrigny (Côte d'Or)," BUCEMA: Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales, Auxerre 12: 2008, http://cem.revues.org/6042.

centuries produced some of the most significant Romanesque and Gothic architectural treasures in Europe. At the chapel of Notre-Dame du Chemin, the duchesses of Burgundy prayed for childbirth and celebrated their *rélevailles*. It was the most popular procession destination from Beaune, an easy distance from the town; a 1512 account speaks of regular processions to the site, sometimes counting as many as 3000 participants. The splendid architectural structure is unlike rural parish churches in the villages of the region, although there exist comparable examples of ducal rural foundations. Notre-Dame du Chemin is a distinctly ducal project carried out by high-end stone-cutters who executed with precision the *pierre de taille* design in the monumental ducal style of the 1430s, while a dynastic crisis loomed large. If, by 1435, Philip the Good adopted a version of the imperial title, Great Duke of the West *(Grand Duc de l'Occident),* in 1434, the dynasty's future was uncertain.

Notre-Dame du Chemin is one of some 260 *sanctuaires à répit* in France, particularly in the Northeast, spreading from Burgundy to Savoy, according to Jacques Gélis.[11] A still-born child would be taken there, placed on an altar, and communal prayer would return him or her to life long enough to be baptized (the signs of life included motion, heightened color, movement of a feather placed on the child's lips). Thus, the souls of the children could continue life in Paradise, where the parents could reunite with them, not in limbo where dwelled innocent but un-baptized souls. The child could be buried in the cemetery attached to the church, as at Notre-Dame du Chemin, or elsewhere. Gélis shows that the custom is documented from the end of the thirteenth century to the 1970s, in witness accounts testifying to the miracles. The numbers are significant, in some locations nearing fifty per year. The ritual is thus attested later than the original text of *Eliduc* (1160–70?), but contemporary with the manuscript tradition of Marie de France's *Lais*. *Eliduc* appears in only one of five manuscripts of the *Lais,* BL Harley 978. This manuscript is a trilingual miscellany (Latin, English, French) and also the only witness of the Prologue to the *Lais*. It includes thirty other works apart from the *Fables* and *Lais,* which are copied in a good hand (unlike some other fragments in that volume). This mid-thirteenth century panoply also includes medical texts, songs with musical notation – the famous "Summer is icumen in" – and Goliardic verse, among others.[12]

Protestantism and its emphasis on grace, independent of parental intervention, lowered the incidence of the practice. Jansenism-inspired reformation in France was also hostile to the

11) On sanctuaires à répit, see Jacques Gélis. According to Gélis, sanctuaries à répit may be less common elsewhere; he speaks of "dozens" in Northern Italy, Switzerland, Austria, etc.

custom. It survived, nonetheless, the prohibitive edict of the Council of Langres in 1452 and the papal decree of 1729 that followed the too-numerous *répit* miracles in the Premonstrensian monastery of Ursberg, in Germany. Decrees are not always carried out in the provinces, and the rise of the cult of the Virgin Mary in the nineteenth century resulted in a revival of the tradition. If the *répit* miracles were a way to access divine intervention, they were used in turn to document its presence in a specific site, and prove the importance of the sanctuary. The Premonstrensians of Ursberg and other sites, as stable institutions throughout history, sustained and were sustained by that tradition.

In order to imagine the importance of that rite in women's lives, we can reflect on the conditions that prompted the 1434 foundation of the chapel at Notre-Dame du Chemin. Isabella of Portugal was thirty-three when she became Philip the Good's third wife in 1430. Philip was thirty-seven and had some eighteen illegitimate children, but no successor. Three sons were born to Isabella in three years, but only one was alive in 1434: Antoine (1430–32), Joseph (1432), and the future Charles the Bold, born in 1433. We can speculate that in the 1434 foundation of Notre-Dame-du Chemin, following Isabella's ceremony of *relevailles,* parallel dimensions intertwine, forming an uneasy relation between politics and maternity, men and women, bare life and spiritual life, hope and refined architectural style, claims of family and rites of faith. Notre-Dame du Chemin is a contact node between irreconcilable, even mutually destructive economies: ducal vs. maternal, political vs. biological. The donation can be even imagined as precisely the measure of their antagonism: the absurd situation where a father of eighteen children does not have an heir. The donation seeks divine intervention and conciliates the supernatural. Just as the *Psalter* of Christine de Markyate or the contemporary burgundian *Recueils ascétiques* filled with lives of the Merovingian Desert Mothers, Notre-Dame du Chemin marks the coexistence of irreconcilable networks of family and piety that women embodied and negotiated.

It has been suggested that the pagan site at Notre-Dame du Chemin was connected to fertility rites. Thus, the site, claimed by some to be part of the Santiago de Compostela road (even if that were not true, being the most important procession destination from Beaune would ensure the site's survival), and within sight of the Roman road, would have functioned continuously despite staggering ideological and institutional changes. The function and the content are more stable than most institutions', a stability we may

12) Recent studies of BL Harley 978 include Andrew Taylor's codicological study (Taylor 2002: 76–136) and Rupert T. Pickens.

attribute to its particular connection to childbearing. As we see in other examples from Merovingian period, if the dominant church could not fight pagan or Arian practices, it adopted them as its own. Guy Halsall pointed out to me an example from nearby Dijon, where Gregory of Langres, the uncle of Gregory of Tours, tries to convince the local population that the sarcophagus they venerate may contain a demon or a pagan saint. He then has a dream vision where St. Bénigne appears to him and identifies himself as the proprietor of the sarcophagus, and recounts the circumstances of his martyrdom. Gregory of Langres then holds an *invention* ceremony and supervises the cult of Saint Bénigne. Similarly, the continuous functioning of Notre-Dame du Chemin *converts* (in the most literal sense) a pagan to a Christian rite. This continuity is also rooted in topography, an a-historical or trans-historical functional element: the spring, a necessary depository of offerings in the pagan context. Lastly, stability is warranted by what is unchanging in the biological and maternal "machines": women as childbearers. Like the text of *Eliduc,* a hellenistic/Celtic/Norman palimpsest, Notre-Dame-du Chemin is shot through by planes of influences and intentions, sometimes mutually exclusive: a Burgundian ducal foundation sustained by a common purpose (pregnancy) that continues a basic function from the prehistoric to the Gallo-Roman period, to the fifteenth century.

2. MUSTEILES An animal and a human are brought back to life in the same ways in *Eliduc,* where two *musteiles* (Old French) or *belettes* (Modern French: weasels) show the heroine how to resurrect her rival using a plant *pharmacon,* a beautiful bright red (*vermeil*) flower placed in mouth or lips of the dead.

Senseless and abrupt violence is a common feature of the *Lais,* where brutal episodes often happen with little introduction. Secondary characters meet similarly brutal ends, whether they are animals or men (weasel and skipper in *Eliduc,* nightingale in *Laüstic* and falcon in *Yonec*), and primary figures share life principles with animals (the resurrection of the damsel and the weasel). While this permeability between animal and human life and resurrection is typical of the folkloric use of the "water/flower of life" motif, current interest in defining "human" via the limits of "animal" made me ask what this episode tells us about the concept of human and animal, and the practical understanding of human life *vs*. bare life.[13)] The distinction between the two, clear to Aristotle, is blurred here. Because the *musteile* in *Eliduc* manifests grief at

the death of her companion (*semblant faiseit de doel mener,* s/he seemed to lament, 1044), she seems human or even super-human, considering that she can also return her companion to life (*en es l'ure fu revescue,* in little time she revived, 1053).[14] Guildeluëc knows, without there being any indication of the source of that knowledge, that this will work for the maiden as well: *dedenz la buche a la pucele/meteit la flur ki tant fu bele/un petitet i demura,/cele revint e suspira* (in the maiden's mouth/[she] put the flower that was so pretty/stayed there a bit/she came to, and sighed, 1061–1064).

Lack of distinction between bare life and sacred life can be life-giving (the *musteile* and the maiden), but it can also have a reverse effect. The skipper asks to throw Guilliadun overboard to save the lives of the others from the storm, in which he sees as a punishment for Eliduc's bringing Guilliadun along, "against God and the law" (*cuntre Deu e cuntre la lei,* 837). He does not want to throw Eliduc out: it's the maiden who is supernumerary. Eliduc is nearly mad with rage (*a poi de l'ire ne mesprist,* 842). "If he could leave his lover, he would make him pay dear" (845); when she falls as if dead, he does: he murders the skipper:

quidot pur veir qu'ele fust morte./Mult fet grant doel. Sus est levez,/vers l'eschipre en est tost alez./De l'avirun si l'a feru/qu'il l'abati tut estendu./Par le pié l'en a jeté fors;/les undes en portent le cors. (858–864)

He thinks she's really dead. He is greatly afflicted. He rises, runs up to the skipper, strikes him with the oar so that he fell him all flat, and throws him out by his feet. The waves take his body away.

There is no commentary on the inhumanity of this killing, but rather, shockingly for me, the text compliments Eliduc's sailing skills:

puis qu'il l'ot lancie en la mer/a l'estiere vait governer./Tant guverna et la nef e tint/le hafne prist, a terrre vint. Quant il furent bien arrivé ... (865–9)

Since he threw him in the sea, he went back to steer. He steered and kept the course so that they got to harbor and landed. When they properly arrived ...

The absence of ethical commentary may be an argument that the *Lai* is a rewriting of a more expansive source. It can also belong to the convention that dictates the lover is passionate, almost mad with rage at any danger to the beloved, and instantly annihilates her foes. Similar to the killing of the skipper, the killing of the lady weasel is sudden and brutal. It receives a glancing

13) For instance, Karl Steel 2011, and postmedieval 2:1 (2011).

14) En es l'ure is given as a synonym of en poi d'ore, in a little time, in AFW (Tobler, 1219, under ore).

justification (a reaction to the dead maiden's body being defiled by the rodent running accross it):

Une musteile vint curant,/de suz l'alter esteit eissue;/e li vadlez l'aveit ferue/pur ceo que sur le corps passa/d'un bastun qu'il tint la tua./En mi l'aire l'aveit getee. (1032–7)

A musteile came running, she came from under the altar, and the servant hit her because she passed over the body, with a stick he held, and killed her. He threw her in the middle of the court.

To add insult to injury, he hits her again pretty hard after she comes back from the dead:

Ad vadlet crie: retien la!/getez, frans huem! mar s'en ira!/E il geta, si la feri/que la florete li cheï. (1055–8)

[the lady] cries to the servant: 'catch her!/ Throw, gentle man! Pity if she] runs away!/and he threw, and hit her so that/he made her drop her little flower.

Although they are clearly differentiated in terms of medieval theology and cognitive categories, animals and humans share essential properties in *Eliduc* and other *Lais*. This is consistent with the difference between Latin and vernacular texts: while well known Latin texts could elicit doctrinal scrutiny (witness the 1277 Paris condemnation of Andreas Capellanus's *De amore*), vernacular texts were almost expected to be unorthodox.

Even in a collection of articles that examines stereotypical categories of gender, the excellent *Gender Transgressions: Crossing the Normative Barrier in French Literature,* the two *musteiles* are mistakenly described as the 'male weasel' and the 'female weasel'.[15] This is not accurate (there is no male weasel in the original; they are both female: *une musteile,* 1032, and *sa cumpaine,* 1039). The author says, "my use of gender here reflects French," probably referring to the modern French translation that attributes a heterosexual symmetry to the weasel couple. However, even given that incorrect reading, the author adds: "we are not sure whether the male weasel is Eliduc or Guildeluëc," and continues: "The complexity of structural relationships within the triangle allows Marie to blur gender identities in the economy of desire," and "spatial distribution at the end of the *lai* leaves the reader with the image of two reunited sisters … From this perspective, the ultimate goal of the triangle is to secure the relationship between Guildeluëc and Guilliadun" (174). It is obvious to most readers that the musteiles episode is crucial; but what does it signify? Numerous readers see the weasels and the women as couples. Thus, Fabienne Pomel: "Does Marie de

France evoke here a possible love between women? (1995:519). And, Rick Chamberlain: "The weasels' sudden intrusion toward the end of an otherwise un-marvelous story of a knight torn between two women precipitates the unexpected conclusion in which the three characters in this love triangle do not die tragically, but live happily ever after in monastic life: the two women together, the knight off with the monks, and the weasels happily romping about the forest" (2002:53). As Chamberlain notes, "medieval association of weasels with uncleanliness and sexual perversion," i.e., homosexuality or oral sex (2002:54) is long-standing, ranging from the Leviticus to apocryphal *Epistle of Barnabas,* to Plutarch *(Isis and Osiris)* to Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 9.322) to the *Physiologus* (Chamberlain 2002: 56–7). However, as Chamberlain further notes, positive associations are also common in Marie's time: the weasel was able to "kill the basilisk and to cure itself or its young with herbs," clearly a tradition known to Marie, and as far as oral/aural conception goes, "after Marie's time, the *Ovidius Moralizatus* allegorizes the aforementioned episode in the *Metamorphoses* ... by aligning the weasel with the Virgin Mary, for whom the Word from God's mouth in her ear is the agent for the Incarnation" (Chamberlain 2002:57).

The Latin for *belette* (weasel), *mustela,* is close to *mus* (mouse). In thirteenth century England, the translations for *mustela* are *beler, mustele, mustoile* and *wesel* (Hunt 1991:108). Could medieval audience know (from Greek Babrius) that a mouse *(mus/mustela)* was transformed into a maiden and, when she was being married to a human, run off in the middle of a wedding to follow a mouse (king)? Could they know (from Phaedrus) the fables of mice and weasel (elderly weasel rolls itself in flour and successfully captures young mice, but the old mouse is wary), or weasel and man (weasel asks for pardon *in extremis* for its service to humanity, but man says the service was far from disinterested; this teaches us not to accept such claims of altruism unthinkingly), or bats and weasels (to escape the weasel the bat pretends to be a mouse, and then, a bird)?

Last but not least, what was the gender of these OF *musteiles?* An audience member at the conference mentioned above who was uncomfortable with the idea of female couples, suggested that the gender of the species, not individuals, is female in Old French; in other words, in Marie's world, *musteiles* were unisex. Why would a whole lesbian species be less shocking for my interlocutor than a lesbian couple within a species is another question

15) Gender Transgressions: Crossing the Normative Barrier in French Literature, ed. Karen J. Taylor (1998) is a pioneering and indispensable collection, even today. The article that mentions Eliduc is Nora Cottille-Foley 1998: 174.

that I will leave the reader to ponder. While such 'species gender' concept may work for ants, it is perhaps less likely to apply to mammals or domestic animals such as weasels/*musteiles,* whether considered pests like mice/mus, expected to catch mice, or trained to catch and deliver fish, as *musteiles* sometimes are. I think these weasels are girlfriends; they certainly care about each other; if they cannot, for some readers, configure a same-sex female couple (passionate or not), it's not for lack of trying on their part. Meanwhile, the nervousness concerning the putative conduct of the devoted *musteile* couple off-stage (are they acting in concord with Catholic doctrine of marriage?) adds a modern motivation to the perceived indistinction between these imagined animals and humans in the medieval text.

Animal and infant respite miracles exemplify indistinction between animal/bare life and human life. Against Aristotle and Agamben, these examples imply that such indistinction can be life-giving (though it can also be the reverse). In other words, in a posthuman world, the ground for human rights is not necessarily weakened. It seems that the regime of distinction brings forth fantasies *(Eliduc)* and strategies *(sanctuaires à répit)* of reassignment that bespeak a profound and practical need for indistinction between hierarchies of life.

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