

## Sound and Vision: Bruno Latour and the Languages of Philippe de Thaon's *Bestiaire*

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Le mot “signe” n’a pas de contraire auquel on puisse l’opposer—et surtout pas le mot “chose.” Si du monde aux mots, l’abîme paraît immense, d’une articulation à une autre articulation, ce n’est plus un abîme du tout. Le mot “chien” n’aboie peut-être pas, mais il ne faut que quelques heures d’entraînement pour que le cri de “Médor!” fasse venir à vos pieds cette chaude boule de poils que vous avez désignée de ce nom et qui s’est chargée peu à peu de réalité malgré l’abîme prétendu entre les mots et les choses. (Latour, *Enquête* 153)

The word “sign” has no contrary to which it can be opposed—least of all the word “thing.” If the chasm between the world and words seems immense, there is no chasm at all from one articulation to another. The word “dog” may not bark, perhaps, but it only takes a few hours of training before calling “Fido!” [“Médor!”] brings to your feet that warm, furry ball that you have designated by that name and that has gradually taken on reality, despite the supposed chasm between words and things.<sup>1</sup>

This passage from *Enquête sur les modes d’existence* wryly illustrates one of the principal arguments of Bruno Latour’s project about the presumed opposition between signifying language and the material world. Latour’s exposition of what he terms, after Étienne Souriau, “modes d’existence” presents such modes as a means of moving beyond the notional separation of signs, or words, from things. This separation, he argues, is one of the mainstays of a Modern way of thinking that also confuses objective knowledge of the material world as it is produced through chains of reference [REF] with what such knowledge comes to know (94–95; 132–33). On the one hand, this confusion results in the misguided notion that a transparent language of truth offering unmediated access to “reality” exists—a language notably associated with the sciences, which consequently appear invested with veracity and objectivity. On the other hand, forms of expression thought to provide less direct access to the material world, such as religion [REL] or art, which Latour classifies under fiction [FIC], are devalued as unreliable or even false (238–44;

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations from French and Latin are my own throughout the essay.

321–25). Latour’s modes of existence are intended to counteract this worldview, which he attributes to “the Moderns,” a shorthand for those who subscribe to the dualistic understandings of the world that characterize post-seventeenth-century Western industrial and scientific landscapes (*Enquête* 22; *Nous*). As furry Médor is called upon to demonstrate, the material world is not a separate sphere that preexists signification, against which the truth of words can be measured. Rather, the world is articulated (in the fullest sense of that term) in ways that include, but are not limited to, material and linguistic entities that produce reality and that therefore demand an alternative assessment of what constitutes truth and falsehood (*Enquête* 80–104).

Latour’s thinking about language in the *Enquête* is part of his broader reassessment of Modernity’s fixation on unmediated access to truth and of the implications of this fixation for the sociocultural groupings he calls “collectifs” (298). His attempt to replace a theory of correspondence between reality and representation with a theory of being as processual accompanies his development of the idea of actor-networks (ANT), where human and nonhuman actors take shape through their relations with one another (*Reassembling; Enquête* 40–58). In this context, existence is defined by agency rather than materiality, such that actor-networks potentially embrace entities of all descriptions—technological, fictional, human, and nonhuman—in a “flat ontology” where all of these entities borrow their capacity to act and to exist from their associations with others in the network (*Enquête* 52–53; *Reassembling* 70–78, 171–72; DeLanda 47; Maniglier 922–24; Miller 27–29, 55–58). In contrast to conventional sociological thinking, which opposes agency to structure and restricts it to human beings, Latour sees agency as independent of human intentionality and dispersed across all entities in the network: “Action is not done under the full control of consciousness; action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly

disentangled” (*Reassembling* 44). Rather than passively imitating a preexisting “reality,” human language has the same agency as other kinds of nonlinguistic utterance, all of which bring about existence by enabling the continuity of courses of action.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in Latour’s *Enquête*, language is neither distinguishable from material “reality,” nor the only means of representing it: it is just one way the world comes into being through the entanglements of different modes (237–60). Instead of persisting in the delusion that an objective window on the world exists, Latour proposes that the Moderns should reject the opposition between articulated language and inarticulate reality that underlies this misconception and attend to the multiple ways the world is translated into existence (*Enquête* 146–47).

This article explores how premodern ontologies connect world and words in nondualistic ways that corroborate these aspects of Latour’s thinking. My particular focus is on a major tradition of medieval Christian didacticism: bestiaries. As moralized works of natural history, bestiary texts combine what Latour terms [REF] and [REL], the referential and religious modes: these works are simultaneously and seamlessly scientific and religious. The bestiaries present and gloss the natural world in ways that challenge the dualisms that Latour identifies as central features of Modern thinking: bestiaries foreground the mediated, translated nature of the world rather than presenting a single, objective reality; they ground their descriptions in textual traditions and religious doctrine rather than direct observation; and they represent nature as articulate rather than mute. In these respects, medieval bestiaries exemplify a premodern approach to ontology that Latour’s Moderns have cast aside in their understanding of the natural world. As I argue below, Latour’s modes of existence in turn help us to understand the multimodal nature of medieval bestiaries, in ways that refuse the Modern preconceptions that

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<sup>2</sup> Latour clarifies this point in his discussion of “circulating reference” in *Pandora’s Hope* 24–79.

often determine the reception of these texts today. Yet if bestiaries confirm fundamental elements of Latour's critique of Modernity, they nonetheless expose certain Modern biases that persist in his modes of existence, most notably in the crossing of the referential and religious modes [REF•REL]. This essay explores the larger implications of this problem by focusing on the operations of the religious mode [REL] in medieval bestiaries—a mode that, I suggest, includes [REF], but does not cross with it as a separate mode. Latour's dismantling of the Modern opposition between world and words invites a reassessment of how we conceptualize the agency of language in the modes of existence. And his association of [REL] with the Word ("Parole")—a form of enunciation distinct from the Moderns' idea of language—suggests that the religious mode is among those most affected by his rejection of the opposition between world and words (*Enquête* 307–8). My focus is consequently on how bestiary texts use the related registers of language and sound to produce what are, in Latour's terms, the "beings of religion" as part of a specifically medieval expression of [REL] that encompasses [REF] rather than marking a crossing with it.

I concentrate here on the earliest bestiary in French, a remarkably multilingual and multisensory work produced in twelfth-century England by Philippe de Thaon. Philippe's work confirms Latour's proposition that language is neither a unified category that can be opposed to a "real" world nor a mode of expression unique to human beings; human language in this bestiary is a plural idiom that encompasses different language groups and intersects with nonhuman forms of utterance. Sound plays a key role in this respect: it traverses various categories (material and symbolic, human and nonhuman, vocal and visual, linguistic and nonlinguistic) and is a site where meaningful categorical distinctions can be made. As I explained above, Latour's concept of translation as an ontological operation that extends, maintains, and prolongs being by enabling

agency to circulate within networks is not limited to linguistic reference. I am not claiming that either language or sound is the only vehicle for the bestiary's translation of the world. Rather, I focus on them here because they jointly represent an area where dialogue between Latour and medieval scholars might lead to a productive reassessment of what language is and does in the modes of existence—both medieval and Modern.

### **The Modes of Existence in Medieval Bestiaries: [REP], [REF], [REL]**

Bestiaries exemplify the premodern enmeshment of the material and the symbolic that Latour suggests is occluded in Modernity. From its inception, the *Physiologus* tradition that gave rise to the medieval bestiary conjoined what would, from a Modern perspective, be classified as scientific knowledge [REF] and religious truths [REL]. Though it took the created world as one of its foundational elements, this tradition was not concerned with what Moderns would consider the objective presentation of an ostensibly empirical reality. Rather, its authority resided in the way it translated the natural world through textual traditions that described and gave meaning to that world—a translation that in Latourian terms crosses the mode of reproduction through which all entities perpetuate themselves [REP] with those of reference [REF] and religion [REL]. Medieval bestiaries ultimately derive from the Greek *Physiologus* (tentatively dated to the second century CE), a work in which the account of nature in pagan literature is reformulated in explicitly Christian terms (*Physiologos* 19–20; Peers 270; Curley). The *Physiologus* comprises loosely arranged groups of chapters that describe and interpret various animals, birds, and stones according to their allegorical, moral, and/or eschatological significance. The early medieval Latin tradition, which drew on Late Antique translations of the Greek *Physiologus* into Latin, further modified the Greek textual tradition by including additional encyclopedic material,

reshuffling chapters, and expanding the ethical content of the *Physiologus* in a way that gave the work an even clearer didactic purpose (Clark 8–10; Kay, *Animal* 8–9). Western European versions of the *Physiologus*, written in Latin and copied between the ninth century and the twelfth such as the *Dicta Chrysostomi*, B-Isidore, and *Physiologus Theobaldi*, eventually gave rise to translations into vernacular languages, most notably French.

The conjunction of natural history and Christian didacticism peculiar to bestiary lore is unscientific by today's standards, as scholars working on this material have labored to show. Scholars often comment on the fact that bestiary descriptions prioritize spiritual meaning over direct observation in a way that runs counter to certain contemporary expectations. Whereas many present-day readers are inclined to view nature through a post-Enlightenment, scientific lens, the bestiaries present nature allegorically from the perspective of Christian faith. Seen in these terms, bestiaries are therefore “nature books, but not books of natural history” (Clark 1). Moreover, their descriptions are governed by symbolic rather than observational principles; as Gabriel Bianciotto remarks, “On a souvent le sentiment que le symbole attaché à la nature lui est antérieur, que celle-ci a été inventée pour servir de support à une signification” (“One often has the impression that the symbol attached to the nature precedes it, that the nature has been invented to act as a basis for a signification”; 8). The “real” world depicted in the bestiaries does not exist independently of its symbolic translation; rather than constituting an object of empirical knowledge in its own right, this translated reality serves (along with religious doctrine) as a foundation for knowledge about a complex, multimodal world (Kay, “Post-human” 475–76; Clark 7).

The way scholars have negotiated between the bestiary tradition and its contemporary readerships exemplifies a long-held principle of medieval scholarship: that medieval ontologies

can—and frequently do—diverge from present-day understandings of the world and need to be approached on their own terms. Though Latour is primarily focused on Modernity rather than premodernity, his appeal for an assessment of modes of existence that is in harmony with the particular “veridiction” operative in each mode (*Enquête* 140–47) mirrors this principle of interpreting other cultures on their own terms. In the *Enquête*, Latour presents this decentering gesture as a form of diplomatic dialogue: to speak in terms of modes of existence is, he claims, “s’adresser enfin dans leurs langues à ceux qui tiennent à ces valeurs sans mettre entre parenthèses la réalité de ce dont ils parlent” (“finally to address oneself to those who hold to these values using their own languages, without bracketing off the reality of which they speak”; 155). Applied to medieval bestiaries, this call for more effective exchange pushes the medievalist’s appeal for greater sensitivity to premodern ontology a step further: the world that bestiary texts open up to their readers should be seen in terms of existence, that is, ontology, rather than linguistic or symbolic reference. In other words, if we take seriously the injunction to address—and listen to—the languages of medieval bestiaries in the capacious sense Latour’s work encourages, we can begin to understand how these texts enable the world to exist, rather than merely interpret it.

There is nonetheless a difficulty with applying Latour’s modes as they are elaborated in the *Enquête* to medieval bestiary texts. As the subtitle of Latour’s inquiry makes clear, the object of his study is “an anthropology of the Moderns.” The modes of existence presented in the work are accordingly a means of exploring values associated with the Modern institutions that Latour refers to in uppercase forms, such as Science, Politics, Law, or Religion (41, 51–58). If medieval bestiaries expose how the Modern scientific worldview opposes Science and Religion, they also point to the Modern biases that inform Latour’s conceptualization of certain modes of existence.

Latour identifies two particularly problematic crossings between the mode associated with objective knowledge [REF] and other modes, crossings that are part of the legacy of the scientific revolution. The first is the crossing between reproduction and reference [REP•REF] whereby the Moderns amalgamate these two modes to arrive at a notion of “material reality” that Science can supposedly access directly (101–03; 106–08). The second is the crossing between reference and religion [REF•REL], a crossing that problematically judges religious truths by the objective standards of the positive sciences (319–21). In both instances, Latour’s concept of reference [REF] enables him to critique Modern category errors precisely because [REF] models the “equipped” and “instrumented” knowledge of Science and thereby possesses felicity conditions that accord with such knowledge (90; 101). The genealogy of [REF] in Latour’s project thus poses a problem for those interested in extending the application of this mode beyond the *Enquête* to groups or historical periods that do not share this scientific vision and the Modern standards that determine its veridiction.

To be sure, the scientific knowledge on display in the bestiaries does not correspond to Latour’s concept of reference [REF]. Even if descriptions of the natural world are foundational to the knowledge transmitted by this medieval tradition, the felicity conditions of such knowledge are determined not by objective transmission of information but by spiritual truth. Put simply, what in the *Enquête* is a historically axiomatic crossing between the modes of scientific reference and religion [REF•REL] is not a crossing at all in medieval bestiary texts because these two modes do not have independent modes of veridiction. This point can be illustrated by considering the way bestiary creatures were perceived—and are translated into being—through the “senses” of biblical commentary used by medieval theologians and preachers. These include the literal and/or historical senses, the allegorical sense, the tropological (moral) sense, and the

anagogic (spiritual or eschatological) sense. Any given bestiary chapter engages some of these figural senses on the basis of a description of the creature (the literal or historical sense), though not necessarily all of them in sequence. The figural senses often interpret the literal sense in a variety of different ways, meaning that bestiary creatures and their (literal) behaviors and properties are associated with multiple, sometimes conflicting significances and symbolic values. If we render these descriptions of the natural world in terms of Latour's modes, bestiary chapters begin with a literal meaning that crosses the modes of reproduction and reference [REP•REF], which then accrues additional meanings that translate reference in terms of religion [REF•REL]. In medieval bestiaries, however, [REF] does not rely on objective standards of description. If, as remarked above, today's readers have the impression that the figurative meanings associated with the literal natures of bestiary creatures precede rather than follow from those natures, this is because these medieval works judge [REF] not by the felicity conditions of post-Enlightenment Science but in relation to the same felicity and infelicity conditions as the religious mode [REL]. In medieval bestiaries, then, [REF] and [REL] are not separate modes in Latour's terms: the modes of existence, while sharing the same basic structure, each have a particular veridiction that determines truth and falsity according to the felicity and infelicity conditions of the mode itself (65–66). As a result, the specific form the nondualism of the bestiary takes cannot be adequately mapped by a crossing of these two modes as Latour conceives of them. In what follows, I thus focus on how medieval bestiaries exemplify an expression of religion [REL] that encompasses what, in Modernity, might be described as reference [REF], while not crossing with it as a distinct mode.

### **[REL] as Regime of Enunciation in Philippe's *Bestiaire***

Like the Latin bestiary tradition from which it is derived, the earliest extant French bestiary by Philippe de Thaon (ca. 1121–35) represents a distinctively medieval version of [REL] that includes [REF] and determines its mode of veridiction. Like Latour’s beings of religion, those in Philippe’s bestiary are “sensitive to the Word” (“sensibles à la Parole”; 297) in the sense that they depend for their existence on continual enunciation and interpretation, rather than substance (314–15). Because of this dependence, Latour classifies religion [REL] in a grouping of modes based around “quasi subjects,” a grouping he identifies as “régimes d’énonciation” (“regimes of enunciation”) due to their dependence on moment, situation, and “tonalité” (375). Bestiary interpretations that trace trajectories from their literal descriptions of the created world to the figurative senses of what is described could be seen in these terms: the essence of bestiary beings is by definition multilayered and dependent on continual, sometimes conflictual, rearticulation. In this regard, bestiary beings encourage an exploration of the interconnections between Word, language, and the regime of enunciation particular to religion [REL]. To see these interconnections in Latour’s terms is to resist the idea that interpretation is a symbolic representation (or misrepresentation) of a “real” natural world and to attend to the way that such interpretation allows the beings of religion to announce themselves and to be transformed.

Philippe’s bestiary is particularly sensitive to religion [REL] as a “régime d’énonciation” that mobilizes human and nonhuman languages as part of its layering of literal and figurative interpretations. Philippe’s text inherits an investment in the Word from its Latin source material: the subject matter of the *Bestiaire* resembles the Latin bestiary redaction known as B-Isidore, a work that combines a version of the Latin *Physiologus* (B) with material from Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*. Though Philippe mostly writes in the French of twelfth-century England, his bestiary also uses Latin and—because of the etymological interests it inherits from the B-

Isidore—makes passing references to Greek etymologies. However, Philippe’s bestiary innovatively experiments with various expressive registers so that the attention to language and sound in the work goes beyond the Latin tradition from which the text emerges.

The manuscripts transmitting Philippe’s *Bestiaire* all exhibit this experimentation with expressive registers, showing how the bestiary’s religious mode [REL] depends on intersecting forms of visual and linguistic enunciation. Philippe’s text is transmitted in three manuscripts: London, British Library, Cotton Nero A. V. (a twelfth-century English manuscript); Oxford, Merton 249 (a thirteenth-century English copy); and Copenhagen, Royal Library 3466 (a late thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Continental copy) (Careri, Ruby, and Short 74–77; Thompson 192–94; Abrahams; Dean and Boulton 191–92 [entry 347]). Of these three versions, the only complete copy of the text is in the Cotton Nero manuscript; though spaces have been left for images, this manuscript is the only one of the three that remains unillustrated. The Cotton Nero copy was owned by the Cistercian monastery of St. Mary’s, Holmcultram and may have been intended to assist novices with training their memories, a use that perhaps explains the spaces left for readers to visualize images described in the text for themselves (Carruthers 159–60). The other two manuscripts do include visual images. Merton 249 has rough, unframed pen drawings inserted before the beginning of each chapter. Copenhagen, Royal Library 3466 contains more skillfully executed color illustrations that show affinities with the iconography of early twelfth-century Latin bestiaries (Muratova). All three manuscripts contain a Latin prologue and intersperse Latin rubrics with the French text, a bilingualism not characteristic of later French bestiaries in the B-Isidore tradition. The Latin rubrics in Philippe’s text are used to organize the material and develop its moralizations, making them unusually extended and thorough when compared with the rubrication found in Latin *Physiologi* and bestiaries.

Considered in this context, the linguistic and sonic features of the text itself offer a means to explore the religious mode [REL] as a “régime d’énunciation” that cuts across human and nonhuman utterances. While the French text is mostly written in hexasyllabic couplets, the metrical form changes to octosyllables at the end of the chapter on the first stone, a shift that Philippe signals as part of an effort to organize his material (2889–90).<sup>3</sup> The Latin text in the *Bestiaire* is mostly in prose, though parts of the Latin prologue appear to be metrical and rhymed (Philippe de Thaün xcix–cii). Whether or not Philippe authored both the Latin and the French texts is uncertain; French and Latin nonetheless work in concert on the manuscript page, glossing one another as well as the images referred to in the text. Some scholars have suggested the work was intended for Francophone readers with limited Latin literacy (Carruthers 159; McCulloch 50; Gerritsen 71). However, one could equally imagine the *Bestiaire* as a fully bilingual production catering to an audience with a range of linguistic competencies in both verbal and written forms of Latin and French (Campbell 42–48). On one level, the different forms and sounds of Latin and French, including the metrical capacity of both languages, animate Philippe’s bestiary material sonically and visually for a bilingual public. On another level, however, Philippe’s emphasis of the sounds of human languages throughout this work enables human utterance to be aligned with the nonhuman utterances that also populate his text, utterances that are all equally involved in bringing the religious beings of his bestiary text into existence.

Philippe’s engagement with sound in the chapters of his bestiary demonstrates even more clearly how medieval [REL] depends on the articulation of the beings of religion through nonhuman as well as human utterances. Alongside the linguistic resources of bilingual glossing

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<sup>3</sup> Parenthetical citations will refer to line numbers in Luigina Morini’s edition of the *Bestiari Medievali*.

and translation, a number of chapters in the *Bestiaire* make use of sound or voice in describing or interpreting the elements of the natural world to which they are dedicated. These representations of sound encompass nonhuman cries, roars, braying, whimpering, crowing, and singing; vegetal noises (e.g., the cry of the mandrake); human speaking and singing; and manifestations of divine speech. Though such depictions of sound sometimes form part of the literal descriptions, their truth in bestiary terms is established less by their referential qualities [REF] than by their religious potency [REL]: the multilayered, spiritual meanings that these sounds accrue ultimately determine their veridiction. The moralizations that assign positive or negative values to these noises draw connections between, among, or across different kinds of sound, translating them into language (through gloss) while also treating them as meaningful utterances equivalent to human language. I will focus on two of the more significant bestiary chapters in which sound plays a role in Philippe's text: those dedicated to the lion and the elephant. These chapters exemplify how sounds operate as part of the enunciative register of religion [REL]. As an entity that moves between human and nonhuman, material and symbolic utterances, sound in these chapters creates chains of association between heterogeneous elements within the chapters themselves, while translating a world that is articulate, multimodal, and symbolically rich.

### **Articulating the Beings of Religion [REL] in the Chapters on the Lion and the Elephant**

As the example of Médor in the epigraph to this essay illustrates, Latour's networks include a broad spectrum of human and nonhuman actants: the human caller, the dog trained and summoned by its human, and the word "chien," which ascribes a canine identity to the being called "Médor" and triggers the dog's and the human's behavioral responses. The process of training evoked in this example recalls Foucault's account of the production of subjects by

disciplinary power and expands Foucault's focus on human subjects to include other, nonhuman beings. Existence in this particular network emerges from articulations within a chain: the creature named, trained, and called by its human gradually comes into being (“s’est chargée peu à peu de réalité”) by virtue of its association with the word “chien,” as well as by the highly conventional name already given by the human trainer and the animal’s conditioned response to this name.<sup>4</sup> “Médor” and “chien” here are not words that simply correspond to a preexisting reality; they are part of a chain of relations that distributes agency across the heterogeneous entities within it and connects them in ways that constitute the essence of what is imagined, described, and/or performed.

As well as illustrating how human language may operate as part of the networks that connect an otherwise discontinuous series of elements, this example calls attention to the functions of linguistic utterance in the ontological processes Latour describes. As is the case with the other modes of existence, the continuity of being in any given network depends on overcoming the discontinuities that threaten to cut it short: “Pour demeurer, il convient de *passer*—en tout cas de ‘passer par’—ce qu’on appelle une TRADUCTION” (“To remain, one has to *pass*—or in any case to ‘pass through’—what is called a TRANSLATION”; 53).

Alongside the “passes” that enable Médor and the trainer to continue to exist as organisms, human language and voice are key entities that facilitate the ontological translations in this example. Both name and dog pass through human linguistic utterance, even as we are reminded, in Latour’s musing that the word “chien” does not bark, that the making of sound is not specific to human beings (*Enquête* 153). In other words, the articulations Latour illustrates, which bring

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<sup>4</sup> “Médor,” like “Fido” in English contexts, is a generic name for a dog; these names both evoke fidelity to human masters, while having different histories and associations. The example of dog training reappears in Latour’s example of the veridiction proper to technology [TEC] (230).

Médor and the dog trainer into being while refusing any clean opposition between word and thing, “articulate” not only in the sense of overcoming discontinuities in a chain or course of action, but also in the sense of pronouncing or voicing. The more sonically animated chapters of Philippe’s *Bestiaire* similarly demonstrate how language and sound work alongside other forms of representation to articulate, rather than represent, a world that connects human and nonhuman actants. Unlike Latour’s illustration, however, the bestiary articulates the world in order to produce religious truth [REL] rather than referential [REF] or fictional being [FIC]. In this context, the linguistic and sonic elements of Philippe’s work take on other interpretative functions, participating not only in the translations of heterogeneous networks but also in the distinctive semiotics of the bestiary’s religious mode [REL].

The most complex example of this process of articulation is Philippe’s chapter on the lion, a creature that, as king of the beasts and a symbol of Christ, occupies first place in the *Bestiaire*. This chapter is among the most extensive in Philippe’s work and draws together many of the literal and figurative senses of bestiary interpretation. The chapter begins with the literal sense of the lion in a description that combines etymology and physical description. After glossing the meaning of the lion’s name in three languages, a passage of Latin indicates that the lion is king of the animals; Philippe then goes on to explain in French that the Greek “leün” translates as “rei” (“king”), as this creature has dominion over “mutes bestes” (“dumb beasts”; 25–29). The subsequent description of the lion’s physical characteristics ends with an example of its dominance over other creatures: when hungry or aggrieved, the lion devours creatures like “this” braying ass (“cest asne . . . ki rechane e brait”), a use of the demonstrative that appears to refer to the visual image depicting this characteristic in the two illustrated manuscripts, though it could equally conjure the mental image developed in the text in the unillustrated Cotton Nero

copy of the text (41–46). In the two illuminated copies, both text and image are further glossed in a Latin rubric describing how the lion tears the ass apart. In the Copenhagen manuscript, the meaning of each creature is reiterated in the rubric that accompanies the visual image of the lion attacking the ass (see Fig. 1). This set of related elements—the sound of the braying ass in the French, the rubric in Latin, and the visual image of the creature being assaulted by the lion—directly precedes the textual interpretation of this behavior: the lion, Philippe tells us, is Christ, king over all creatures, who was crucified by the Jews. The physical characteristics of the lion are then interpreted in terms of Christ’s humanity, divinity, justice, and vengeance against the Jews (47–78). Meanwhile, the ass, which is “fol par nature” (“foolish/wicked by nature”; 81), represents the Jews, who are stuck in their ways and refuse to believe in God (79–90).

As remarked earlier, referential and religious modes share the same veridiction in this chapter; the etymological and physical descriptions of the lion anticipate and reinforce the figurative interpretations rather than being governed by objective principles. Moreover, the literal [REF] and figurative [REL] senses of the lion are part of a multilayered description that brings this creature into being through a complex chain of associations that pass through various languages and sounds as well as visual images. The braying of the ass, mentioned in French but not Latin, animates the anti-Semitic description by providing an implicit background noise to the painted and/or mental picture that accompanies the text. The verb “braire” in Anglo-Norman French could refer to both human and animal cries (*Anglo-Norman*, s.v. “braire”); indeed, in the *Chanson de Roland*, it evokes the screams of dying men on the battlefield (Cazelles 64–65). Though not interpreted as such by Philippe, this sound—as a transcription of inarticulate animal distress and as a cry that communicates the pain of impending death—reinforces the Jews’ identification with irrational, self-defeating folly as they become prey to Christ’s vengeance. It

thus also creates contrasts between the Christian subject possessed of belief, understanding, and language(s) through the bestiary text itself (French, Latin, and Greek, in only the first few lines of the chapter!) and the irrational inarticulateness of the Jewish nonbeliever, whose cries of defeat ring out through the ass's mouth.

Already in this first section of the chapter we see a set of translations that produce the essence of what is described and attribute religious values to it. These translations draw on different human languages, visual images, and human and nonhuman sounds, while also conjoining literal and figurative levels of meaning. As observed in the example of Médor, sound in this scenario has a double articulating function: it both voices and connects different human and nonhuman entities. Yet in a more explicit way than in Latour's example of the dog called by its human trainer, the ass's braying in Philippe's text signifies multiply by crossing between human and nonhuman utterance: as a cry that is both animal and human, it communicates the ass's distress when attacked by a literal lion and expresses the Jews' defeat in a way that renders them subhuman and their vocalizations sublinguistic. Sound here binds reference [REF] to religion [REL]: it articulates literal, allegorical, and eschatological meanings and enables them to exist simultaneously.

The same chapter later describes the lion's fear of the cockerel and the cart in a depiction that introduces another chain of sounds that take on explicit figural values while still accruing other meanings that place these sounds in even larger chains of association. In this later section, the white cockerel is identified with the holy men who announced Christ's death, which Christ's humanity caused him to fear (229–42); the cart, a symbol of the four Evangelists, similarly emits a "cri" ("cry/noise"; 224, 321) announcing the death of Christ (315–26). The crowing of the cockerel in this chapter develops the connotations of the cockerel's singing at certain times of

day: the listener is reminded that Peter denied Christ three times before the cock crowed (245–48), and that the cock sings the hours in Christ’s honor (249–50). The cockerel’s crowing is subsequently identified in the text with the singing of the Canonical Hours, an association that may reflect the exhortation in the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* to “offer up your prayers in the morning, at the third hour, the sixth, the ninth, the evening, and at cock-crowing” (Bk. 8, Sec. 4.34). This part of the chapter runs through six of the eight Divine Offices, switching between Latin and French while reminding audiences of the biblical events commemorated by each Office and occasionally exhorting listeners (in French) to retain significant details—notably Christ’s Passion, remembered at Sext, and his death, commemorated at Nones (279–80; 287–88). Sound in this section once again translates heterogeneous entities while creating sequences that connect them to religious meanings. This second section of Philippe’s chapter on the lion also shows how the relationship between sound and meaning varies in this bestiary, and how such variations serve the ideological purposes of the work in different ways. Whereas the earlier, anti-Semitic example of the ass demotes human utterances to inarticulate sounds devoid of reason, this second example interweaves the sounds of human languages with the cockerel’s crowing and the monastic singing with which it is identified, to its spiritual glory.

Moreover, in the second section of the chapter, sound not only extends chains of reference and binds different layers of meaning together in a consistent way; it also generates productive divergences in meaning that are characteristic of the veridiction proper to the bestiary’s religious mode [REL]. The crowing of the cockerel spurs the human listener to recall the significance of the lion’s fear of this cry, while also conjuring a more extensive network of biblical and liturgical associations generated by this singing—a network that passes through Latin as well as French, text as well as song. Without erasing the negative significance of the

cockerel's crowing in the original example, this soundscape introduces other, more positive associations that exist in contrapuntal relationship to the allegorical interpretation. Unlike the lion that fears the cockerel's crowing, Philippe suggests his listeners should fear silence rather than the singing that marks the liturgical hours, for it is when prayer ceases that the devil gets to work (299–314). The cockerel's singing, which announces the death feared by Christ, runs parallel to the spiritual threat to the Christian subject when he stops singing his prayers, making song not only a reminder of the human mortality of Christ that brought humankind salvation but also a means of warding off an altogether more serious kind of spiritual death. The cockerel's singing thus generates an accretion of meanings associated with this noise around the original moralization, resulting in a kind of sonic and semiotic counterpoint whereby the negative and positive meanings and associations of singing that echo through Philippe's text are juxtaposed. If sound here creates continuity among otherwise discontinuous entities, continuity generates contrast as much as consistency. Such plurality of interpretation is one of the particularities of the mode of veridiction associated with the religious mode [REL] in the bestiaries. In a way that mirrors Saint Augustine's positive valuation of multiplicity in Scriptural exegesis, the authors of medieval bestiaries cultivated a variety of interpretations in their work rather than searching for definitive meaning (Clark 44). If the beings of religion [REL] in Philippe's work are translated in multiple, sometimes contrasting ways, that translation makes them more credible as a reflection of God's gift to divine eloquence.

The sonic qualities of this section of Philippe's chapter are complemented by illustrations in the two illuminated manuscripts that transmit the *Bestiaire*. Along with sound and language, these images perform a translating function; they also illustrate how sound connects visual and textual registers in the chapter as well as different layers of interpretation. In Merton 249, the

picture accompanying this section of the chapter comprises a sequence of images that represent the lion's reaction to the sounds of the cockerel and the cart (see Fig. 2). This sequence, when read from left to right, corresponds to the ordering of the interpretations in the text: an image of a cockerel with a raised foot appears on the left, followed by a box in the center containing a cart wheel, followed on the right by a lion with its tail tucked fearfully between its legs. In Copenhagen Royal Library 3466, the same three elements (cockerel, cart, lion) appear in a circular arrangement that places the cart above the lion and the cockerel behind it to the right (see Fig. 3). The tripartite composition of these images points to the dependency of the visual register on the complex articulating functions of sound. The elements that make up these images represent both the physical entities described in the text and, by extension, the moralizations attached to those descriptions; yet what unites these elements is the making of noise and the reactions to it evoked in the text. Like the earlier example of the ass braying as it is slain by the lion (see Fig. 1), the composite images in these two manuscripts are not a "representation" of the soundscape described in the text but part of a chain of relations that connects linguistic and visual interpretations through sound.

The sound that closes the chapter again crosses between human and nonhuman utterance to express divine strength rather than Jewish folly (as does the braying of the ass) or Christ's death (as does the cockerel's crowing and the noise of the cart). The lioness, we are told, gives birth to dead cubs, and the lion roars ("crier") to give them life (363–68). Mary is the lioness in this instance and Christ the cubs, with the lion's roar interpreted as the power ("vertud") that enabled Christ to be resurrected and to harrow hell (371–86). Though all the noises evoked in the chapter communicate the supremacy of God in their own way, the lion's cry does so most triumphantly by emphasizing the redemptive consequences of Christ's death and resurrection.

This final sound thus reaches across two categories of nonhuman utterance—animal cries and the cries of spiritual beings—in order to connect literal and anagogic senses.

Taken as a whole, the chapter on the lion illustrates the complexity of religion [REL] as a “régime d’énonciation” dependent on sound as well as visual and linguistic registers. In addition to drawing on the sonic dimension of human languages, Philippe’s chapter uses sound to extend meaning-making beyond the linguistic to the noises made by spiritual beings, animals, birds, and manmade objects (the cart). As in Latour’s example of Médor, sound both voices and connects otherwise discontinuous elements in the network; however, in the bestiary, the translations that sound performs connect not only human and nonhuman actants but also literal and figurative interpretations and textual and visual registers. The multisensory world that Philippe’s bestiary thereby conjures presupposes readers with basic literacy in both Latin and French. Viewing this bestiary chapter as a network of visual, linguistic, and sonic elements connected and reworked through different readings enables us to appreciate its nonlinear, associative qualities for such readers, as well as its sensory appeal. Moreover, the multiplicity of translation and the multilayered beings it generates are indicative of the specific type of veridiction appropriate to bestiary lore: it is precisely because the world of Philippe’s bestiary is mediated so obviously and elaborately that it is true.

A different picture of the translating functions of sound emerges from another of the *Bestiaire*’s more extensive chapters: that dedicated to the elephant and the mandrake tree. In contrast to the chapter on the lion, this later chapter illustrates not only how Philippe’s bestiary makes use of the articulating capacities of sound in its creation of the beings of religion [REL], but also how this “régime d’énonciation” can articulate selectively as well as multiply when some of the entities it generates risk becoming dangerously real. The chapter begins by

describing how the elephant is an intelligent creature that does not often reproduce (1415–420). When the time comes for it to give birth, male and female elephants travel eastward, to paradise, where the mandrake tree grows. The female plucks the fruit of the tree and gives it to the male; when they have both eaten the fruit, they copulate and the female conceives. Because the newborn elephant is vulnerable to attack by the dragon, the female gives birth underwater, after which the male protects its offspring (1421–450). The male and female elephants represent Adam and Eve, who were placed in the earthly paradise and tempted by the serpent to eat the fruit of the tree against God’s will; the baby elephant represents humankind, threatened by the devil (the dragon) (1453–480). The next section of the chapter, citing Isidore, describes the elephant’s physical properties and origins in more detail (1531–568). The chapter then turns to the mandrake, which has roots shaped like human men and women. These roots, the chapter tells us, must be gathered using a particular technique: a famished dog must be tied to the root, and the man who wishes to harvest the root has to entice the dog from afar with some bread. As the ravenous dog races towards the food, it uproots the tree, whereupon the broken root emits a “cri” (“cry/noise”; 1593) that kills the dog, and that would also prove fatal to the man, if he did not stop up his ears. The mandrake root is, Philippe informs us, an excellent medicine and can cure anything but death (1569–614).

Sound in this chapter is once again a key component of the description, though the fatal cry of the uprooted mandrake does not exhibit the same articulating functions of sound seen in the chapter on the lion. This is not to say that the mandrake’s cry is meaningless: the noise made by the uprooted tree is implicitly connected to the mandrake’s symbolic meaning earlier in the chapter as a figure of the fruit tree in the earthly paradise. Through its literal and figurative meanings, the mandrake is associated simultaneously with fertility and birth (for the elephant)

and with temptation and mortality (for Adam and Eve)—properties reflected in the ambivalently curative and fatal properties later attributed to the tree. Seen within the broader network of associations in the chapter, the mandrake's fatal cry communicates the irreversible mortal consequences of humanity's uprooting from Paradise, an association reinforced by the male and female forms of its roots. Though some of the consequences of the Fall are mitigated by the curative powers of the plant once it has been safely harvested, we are reminded that human mortality is the one thing this tree cannot cure.

The retracing of the figurative interpretations of the mandrake in the literal descriptions of the tree once again illustrates how reference [REF] shares the veridiction of religion [REL] in this bestiary chapter. Within this context, sound implicitly connects [REL] to [REF], binding the chapter's earlier allegorical interpretation (the mandrake as fruit tree in the earthly paradise) to the literal descriptions of both the tree and of the noise it makes when uprooted. At the same time, however, the bestiary holds the literal and figurative associations of the mandrake's cry apart in its linguistic and pictorial interpretations of this sound. Though described at some length in the French text, the noise emitted by the mandrake is not moralized in the chapter, nor is it integrated into the Latin passages, which instead describe the harvesting of the tree's roots and their curative properties. The noise is not visualized in any of the extant manuscripts either: the images in Merton 249 that accompany this chapter do not depict the gathering of the roots, while the other two manuscripts do not illustrate this chapter at all. The fatal cry emitted by the tree is kept in isolation, as if to interpret it explicitly would transmit physical and spiritual danger. If, as Latour claims, continuity of being depends on translation, the refusal to translate the mandrake's nonlinguistic cry in this chapter cuts short the existence of this potentially lethal sound. Yet this interruption does not altogether arrest the potential of this cry to articulate in figurative terms.

Though the chapter suppresses the explicit translating functions of the utterance itself, the symbolic value of this noise for the human reader/listener is still implicitly maintained.

Philippe's treatment of the mandrake thus offers a far more selective deployment of sound's articulating functions than that seen in the chapter on the lion, a deployment that allows [REF] and [REL] to be juxtaposed and compared, without being linked overtly.

### **Listening to the Languages of the *Bestiaire***

This essay began with a dog summoned by the call of its human trainer, and ends with a dog that dies in its human trainer's stead. If Latour's example creates a scene where existence takes shape through a chain of associations between language, sound, and human as well as nonhuman agents, Philippe's mandrake-harvesting dog is part of a scenario where similar elements are connected in a way that proves fatal to the creature and evokes human as well as animal mortality. This bestiary example testifies to the connectedness of the material and the symbolic in a tradition that did not distinguish scientific and religious ways of thinking as Latour's Moderns do. As the chapters on the lion and the elephant illustrate, language in Philippe's *Bestiaire* eschews any direct correlation between word and thing. One of the distinctions between Philippe's bestiary dog and Latour's Médor is that the former is part of the bestiary's religious mode [REL], rather than a being of reference [REF] or fiction [FIC]. I have suggested that the seamless combination of medieval science and religion in bestiary texts poses a challenge not only for Modern ways of thinking, but also for Latour's conceptualization of reference [REF] as a mode that remains wedded to the veridiction of post-Enlightenment science. Though bestiaries make use of a mode that resembles reference [REF] in their literal descriptions

of the natural world, this mode shares the veridiction of religion [REL], a mode Latour associates with a form of enunciation distinct from Modern, dualistic understandings of language.

Philippe's text, like other medieval bestiaries, is invested in a world that is openly and intricately mediated, through the parallel operations of historical textual tradition and Christian moralization that require [REP], [REF], and [REL] to relate in historically specific ways. The figural senses of the creatures, plants, or stones described in this text can, and often do, produce a range of meanings that draw differently on the literal sense of the subject described. "Reality" in the *Bestiaire* thus emerges from networks that produce plural and sometimes contradictory meanings, and that maintain productive tensions between literal and figurative levels. Equally importantly, the articulation of the world in Philippe's text—a world that always already combines the literal and the figurative—passes through a diversity of languages and idioms, as well as sonic and visual registers. The unusual attentiveness to sound and language in the text and images of the *Bestiaire* make this a productive site for exploring religion [REL] as a "régime d'énonciation" that draws these various modes of articulation together. Sound in the *Bestiaire* not only animates the descriptions and images in a way that engages multiple senses; it also connects various elements of the text while simultaneously demonstrating how human and nonhuman utterances have similar articulating capacities. Though it does not necessarily have symbolic content (insofar as it is not always interpreted), sound nonetheless enables the mobilization of multiple meanings—literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogic—within the bestiary's networks. Sounds sometimes articulate elements in the bestiary chapters in the fullest sense, by both voicing and connecting various layers of interpretation; the lion and the ass provided an example of this phenomenon, where the ass's braying connects the literal sense to the allegorical and eschatological meanings of the text. Sound can also articulate different types

of interpretation even when the referential functions of the utterance itself are suppressed; the fatal cry of the uprooted mandrake is kept in interpretive isolation, yet recalls the allegory presented earlier in the chapter, which focuses on the Fall. The linguistic and sonic elements of the *Bestiaire* thus have important interpretative capacities of their own: in Latour's terms, they are crucial to the translation—and thus to the existence—of the beings of religion [REL].

Being alert to the ways in which bestiary texts articulate world and words, human and nonhuman through different sounds and languages has a double advantage. First, it offers ways of seeing these works as composite and multimodal networks engaged in creating the world, rather than simply describing it. Second, it encourages us to see language in Latour's modes as a category with crosslinguistic and multisensory as well as posthuman potential. Granting medieval bestiary creatures their share of existence involves an attentiveness to the visual, multilingual, and sonic agencies that bring them into being; it might also encourage us to hear them calling to us from a place beyond the linguistic as well as the material presuppositions of Modernity.

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