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--Visualizing the Trans-Animal Body: The Hyena in Medieval Bestiaries

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Est animal quod dicitur hyaena in sepulchris mortuorum habitans, eorumque corpora vescens. Cuius natura est, ut aliquando masculus sit, aliquando femina, et ideo est immundum animal.

[There is an animal called the hyena, living in the tombs of the dead and eating their bodies. It is its nature that it is sometimes male, sometimes female, and for that reason it is an unclean animal.]¹

This article critically examines transness in one of the most significant Christian didactic traditions of the Middle Ages: the bestiary. Works in this tradition offer moralized accounts of natural history; they comprise loosely organized groups of chapters in which various animals, birds, and stones are described and interpreted in Christian terms. Medieval bestiary texts ultimately derive from the Greek *Physiologus* (tentatively dated to the second century CE), a work disseminated widely both within and beyond Europe. In European contexts, Late Antique translations of the Greek *Physiologus* into Latin gave rise to bestiary redactions in both Latin and vernacular languages, notably French. The natural world depicted in the *Physiologus* tradition reflects the capaciousness of God's creation, encompassing the ambiguity and even deviancy of creaturely life from a Christian moral perspective as well as its reflections on the sublime. Nature as it is represented in this tradition is therefore intentionally diverse, a diversity that extends to these works' engagement with sex and gender.² Thus, despite its temporal distance from today's understandings of sex and gender, the medieval bestiary tradition offers an important resource for histories of gender and sexuality, including transgender histories. It also provides a means of exploring the imbrication of animal studies, gender studies, and natural history through a transgender

¹I would like to thank Debra Strickland and Blake Gutt for their generous comments on an earlier draft of this essay. My thanks also go to the editors of this volume for encouraging me to write this piece in the first place, and for invaluable suggestions on improving it. My research on the French bestiaries discussed in this article was supported by an award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-Family Bestiary. Commentary, Art, Text and Translation* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), p. 131. Latin text and English translations for the Second Family Bestiary are taken from this edition.

²Debra Strickland [Hassig], 'Sex in the Bestiaries', in *The Mark of the Beast*, ed. by Debra Hassig (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 71-97.

prism. This article focuses on the historical representation of what some trans scholars refer to as ‘animal transex’ or ‘trans-animality’: a form of transness that encompasses both gender and species, while demanding an analysis that also extends to sexuality, geopolitics, and race.³ I consider the trans-animal body as part of the natural world described and allegorized in Latin and French bestiaries derived from the so-called ‘B-Isidore’ version of the Latin *Physiologus*, a version dating from the tenth or eleventh century, which combined the Late Antique *Physiologus B* text with material from Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies*.⁴ I concentrate most especially on how a selection of these works depicts the hyena: a creature thought to alternate between male and female sexes, or (in bestiary terms) ‘natures’.

The hyena offers a particularly interesting point of connection between medieval engagements with the trans-animal body and more contemporary discussions of trans-animality. The description of the hyena in the epigraph above, taken from the Latin Second Family Bestiary (c.1180), is embedded in a much longer history that attempts to make sense of this creature’s apparent deviation from human sex and gender norms. That history stretches back at least as far as the sixth century BCE and forward to present-day discussions of the hyena as a creature that challenges binary conceptions of biological sex and gender in both scientific thinking and more popular cultural discourses. Medieval accounts of the hyena’s ability to change its sex were based on textual tradition rather than observation. However, in drawing on earlier natural histories, these texts pick up on an aspect of the hyena’s physical make-up that continues to intrigue observers of these creatures today: the fact that the external genitalia of spotted hyenas are virtually identical in all members of the species. On the one hand, this physical particularity has made the hyena a focus of gender anxiety for those who see its body as a site where human binary gender categories are confused. On the other hand, that same body has, more recently, been positively valued as an encouragement to rethink binary conceptions of human sex and gender in both feminist and transgender studies.

The first section of this article briefly sketches out the longer history in which bestiary depictions of the hyena are situated and makes a case for a more comprehensive understanding of medieval bestiaries’ place in that history. If the *Physiologus* has been rightly identified as the source of much of the negative symbolism subsequently associated

³ E.g. Myra J. Hird, ‘Animal Transex’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 21:49 (2006), 35-50. Mel. Y. Chen, ‘Animals Without Genitals: Race and Transsubstantiation’, *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 20.3 (2010), 285-297.

⁴ The oldest manuscript transmitting the B-Isidore version is Vatican MS Palatinus Latinus 1074, which is dated to the tenth or eleventh century.

with the hyena's sexed body, today's scholarly accounts of the tradition that flows from it are often reductive and homogenizing. Such accounts overstate the symbolic unity of the *Physiologus* tradition, while overlooking its affirmation of transsex as a feature of the natural world it symbolically interprets. I argue that a closer attention to the medieval bestiary tradition's treatment of the hyena not only counteracts overly simplistic historical accounts of this tradition's development, but also opens up an important site from which to examine the complexities of premodern transgender formations.

My aim in so doing is not to reclaim the bestiary hyena as a positive figuration of premodern transgender or intersex embodiment. Rather, my focus is on how the multi-layered mediation of this creature's supposed switching between male and female embodiment in medieval sources can be understood through a critical framework that trans studies makes possible. This bestiary creature shows how today's trans perspectives may be productively used to analyse moments where forms of sex and gender that challenge binary expectations feature in historical sources—even sources where such sex/gender formations are stigmatized and ideologically exploited in ways that are deeply distasteful. The second section of this article investigates the representation of the hyena's trans-animality in Latin and French bestiary texts and images. In all of the works examined, descriptions of the hyena's trans-animal body provide a substratum for a range of allegorical and moral interpretations that variously mobilize the anti-Semitic or misogynist associations of gender fluidity in medieval contexts. I consider the intricate forms of visibility to which this creature's trans-animality is subject in textual and pictorial examples, exploring how this visibility demands an approach attentive to the ways transness manifests itself indirectly as well as overtly, through accreted layers of bestiary representation and interpretation. This, I suggest, is an area of particularly fruitful intersection between medieval bestiary depictions and more contemporary approaches to queer and trans visibility. The troubling doubleness of the hyena's trans-animal body in these medieval sources is communicated not only through explicit forms of textual and visual description, but also more implicitly, in ways that circumvent straightforward representation. I show how the trans-animal body in these bestiary chapters endures as a literal and figural presence, irrespective of whether or not that body is represented with genital markers that make its ability to move between sexes visually explicit. The visibility of transness in these depictions requires ways of seeing that situate the hyena's nature within the particular constellation of meanings that accrue around it in any given bestiary text. In all of these respects, the optics of queer and trans visibility enable a more granular understanding of the gendering of animal bodies in medieval bestiaries. They help to foreground not only how

transgender formations may be overwritten and manipulated in such sources, but also how we can identify and analyse these formations through attending to the narratives and symbolic contexts that translate sex and gender in all their non-binary complexity.

As I suggest in my conclusion, this approach to the pre-modern idea of nature in medieval bestiaries complements the work of transgender studies scholars, by showing how modern and contemporary conceptions of ‘natural’ sex and gender are embedded in longer cultural histories. Visualizing the trans-animal body of the hyena might, in this sense, additionally contribute to the enterprise of relativizing more contemporary visions of nature and their relationship to human gender systems in the era following the advent of modern science.

The Hyena: A Trans-Historical Overview

The hyena’s association with non-binary sex and gender has a long history, which will be summarized here only briefly. The idea that the creature alternated between male and female sexes probably originated in Aesopic lore (6th century BCE), which suggested that this switching occurred annually.⁵ In later centuries, the widespread acceptance of the hyena’s sex changing ability was challenged by Aristotle (4th century BCE), who may have based his remarks on the observation of striped hyenas—a different species of the hyena family from the spotted hyena.⁶ Refuting popular claims about the creature’s alternation between male and female embodiment, Aristotle pointed out that the genitals of male and female hyenas were remarkably similar in structure.⁷ Pliny the Elder (1st century CE), referencing Aristotle, accordingly presented the hyena’s supposed ability to change sex as popular hearsay.⁸ However, Aristotle’s scepticism did not prevent other authorities from repeating the claim that the hyena changes sex, both in popular literature and in zoological treatises.⁹ Aristotle’s

⁵ Babrius and Phaedrus, *Fables*, trans. by Ben Edwin Perry, Loeb Classical Library 436 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 470 nos. 242-43.

⁶ There are four species in the hyena family. Aristotle’s descriptions of the hyena suggest he was commenting on the striped hyena, whereas the rumours he was refuting probably originated with the spotted hyena. Stephen E. Glickman, ‘The Spotted Hyena from Aristotle to *The Lion King*: Reputation is Everything’, *Social Research*, 62.3 (1995), 501-537 (pp. 508-511).

⁷ Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, 6.32 *On the Generation of Animals*, 3.6. McCulloch, *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries*, p. 131.

⁸ Pliny the Elder, *Natural History, Volume VIII: Books 28-32*, trans. by W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library 418 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), Chapter 30.

⁹ For example, Ovid (1st century CE) used the story in *The Metamorphoses* and the natural historian Aelian (2nd/3rd century CE) accepted it as fact. Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, Book 15: 391-417. Aelian, *On the Characteristics of Animals*, ed. and trans. A. F. Schofield, Loeb Classical Library 448 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), I, 25.

comments similarly had little impact on early Christian moralizers. The *Epistle of Barnabas* (1st century CE) attributes the hyena's 'uncleanness' (its unsuitability for consumption or sacrifice) to the creature's ability to change sex annually, combining this pronouncement with a condemnation of adultery and fornication.¹⁰ Despite his misgivings about the legend, Clement of Alexandria (2nd century CE) also used the sex-changing hyena for the purposes of moral illustration, as a figure of instability and duplicity.¹¹ In the *Physiologus*, both the earlier Greek texts and the later Latin tradition claim that the hyena is an inedible animal regarded as unclean because of its switching between male and female 'natures'. However, these traditions offer divergent interpretations of this characteristic. The Greek text, which may have been written shortly after the *Epistle of Barnabas* (2nd century CE?), makes the hyena's alternation between male and female natures the basis for a moral condemnation of male homosexuality based on apostolic authority (Romans 1.27).¹² By contrast, the Late Antique Latin *Physiologus* tradition associates the ambiguity of the hyena's nature with the religious indecision warned against by the Gospel of Matthew (6. 24), and compares the hyena to Jews, who, it is claimed, first served God and then adored idols.¹³

Post-medieval writers continued to draw upon the hyena's earlier symbolism, while occasionally attempting to reconcile that symbolism with a more observational approach to the natural world. The creature's alleged ability to change its sex was once again called into question by the sixteenth-century Swiss professor Conrad Gessner, whose monumental *Historia animalium* (1551-58) was disseminated further in the early seventeenth century in an edition and English translation by Edward Topsell.¹⁴ Later seventeenth-century writers such as Sir Thomas Browne similarly dismissed the claim that hyenas (or any animals) possess both male and female natures, explaining this by reference to a 'law of coition' that determines the sexual position each creature adopts for copulation—a law that Browne

¹⁰ *The Epistle of Barnabas*, trans. by J. B. Lightfoot 10, 7.

<<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/barnabas-lightfoot.html>>

¹¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Pedagogus*, II, 10, 83 (see 85 for Clement's skepticism). Boswell presents these developments as part of the history of Christian condemnation of homosexuality: *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, pp. 137-141.

¹² *Physiologos. Le bestiaire des bestiaires*, ed. and trans. Arnaud Zucker (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 2005), p. 163.

¹³ See for example *Physiologus Latinus. Éditions préliminaires versio B*, ed. by Francis J. Carmody (Paris: Droz, 1939), p. 34. On this point, see also *Physiologos*, ed. and trans. Zucker, p. 165. McCulloch, *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries*, p. 131. Debra Strickland [Hassig], *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 145-6.

¹⁴ Conrad Gessner [Conr. Gesneri], *Historia animalium* 4 vols. (Zurich: Chr. Froschauer, 1551-58). Edward Topsell, *The History of Four-footed Beasts and Serpents* (London: E. Cotes, 1608).

claimed no species breaks, except humankind.¹⁵ Such challenges to the view that hyenas changed their sex were accompanied in later centuries by anatomical descriptions of the genitalia of spotted hyenas, a move that followed the identification and naming of species of hyena still recognized today.¹⁶ Despite these more ‘scientific’ descriptions of the creature, the negative associations of the hyena’s supposed sexual instability persisted in European cultural discourses in other guises, inflecting the creature’s post-medieval associations with social disorder and with sexual and racial otherness. For example, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the hyena became a metaphor for sexual disorder of a different kind: what Alan Bewell describes as ‘the cultural monstrosity known as the “masculine” woman’.¹⁷ It also came to serve as a figure for other perceived threats to established social order among Europeans, standing for Eastern and African anarchy in the Romantic era and, from the late eighteenth century, for the unsettling alterity of new colonial environments as they were experienced by British colonizers.¹⁸

If the notion that the hyena alternates between male and female sexes is no longer current today, the trouble this creature causes for human sex/gender systems based on visible sexual difference has remained a source of fascination and potential unease in the present. The ways the spotted hyena confounds human binary expectations have continued to attract scientific attention and popular comment. Stephen Glickman points to the creature’s ‘sexual ambiguity’ as one of the historically significant elements assuring the hyena’s enduringly bad reputation.¹⁹ He nonetheless emphasizes that, in contrast to the *Physiologist*’s regressive insistence on the hyena’s supposedly unstable sexed body, more contemporary, scientifically informed work on the animal no longer treats its ambiguous sex as a moral concern.²⁰

Modern representations of the hyena in both scientific and popular contexts nonetheless continue to be enthralled by – and occasionally anxious about – its sexual particularity. Anna Wilson has linked such responses to a more pointed discomfort with the way the female hyena is thought to deviate from human sex and gender norms.²¹ Wilson

¹⁵ Sir Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* in *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. by Charles Sayle, 2 vols. (London: Grant Richards, 1904), Vol. 2, pp. 40-41. Browne’s work first appeared in 1646. Sayle’s edition is based on the sixth edition, published in 1672.

¹⁶ For a fuller account of the development of scientific literature on the hyena, see Glickman, ‘The Spotted Hyena from Aristotle to *The Lion King*’, pp. 518-523.

¹⁷ Alan Bewell, ‘Hyena Trouble’, *Studies in Romanticism* 53.3 (2014), 369-397 (p. 372).

¹⁸ Bewell, ‘Hyena Trouble’, pp. 375-384.

¹⁹ Glickman, ‘The Spotted Hyena from Aristotle to *The Lion King*’, p. 508.

²⁰ Glickman, ‘The Spotted Hyena from Aristotle to *The Lion King*’, pp. 528-530.

²¹ Wilson, ‘Sexing the Hyena: Intraspecies Readings of the Female Phallus’, *Signs* 28.3 (2003), 755-90.

argues that the fact both male and female hyenas ‘appear to have a penis’ associates the creature with a gender ‘aberration’ that is specifically female.²² The female hyena’s troubling of normative conceptions of gender is, Wilson emphasizes, both physical and behavioural: ‘the quintessential deviance of female appropriation of power is eloquently displayed both by the female hyena’s deformed phallicized body and by the manifestly abhorrent behaviors of which, whether as cub or as adult, she is capable’.²³ In contrast to Glickman, Wilson contends that the new methodologies and sites of hyena study in the early 2000s produced knowledges about this creature that reiterated patterns of thinking also discernible in earlier depictions of the hyena as a dangerous sex-changer. Wilson makes a persuasive case for seeing scientific studies of hyena colonies as a continuation of more traditional representations of this creature dating back to Antiquity. Though such studies might have moved away from seeing the hyena as a dangerous, unknowable other and towards a position that enabled the creature to be scientifically examined and understood, she points out that ‘the new science, almost despite itself, deploys the hyena as a warning of the consequences of deviation from sex/gender norms’.²⁴ Instead, Wilson claims, the spotted hyena should encourage scientists to expand their thinking beyond binary conceptions of gender or unitary models for understanding gendered behaviour. For the purposes of her own argument, however, the hyena is an incarnation of a type of phallic femininity that remains residually attached to a binary conception of the sexed body, rather than being a figure of intersex or transgender.²⁵

Deployments of the hyena by trans scholars, activists, and artists offer a different vantage on the issues addressed in Wilson’s argument. In the 1990s, queer reinterpretations of transsexuality sometimes used the hyena’s apparent deviance from binary conceptions of sex and gender as an encouragement to rethink those conceptions in humans. For instance, Kate Bornstein’s *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (1994) mentions the female hyena in an argument that dismantles popular definitions of human maleness and femaleness, which depend either on genitals or on the supposedly ‘male’ and ‘female’ hormones, testosterone and oestrogen. The fact that female hyenas have higher levels of testosterone than males and a kind of external vagina or clitoris resembling a penis is used to

²² Wilson, ‘Sexing the Hyena’, p. 756.

²³ Wilson, ‘Sexing the Hyena’, p. 785.

²⁴ Wilson, ‘Sexing the Hyena’, p. 757.

²⁵ Wilson, ‘Sexing the Hyena’, pp. 782-785 (esp. n.51, p. 783).

reinforce Bornstein's point 'that the universal key to gender is not hormones'.²⁶ Monika Treut's film *Gendernauts: A Journey Through Shifting Identities* (1999) uses the hyena for comparable purposes. As a prelude to its examination of the lives of transgender and intersex individuals living in San Francisco, Treut's documentary opens with a sequence that draws attention to the way the hyena eliminates the human opposition of male and female.²⁷ The illustrative function of the hyena in these works anticipates some of the points made subsequently by scholars working within what has been termed trans-animal or tranimal studies.²⁸ Scholars working in this area have argued forcefully for seeing transgender as a feature of a wide variety of nonhuman organisms, a feature that calls into question the anthropocentric and transphobic idea that transness is deviant or 'unnatural' when viewed from a human, biological perspective.²⁹ Such scholarship challenges the supposed biological inevitability of human gender binaries and simultaneously uses transness as a means of exploring the complexity of gender definitions situated between human sex/gender systems and the gendering of animals. The hyena sometimes makes an appearance in this scholarly work too. For instance, Joan Roughgarden's influential survey of sex and gender diversity in nonhuman species analyses the spotted hyena as an example of intersex in mammals, or what she terms 'intersexed plumbing'.³⁰ Once again, the hyena in Roughgarden's argument serves to illustrate a broader point about the limitations of human gender categories: among vertebrates, from fish to mammals, binary distinctions in gamete size (which distinguish male and female in biological terms) do not translate into binary body types.³¹

²⁶ Kate Bornstein, *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994), p. 56. For a critique of the research into hormonal influences on hyena morphology and behaviour, see Wilson, 'Sexing the Hyena', pp. 766-779.

²⁷ See also Patrick Boucher, 'Le cri de la hyène: trans, cybermedia et post-pornographie', *Rue Descartes* 79 (2013), 16-28.

²⁸ The second *Transgender Studies Reader* includes a section on 'Transsexing Humanimality', which showcases key examples of work that had emerged in this field since the publication of the first collection in 2006. Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura, eds, *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013). See also the *Transgender Studies Quarterly* special issue on 'Tranimalities', 2.2 (2015).

²⁹ Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution's Rainbow: Diversity, Gender and Sexuality in Nature and People*, 2nd edn (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009). Bailey Kier, 'Interdependent ecological transsex: Notes on re/production, "transgender" fish, and the management of populations, species, and resources', *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 20.3 (2010), 299-319. 'Hird, 'Animal Transsex'. Chen, 'Animals Without Genitals'.

³⁰ Roughgarden, *Evolution's Rainbow*, p. 38.

³¹ Gamete size nonetheless continues to be evoked to support binary conceptions of 'male' and 'female'. On the recent invocation of gamete size by TERFs, see this Twitter thread by Julia Serano: <https://twitter.com/JuliaSerano/status/1135937130197209088>. I am grateful to Blake Gutt for pointing me towards this discussion.

Seen as part of this chronology, then, premodern descriptions of the hyena are a perfect example of ‘trans-historicity’: they acknowledge the presence of transness in nature, albeit in a manner that fails to align with more positive, contemporary assessments of the hyena’s non-binary body.³² I am not seeking here to contest or smooth over the problematic aspects of the hyena’s depiction in medieval bestiaries. There are clearly significant and troubling divergences between medieval representations of this creature and its more recent reclamations. However, I would like to offer a more nuanced picture of how the bestiary tradition deals with the hyena’s purported switching between male and female embodiment and to draw out what I take to be its broader significance for transgender histories and approaches. As it stands, large parts of this chronology remain unexamined or poorly understood. In today’s accounts of the history of reflection on the hyena, the *Physiologus* tradition – if it features at all – primarily serves to introduce new, negative associations for the creature’s supposed sexual deviance. Glickman’s historical survey of depictions of the hyena is emblematic of this tendency. Glickman attributes the first negative judgements of the hyena to the *Physiologus* tradition and proposes a largely static symbolism for the creature covering the period from the second to the sixteenth century:

Early in the Christian era and continuing through the middle ages, two themes emerged: that hyenas changed sex from year to year – a morally unacceptable practice – and that they preyed upon human corpses, digging up graves. The former was linked metaphorically to the Jews and reflected the anti-semitism of this extended period, while the latter was threatening to many human traditions and persists to the present day.³³

³² On ‘trans-historicity’ see Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura, eds, *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 317-318., and Leah DeVun and Zeb Tortorici, ‘Trans, Time, and History’, *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5.4 (2018), 518-539 (pp. 522-524).

³³ Glickman, ‘The Spotted Hyena from Aristotle to *The Lion King*’, pp. 527-528 (see also pp. 515-518). Boswell saw the *Physiologus* tradition as a hugely influential justification of prejudice against homosexuality – one that included sexual inferences about various animals, including the hyena: John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 141-143. Wilson speaks about the *Physiologus* as if it were a single text and proposes that it ‘lodges the sex-changing claim in the Western lexicon of hyenic meaning’. Wilson, ‘Sexing the Hyena’, p. 760. Bewell distinguishes the bestiaries from the *Physiologus*, but somewhat misleadingly claims that ‘medieval bestiaries [...] routinely cast the hyena as a creature of insatiable lust and gluttony for unclean things, satisfying its appetites with a gross cross-sexing’. Bewell, ‘Hyena Trouble’, p. 372.

Discussions of the *Physiologus* tradition's treatment of the hyena thus tend to homogenize an extraordinarily complex tradition. In treating the medieval bestiary as a discursive and symbolic unity, such discussions adopt an approach that has been largely abandoned in medieval scholarship on these texts.³⁴ They also glance over what, from a trans perspective, constitutes one of the more interesting aspects of the *Physiologus*'s insistence on the hyena's double nature: namely, *contra* Aristotle, the affirmation of transsex as a feature of the natural world.

Reclamations of the hyena as a figure of trans and non-binary interest have understandably focused on the creature itself, rather than on its more negative representation in natural histories and pre-Enlightenment scientific literature. The present article seeks to demonstrate how premodern representations of the hyena may be examined in a way that complements the important work of transgender studies scholars, by showing how our contemporary ideas of what constitutes 'natural' sex and gender are themselves part of longer cultural histories. I am not, then, seeking to reclaim the bestiary hyena as an affirmative historical example of transness. Instead, I examine how this creature is, from a medieval perspective, a figure of naturally occurring sexual deviancy. The hyena exemplifies the understanding of nature in the *Physiologus* tradition as potentially aberrant as well as potentially ideal, as both meaningful and in need of interpretation. Bestiary representations thus represent an important site from which to consider how transgender formations become visible within historical cultural discourses about non-binary bodies, as well as through more direct forms of scientific observation. They also present us with an alternative perspective on 'natural' sex and gender that may be placed in productive tension with certain conceptions of gender and of nature today.

Thick Description and Trans Visibility in Bestiary Texts

Bestiary hyenas share at least one important characteristic with their more contemporary counterparts: a non-binary body that is a contested site for the production of meaning. This body is somewhat unusual, even by bestiary standards. The hyena's double nature might be considered to echo that of hybrid creatures featured in the bestiaries, such as the siren (half woman, half fish or bird) or the centaur (half man, half ass); however, unlike these bestiary hybrids, the hyena crosses between sexes rather than species. Moreover, textual descriptions

³⁴ Ron Baxter, *Bestiaries and their Users in the Middle Ages* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing/Courtauld Institute, 1998), pp. 1-28.

suggest the hyena metamorphoses, rather than combining within a single body the physical characteristics of creatures usually thought of as distinct—a depiction of metamorphosis that is rare in bestiary texts. Though these medieval depictions of the hyena do not explicitly encourage a rethinking of human sex/gender formations, they nonetheless affirm the non-binary nature of the hyena’s sexed body and emphasize its symbolic significance.

In so doing, bestiaries raise the question of how transness figures in these sources, in both textual and visual terms, and how we do justice to this figuration in approaching these texts today. The trans-animal body’s visibility in such contexts is an area where the perspectives generated by medieval bestiaries productively intersect with the insights of queer and trans scholarship. Visibility has long been a subject of discussion in such scholarship precisely because of the problem of epistemic blindness that renders queer and transgender individuals effectively invisible in cultures structured along the lines of a binary gender order.³⁵ ‘Passing’ as a cisgender, heterosexual man or woman in such contexts can be a relief or a desired aim, but may also involve the ambivalent occlusion of the individual’s specific history and/or their inadvertent complicity with the existing binary gender regime. Rendering queer and transgender formations visible within dominant cultural discourses is therefore politically valuable, insofar as it offers opportunities for expanding and modifying the vocabulary and grammar of gender within those discourses. As Eveline Kilian puts it, ‘[...] for queer and transgender to unfold their subversive potential they must find, or create, a space for articulation, and articulation is closely connected to visibility’.³⁶ The flip side of the dynamic Kilian describes is the development of ways of seeing queer and transgender not

³⁵ The intelligibility of queer lives and bodies has been a persistent topic in Judith Butler’s work, where visibility is often tied to livability. See for example *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Queer visibility has also been influentially explored in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 2nd edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). Key examples of the literature on trans visibility include Sandy Stone, ‘The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto’, *Camera Obscura*, 10.2 (1992), 150-176; Harold Garfinkel, ‘Passing and the Managed Achievement of Sex Status in an “Intersexed” Person’, in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 58-93; Nan Alamilla Boyd, ‘Bodies in Motion: Lesbian and Transsexual Histories’, in *A Queer World: The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. by Martin Duberman (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 134-152; Jamison Green, ‘Look! No Don’t! The Visibility Dilemma For Transsexual Men’, in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, pp. 499-508. The visibility of transness in medieval sources has been garnering increasing attention. See for example Robert Mills, *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 81-132; Robert Mills, ‘Visibly Trans?: Picturing Saint Eugenia in Medieval Art’, *TSQ* 5.4 (2018), 540-564; Blake Gutt, ‘Medieval Trans Lives in Anamorphosis: Looking Back and Seeing Differently (Pregnant Men and Backward Birth)’, *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 55.1 (2019), 174-206; Dorothy Kim and M. W. Bychowski, ‘Visions of Medieval Trans Feminism: An Introduction’, *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 55.1 (2019), 6-41 (pp. 6-8).

³⁶ Eveline Kilian, ‘Claiming Space: Transgender Visibility in the Arts’, pp. 85-6.

only in new cultural discourses that seek to represent them as such, but also within prevailing cultural discourses from which they might otherwise appear to be excluded. Such a project – in line with the theorizing of queer and trans visibility – involves modes of reading that focus not only on explicit articulations of sex and gender, but also on the particular narratives in which sex and gender are embedded and through which they are translated. The bestiaries are a case in point.

A thick description of sex and gender along these lines – an attention, in other words, not only to their literal or face value presentation but also to their connections to particular contexts and histories – offers a productive way of considering the various figurations of the bestiary hyena’s trans-animal body. The problem for the reader of the bestiary today is not simply how we might go about ‘seeing’ transness in or through established, binary conceptions of sex and gender; this problem is also connected to the way the hyena’s sexed body is used figuratively in bestiary moralizations that might appear to obscure transgender or non-binary gender formations still further, by translating them into meanings that appear to have little to do with the sexed body per se. Yet, if the hyena’s sexed body gives rise to multiple interpretations, it remains present as the literal touchstone for the meanings it generates. It also inflects those interpretations in ways that exploit the anti-Semitic or misogynist associations of gender fluidity in medieval contexts. Bestiary depictions thus demand the kind of intersectional approach to trans-animality called for by Mel Y. Chen, who stresses the importance of sexuality, geopolitics, and race in more contemporary analyses of the transness of animality.³⁷ What I am proposing is not therefore a comfortable or politically enabling form of trans visibility such as that advocated for by Kilian. Instead, what I suggest the bestiary hyena offers us is a way of using trans perspectives to uncover and deconstruct those moments where non-binary gender or transgender feature in historical sources, as well as exposing the ways in which such gender formations are exploited to particular – sometimes deeply unsavoury – ideological ends.

Bestiary chapters in the B-Isidore tradition illustrate how the hyena’s nature and the figurative meanings attributed to it are superimposed in a way that explains, while not erasing, the texts’ literal representation of the transness of this creature. The hyena’s sexed body in these works is located within a constellation of figurative meanings connected to the creature’s double nature. This multiplication of meaning is quite typical of bestiary texts, which understand the natural world and the creatures that inhabit it analogically, through the

³⁷ Mel Y. Chen, ‘Animals Without Genitals: Race and Transsubstantiation’.

so-called ‘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 extrapolates some of these figural senses from a description of the creature (the literal or historical sense), though not necessarily all of them, and not necessarily in sequence. The figural senses frequently draw upon the literal sense in a variety of different ways, meaning that bestiary creatures and their (literal) behaviors and properties are associated with multiple symbolic values. Thus, early versions of the Latin B-Isidore text (10th/11th century) begin by describing the hyena’s alternation between male and female.³⁸ On the basis of this literal description of the creature’s double nature, the text goes on to outline the allegorical meaning: like the hyena, the children of Israel switched from serving the living God to worshiping idols and indulging in riches and riotous living. To this is added a further, moral meaning (the tropological sense): those who are neither faithful nor unfaithful are also like the hyena. The hyena’s double nature is thus singled out for negative comment, while anchoring other, figurative meanings: the beast’s literal vacillation between male and female comes, by association, to stand for more generalized forms of inconstancy that apply in the first instance to the Israelites and, by extension, to Christian readers who risk jeopardizing their souls.³⁹

Later Latin bestiaries similarly demonstrate how the hyena’s trans-animality is translated literally and figuratively in ways that identify the text’s negative valuation of transness with anti-Semitic as well as moral messages. These versions elaborate upon the literal description of the beast found in the earlier B-Isidore text. For example, the Second Family Bestiary – a twelfth-century Latin redaction that reshapes and reorders B-Isidore – claims that, as well as moving between male and female natures, the hyena lives in the tombs of the dead and feeds on human corpses. The beast’s other characteristics include a rigid spine; its nocturnal circling of sheepfolds and human domestic spaces; and its ability to

³⁸ Morini, *Bestiari Medievali*, p. 44. The oldest manuscript transmitting this version is Vatican MS Palatinus Latinus 1074 (10th/11th century): an unillustrated Continental bestiary. The earliest English copy is contained in Laud Miscellaneous 247. Sarah Kay, *Animal Skins and the Reading Self in Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), p. 158; Morini, *Bestiari Medievali*, p. 8; Baxter, *Bestiaries and their Users*, p. 83. For an account of the development of this chapter in the early Latin tradition (the Y and B versions of the *Physiologus*), see Andreas Krass, ‘The Hyena’s Cave: *Jeremiah* 12.9 in Premodern Bestiaries’, *Interfaces*, 5 (2018), 111-128 (118-119).

³⁹ In the *Dicta Chrysostomi* (another medieval redaction derived from *Physiologus* B), the allegorical meaning is connected to the hyena while the moral meaning is related to another transsex creature: the coot. Krass, ‘The Hyena’s Cave’, pp. 119-120.

imitate human voice and vomiting in order to lure men and dogs to their deaths.⁴⁰ The literal description in this later redaction thus connects the hyena's troubling of the supposed boundary between male and female natures with other forms of boundary crossing between the living and the dead, domestic and wild, human and animal. As in the earlier B-Isidore tradition, the allegorical meaning attached to the literal description of the creature connects this 'unclean' boundary crossing to the children of Israel and the tropological sense converts this allegory into a moral lesson for the Christian reader, who is advised not to emulate such double-mindedness and inconstancy. The trans-animality of the hyena in this later redaction is therefore apparent in multiple ways: not only as a property of the creature's non-binary body and the figurative meanings associated with that body, but also as a disruption of other binaries evoked in the literal description of its behavioral characteristics.

French bestiary authors who drew their material from the B-Isidore tradition further demonstrate how the hyena's trans-animal body is seen through multiple, subtly divergent translations of that body. I limit my comments here to two bestiaries written in England almost a century apart: Philippe de Thaon's *Bestiaire* (c.1121-35) and Guillaume le Clerc's *Bestiaire divin* (c.1210/1211).⁴¹ These two versions both rework Latin B-Isidore models, though to different effect. The interest of these versions is, in part, that they show how vernacular bestiary authors reshape their material in ways that can introduce important differences in emphasis. The fact that both texts are written in French verse, rather than prose, means that the degree of creative license used by these writers is much greater than that found in some other French bestiaries.⁴² Another reason for focusing on these vernacular versions is that they are transmitted in illuminated copies which enable a consideration of the visibility of the trans-animal in visual as well as textual registers, a feature of these texts that I discuss in greater detail in the final section of my argument.

⁴⁰ These details are added from Solinus' *Collectanea*. They are also found in Pliny's account. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, p. 131 n.73.

⁴¹ *Bestiari Medievali*, ed. and trans. by Luigina Morini (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1996), pp. 112-285; Philippe de Thaon, *Bestiaire* (*MS BL Cotton Nero A. V*), ed. by Ian Short (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2018). Both of these editions share the same line numbering. Short's edition is a single manuscript edition; Morini's edition is more interventionist and does not list variants or rejected readings. Quotations and references unless otherwise indicated are from Short's edition. Guillaume le Clerc, *Le Bestiaire. Das Thierbuch des Normannischen Dichters Guillaume le Clerc zum ersten male vollständig nach den Handschriften von London, Paris und Berlin*, ed. by Robert Reinsch, Altfranzösische Bibliothek, 14 (Leipzig: 1890; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1973). Quotations are from this edition. All translations from Old French are my own.

⁴² For instance, Pierre de Beauvais's bestiary is a relatively close translation of a B-Isidore model in French prose. Pierre's *Bestiaire* exists in two versions, only the first of which can be securely attributed to him: the Short Version (before 1218, possibly 1180–1206) and the Long Version (1246–68), which incorporates the chapters from the Short Version into a much longer compilation. Only one of the manuscripts of the Short Version is illuminated.

The earliest bestiary written in French by Philippe de Thaon is an important example of the divergent readings that the hyena's nature sometimes produces in the vernacular development of the *Physiologus* tradition. Philippe's source was probably an early twelfth-century variant of the Late Antique Latin *Physiologus*, incorporating elements from the *Dicta Chrysostomi*.⁴³ His text attaches the hyena's putative sexual transformation neither to a condemnation of homosexuality (as in the Greek prototype) nor to Jewish fickleness (as in the Latin B-Isidore). Rather, Philippe's *Bestiaire* presents the creature's apparent switching between sexes as analogous to the improper adoption of female characteristics among his implicitly male target audience.⁴⁴ The opening of the chapter follows the Latin B-Isidore quite closely: Philippe claims that the hyena is a fierce creature that must not be eaten, before quoting from Jeremiah 12.8, 'my inheritance is become to me as a hyena in its den' (*Bestiaire*, vv. 1177-1188).⁴⁵ According to Physiologus, Philippe continues, the hyena is both male and female (*male e femele est; Bestiaire*, v. 1191) and thus considered unclean. Philippe then bypasses the allegorical meaning associating the hyena with the children of Israel and moves straight to the tropological meaning, which associates avarice, covetousness, and lecherousness with the hyena's sexual dynamism (*Bestiaire*, vv. 1193-1196). Though the reference to Jeremiah might obliquely conjure up the Jewish rejection of Christ, this is not the focus of Philippe's bestiary moralization. The tropological significance identified with the hyena's ostensible sexual transformation is in fact more misogynist than anti-Semitic: man should be stable by nature, Philippe claims, but is like a woman when he is covetous (*Bestiaire*, vv. 1197-1208). The connection in the Latin B-Isidore between the hyena's double nature and the potential doubleness and inconstancy of the male Christian reader is thus drawn out more clearly in Philippe's text, which omits other details in order to use the creature's supposed sexual transformation as the basis for a moralization focused on female (rather than Jewish) inconstancy.

In contrast to Philippe's focus on gendered bodies and behaviours, Guillaume le Clerc's thirteenth-century *Bestiaire divin* ties the instability of the hyena's sexed body more

⁴³ Sarah Kay, "'The English Bestiary', the Continental *Physiologus* and the Intersections Between Them', *Medium Ævum*, 85.1 (2016), 118-142 (pp. 128-32).

⁴⁴ The *Bestiaire* is dedicated to at least one, if not two queens: the prologue in Cotton Nero A. V. dedicates the work to Adeliza ('Aelis') of Louvain, second wife of Henry I of England; in Oxford, Merton 249 'Aelis' is changed to 'Alienor', Henry II's queen. Nevertheless, the implied audience here is male – a feature of the work that would fit with its use as a memory book for novices.

⁴⁵ This biblical quotation from the Book of Jeremiah only appears in the Greek *Septuagint*; the reference to the hyena is in fact a distortion of the original Hebrew text. The reference may have made its way into the *Physiologus* tradition from Clement of Alexandria. *Physiologus*, ed. and trans. Zucker, p. 165; Krass, 'The Hyena's Cave'. pp. 116-117.

closely to the creature's transgressive appetite, while using the trans-animal as the impetus for figurative interpretations that are both misogynist and anti-Semitic. The opening of Guillaume's chapter emphasizes the hyena's association with the eating of human corpses, a characteristic that confirms the creature's uncleanness (*Bestiaire divin*, vv. 1580-88). In mentioning the hyena's sex changing, Guillaume again recalls that it inhabits graves, before marvelling at its strange ability to change its appearance or coat (*son vestement; Bestiaire divin*, vv. 1599-1606) – a formulation that, in drawing on a sartorial metaphor, may already anticipate the allegorical identification of the hyena with Jews.⁴⁶ In the subsequent moralization, Guillaume accordingly associates the feminization of Jews with their excessive lifestyle and diet, tendencies that he claims led them to abandon God and worship idols (*Bestiaire divin*, vv. 1607-18). He then suggests the hyena signifies unreliable people in general, who are neither male nor female but double and untrustworthy (*Bestiaire divin*, vv. 1619-42).

Guillaume's text thus preserves the connection between the hyena's ability to change its sex and Jewish fickleness, while subtly shifting the relationship between these elements in the Latin versions already examined. In Guillaume's allegory, as in his description of the hyena, the movement from male to female embodiment is inseparable from transgressive appetite: Jews became female 'quant il furent suef norri/ e as delices adenti,/ a la char e a la luxure' [when they were well nourished and overcome/tamed by delights, by flesh, and by lechery] (*Bestiaire divin*, vv. 1613-15). Guillaume's phrasing conflates sexual appetite (notably the Cardinal Sin of lust, or lechery) with desire for other kinds of pleasure, including food; at the same time, the satisfaction of such appetites is used as the basis for likening Jews to the corpse-devouring hyena. Such unclean nourishment links Jews not only to the hyena's sex changing, by effeminizing them, but also to the creature's animality. This dehumanizing gesture is implied by Guillaume's choice of the verb *adenter* to describe Jews' feminizing submission to their appetites: a term that evokes the breaking or taming of animals, as well as the experience of being overcome.⁴⁷ In Guillaume's symbolically dense rendering, then,

⁴⁶ Guillaume's poem predates by four or five years Pope Innocent III's decree that Jews be distinguishable from Christians by their dress, a decree issued following the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. The allusion to the switching of clothing may nonetheless reflect the concerns about Jews and Muslims passing as Christians that gave rise to this decree, and which were fostered by the increasing contact between these populations within Christian Europe. The concerns articulated in Canon 68 focused on the impossibility in certain provinces of differentiating Christian and non-Christian populations, leading to inadvertent and spiritually dangerous sexual relations between Christians and Jews or Saracens. Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, pp. 147-8; Higgs Strickland, 'The Jews, Leviticus, and the Unclean', p. 210; Nicholas Vincent, 'Two Papal Letters on Wearing the Jewish Badge, 1221 and 1229', *Jewish Historical Studies*, 34 (1994-6), 209-24.

⁴⁷ See the entry under 'adenter' in the Anglo-Norman Dictionary <<http://www.anglo-norman.net>>

Jews' purported effeminacy, fickleness, animality, and rejection of Christ, emerge from appetites analogous to those of the hyena. This association is carried over into the tropological significance Guillaume attaches to the creature, which identifies the hyena with those duplicitous in word and deed. Neither male nor female in their double-dealing, such people, Guillaume maintains, want to serve more than one master while being faithful to neither (*Bestiaire divin*, vv. 1621-34). The doubleness of the hyena's nature is here connected to a different kind of desire, one which similarly runs counter to the Gospel's teaching that God and Mammon cannot be served simultaneously and that, in this instance, implies identification with Jews as well as with the trans-animal. Guillaume's reworking of his source thus knits the hyena's putative sexual instability more closely to its transgressive appetite, while still using its trans-animal body as a crucial element – if not the foundation – for each of the figurative interpretations.

Comparison of different texts within the *Physiologus* tradition – even those within the same branch of that tradition – thus paints a more nuanced picture of the medieval bestiary hyena than that which emerges from accounts like Glickman's. Although, as we have seen, there is a large degree of consistency in the bestiaries' depiction and interpretation of the hyena's sexually dynamic nature, that nature does not have a single symbolic value: bestiary authors describe the creature in subtly different ways and place different emphases on the allegorical and moral meanings associated with its trans-animal body. Equally important for the argument I am making here is the fact that the bestiaries' interpretations of the hyena's trans-animality do not replace the literal description of the creature's nature with its associated allegorical meanings. If the French and Latin bestiarists examined above present the figurative significance of the hyena's trans-animal nature in divergent ways, that nature remains a crucial substrate connecting different layers of description and meaning. This is because bestiary chapters are constructed according to a principle of accumulation rather than substitution – a principle that underpins these works' demonstration of the richness of meaning in the created world. In this sense, what a thick description of sex and gender in chapters on the hyena reveals is how the trans-animal body persists as a literal and, sometimes, as a figural presence, regardless of whether or not that body is identified with visible genital markers. The visibility of transness here requires modes of reading that locate the hyena within the particular constellation of interpretations to which its double nature gives rise, a constellation that varies depending on the bestiary text in which it features.

Visualizing the Trans-Animal Body in Bestiary Images

The question of how we see transness within the cluster of meanings generated by bestiary chapters on the hyena poses itself in a different way when it comes to the visual images accompanying the texts. The focus on the animal in bestiary illuminations is itself historically significant: the bestiaries are among the first works to place animal subjects at the centre of the image, rather than using them for peripheral decoration.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, bestiary illuminations, like the chapters themselves, are less concerned with observational realism than with conventional modes of representation. The aim of bestiary images is not to provide an image of the material world drawn from life, but to make the Christian symbolism of the natural world more legible to readers. In this respect, such images are not, strictly speaking, illustrations: they are neither drawn from life, nor illustrations of the letter of the text they accompany. Rather, bestiary illuminations interpret, synthesize, and embellish the text: illuminators sometimes draw attention to particular senses of interpretation in depicting animal subjects or, in some instances, encourage multidimensional modes of reading that connect the text's literal and figurative interpretations.⁴⁹ The animal in bestiary images thus often participates in the analogical thinking already observed in connection with the texts. The trans-animal body of the hyena in manuscript illuminations likewise needs to be viewed in this context.

Visual images of the hyena often draw on the bestiary chapter's literal sense, combining a depiction of the animal with characteristics included in the textual description.⁵⁰ The hyena's animal body is the focus of all of these illuminations, though its sex changing is figured in more or less overt ways. In the B-Isidore tradition, some early manuscripts represent the hyena with a forked outgrowth emerging from its mouth (e.g. British Library, Stowe 1067, fol. 3r), a visual reference to the metaphorical doubleness of its tongue in *Physiologus*, as well as the doubleness of its nature.⁵¹ In later versions, narrative images of the hyena – i.e. images representing the creature in a descriptive context, as opposed to offering a portrait of it in isolation – usually represent its habit of feeding on human corpses, most often showing the beast violating a sepulchre or devouring a dead body.⁵² Some of these narrative images additionally depict the hyena's switching between male and female as a kind

⁴⁸ Pastoureau, *Bestiaires du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Seuil, 2011), p. 38

⁴⁹ Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, pp. 8-16 and 18; Pastoureau, *Bestiaires du Moyen Âge*, pp. 39-42.

⁵⁰ See my explanation of the layering of literal and figurative senses in bestiary chapters, on pp. 000-000.

⁵¹ Kay, *Animal Skins*, pp. 70 and 57 (fig. 5).

⁵² Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, p. 146. In bestiaries derived from the *Dicta Chrysostomi* version, the pictorial tradition includes images of two hyenas embracing. See Kay, *Animal Skins*, pp. 70-71 and Krass, 'The Hyena's Cave', p. 125.

of intersex embodiment, reinforcing the beast's association with Jews by representing it with a circumcised penis. The intersex representation of the hyena in illuminations can be observed in several Second Family manuscripts. Aberdeen, UL 24 and Bodleian, Ashmole 1511, two luxury manuscripts executed in the Second-Family Bestiary's earliest production period (1180-1250), represent the hyena with a circumcised penis as well as a vaginal opening under its tail (figs. 1 and 2). A family of so-called 'Transitional' bestiaries which all share textual and pictorial features with one another also show the hyena with penis and vaginal opening: New York, Morgan M. 81 (1300-1350); St Petersburg Q.v.V.1 (late 12th century); British Library, Royal MS 12 C. xix (first quarter 13th century) (fig. 3); and Getty Museum, MS 100 (1250-60) (fig. 4).⁵³ The elaborate belt circling the hyena's mid-section in this group of Transitional bestiary images might additionally allude to the creature's doubleness, by dividing its body into two.

The intersex depiction of the hyena in some Latin manuscripts appears to be a means of communicating the mobility of the creature's sexed body. The hyena's circumcised penis encourages a multi-layered reading that connects the literal and allegorical senses of the beast's nature, reinforcing the sense that what is depicted here is sexual mobility, glossed in the textual description as Jewish inconstancy. Indeed, critics have often drawn attention to images where the hyena's genitals are emphasized by illuminators in order to spotlight the anti-Semitic readings evoked by such images. Making a persuasive case for viewing images of the hyena in terms of widespread anti-Semitic sentiment in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Debra Strickland ventures that hyena images featuring prominent genitalia could be interpreted in light of contemporary accusations of illicit sexual relations between Jews and Christians.⁵⁴ Focusing on the image of the hyena in the Aberdeen Bestiary (fig. 1), Jeffrey Cohen similarly proposes that the animal's strangeness is underscored by its depiction with an enlarged, anally positioned vagina and a circumcised penis, physical features that associate the creature with Jewish racial and sexual alterity.⁵⁵ What this suggests is that the hyena's genitals not only make its trans-animality visible in these illuminations, but also connect that visibility to the legibility of its body as Jewish as well as non-binary. The trans-

⁵³ Hassig mentions the first two of these images: *Medieval Bestiaries*, figs. 151 and 152. I am grateful to her for discussion of other images in personal correspondence.

⁵⁴ Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, p. 152. Hassig, *The Mark of the Beast*, pp. 74-5.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'Inventing with Animals in the Middle Ages', in *Engaging with Nature: Essays on the Natural World in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt and Lisa J. Kiser (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), pp. 39-62 (pp. 47-48).

animal body here is inseparable from its anti-Semitic interpretation, being identified with the ambiguously gendered, sexually threatening body of the Jew in medieval Christian thinking.

What a trans approach encourages us to consider is how the trans-animal body may appear in bestiary images that do not privilege the genital marking of sex, as well as those that do. As explained earlier, queer and trans perspectives highlight the complex ways in which sex and gender may be articulated indirectly, as well as overtly, requiring what I refer to in my readings of bestiary chapters as a thick description of sex/gender formations. Such an approach can also be applied to more conventional images of the hyena, which show the creature without visible genitalia, eating, attacking, or unearthing human corpses or body parts. This depiction of the hyena's body is in keeping with the representation of other bestiary creatures: most bestiary animals are depicted without genital markers. Yet this portrayal of the body does not necessarily amount to an absence of sex or gender. The hyena's trans-animality is equally, if differently, apparent in such illuminations. Indeed, images of the hyena without visible genitalia arguably allow for greater emphasis of the creature's vacillation between male and female natures by omitting any visible markers of its sex. In this sense, what is euphemized in images that do not explicitly feature the hyena's genitalia may be less the hyena's ambiguously sexed body than the Jewish associations of the creature's double nature. From this perspective, then, the question is less whether the hyena's body is genitally marked and more how the trans-animal body, which provides the focus for all of these images, is contextualized.

Philippe's *Bestiaire* presents a depiction of the sexually marked trans-animal that contrasts with the sexualized, anti-Semitic Latin images mentioned above. The Merton copy of Philippe's text is one of just two illustrated manuscripts transmitting this work.⁵⁶ Like the early B-Isidore bestiary in Stowe 1067, this copy of Philippe's text features a portrait depiction of the hyena with penis and testicles (fig. 5);⁵⁷ the beast is depicted in profile, without reference to any narrative or background elements.⁵⁸ As mentioned earlier, Philippe's

⁵⁶ The Copenhagen manuscript transmitting Philippe's text represents the hyena as part of a narrative image that adds an association with cemeteries absent from Philippe's description (fol. 34r). The beast in this illumination stands before a structure that could represent either a church or an entrance to a cemetery, holding what appears to be a spine in its mouth.

⁵⁷ Though it lacks the elaborate tongue (and wings) of the hyena in Stowe 1067, the Merton illustration is otherwise very similar to that image. Most beasts in the Merton manuscript are represented without visible genitals. Of those creatures that are represented with a penis, the hyena's genitals are more clearly depicted than those of other beasts. Five other animals have a protuberance in the genital area that might represent a penis or testicles; the onoscentaur (also on folio 5v) has three such protuberances, which look more like teats, though are probably intended to represent a penis and testicles. <<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/inquire/p/38f16924-e29d-4a8d-ab33-982db9db3b35>>

⁵⁸ On portrait images in other bestiary texts see Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, p. 10.

text omits the anti-Semitic allegory and focuses instead on a moral interpretation that encourages male readers to shun the inconstancy that, it is claimed, is typical of women. In this instance, then, although the image concentrates on the hyena's male body, that body is not designated as Jewish. Indeed, the genital markers in this image would appear to reinforce the message communicated in Philippe's moralization: the male reader, like the hyena, should cultivate properly male characteristics, even if his nature may threaten to switch the other way. The hyena thus figures the inherent fragility of male, Christian identity in this text: if the trans-animal is gendered male in this image, its double nature means it is, by definition, only temporarily so.

In illuminations of Guillaume's *Bestiaire divin*, the hyena's trans-animality is most often seen in relation to its appetite for human corpses. These, mostly narrative, images conform to a common depiction of the hyena also seen in Latin manuscripts, while reinforcing the more explicit emphasis of the hyena's unclean appetite already noted in Guillaume's text. Three examples, each representing a variation on a theme, give a flavor of the imagery included alongside the chapter: in British Library, Cotton Vespasian A. VII, the hyena stands over a human body wrapped in a white shroud (fol. 15ra); in Bibliothèque nationale, français 1444, the hyena runs about with a human head in its mouth (fol. 247v) (fig. 6); and in Bibliothèque nationale, français 14970 a dark-grey hyena with long ears is shown lurking in a cemetery (fol. 14rb). While representing its body without genital markers, these examples all gesture at the hyena's changeable sex by associating its body with the violation of other types of boundary crossing. In one manuscript, Cambridge Fitzwilliam MS 20 (1323), the doubleness of the hyena's nature is alluded to through the duplication of the (genitally unmarked) animal body. This codex depicts two hyenas facing in opposite directions, while feeding on human heads (fol. 56ra) (fig. 7), a doubling that also has the effect of repeating the focus on the creature's appetite.⁵⁹

An especially complex articulation of the hyena's trans-animality in the pictorial tradition associated with Guillaume's bestiary may be seen in Bibliothèque nationale, français 14969 (c.1265-70), an Anglo-Norman manuscript believed to have been executed at St Albans in a workshop that specialized in pictorial commentaries for other types of work,

⁵⁹ The codex was illuminated by a single artist known as the Ghent master. See the Fitzwilliam's entry for this manuscript: <<http://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/169648>> This image might be compared with that in a later, Latin bestiary (c. 1450) – Museum Meermannno, MMW, 10 B 25 (fol. 7v) – where two hyenas also appear in the same frame.

such as apocalypses.⁶⁰ BnF, fr. 14969 is one of only two *Bestiaire divin* manuscripts depicting the figurative or moral meanings of bestiary creatures as well as the creatures themselves, thereby introducing new iconography as well as drawing on earlier pictorial models.⁶¹ The image programme in this manuscript includes both allegorical and narrative illustrations for the creatures analysed in the text; these illustrations usually invert the order of the literal and figurative descriptions in the text, placing the allegory first and the narrative illustration of the literal sense second. The allegorical illustration that introduces the chapter on the hyena in this manuscript splits into two, the top half representing the ‘good’ Old Testament patriarchs led by Moses experiencing the vision of the burning bush and the bottom half depicting ‘bad’ Jews worshipping the Golden Calf (fol. 29v) (fig. 8).⁶² The pendant image of the hyena on the next folio depicts it facing left, like the idolatrous Jews in the previous image; the creature is represented stepping over a disembodied human head to devour a male corpse (fol. 30r). The body of the hyena represented in the image thus marks the end of the chapter, whilst that same body, as described in the text, provides the chapter’s starting point. The trans-animal body comes into being here as part of a circular process of reading whereby the pendant image showing the hyena appears as the culmination of the textual (and visual) interpretations that make it meaningful.

Moreover, the unsettling doubleness of the hyena’s body is communicated not only through textual and visual description, but also in ways that bypass direct representation. The image of the hyena on fol. 30r is painted onto a ruptured folio that was stitched back together prior to the writing of the text, which is oriented around the stitching. The creature’s body is consequently traversed by a visible seam in the parchment that cuts across its mid-section. Medieval parchment was a material produced from specially prepared animal skins (usually

⁶⁰ Henri Omont, in collaboration with C. Couderc, L. Auvray and Ch. De la Roncière, *Bibliothèque nationale catalogue général des manuscrits français. Ancien supplément français III (n° 13091 à 15369 du fonds français)* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1896). Paul Meyer, ‘Les Plus Anciens Lapidaires français’, *Romania*, 38 (1909), 44-70 (p. 54). Muratova, ‘Les Miniatures du manuscrit Fr. 14969’. Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, p. 12.

⁶¹ Bibliothèque nationale, français 24428 (c.1270) appears to have two separate images representing the hyena and the moralization of its nature; the first of these may be misplaced, as it appears above a rubric announcing the chapter on the beaver. This manuscript, like BnF, fr. 14969, represents a hyena eating a corpse in the left-hand section of the image and Jews turning away from God on the right (fol. 64v). The second miniature on the next folio is almost identical to the first in its composition, but replaces the Jews with an unidentified group of three haloed figures worshipping an idol (fol. 65r). This second image – which may have been the result of an illuminator’s attempt to recover from an error in the placement of the previous image – appears to indicate the moralization applies to Christians, as well as Jews.

⁶² On the positioning of the Jews in this image, see Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, repr. 1990), p. 166; and Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries*, pp. 150-51. On the conversion imagery, see Higgs Strickland, ‘The Jews, Leviticus, and the Unclean’, pp. 210 and 230 n.99.

those of calves, sheep, or goats). Sarah Kay has proposed that ruptured or perforated parchment in bestiary texts may produce moments where the distinction between textual content and its medium of transmission is suspended, with uncanny effect.⁶³ As she points out, this image offers an example of precisely such a parallel between textual content and parchment page, by graphically calling attention to the hyena's double nature.⁶⁴ As well as splitting the hyena in two, the ruptured skin of this folio evokes other boundary crossings with which this creature is identified, most notably its violation of the boundary between living and dead, and between man and animal.⁶⁵ The wound in the parchment echoes the tearing of human flesh in the miniature itself, mirroring the harm inflicted by the hyena on the human corpse as the animal goes to devour it. The association of the hyena with Jews – an association that is all too clear in the allegorical image as well as in Guillaume's text – adds a further dimension to this gesture, which conjures the common medieval association of Jews with the 'dead' letter of Scripture. Yet, even as it draws attention to the rupturing of flesh in the image, the stitching of this folio reverses the destructive gesture that satisfies the hyena's appetite. This repaired parchment is a reminder that the manuscript transmitting the text re-establishes the correct hierarchy of man and beast violated by the hyena, both as a book made by humans from slaughtered animals and as a text that instructs human beings to curb their animal appetites and cultivate a properly Christian attention to the spirit of the text.

The images examined above represent the trans-animal body in ways that draw differently on visible genital markers. The doubleness of the hyena's sex is emphasized explicitly in some illuminations, through the intersex representation of the beast in some Latin manuscripts. In the Merton copy of Philippe's text, the hyena's body is genitally marked as male in the image, although that same body, read in conjunction with the moralization, signifies in ways that encourage a more mobile conception of the animal's sexed body. In other images that omit genital markers altogether, the ambiguity of the creature's nature and the challenge that nature poses to binary thinking is communicated in less overt, though equally potent, ways. In images of this kind, the hyena's trans-animality may be communicated through the association of its body with other kinds of boundary

⁶³ Kay, *Animal Skins*, pp. 4-7, and 'Surface and Symptom on a Bestiary Page: Orifices on Folios 61v-62r of Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 20', *Exemplaria*, 26.2-3 (2014), 127-147.

⁶⁴ Kay, *Animal Skins*, pp. 72-73.

⁶⁵ On the illuminations in this manuscript, see Muratova, 'Les Miniatures du manuscrit Fr. 14969', who suggests that moralized illuminations return to an older tradition of *Physiologus* illumination. Hassig proposes that the placing of the allegorical image first, before the depiction of the creature itself, may reflect a privileging of theological truths over the animal stories from which they are derived: *Medieval Bestiaries*, p. 151.

crossing; through the duplication of its body within the image; or even by the ruptured parchment on which its body is painted. In all cases, illuminations contribute to a trans visibility that operates in conjunction with the textual descriptions and interpretations. These images, seen in terms of a thick description of sex and gender in the manuscripts that transmit them, offer ways of viewing transness as part of the cluster of interpretations that make the hyena meaningful in bestiary terms.

Conclusion: The Trans-Animal Body as Natural Aberration

I have argued that the bestiaries' depictions of the hyena, in contending with the creature's supposed ability to move between male and female natures, offer an uncomfortable, but significant, source for thinking about how transness before transgender is conceptualized through the animal body in premodern sources. This tradition affirms that transsex is part of the created world: the hyena's literal switching between male and female embodiment is precisely what makes this creature significant in figurative terms. Yet, in all their manifestations, bestiary hyenas offer negatively marked interpretations of transness, interpretations that combine transphobic, anti-Semitic, and misogynist positions. This tendency arguably makes it all the more important to examine the intricacies of how the hyena is figured in this medieval tradition. Being alert to the differences between depictions of the hyena in bestiary texts not only helps to counter the homogenizing tendencies of more contemporary historical chronologies; more importantly for transgender histories, it also exposes the ways transness was variously appropriated, maligned, and racialized in one of the most influential cultural discourses of the Middle Ages.

The engagement with the hyena's putative ability to change its sex on the part of bestiary authors and illuminators raises the important question of how we go about reading and interpreting these textual and visual figurations of transness today. I have proposed that, in responding to this question, medievalists can usefully draw on queer and trans perspectives, which emphasize that sex/gender formations perceived as non-normative are often subject to complex forms of articulation and visibility within dominant cultural discourses. Seeing transness in the medieval bestiary tradition – a cultural discourse that often presents fluid or non-binary sex/gender formations in overtly hostile ways – involves attending to the more or less explicit ways in which transness may manifest itself. My analysis of the hyena illustrates how a thick description of sex and gender captures a range of

ways in which trans visibility functions in the bestiaries, as well as how it varies across different texts in this tradition.⁶⁶

Visualizing the trans-animal body of the hyena in this way is not a straightforward retrieval of an affirmative kind of trans embodiment. Rather, it is an attempt to think ‘trans-historically’ in one of the senses this collection encourages, by confronting and working with the tensions inherent in excavating a transgender past from medieval sources.⁶⁷ This approach offers a more nuanced picture of the bestiary tradition’s place in the longer cultural history of the hyena: a creature with an enduring relevance to those interested in rethinking human sex/gender binaries today. In this respect, bringing the multifaceted trans-animality of the bestiary hyena more clearly into focus might enable this creature to take its place in a history of the natural world that complements the important work of trans scholars on animal transsex or trans-animality. If the medieval hyena’s non-binary nature does not fit with more inclusive arguments about gender diversity among nonhuman creatures, the bestiaries nonetheless open up sites of resistance within cultural narratives that presume the timelessness and universality of human concepts of nature, as well as concepts of sex and gender. In this regard, it is worth highlighting the fact that the hyena’s supposed deviance, seen from a medieval point of view, is not identical with the notions of deviance sometimes mobilized in today’s discussions of ‘natural’ or ‘unnatural’ sex and gender norms— notions that, as noted earlier, scholars in trans studies have vehemently challenged. Nature in these texts is potentially transgressive by definition, which is precisely why didactic works such as the bestiaries are required to intervene in disciplining the human natures of their intended audiences. Thus, if we look beyond the constellation of meanings that accrue around the hyena’s trans-animal body, the bestiaries also encourage us to see how ‘nature’ is subject to historically contingent and multi-layered forms of visibility, even when that visibility is framed in terms of more objective, scientific observation. Visualizing the trans-animal body of the bestiary hyena is also an encouragement to relativize today’s post-Enlightenment vision of the natural world and its reflection (or otherwise) of human sex/gender systems, by situating that vision within a much longer, more complicated history.

⁶⁶ On ‘thick description’, see above, pp. 000-000.

⁶⁷ See the introduction to this volume. This approach also chimes with other historical work in trans studies, for example, the special edition of *TSQ* on ‘Trans*historicalities’: *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5.4 (2018).