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**The (Fe)Male Shifts Shame: Androgyny and Transformation in Marie
de France, Gerald of Wales, and the *Volsungasaga***

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Abstract

The (Fe)Male Shifts Shame: Androgyny and Transformation in Marie de France, Gerald of Wales, and the *Volsungasaga*

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Transformation is inherently entwined with the transgression of borders; for male shifters, there is an acquittance of this transhuman breach, but not so for female shifters. Gerald of Wale's *History and Topography of Ireland* depicts two werewolves: the male's shapeshifting is all but disregarded, while the female's own transformation is depicted in detail and effectively shames her into silence. In addition, the *Volsungasaga* also contains werewolves: Sigmund and Sinfjotli don wolfskins, but soon regret their transformations. However, neither is shamed for the shapeshifting, and indeed, Sinfjotli successfully twists the experience to his advantage. The female werewolf, King Siggeir's mother, however, is killed and her identity as a “foul” witch exposed. There are also the human-to-human transformations of Signy/a witch and Sigurd/Gunnar. Signy expresses shame for the incident; Sigurd and Gunnar's plot is revealed, but neither is condemned: the tale passes over the shapeshifting in favor of the narrative drama. Furthermore, Marie de France's *Bisclavret* perpetuates the same pattern: the male werewolf is praised and exonerated for his transhuman nature while the wife's pseudo-shapeshifting is met with condemnation

and shame. However, Marie de France's *Yonec* attempts to break this pattern, with the shapeshifter Muldumarec transgressing not only the animal/human binary but that of the male/female. His androgyny is conferred onto his beloved, who also undergoes transformations but is spared the shaming consequences via Muldumarec. While this sharing of androgyny breaks the pattern and keeps the beloved from condemnation, it ultimately fails in breaking the patriarchal underpinnings of the pattern itself.

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Transformation is inherently entwined with the transgression of borders; shapeshifting throws light on and opens for examination the amorphous boundary separating the human from the supernatural and the Other and, in the end, reveals the “dangers” of crossing that boundary (Grimstad 28). The treatment of such transgressions is multifaceted in nature; gender, nationalism, society, and more create thematic undertones to the border-crossing shifter. The question of gender in animal transformations is particularly interesting, as seen in the cases of the 12th-13th-century texts of Gerald of Wales' *The History and Topography of Ireland*, Marie de France's *Bisclavret* and *Yonec*, and *The Volsungasaga*. In these texts, the feminine shifter is inevitably exposed and socially disgraced, while the masculine shapeshifters remain socially safe and even honored. This pattern is yet more intriguing when applied to the shapeshifter of Marie de France's *Yonec*. The exposure of the female transformation acts as a shaming device, mitigating their sexual threat, because each feminine shifter experiences social discovery and condemnation.¹ While *History and Topography of Ireland*, *Volsungasaga*, and *Bisclavret* perpetuate this pattern, *Yonec* attempts to break and reform it via the androgynous figure of Muldumarec, whose shapeshifting is not only trans-species but also trans-gender. Despite being able to break free of the pattern of

¹ This scorn for the powerful, transgressive female is a well-known tradition in fairy tales, wherein “self-aware and non-conformist women are depicted unkindly; they invariably have to pay for their rebellion by being either ostracized or killed. . . . The powerful women are usually wicked witches or stepmothers, whose assertiveness and independence prove destructive” (Deszcz 28-29). This trend, however, is not universal in folklore. The female trickster figure has been known to play with traditional female roles, vacillating between “prize/victim to pseudo-ally” of patriarchy as best suits her (Mills 247). For example, storyteller Abdul Wāhed's tale of “The Carpenter” presents a wife who traps visiting men (who threaten her reputation) in a female, domestic sphere, but does so to preserve her virtue and assist her husband, becoming his “accomplice” in a depiction of female power that is “ultimately supportive of patriarchy” (245, 255).

shaming, Marie de France still fails to appropriate and usurp the patriarchal pattern found in her folkloric sources.

Her attempt is analogous to the feminist struggle to create or locate a female voice, as established by French feminist theorists Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. In her 1985 piece, “The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine,” Irigaray urged women to “play with mimesis” in order to “recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it” (795). Her methods were not unlike the techniques that Marie de France seems to utilize: “[o]ne must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it” (795). Similarly, in her 1975 manifesto “The Laugh of Medusa,” Hélène Cixous disclaims the “appropriation of [male] instruments, their concepts, their places,” but she nonetheless advocates women to *voler*—a French verb that can mean either to “fly” or to “steal”—implying an appropriation that does not require one to first remain in the patriarchal discourse but to “[b]reak out of the circles” (1953; 1958). Drawing on these feminist philosophers, one can elucidate the differences between the treatment of male versus female shapeshifters in these source texts: the process of appropriating and changing the language of patriarchy that is analogous to Marie de France's own use and misuse of the patriarchal pattern of female shame: with *Bisclavret* there is the perpetuation of the male domination, a domination that is then subverted through androgyny in *Yonec* as Marie attempts to rupture the paradigm surrounding these gendered depictions of shapeshifting.

Shapeshifting itself boasts a long tradition; in Norse mythology, it was multitudinous, with such variety of forms and methods as the berserker's bear- and wolf-

skins, or the Norse goddess Freyja's use of a feather to become a falcon; donning the hides of an animal transferred the powers inherent to that creature onto the wearer (Morris 98). In other cases, intermediary devices are less specific: Freyja could also assume the form of a sow, and many literary figures favored the walrus; meanwhile, sorcerers were not picky: at sea they chose marine animals and on land, fowls (Morris 120). The ability to transform one's shape has always been prominent in Norse literature, the supernatural ability encompassing not only the divine pantheon but also humans;² in the case of the latter, the ability was most often interpreted as sorcery and acted as a “chief characteristic of the medieval witch” in the 12th- to 14th- century Icelandic sagas (Morris 97).³ The association of the witch and the animal grew, until one could not only ride,⁴ eat, have sex with but also transform herself into an animal (Morris 125).⁵ In Norse

2 It is also of note that shapeshifting is very common in the Icelandic sagas that Morris references (e.g.: *Eyrbyggjasaga*, *Volsungasaga*, *Ynglingasaga*), the presence of the *hamrammr*, or “shapestrong” occurring fairly regularly (Morris 98). Morris’s studies encompass medieval northern Europe as well as said Icelandic literatures.

3 This association is by no means limited to the Old Norse traditions, but also occurs in European superstition. The tenth-century *Episcopi* cites women who fly at night with Diana, and the 11th-century *Decretum* by Burchard of Worms references the same detail, and for both the concern is less with magic and more with heretical delusion; it wasn't until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that ecclesiastical authorities began to treat magic and sorcery as a more serious threat (Bailey, Michael 124-125). Further, while witchcraft was often attributed to women, men could also play the role of magician (Jochens, “Old Norse Magic” 307; Nildin-Wall and Wall 72). Some magicians were “likely to dress and act like a priest” in rituals, though the 13th-century *Le Fait des Romains* notes that women were better known for their sorceric knowledge than men (Maxwell-Stuart 7; Page 16). By the fifteenth century, witchcraft was a largely female endeavor: according to Dominican inquisitor Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus maleficarum*, “Omnia per carnalem concupiscentiam, que quia in eis est insatiabilis” [“All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which in women is insatiable”] (Kramer and Sprenger 47; Stephens 842). Of the known witch trials and executions between the 1400s and the 1700s, approximately 80% of defendants were female (Stephens 840-841). The image of the typical witch had shifted to female, poor, and old “at a time when few people lived to advanced age” (Goodare 290).

4 The image of a witch riding an animal is common in folklore; the Thompson *Motif-Index* categorizes it as G241.1 (III.293).

5 The transition is an interesting and complex one; 12th-13th-century Alan of Lille and Walter Map cite devil-worshippers as revering the “Devil in the form of a black cat,” while 13th-century Gervase of Tilbury asserts that witches “change into cats at night” and Stephen of Bourbon (also 13th-century) claimed that demons could take wolf for female form to kill and vampirize children (Morris 124). The bestial forms taken by demons and the devil increased the association of the witch with said animals until the various phenomena involving both became inextricably linked together (124-125).

mythology, a goddess's affiliation with an animal served to emphasize her sexuality, and the sexual nature of this association of female with animal became highlighted until it had “become synonymous with sexual promiscuity, bestiality, and heresy” in the witch trials of the later Middle Ages (Morris 127-128). Phillip Bernhardt-House, for one, observes that werewolves in particular are seen in literature as representative of the “uncontrollable and dangerous nature of female...sexuality” (168). These connotations of shapeshifting are emphasized when one considers that the non-human,⁶ according to Jeffrey Cohen, acts as a “dangerous reminder of every power/knowledge system's fragility, of its vulnerability to whatever lies outside and that it excludes” (“The Order” 37). Indeed, John Simons discusses a similar concept when addressing anthropomorphism as a conduit for evoking thought “as to the extent to which humans and non-humans are really different” (120); to him, anthropomorphism is a “transgressive route” across multiple boundaries, including both species and linguistic/material (171-172). The animal Other was dangerous, and its mingling with humanity only served to confer that danger onto the transhuman figure.

References to the werewolf as a shapeshifter figure⁷ multiplied in the 12th century,

6 Specifically, the “monstrous Other,” which is arguably a fitting description of the shapeshifter, which inhabit both realms of human and monster while their bestial duality pushes them firmly into the non-human other.

7 It would be remiss to talk about shapeshifting figures and not reference the widespread presence of the Trickster, appearing in several cultures (e.g. Africa, ancient Greece, Japan, China, the Middle East, etc); Mercurius of medieval Europe is such a shape-shifting trickster figure (Phelan 133). Tricksters serve important functions in culture, acting as comical teachers about transgression, utilizing intelligence, subterfuge, and supernatural abilities to achieve their ends (Phelan 134-135). While trickery is “a weapon for the weak, and thus quintessentially of women,” Tricksters are often (but not always) male characters, often underdog figures, though gender can be a transmutable assignation for the Trickster (Mills 240; Ballinger 15, 21). For both male and female tricksters, the root of communal scorn seems to be in their failure to fulfill their appropriate gender roles, or in falling short of the community expectations of the same (Ballinger 21, 24).

though Pluskowski notes that “few refer to England” (175-176).⁸ He attributes this “general absence of werewolves (but not other shapeshifters)” to an absence of wolves themselves as they were progressively hunted and diminished, while the werewolf beliefs in Scandinavia persisted in relation to the uninterrupted presence of wolves, “or at least the continuing cultural relevance of wolves in this region into recent centuries” (174).⁹ Nonetheless, the werewolf was a major shapeshifting motif not only in Germanic culture but all across Europe, including southern France, where there are cave paintings similar to the animal-human hybrids depicted on a 6th-century bronze plate found in Sweden [see Figures 1.1-1.2] (Morris 125). Pluskowski notes that three transformative methods (voluntary, hereditary, and spell/curse-originating), as identified in Odsted's study of werewolf folklore in Sweden, are “evident in Irish, Scandinavian and Anglo-Norman literature” (185).

The figure of the wolf is a loaded image as well; if, as Pluskowski states, the “shape of the animal is typically related to the character of the individual,” then to examine these texts and their shapeshifters, one must look at wolves as well as werewolves (179). In Norse tradition, the wolf possessed dual connotations: the “mythic” connection to the invincible berserker warriors and their patron god Odin, as well as the “legal” tie to the outlaw, who was to be “hunted down and killed with impunity” (Grimstad 29); this association persisted on the continent, too, as the “canine or lupine

8 The werewolf is categorized by the *Motif-Index* as Type D113.1.1; the text notes that the man “is usually malevolent when in wolf form” (II.15).

9 Jody Emel points out a trend with ecofeminists to interpret wolf eradication as originating in not only cultural and economic catalysts, but also a “dominant construction of masculinity that is predicated upon mastery and control” (102). The suppression of the wolf, in this manner, is seen as parallel to the repression of women.



Figure 1.1: Bronze plate found at Torslund (Öland, Sweden), featuring “a figure with a wolf’s head, skin, and tail, but with human feet” (Morris 125). Photocredit: Oscar Montelius.

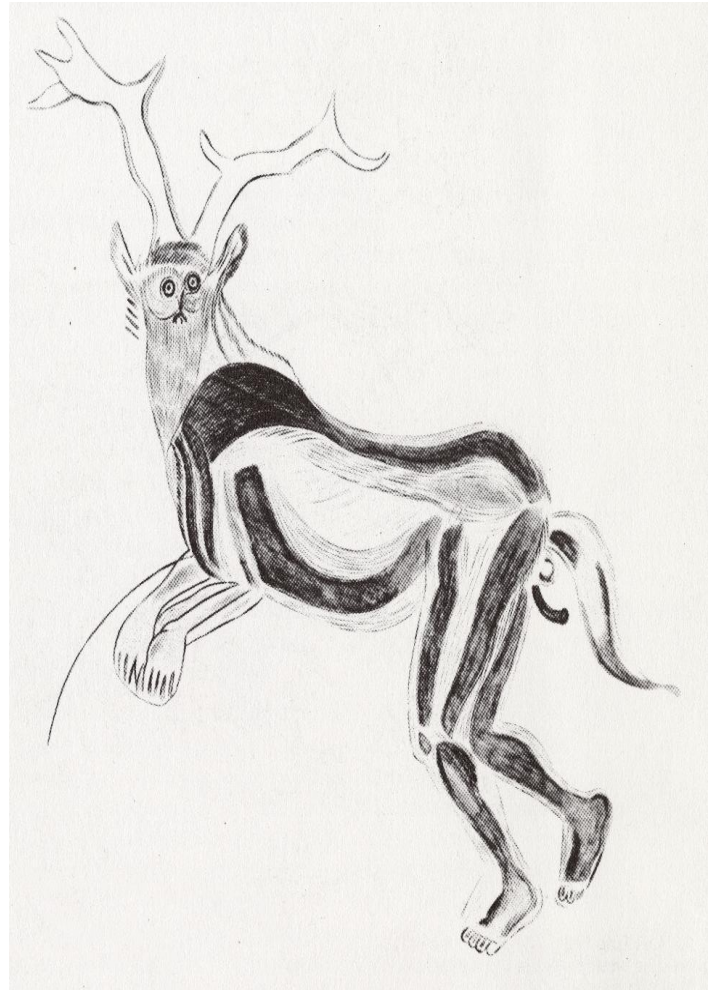


Figure 1.2: Old Stone Age rock drawing from Des Trois Frères in southern France (left), and a sketch of the same image (right); the figure is known as “The Sorcerer” (Höfler 65; Morris 125). Photocredit: Encyclopaedia Britannica (left) and Henri Breuil (right).

image” has long served as a symbol for the “semi-outcasts” of society (Bernhardt-House 160).¹⁰ In addition, the wolf was closely associated with Odin as one of his patron animals, and Valhöll is described as having a wolf outside (Lindow 150). The wolf was also a beast of battle in Anglo-Saxon poetry, a scavenger that feasted on the slain, and there is a recurring heroic motif of “the rejoicing of wolves” and other battle-beasts when a hero is born, for he will “feed them with the carrion of the slaughtered victims” (Glosecki 1057; Morris 110). Even in Europe, the wolf is not without mixed symbolism: it was viewed as the “[q]uintessential carnivore, a common figure of a dangerous predator throughout medieval legendry,” constituting a threat to both animal and human welfare (Glosecki 1057). The wolf is often portrayed as evil and murderous, gluttonous and thieving, with a long European tradition as “[f]erocious, hairy, dripping with blood, a devourer of human beings” (Leshock 2; Bynum, “Metamorphosis” 1000-1001).¹¹ Conversely, a few Aesopian fables portray wolves as symbols of liberty, forbearance, or victimization (Glosecki 1057-1058).¹² The 13th-century *Renart* cycles also present a “more ambiguous wolf figure,” in contrast to the “bloody, starved, and ravenous” depictions in other fables (1058).¹³ Overall, the image of the wolf surrendered to the

10 Pluskowski also notes this use of the “wolf’s-head” to indicate outlawry even over that of transformation, and Andrew Reynolds’ *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* deals with the connection as well; while outlawry is only of minor relevance to this project, this further example of the wolf-as-negative-symbol is worth noting.

11 Wolves were also the bearers of sexual connotations as well: it was believed that the wolf’s rump bore “a small patch of aphrodisiac hair, which it plucks off with its teeth if it happens to be afraid of being caught. Nor is this hair, for which people are always trying to catch it, of any use unless taken off alive” (Schrader 25). This notion presents the wolf as doubly dangerous: not only is it a creature of such lasciviousness that its very hair (and on the backside, no less, the site of sexual congress) is imbued with aphrodisiac properties, but it also presents a temptation for man to fall into that hypersexualization—people chase the wolf constantly to acquire those hairs.

12 The tales are “The Dog and the Wolf,” “The Wolf and the Crane,” and “The Wolf and the Shepherds,” respectively (Glosecki 1058).

13 However, this wolf—Isengrimus—is often the subject of ridicule and the butt of Renart’s pranks. He is a victim, but one that is taken to be humorous and perhaps not a little deserving of the punishment.

negative valences that abounded, although contradictions remained: the naming of noble sons versus crop blights and outlaw-derivatives of “wolf,” or the remedies that called for “dried and powdered wolf parts” and herbal extracts of the floral genera while other lupine-associated plants were toxic [See Figures 2.1-2.2] (1060-1061);¹⁴ the wolf, though viewed primarily as a bad omen, embodied the extremes of cure and poison, hero and villain.

Marie de France herself, in her brief prologue to *Bisclavret*, defines the werewolf as

c[eo] est beste salvage:
Tant cum il est en cele rage,
Hummes devure, grant mal fait,
Es granz forez converse e vait”

[a ferocious beast which, when possessed by this madness, devours men,
causes great damage and dwells in vast forests]
(9-12).¹⁵

This definition is refuted later in the tale when Bisclavret, chased by the king's hunting dogs, did not try to devour the men in his path but “[v]ers lui curut quere merci” [“begged for mercy”] of the king and “[i]l l'aveit pris par sun estrié,/La jambe li baise e le pié” [“took hold of his stirrup and kissed his foot and his leg”] (146-148). In this scene, Bisclavret is not a ravening, mad beast, but a very intelligent creature,¹⁶ a distinction the

¹⁴ Wolfsbane, along with nightshade and mandrake, were seen as “consecrated to the infernal deity Satan and the witches who were said to use them in magic and witchcraft” (Keezer 189).

¹⁵ I've deferred to the authority of Glyn Burgess and Keith Busby in translating the tale, and include their versions after the original Old French lines, cited from Philippe Walter's French bilingual edition, and whose editorial marks I have chosen to retain (see 'de France' in the Works Cited for more).

¹⁶ This dichotomy has been interpreted several different ways; Joyce Salisbury, in *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*, explores the tale's animal/human hybridity and argues that the moral warns of the beast that resides in every man (qtd. in Leshock 1); Jeffrey Cohen, on the other hand, states that it is a full submission to the king by Bisclavret, depicting his fulfillment of his role as a proper man in the male hierarchy (“The Body” 129). It should also be noted that this behavior, for all that the reader is aware, is limited only to this scene of the lay; it can easily be presumed that Bisclavret was as ravening as any werewolf prior to this episode, as will be discussed more below.



PLATE XXVIII.—*Aconitum napellus* (Monkshood). (From Jackson: *Experimental Pharmacology and Materia Medica*.)

Figure 2.1: *Aconitum napellus*, also known as aconite, anthora, wolfsbane, monkshood, soldier's cap, friar's cap, etc.; found in central and western Europe (Loewer 18; Keezer 190). Photocredit: Franz Eugen Köhler.



Figure 2.2: *Arnica montana*, leopard's bane, wolf's bane, arnica, etc.; endemic to western Europe but not found in the British Isles (Ladner). Photocredit: Franz Eugen Köhler.

king himself notes when he takes Bisclavret into his protection.¹⁷ The role and depiction of the wolf and shapeshifters are layered despite their overall negativity in these cultures, and the figure of the wolf and the shifter remain important in folklore.

Joseph Campbell asserts that one of the functions in folklore (what he dubs “traditional mythologies”) is that of “validating and maintaining some specific social order, authorizing its moral code as a construct beyond criticism or human emendation,” while another is to “shap[e] individuals to the aims and ideals of their various social groups” (181). Robert Segel critiques Campbell and his theories on several points, focusing mostly on Campbell's method and apparent indifference to the stories within the myths studied (140-141); despite these misgivings about Campbell's methodology and foci, his point remains: folklore and its motifs can reveal valuable aspects of a culture's social concerns via what the tale is promoting or discouraging in its audience. Both the consistency and variation of folktales is valuable in determining these insights, as a variant tale's shared qualities with its brethren can provide information about the form or function of the folkloric type in general, while its differences can shed light on the social and cultural climate that gave those discrepancies birth (Lindahl 338);¹⁸ Carl Lindahl asserts that “the more similar two items of lore, the more significant the differences between them” (338). In establishing a trend and determining the function of a folkloric motif or tale, one can interpret the concerns of the pattern in the social order it attempts to uphold while highlighting specific anxieties or cultural idiosyncrasies within that order/function via the variants from that known trend. Each narrative discrepancy, then,

¹⁷ “Ele ad sen de hume, merci crie” [“It has the intelligence of a human and is pleading for mercy”] (154).

¹⁸ For more on the study of consistency/variability of folkloric motifs, see Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott (1968. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

is potentially indicative of a particular cultural concern, just as narrative similarities may imply a shared social preoccupation despite geographical distance (and even may point toward social contact between disparate societies).

The question of such transnational contact arises when one attempts to comparatively analyze transformations in the Icelandic *Volsungasaga*, Marie de France's *lais*, and Gerald of Wales' *History and Topography of Ireland*. While not much is known of Gerald of Wales, he did make several trips to France and Ireland (O'Meara 11-12). Composed by a Welshman writing on Ireland to an English king, Gerald's *Topography* is inherently a transnational text. Marie de France, similarly, is somewhat of a mystery, with little more than her self-references to guide scholars (Bloch 3-7; Krueger, "Marie" 172). What is known of this Anglo-Norman writer is basic: a woman "of French descent and upbringing living and working in England" (Burgess and Busby 20). The *lais* were very popular among the aristocratic men and women of the English court—likely that of Henri II Plantagenet—and as the author, Marie de France was "part of the mainstream of medieval culture" (Burgess and Busby 11, 23; Krueger, "Beyond" 81); her lays were, she claimed, of Breton oral tradition, and her concern in writing them was that of preserving their memory (Marie 41; Block 39-41).

French and Welsh writers were not the only purveyors of literary works in England: Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson observe that the trade of goods to and from Iceland also spread court poetry to Scandinavia, Orkney, Dublin, and, yes, England (14).¹⁹ By the early 13th century, while many Icelandic sagas were being written,

¹⁹ Considered an "invisible" export, court poetry was alive and traveling among the resource-scarce Iceland's trade routes; even as some Icelandic poetry was sold for "hard cash" abroad, traveling poets returned with "intimate knowledge of foreign parts" and their poetic traditions (Magnusson and Pálsson 14). In the latter part of the Viking Age (10th-11th centuries), the Vikings had exported Scandinavian

such works as *Tristrams saga*, the famous tale of Tristan and Isolde, found themselves translated into Old Norse,²⁰ and even Marie de France's *Bisclavret* had a thirteenth-century translation into Norwegian (Jesch, *Women* 198; Pluskowski 185). John McKinnell argues that Anglo-Scandinavian sculptures provide evidence that eddic poetry and Norse mythology were sufficiently familiar in England (at least in the 11th century) that entire stories could be recognized by a “a few symbolic motifs,” likely known and spread through poetry [Figures 3.1-3.3] (330).²¹ It seems that the literary contact between these cultures and nations was two-way and not at all meager. Indeed, Carl Lindhal notes that folktales in particular, with their stability and longevity of patterns and their contextual flexibility, are valuable sources for the study of intercultural variation (337). He also asserts that recent folkloric studies have emphasized it as a “community-based process,” through which groups²² “express and negotiate” shared values and concerns (334, emphasis retained). Therefore, it does not seem at all incongruous to examine these

poetry, including Scaldic and Icelandic traditions, to Britain and, Judith Jesch asserts, “may, despite the language barrier, even have been practiced at the court of kings whose native tongue was English” (“Skaldic” 313-314). English influence is evident “in all kinds of poetry produced later in Scandinavia,” indicating a mutual exchange of poetic traditions (Jesch, “Skaldi” 314).

20 Known as the *Riddarasögur*, these translations are estimated to have arrived in Iceland from Norway in the late 13th century by the commission of King Hákon Hákonarson (Andrews 261 & 257; Amory 509); this saga is found in the unique Kr. Kålund, *Katalog*, 1433 of the Old Norse Arnarnagæan Collection in Copenhagen (Schach 83). For more on the *Riddarasögur*, see Geraldine Barnes or Marianne Kalinke.

21 Of McKinnell's examples, the Gosforth Cross is one of the most prominent, boasting images of “known iconography”: Heimdallr at Ragnarok (from *Völuspá*), Þórr fishing for the World Serpent (Hymiskviða), and possibly Freyja taking the slain (Grímnismál); “[a]ssociated scenes”: Viðar and Fenrir (*Vafþrúðnismál* and *Gylfaginning*), Loki bound with Sigyn (*Völuspá*, *Lokasenna*, and *Gylfaginning*); and “doubtful or hybrid cases”: the image of a Valkyrie receiving a warrior (*Hákonarmál*) (343-344). This final carving bears a striking resemblance to a silver gilt pendant/mount from Klinta, Köping, Öland (Bailey, Richard, *Viking* 110-111). For more on the cross-cultural contact between England and Scandinavia, see Richard Bailey's *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (London: Collins, 1980), his *England's Earliest Sculptors* (Toronto: PIMS, 1996), and the Thirteenth Viking Congress paper collection in *Vikings and the Danelaw* edited by James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch, and David Parsons (Oxford, UK: Oxbow Books, 2001).

22 Early distinctions of folkloric groups consisted of ethnic, religious, occupational, social, regional, or national, though it wasn't until the late Middle Ages that “nationhood” as a concept coalesces culturally as a powerful force; regional units, on the other hand, were qualified as groups that “shared many cultural traits derived from social interaction and common geographical conditions” (Lindahl 333).

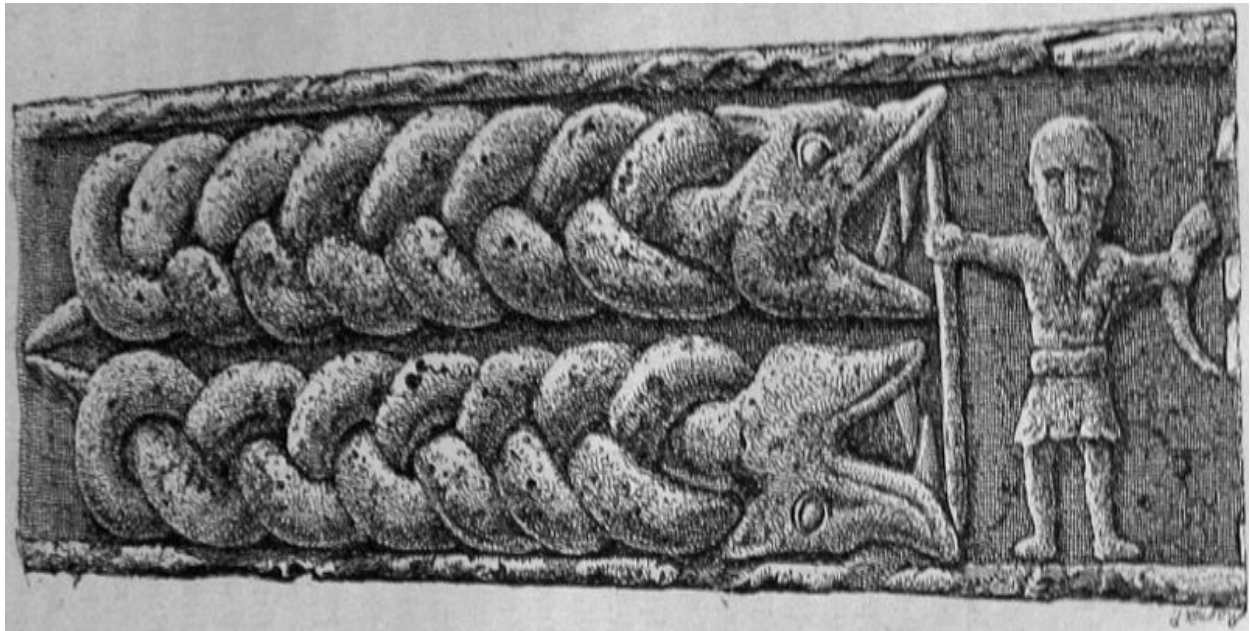


Figure 3.1: Heimdallr at Ragnarok, depicting a “warrior with horn and monster(s),” carved in the Gosforth Cross, Saint Mary's churchyard in Cumbria (McKinnel 343). Photocredit: Finnur Jónsson.



Figure 3.2: Sygny with a bound Loki: “Snake hangs over bound man lying on his back; woman with bowl kneels over him;” once more on the Gosforth Cross in Cumbria (MicKinnel 343). Photocredit: Finnur Jónsson.



Figure 3.3: “Valkyrie receiving warrior,” or a pigtailed female offering a drinking horn; Gosforth Cross, Cumbria (left). A pigtailed female offering a drinking horn in silver gilt; Klinta, Köping, Öland; from the Antikvarisk-Topografiska Arkivet (ATA) in Stockholm, Sweden (right) (McKinnell 144; Bailey, Richard, *Viking* 110-111). Photocredit: J.T. Lang. (left) and the Antikvarisk-Topografiska Arkivet (ATA), Stockholm (right).

texts in light of each other, despite the additional separation of genre that persists between them. The motif of metamorphosis and exposure would readily lend itself to such a transnational nature, easily traversing cultural boundaries just as the shapeshifters themselves traverse social borders.²³ The pattern of problematic transformation found in these texts certainly gestures toward just such a shared concern, as will now be explored.

The trend of voyeuristic bestial transformation is quite distinct in Gerald of Wales' *The History and Topography of Ireland*. In one section, Gerald relates the story of an Irish priest approached by a male werewolf, who leads him to his dying female companion so as to provide her the Eucharist. In this narration, the male remains in wolf form for the majority of the tale; his own transformation is only hinted at once, when the narrator states that “more in equity than with proper procedure – the wolf showed himself to them to be a man rather than a beast” (72). This shift is entirely invisible to the reader, in sharp contrast to the female's very detailed exposure: her male companion “pulled all the skin off the she-wolf from the head down to the navel, folding it back with his paw as if it were a hand. And immediately the shape of an old woman, clear to be seen, appeared” (71).²⁴ This transformation is extremely voyeuristic in nature: the shapeshifting is carefully described in a startlingly intimate exposure of her body as she is literally skinned alive. Her fur is removed from her flesh like clothing, an almost sexual disrobing and revelation of the naked female flesh beneath.

Additionally, the female's distinction as an elderly woman does not mitigate her sexuality, even if one does not associate her bestial transformation as a mark of

²³ It would be far too presumptuous to universalize this claim at this juncture; a larger sampling of texts is required in order to verify these findings.

²⁴ Deconstructively speaking, the very absence of the male's transformation in itself draws attention to his shapeshifting. Even so, the treatment of the changes is drastically different.

witchcraft and its inherent hyper-sexuality.²⁵ While men's virility suffers with age, older women were not so physically hindered: a persistent tradition (from classical Greece and Rome through Renaissance England) adhered to the attitude that while men faced impotency with old age, women “had an inexhaustible capacity for sexual pleasure” (Henderson and McManus 56). The tropes and jokes in May/December romances illustrate the laughable inability of older men to sexually perform with their young, virile wives, while the widow posed a looming threat of sexual knowledge and desire.²⁶ According to Merry Wiesner, by the sixteenth century, “[p]ost-menopausal women were widely believed to experience increased sex drive” (92).²⁷ Older women unable to conceive children and cannot have sex for procreation, a purpose stressed by the Church at the time (Morris 157); they are free, then, to have sex purely for pleasure. Gerald's female werewolf, even dying as she is, does not escape this sexualization in the highly sensual depiction of her disrobing, a sensuality that indicates at the very least an awareness of the latent sexuality in the scene. On the other hand, her shift back to animal form is almost an afterthought, but with a very revealing clause added: “Afterwards the skin *which had been removed by the he-wolf* resumed its former position” (72, emphasis

25 Witches are also known for their older ages: post-menopausal women, unmarried or widowed, were the most common targets for witchcraft accusations (Cooke 221; Roper 204). Marianne Hester directly attributes this increased vulnerability to age: “Women over the age of forty were vulnerable to witchcraft accusation, partly because they were no longer carrying out their main role. . . that of childbearing” (193). There persisted a correlation between age and wickedness; for example, the tradition of Morgan le Faye depicts a falling trajectory: as a healer, Morgan was young and beautiful, but ““as her knowledge of the wicked arts of sorcery grew, she became progressively uglier” (Friedman 267; Tolkien and Gordon 130). Femaleness was not the only marker of the traditional witch, as age itself bore “‘mystical power' associated with it which could be used to do evil” (Hester 193).

26 Once more, this motif may be labeled in two ways, under type J445.2, “Foolish marriage of old man and young girl,” or as type T237, “Old man married to young, unfaithful wife” (Thompson IV.39; V.367).

27 Judith Gardener notes that in more contemporary theory, males of status appear to maintain their status as desirable sexual subjects while older females are considered sexually devalued with age. She also notes that this paradigm “seems to be changing” (98).

added). The phrasing directly recalls the female's detailed skinning; the text is making a point to remind the reader of the scene that had occurred only a few scant lines above, lingering on the image and its intimate nature. This reiteration in the text likewise emphasizes the male's control of the female's nudity, indicating a level of superior agency over her body. In the illustrations of three 13th-century manuscripts,²⁸ the werewolves are depicted in lupine form, and in two of these, while “the male werewolf is...depicted standing as a biped, the female is lying down and being fed a consecrated host by the priest” (Pluskowski 176). The upright position of the male in relation to the female's prone state, Aleksander Pluskowski asserts, “expresses the agency of the male wolf's character,” whose efforts assured the receipt of his ill companion's final sacrament (177). The female, exposed by the male, is also seemingly subservient to his agency.

Moreover, the revelation of her shapeshifting is stigmatized: in the giving of the sacrament, Gerald notes that “the priest, more through terror than reason, communicated her” (71).²⁹ The exposure of the old woman's duality and the voyeuristic intimacy of its revelation are shocking and horrifying to the cleric.³⁰ However, one must bear in mind how the male shifter's transformation, mentioned off-hand, is apparently of no concern to the priest, as the shifter “share[s] the fire with them during the whole of the night” and then separates with a friendly farewell, the male expressing his gratitude to the priest for

²⁸ BL Royal 13.B. viii MS; Dublin, NL 700 MS; CUL, Ff.1.27 MS (Pluskowski 176).

²⁹ The parallel here between transformed human and transubstantiated bread is striking. In addition, medieval miracles and Eucharistic visions “tend to occur together and are frequently accompanied by miraculous bodily changes,” which occurred “almost exclusively in women” (Bynum, “Fast” 3). This tendency toward female revelation emphasizes the femaleness of Gerald's werewolf. For more on the intersection of the Eucharist and women, see Bynum's “Fast, Feast, and Flesh: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women” in *Representations* 11 (1985).

³⁰ Fifteenth-century texts, such as *Secretum Secretorum* and *Death and Liffe* also portray old women in varying states of undress, and each is treated as “frightening and hideous,” suggesting that the elderly body of the female, deprived of its reproductive function and sexual appeal, “should be muffled up from sight” (Cooke 223).

the “benefit he had conferred upon him” (72).³¹ The dying female is conspicuously absent, silent and invisible after her exposure; dead or alive, she is never again mentioned, and her sexualized threat, not hindered by age, is contained by the exposure of her shapeshifting and the social horror it engendered.

This discrepancy of male versus female exposure continues with Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, in which an adulterous wife hides the clothes of her werewolf husband, thus barring him from human form, until he attacks her in court and reveals her treachery. Bisclavret is very specific in his concerns about being seen while shapeshifting: he hides his clothes in a secret place by an old, presumably abandoned chapel, in “la piere cruose e lee/Suz un buissun, dedenz cavee” [“beneath a bush [in] a broad stone, hollowed out in the centre”] (93-94).³² His reasoning seems sound: he wishes to keep his werewolf nature a secret, and so his transformation should also be discreet. After all, as the tale's wise man explains, to shapeshift in public “[m]ut durement en ad grant hunte” [“is most humiliating for”] Bisclavret and “[c]ist nel fereit pur nule rien” [“nothing would induce him”] to change forms in front of an audience (288 & 284). Despite being well-loved in the court, as a knight and then as a wolf, Bisclavret finds the trespassing of boundaries inherent in transforming one's shape as shameful.³³ Yet even

31 It is interesting to note that both of these shape-shifters have been removed from society, having been “compelled to go into exile not only from their territory but also from their bodily shape” by a saint (70). They are, as Bernhardt-House described above, outcasts of society in every way—not only proscribed their community but also from the human forms that would allow them to possibly participate in a different community. The male's friendly interactions, then, are doomed to be brief.

32 The use of clothes as a conduit for transformation can be found under motif type D537 (Thompson II.61); meanwhile, the disenchantment via hiding skin/clothing is motif type D721.2 (Thompson II.83).

33 The details of this scenario, the removing one's clothing and the shame of their return, is yet more intriguing when viewed in light of Derrida's theories on animality and nudity: “The animal, therefore, is not naked because it is naked. It doesn't feel its own nudity. There is no nudity ‘in nature.’ ...[Man] would be a man only to the extent that he was able to be naked, that is to say, to be ashamed, to know himself to be ashamed because he is no longer naked. And knowing *himself* would mean knowing himself to be ashamed” (5). Bisclavret's humanity is tied inherently with his clothes, his lack of nakedness. The removal of that clothing signifies a transition to the unashamed non-nakedness of

after his secret is out,³⁴ Bisclavret refuses to shape-shift in front of any viewers: his clothing is placed directly in front of him, and yet Bisclavret “ne se prist garde en nule guise” [“took no notice of them”] (280). It is only after the king leads Bisclavret to his rooms and “tuz les hus sur lui ferma” [“closed all the doors on the wolf”] that they return to find “dormant le chevalier” [“the knight sleeping”] on the bed (294 & 299). Bisclavret's transformation is left entirely off-screen, invisible to the audiences both within and outside of the text.

The attack on his adulterous wife, in contrast, is very public: in the middle of the court, Bisclavret “[l]e neis li esracha del vis” [“tore the nose right off her face”] (235). The text notes that “[n]ul hum nel poeit retenir” [“no one could restrain him”] and that after the assault, “[d]e tutes parz l'unt manacié;/Ja l'eüssent tut despescié” [“From all sides he was threatened and was on the point of being torn to pieces”] (232 & 237-238); the text makes a point to show that this attack occurs in full view of the entire court. Roberta Krueger observes in her analysis of Marie de France's *lais* that Bisclavret's biting off of his wife's nose constitutes a transference of the “mark of 'bestiality’” from the husband to his wife (“Marie” 175).³⁵ Judith Rothschild likewise notes this disfigurement as a marking with a bestial sign, a permanent animal “condition” to which the wife believed she had condemned Bisclavret by stealing his clothes (140). The wife, then, is transformed via a common werewolf trope: “the phenomenon of substitution, which

animality, a transition that would be reversed (and his nakedness and shame returned) upon the donning of the clothing.

34 Although one can consider Bisclavret's confession to his wife as a type of exposure (and it does have social consequences for Bisclavret), it is a “private revelation,” one that is compromised by the wife's own exposure as “one who pretended well” instead of “an estimable wife” (Gilmore 81, 83).

35 This defacement may also constitute a transference of male castration onto the female, the loss of her nose manifesting as a lack, a physical deficiency, as an analogue for the penis. Considering the adulterous nature of her betrayal, this transfer of male humiliation is rather fitting, especially as removing the nose was the traditional punishment for adultery (see below).

saves the original victim by allowing him to pass on his curse” (Holten 199). This transformative mark brands Bisclavret's wife as transhuman,³⁶ one whose conferred animal traits persist in her line for several generations:

Enfanz en ad asés eüz,
Puis unt esté bien cuneüz
[E] del semblant e del visage:
Plusurs [des] femmes del lignage,
C'est veritü, senz nes sunt nees
E si viveient esnasees.

[She had a good many children who were thereafter recognizable by their appearance. Many of the women in the family, I tell you truly, were born without noses and lived noseless.]

(309-314)

Freeman describes this new appearance as “wolf-like,” one that will recurrently disgrace the female line: the women will need to continuously explain this facial absence, and the “shameful confession will be repeated,” creating a “matrilineal narrative of dishonor” (Freeman 298). Moreover, the trope of missing or removed limbs or items is common in distinguishing shapeshifters, such as a knife carried off by the wolf and found later in the human's possession (Thompson 259);³⁷ Gervase of Tilbury, in his reference to Raimbaud de Pouget,³⁸ notes that “the severing of limbs freed people from” lycanthropy, while in other tales the removal of bodily members/features only identifies persons as

³⁶ While transhumanism is a term largely applied to bio-ethics and human augmentation via technology, with the ultimate goal of a 'posthuman' entity that is “no longer unambiguously human,” it is also a term that possesses a “wide range of views” with “idiosyncrasies of individual academics” and no “absolutely agreed on definition” (Fukuyama 42; Agar 12-13; McNamee and Edwards 513). In this case, however, I wish to use the term to express the hybrid creature formed when the boundaries of the human and the animal blur and converge: it is neither animal nor human, but a trans-species figure that straddles and rejects both categories.

³⁷ This trope could be labeled under type H57, “Recognition by missing member,” or D702.1: “Disenchantment with missing member”: “While in transformation a person loses a bodily member. When disenchanting, he still lacks the member” (Thompson III.378; II.80).

³⁸ This werewolf had his paw cut off by a woodcutter, thus enabling him to regain human form (Pluskowski 178).

shapeshifters (Pluskowski 178; Thompson 259).³⁹ With the removal of her nose, Bisclavret exposes his wife as a shapeshifter and confers onto her the “feral and sensual” traits of his werewolf nature in a metamorphosis that is “so complete and unabsolvable” that it is transmitted to her female progeny like lycanthropy (Holten 199; Cohen, “The Body” 129).⁴⁰ Also, the removal of the wife's nose is not merely indicative of her dual natures, but also of her sexual licentiousness: cutting off a woman's nose was a stock punishment for adultery (Gilmore 82; Holten 199).⁴¹ Kathryn Holten also likens the amputation to leprosy and its connotations with “carnality, unbridled lust, even moral depravity” (199). The wife's status as adulteress, then, is exposed with her transformation and passed down congenitally to her daughters. Furthermore, the wife has “devoured” her husband through her machinations (Freeman 294); preying on him as a true *garvalf* would, she reveals herself to be just as much a werewolf as her husband. Emphasizing this association with werewolfness, the wife was “ostee” [“banished”] and “chacie” [“exil[ed]”] from the country, cutting her off from her community (de France 305 & 306).⁴² Gloria Gilmore attributes the noseless mark as the “reason for their exiled wanderings” (68). And indeed, it seems that the wife's disfigured face (and those of her daughters after her), together with its social implications, also ensure she will be unable to fully integrate into a different community, much like the werewolf pair in Gerald of

39 For example, a female were-cat whose husband cuts off one of her paws and discovers the truth in the morning, when his wife's hand is missing (Thompson 259); see type D702.1.1 in the *Motif-Index* (II.81).

40 The wife's duality is also found in her own confession: she reveals her plot against her husband, “in effect becoming her husband's voice” in a direct reflection of his earlier confession, juxtaposing his lycanthropic and privately revealed duality with her publicly announced betrayal (Hopkins 321).

41 Thompson notes this specific reason in type Q451.5.1 (V.231).

42 “La femme ad del país ostee/E chacie de la cuntree”[The King “banished the woman from the country, exiling her from the region”] (305-306)

Wales' tale. True to the werewolf tradition, the adulterous wife's line consists of exiles and outcasts, shamed by the exposure of the wife's sexuality and bestial transformation.

Meanwhile, despite being outed as a werewolf, Bisclavret suffers no such consequences. Bisclavret's method of transformation indicates a *choice*: "it must be a conscious decision on the human hero's part to remove the clothing in the first place" (Gilmore 72).⁴³ Although Holten argues that Bisclavret is depicted as refraining from indulging in the traditional werewolf behaviors, there is little to indicate that he did so prior to reuniting with the king (203-204). David Leshock reacts against attributing admirable qualities where the text gives none for the very-much-voluntary werewolf; it is presumable that Bisclavret has murdered and devoured men as the prologue warns all werewolves do (Leshock 3-4 & 7)⁴⁴; that the text goes so far as to open with such a warning highlights its significance to the tale. Nor is the hero reformed at the end of the tale, as it can be assumed that he will continue his part-time werewolf antics (Leshock 4); while Caroline Bynum asserts that Bisclavret's wife "confuse[d] her bisclavret with the *garvalf* tradition, thus denying him the possibility of escaping from it," the text's silence about his flexible humanity and its emphasis of this *garvalf* tradition give no amnesty to Bisclavret (*Metamorphosis* 172).⁴⁵ Bisclavret will "openly return, as in, turn and turn again" in his transformative donning and doffing of his clothes (Gilmore 81).⁴⁶ While the

43 Many scholars argue that Bisclavret is also an "involuntary" werewolf, as his wife stole his clothing and forced him into that state permanently (Holten 207; Gilmore 77; Pluskowski 177). Nonetheless, said development does not absolve him of his previous and certainly voluntary transformations.

44 Recall lines 9-12, quoted above in the project's introduction.

45 Bynum also admits that despite Bisclavret's "rational" and "human" nature in his lupine form, he is still "also a wolf" (*Metamorphosis* 172).

46 Conversely, as Freeman asserts, the silence on Bisclavret's shapeshifting indicates that it "is no longer relevant," as "the mark of the *bisclavret* is now translated into an inflicted symbol of mutilation" passed to the wife: they have "traded roles" and the wife is now the "human beast" in Bisclavret's place (Freeman 298-299). Even if one interprets the transference of lycanthropy as a cure for Bisclavret, his beloved status in the court and his wife's reviled bestial duality is unchanged: she is shamed and outcast,

wife was exposed and shamed, Bisclavret continues on with his life much as before.

The male shapeshifters in *The Volsungasaga* similarly escape condemnation while a female transformer is punished. In the case of the latter, Signy's brothers are left in the woods, bound in stocks, after having been defeated by Siggeir. At midnight, “an old she-wolf” devours one man per night until Sigmund is the lone survivor (89). Signy sends a messenger to Sigmund with honey, instructing him to spread it across Sigmund's face and in his mouth. When the she-wolf comes that night, she is distracted by the smell of the honey and licks at his face, finally slipping her tongue into his mouth. Sigmund bites down on her tongue, and she jerks so violently that the stocks break and her tongue is “torn out by the roots, leaving her dead” (91). The old she-wolf, the narrator notes, was thought to be King Siggeir's sorceress mother. The terse style characteristic of Icelandic sagas does not leave much in the way of detail, but there is plenty to analyze in this scene. This episode has many similarities to the wife's disfigurement scene in *Bisclavret*, such as the facial amputation.⁴⁷ Once more, the removal of a “limb” or appendage signifies the discovery of the shapeshifter's identity: the she-wolf is identified as the mother of Sigmund's enemy, King Siggeir, immediately after the removal of her tongue.

There is also a sexual undertone to the story, as the she-wolf licks Sigmund's face “all over” before sliding her tongue into his mouth (91). Not only is there the intimate pseudo-kiss, but also the she-wolf's role as a night-visitor: the *Leechbook* references sorceresses who inflict severe wounds or even death “by 'riding' people at night” in what is known as a '*mare ride*'” (Morris 150).⁴⁸ While *mær* is commonly taken to mean

and he resumes his life in happy fashion.

⁴⁷ Even this motif can be categorized by Thompson: Q451.4, “Tongue cut off as punishment” (V.230).

⁴⁸ Bald's *Leechbook* is an Anglo-Saxon medical book of medical lore written circa 950 in Winchester, copied from from a 9th century manuscript under Alfred the Great; it can be found in London, British

“maiden,” the Old English *mere, mare, maerae* was the term for a “sorceress or incuba,” while the Old Norse equivalent of these night-riding witches were shapeshifting females called *túnriða* or *kveldriða*, which translate to “witch” and “evening rider,” respectively, but were taken as synonymous creatures (Jesch, *Women* 159; Morris 150-152).⁴⁹ The sexual connotations of a sorceress who ventures into the night to “ride a man” are difficult to ignore (qtd. in Morris 150). The she-wolf, revealed to be a sorceress shapeshifter as well as a night-visitor who “bites...to death” or sensually “lick[s]” her victims, readily lends herself to the classification of *kveldriða* (91).⁵⁰ Once more, the age of the she-wolf is an indication of her sexual freedom and threat: viewed as more sexually-driven and freed from the act of procreation, the older female is outside the social boundaries. Nonetheless, King Siggeir's shapeshifting mother is quite literally silenced: her tongue is ripped out and she immediately dies.⁵¹ The only aspect of her that continues is her exposure as a shapeshifter: all know that “this beast was the mother of King Siggeir and that she resorted to foul witchcraft to take on this guise” (91). Her social condemnation follows her into death, revealing her transhumanity and the “foul” nature that it lent to her.

The shapeshifting episode with Sigmund and his nephew/son Sinfjotli is quite different: while hunting for booty, the heroes find a hut with two princes sleeping inside

Library, Royal I c.D.xvii (Tucker 75; McNamara 115; Olsan 265).

49 The *Eyrbyggja saga* presents the example of Gunnlaug, who had “apparently been 'ridden' by the sorceress Geirrid;” he was attacked at night and found unconscious on the threshold of his family home, “badly bruised and bloody, and his skin...ripped off his bones” (Morris 152).

50 Additionally, as a shapeshifter, the she-wolf's devouring of men makes her into a cannibal-figure. Katherine Morris asserts that references of cannibalism at medieval witches' orgies were “most likely a disguised reference to birth control,” as infanticide as (literal and figurative) contraception enables women to have sex without procreation, a freedom outside the traditional religious and social female role (157). Cannibalism, yet more, is “conceptually linked...to werewolves” (Pluskowski 179).

51 This death, in a manner, can be taken to mean an ultimate exile: forbidden from any and all known communities.

beneath a pair of wolfskins, out of which the princes could escape only every tenth day.⁵² When Sigmund and Sinfjotli don the wolfskins, they are unable to remove them and, when they howl, are able to understand each other (97). At one point during their time as wolves, a disagreement leaves Sinfjotli wounded by Sigmund, and Sigmund sits beside the injured Sinfjotli, “bidding the trolls take the skins” (99). Morris translates this line (“enn bað traull taka vlfhamina” [98]) as “wished the wolfskins to the devil” (98). The wolfskins are depicted as the source of disgraceful transformation, one better fitted to witches and devils. After “many famous exploits” as wolves in King Siggeir's land,⁵³ they are able to remove the skins, and the two then burn the wolfskins “to make sure that they would cause no further harm to anyone” (99); this action seems to indicate that shapeshifting is dangerous and its tool must be discreetly destroyed. Still, there is no social shame attributed to the two, and they continue on to enact revenge upon King Siggeir.

The threat of social shame does not rise again until Sinfjotli's *flyting* confrontation with Granmar.⁵⁴ Sinfjotli arrives with King Helgi's army and addresses Granmar, who responds with knowledge of Sinfjotli and Sigmund's wolfish exploits: “you lived on wolf's food for a long time out in the forest and killed your brothers. It's amazing that you who have sucked blood from many a cold corpse dare show yourself in an army made up

52 Thompson directly references this scene when categorizing type D623, “Transformation every ten days” (II.69).

53 In which they are outlaws, hiding and hunting in wolfish-style even before transforming into werewolves.

54 The purpose of *flyting* was to test unknown warriors: “In these situations the taunt played a practical psychological role. It provoked a warrior to do his utmost” (Enright 306). Sinfjotli provokes Granmar to verbal combat in order to assess his ability and willingness to fight as well as showcase his own willingness and ability.

of decent men” (109).⁵⁵ The verbal battle relies on insults and humiliation to rile the other warrior, and Granmar is attempting to do just that by exposing Sinfjotli's werewolf episode. However, Sinfjotli twists and subverts the insults thrown at him regarding his shapeshifting and uses them as weapons against Granmar, depicting Granmar as a woman who bore him wolf cubs: “[I] begot nine wolves with you,” he declares, “and I was the father of that whole pack” (109).⁵⁶ This shifting of the exposure threat into an insult acts takes on the qualities of the “healing and aggressive properties” in jokes, drawing on humor to “make the transgression of taboos acceptable” (Heng 65, 74).⁵⁷ By inverting the insult of his bestial transformation and directing it at his opponent, Sinfjotli evades social shaming from his transhuman episode and turns it into his victory. In this scenario, Sinfjotli is superior because of his virility (impregnating Granmar with nine cubs, all of which are Sinfjotli's) and forcing Granmar into the inferior role as his 'wife': “you [Granmar] said you needed a husband and chose me [Sinfjotli] for that service” (109). Granmar is the inferior wife in the depiction, producing yet more wolves for the shapeshifting Sinfjotli. After some additional insults, Granmar ceases to accuse Sinfjotli of shapeshifting, stating he'd rather “feed birds with your carcass than wrangle with you any longer,” at which point King Helgi intercedes and the *flyting* stops (109). While

55 Recall 13th-century Inquisitor Stephen of Bourbon's notes on witchcraft and demons (Morris 124). Cannibalism and vampirism thus are both tied to werewolves. Further, Sinfjotli murdered two of his younger siblings while he and Sigmund laid in wait to kill King Siggeir (*Volsungasaga* 101).

56 This scene is very evocative of the Trickster traditions. For example, in one of the Coyote tales of Native American folklore, Coyote disguised himself as a female and married a young man, eventually bearing him children: “the children are wolf cubs, a fact that makes the young man the laughing stock of the community. It is immediately obvious to all that the beautiful woman must, in fact, be the trickster” (Ballinger 21).

57 Heng was referring the use of jokes by Richard in *Richard Coeur de Lyon* to alleviate and transform cultural trauma into national pride; Sinfjotli appears to be utilizing a similar technique here to divert shame. It is in the same vein as the idea of the carnivalesque “subversion through laughter...and hierarchical reversals” theorized by Bakhtin (Murphy 165).

Granmar had the final words, he by no means silenced Sinfjotli; Granmar *withdraws* from the match: he does not deliver an insult or provocation but a frustrated dismissal of the verbal sparring altogether, stating that he'd rather physically fight Sinfjotli than continue verbally. Therefore, Sinfjotli is the victor and remains unshamed by his past werewolf metamorphosis.

Of note are two other transformations in the *Volsungasaga*: two human-to-human shifts between Signy and a witch, and Sigurd and Gunnar. Signy changes appearances with a sorceress so as to lie with her brother (103). Her transformation is spurred by her desire for a true Volsung heir, “the offspring of both the son and daughter of King Volsung,” which leads her to “change shapes” with a sorceress so that she may sleep with Sigmund “for three nights without being recognized” (*Volsungasaga* 103; Jochens, *Old Norse Images* 156-157).⁵⁸ Signy confesses this truth as the fire burns behind her, exposing her transformation and its sexual nature. Kaaren Grimstad interprets the incestuously-motivated shapeshifting as being punished in Signy's later decision to die with King Siggeir (30); and Signy does express shame at her transformative actions: “I have gone to such lengths to bring about the revenge that under no circumstances am I fit to live” (103). It is not the revenge that is shaming to Signy—that is a point of pride, that she did not forget her father's death—but the sexually-driven metamorphosis that pushes her to shame.

Meanwhile, Gunnar cannot leap the wall of fire (a prerequisite to marrying Brynhild), so he and Sigurd “exchange shapes” (173). Sigurd leaps the fire and gains Brynhild's hand, and for three nights “they share one bed, but he takes the sword Gram

⁵⁸ Once more, this instance is specifically referenced by Thompson as a source of type D45.4, “Girl exchanges form with a sorceress in order to visit her brother and get a son by him” (II.11).

and lays it unsheathed between them” (175). The two exchange rings, Brynhild giving him Andvari's ring, and when Sigurd leaps back over the wall of flames, he and Gunnar “again exchange appearances” (175). There is no exposure of this shapeshifting until Sigurd's wife, Gudrun, becomes angry at Brynhild and reveals the ploy (revealing Andvari's ring as proof), Brynhild—successfully—plots the demise of both herself and Sigurd (181, 191, 199). Despite their deaths, there seems to be little anxiety of shame in their exposure.⁵⁹

Despite these acts of human-to-human transformation, the text does not give the metamorphoses much attention (of course, this lack of detail could again be due to the laconic nature of Icelandic sagas); indeed, it is the results of these exchanges that are of importance to the story: the truth of Sinfjotli's pure Volsung blood and Brynhild's marriage to Gunnar instead of Sigurd, resulting in the breaking of her oath to marry the superior male. After the revelation of the shapeshifting—and its results—Signy's transformation is left behind. Sigurd's shifting is more recurring, though it is his betrayal and Brynhild's oath-breaking that are the foci of the story as far as this shapeshifting incident is concerned; although the transformation scene, as Grimstad observes, is pivotal for the plot, nevertheless the exchange itself is passed off as secondary and not masculine at all as it is performed “as Grimhild had taught them to do” (Grimstad 30; *Volsungasaga* 173). Gunnar's mother (Grimhild) is the source of this supernatural knowledge, not Gunnar or Sigurd, and the knowledge is not treated as significant in and of itself.

⁵⁹ There may be case of Brynhild undergoing a pseudo-transformation, as her abnormal behavior after the discovery of the ploy and Gudrun's calling her “a monster” who is “in all likelihood doomed to die” (181-195). At one point, even, when Brynhild tells Gunnar to kill Sigurd, she tells him “Don't raise a wolf cub” (191). She means that Gunnar should kill Sigurd's young son so as to prevent him from returning for vengeance later. Her potential transformation does not take on any physical aspects or indicate any threat of exposure.

Furthermore, the shapeshifting is not a complete transformation, for Brynhild later reveals that she was wary of the disguised Sigurd at first, telling him, “I thought I recognized your eyes, but I couldn't see for certain because of the shroud that obscured my fate” (187).⁶⁰ While the transformation was sufficient to complete its purpose, it was nonetheless somewhat faulty.

The pattern of exposing the transformative female (in relation to the unshamed male shapeshifter) takes on a curious cast when addressing Muldumarec of Marie de France's *Yonec*, which presents this voyeuristic shape-shifting in a very different light; despite the lack of werewolves,⁶¹ the trend both persists in this tale and is complicated within it. Muldumarec magically switches between fowl and man in plain sight of the heroine:

Il s'est devant la dame asis.
Quant il I ot un poi esté
E el l'ot bien esgardé,
Chevaler bel e gent devint.

[It landed before the lady, and after it had been there for a while for her to see, it turned into a fair and noble knight]

(112-115).

The hawk-knight does not hide his shape-shifting nature from his beloved,⁶² but *waits* to transform “el l'ot bien esgardé” [“for her to see”] it well. Even Bisclavret, who confessed his nature to his wife, did not *show* her his transformation. Muldumarec's beloved is “a

⁶⁰ This recognition is reminiscent of the *fylgjur*, creatures either animal or human who attach themselves to individuals or families as guardian spirits. Although these spirits “personified the individual” and were “recognizable by his or her eyes,” they were also “always females,” presenting an interesting facet of femininity onto Sigurd's transformation (Jochens, *Old Norse Images* 37). While of note, the connection is still severely incongruous and most likely unrelated.

⁶¹ One may think that this discrepancy should invalidate the analysis of *Yonec* in conjunction with the other texts; even so, as it is Marie de France's other shapeshifting *lai*, and one that presents such a different treatment of human-to-human metamorphosis, overlooking it would be remiss.

⁶² The transformation of a man to a hawk is noted in motif type D152.1 (Thompson II.21).

merveille le tint” [“astounded by this”] and “[g]rant poür” [“very afraid”] at the sight of his metamorphosis (116 & 118). His shifting is not merely a private show for his love, either; later in the tale, the old woman who guards the beloved also witnesses his transformation when she spies for the lord: she, too, is “grant poür/Que hume le vit e pus ostur” [“very much afraid because she saw him one moment a man and another a hawk”] (277-278).⁶³ His shapeshifting is frightening to those who witness it, much like Gerald's old she-wolf's change had been terrifying for the priest. The presentation of Muldumarec's transformation as one intended to be witnessed is difficult to refute; he exposes himself as an alien entity, an Other, by allowing his bestial/avian metamorphosis to be seen. His transformative powers allow him to breach the border between man and animal, to cross boundaries considered impassable by the ordinary; his powers are so frightful that he must confirm his humanity to his beloved by taking communion and professing the Christian faith. This level of horror acted as a shaming device with Gerald's female werewolf, but Muldumarec works past it to prove his nature is not demonic.

This ruse of taking the sacrament reveals another, potentially more disturbing transformative power: not only is Muldumarec capable of human-to-beast metamorphoses, but also of human-to-human ones. As discussed previously, *Volsungasaga* contains two such human-to-human shapeshifting incidents: Signy and Sigurd, but this masculine/feminine transformation is complicated by Muldumarec's

⁶³ Once more, a motif type can be found: T50.13, “Girl carefully guarded from suitors by hag” (V.339). While the trope dictates a “[g]irl” and “suitors” instead of “wife” and “lovers,” the presence of the elderly woman as strict watcher at least forms for itself a subcategory to the T50.13 type.

androgyny.⁶⁴ This episode paints Muldumarec as somewhat of a feminine figure, complicating his masculine identity and heightening his androgynous depiction. As mentioned above, in order to prove to his beloved that he is not a demon, Muldumarec agrees to take communion; to do this, he claims that he will “[l]a semblance de vus prendrai” [“assume [her] appearance”] in her bed (161).⁶⁵ This particular shapeshifting is not witnessed at all: after informing her of his intentions, he climbs into her bed next to her and the audience hears nothing of Muldumarec until he is given communion in his lady's place.⁶⁶ The text is silent on this transformation: when the old woman guarding the beloved returns, the text merely states that “La dame trovat esveillie” [“she found the lady awake”] (170); whether this “dame” is referring to the imprisoned wife or the presumably transformed Muldumarec is less ambiguous when one considers the passage as a whole. It can be presumed that “La dame” refers to the beloved, as the text explicitly notes that Muldumarec “[d]elez li s'est couché al lit” [lay down next to her on the bed]

64 This is not the only instance of androgyny in the *lai* of Marie de France. In *Guigemar*, the hero slays an antlered white hind with her fawn, committing a husbandry violation, and is wounded by a rebounding arrow in his thigh (an injury commonly interpreted as a generative wound, and befitting his transgression) (44).

65 The transformation of a male to a female is labeled under type D12 (Thompson II.9).

66 Once again we see a shapeshifter taking the Eucharistic sacrament; this conjunction of transformers is intriguing in light of medieval resurrection theology, which emphasized the “materialist and literal” rising of the body, with the “embodied self . . . triumph[ing] over change, over physical process and decay” (Bynum, *Metamorphosis* 79). There is a correlation between the rise of this belief and the ecclesiastical condemnation of heretics for “metempsychosis—that is, body-hopping, body-exchange, or body-erasure” (Bynum, *Metamorphosis* 79). Yet more, the 11th-17th-centuries were rife with debate on the nature of transubstantiation, leading to “more and more literalist and materialist explanations and to the miraculous behavior of the materials themselves” (Bynum, “Sacrality” 8). And the flourishing of Eucharistic miracles in the 12th century may have been in reaction to rising “doubts about the increasingly literalist understanding of real presence.” (14). The inherent transformative powers of the Eucharist, though, “could not be change of appearance” as it was the matter’s “invisibility that guaranteed divine presence” (15). Nevertheless, the later Middle Ages held increasing claims of visions in which the Eucharist “appeared as a human figure” or as “human flesh,” highlighting the perception of the materials as “human flesh and blood, however hidden as such” (Bynum, “Sacrality” 12-13). The intersection of shapeshifting human and shapeshifting bread/wine is an intriguing one, especially in light of the Egyptian tablet depicting a shape-changing Jesus (Jaros). For more on formulations of the Eucharist in the Middle Ages, see Bynum’s *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987).

(166); he is lying beside her in the bed, but is never seen by the old woman: either the beloved is hidden and the transformed Muldumarec is in her place, feigning illness to lure in a priest, or Muldumarec is hiding and the beloved is the one who sets up the ploy. The ambiguity is heightened by the passage's repeated use of the third-person indirect object pronoun “li,” which is gender ambiguous—applicable to a masculine, feminine, or neuter subject. Despite this grammatical androgyny, the text seems to support the latter hypothesis, as it ignores Muldumarec's gender-bending when he takes the sacrament: “[l]i chevaler l'ad receü,/Le vin del chalice beü” [“The knight received it and drank the wine from the chalice”] (187-188). It is not “la dame” who takes the communion, but “li chevaler”—specifically the male knight. While Muldumarec is by this point undoubtedly transformed into his beloved's likeness, the text still refers to him with masculine signifiers, marking a clear distinction between the two subjects that is difficult to discard. It is unlikely, then, that the *lai* refers to a female-shifted Muldumarec as “la dame,” but rather maintains his male identity despite his transformed sex. Even so, when Muldumarec accepts the host (the only indication the reader is given that he has shape-changed at all), the ruse remains undiscovered by either the old woman or the priest. Muldumarec has flawlessly slipped into this private, feminized sphere of the wife's imprisoning bed chambers⁶⁷; he has, thematically if not textually, usurped her feminine identity.

Additionally, Muldumarec is further feminized in his penetrative death: the lord sets a trap at the window, so that when Muldumarec flies to meet his beloved, he is

⁶⁷ It is perhaps worthwhile to note a trend in human-to-human shifting here: Sigurd's transformation gained him three nights in Brynhild's bedchambers, and Signy's shape-exchange gained her access to her brother's bed. Human-to-human transformations would initially appear to be focused on obtaining sexual access.

stabbed by the phallic spikes: “L'une le fiert par mi le cors,/Li sanc vermeil en eissi fors” [“One of them pierced his body and the red blood flowed out”] (311-312).⁶⁸ This scene of wounding is given specific attention in the text, with even Muldumarec's need to “[d]esferré tut enz est” [“free...himself from the prongs”] provided as additional detail (314). This elaborated depiction of Muldumarec's penetration portrays him as a feminized figure, as the female, “porous body” was made to be penetrated in both the martial and sexual forms of subjugation, making it the weaker of the sexes (O'Brien 183). And yet it is at this point that Muldumarec reveals his beloved's pregnancy to her; this child (and the revelation of it) acts as concrete proof of his male virility. From this point onward, his transformations are not detailed as witnessed: “Kar sa plaie seignot adés./A grant dolor s'en est partiz” [“his wound was bleeding continuously, and he left in great pain”]--he leaves without any reference to his shifting abilities (334-335).⁶⁹ It cannot even be taken for granted that he shape-shifts at this point, as his beloved easily follows him out the window, and though it is “[c]'est merveille k'el ne s'ocist” [“a wonder she did not kill herself”] in the great fall,⁷⁰ she immediately begins following Muldumarec's blood-trail, which has “del *chevalier* [de]curot/Sur le chemin u ele alot” [“flowed from the *knight* on to the path”] (338 & 343-344, emphasis added). Muldumarec is not here referenced as a hawk or a shifter in any way; he is referred to as merely a human knight.⁷¹ Muldumarec's trail and the repeated references to flowing blood not only remind the audience of his

68 This scene, too, appears as a motif in folklore: see type K1565, “Blades (broken glass) to wound and detect wife's lover. (Often on window)” (Thompson IV.409).

69 While there does not appear to be much in the way of exile for Muldumarec, Frederick Hodgson examines the exile-like imprisonment of Yonec's mother and the implications such alienation has for both lovers (28-29).

70 This particular incident is evocative of motif type J1184.1, “Adulteress hurled from high rock escapes without injury: she may not be punished again” (Thompson IV.88).

71 Cohen makes a similar observation on Marie de France's use of the proper noun Bisclavret and the regular noun “bisclavret,” the Breton word for “werewolf” (“The Body” 129).

penetration, but evokes a parallel to the female menses.⁷² It is interesting to note the sequence in this scene: Muldumarec's feminizing penetration is followed immediately by the proof of his virility, which is in turn followed by the lack of voyeuristic qualities in his transformative abilities, but he is still not free from feminine attributes. Muldumarec inhabits a double-nature beyond that of animal/human: an androgynous male/female duality that enables him to exist within both categories.

Furthermore, when the beloved finds Muldumarec prone in his bedchambers, he gives her both a ring and a sword—yonic and phallic symbols epitomizing his androgynous nature (91).⁷³ The dual natures of Muldumarec's gender identity seem to supersede his bestial transformations, becoming the core of his shapeshifting capabilities. When he bestows the ring and sword on his beloved, then, he is conferring that androgyny onto her, so that she leaves “l'anel en porte/E l'espee ki la cunforte” [“wearing the ring and carrying the sword that comforted her”] (441-442). The beloved now bears the marks of Muldumarec's dual gender identity, which protects her from later exposure for her own transformative shift—the only shapeshifting this female actually performs; the revelation of the affair between Muldumarec and his beloved originated in a pseudo-transformation of the beloved: with their growing happiness, the beloved's waning beauty returns, and Susan Johnson points out that it is this alteration in her appearance that

⁷² This scenario is not unlike the incident in Chretien de Troyes's *Knight of the Cart*, in which Lancelot is wounded while gaining access to Guinevere's chamber and his blood soaks through the bedsheets; in this scene, Lancelot participates in the trope of knights who “penetrate their lady's room [and] are themselves first penetrated,” with the “nexus of symbols centered on wounding, blood and bleeding” indicating a transfer of feminine sexuality onto the penetrated knights (Ferguson 205-206). Lancelot's bleeding and the image of the “bloody bed” act as signifiers of “female menstruation, the knight's loss of blood serves to confirm his feminization and submission” (Ferguson 205; Mandel 72).

⁷³ Another parallel to Sigurd's human-to-human shift arises here: he gained access to Brynhild's bedchamber after his metamorphosis, wherein a naked blade lay between them on the bed and they exchanged rings (175).

awakens suspicion in her husband (167). The beloved experiences a minor trans-human shapeshifting of her own, one for which she is not shamefully exposed because of the embodied androgyny she now carries from Muldumarec. The ring in particular is for her use:

Ja, tant cum el le gardera,
A sun seignur n'en membera
De nule rien que fete seit,
Ne ne l'en tendrat en destreit.

[as long as she kept it her husband would remember nothing that had happened and would not keep her in custody]

(417-420)

And, again, when the beloved returns home, she faces no repercussions, as her husband “[q]ue de cel fet ne la retta/Ne ne mesdist ne ne gaba” [“made no accusations against her, and neither slandered nor mocked her”] (455-456).⁷⁴ And it is at this point that she most needs amnesty: her body has already begun the most basic of human transformations, that of pregnancy. In her examination of early modern Germanic traditions in shapeshifting and gender, Lyndal Roper noted that witchcraft accusations were not focused on gender constructions in the society, “but were related much more closely to the physical changes a woman's body undergoes when she bears children” (204). While the beloved is not accused of witchcraft, her body is about to dramatically change shape as she carries her illegitimate son to term.⁷⁵ The threat of the shaming is also present in this scandalous pregnancy and is yet more potently seen in what the husband does *not* do, but that he

⁷⁴ The motif of the magic ring is a common and varied one (see type D1076), but rings that specifically cause forgetfulness (D1365.5) and provide protection (D1380.23) may also appear (Thompson II.136; II.200; II.206).

⁷⁵ Caroline Bynum examines transformation and metamorphosis, stating that these terms could “denote moral growth or deterioration, the unfolding rather than the transgressing of nature;” some eleventh- and twelfth-century texts interpret metamorphosis as a “normal biological process” (85).

would have done if not for the ring Muldumarec had given his beloved (part of a pair in an androgynous emblem, the other half of which is always with her as per her promise). Her shameful exposure is averted.

The mark of androgyny will be partially passed on to their progeny when he is full grown, for Muldumarec charged his lover to “ja nul hum n'en seit saisiz,/Mes bien la gart a oés sun fiz” [“prevent any man from ever taking possession of it [the sword], but to keep it for the use of her son”] (423-424).⁷⁶ Presumably, the beloved keeps the ring even unto her swooning death (538-540), and the son is cut off from his full androgynous mark, keeping only half of the symbolic pair. Sylvia Huot observes that, while mingling of the magical and human realms appears fatal for both parties involved, the “half-blood son...is integrated into the magical kingdom only, decisively rejecting his human heritage” (239). The son receives the sword and loses the ring, embraces his kingship of the magical kingdom and rejects the human world. His metamorphic potential is cut away and he does not transgress the boundaries between the realms. The shapeshifting qualities of his parents remained unshamed, and he remains untransformative.

Further, Muldumarec's androgyny brings to the fore defamiliarisation of gender identity. As human personhood is compromised by its inclusion of the bestial, the transhuman characters become less identified by their animal natures and more by their gender constructs: the masculine shifters were able to transform with little to no social repercussions or shame (and, as discussed previously with Bisclavret, even *continue* to shape-change as desired), while feminine shifters were exposed and shamed for their

⁷⁶ This scene is cited a source for the motif type T645.1, “Sword left for posthumous son to kill father's murderer” (Thompson V.414).

animalistic duality.⁷⁷ The exception is Muldumarec (and, through the passing on of his ambiguous gendering, his pseudo-shifting beloved), who retains an androgynous social construction and escapes the feminine shaming that routinely followed exposure in the established trend.

And it is this paradigm's unfolding in *Yonec* that stands in contrast to that of *Bisclavret* as Marie de France explores transhumanity and its consequences. To consider the struggle of such theorists as Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray to find a female voice in the midst of patriarchal language, one can find an analogue in the motifs that persist in these texts' pattern. The discrepancy between the pattern perpetuated in *Bisclavret* and then ruptured in *Yonec* can be viewed in this light of appropriation and reinvention: Marie de France establishes the pattern she wishes to break, adhering to it only to deconstruct it in a later tale, perpetuating the paradigm of female shame and then rupturing the pattern via androgynous transformation. The female shapeshifters are inevitably shamed and Othered in the patriarchal depictions of transhumanity, similar to the seeming inescapability of patriarchal language for the female voice. Therefore, while the conclusion of *Bisclavret* is hardly hopeful for any freedom from the patriarchal pattern of female shame and male amnesty, *Yonec* provides a potential solution: his androgyny.

In his examination of queerness in Middle English literature, Tison Pugh asserts that hermaphroditism can be seen as either "the erasure of the dualistic construction of male/female through the embodiment of a merged, unified, and singular 'gender' or as the

⁷⁷ According to Jeffrey Cohen, the sacred/profane duality of the monster's body also acts as a conduit through which "knowledge is forbidden even at the moment it is produced" ("The Order" 37). To perceive the monstrous body, then, is to see a taboo hybridity; it is interesting to note that, in the trend of exposure discussed throughout, it is the feminine body's exposure and condemnation that is evocative of a transgression into the forbidden.

oscillation between male and female gender roles,” which can be read as analogous to the androgyny posited in this project (81). Muldumarec vacillates in his gendered identity, inhabiting masculine and feminine imagery both by turns and simultaneously: he is the epitome of hybridity (animal/human, feminine/masculine), embracing the dualities of his nature, his feminized figure retaining masculine traits and role-fulfillment. His duality of gender signification “highlight[s] the omnipresent possibility of hermaphroditic gender reassignments,” which he manipulates to break the patriarchal pattern of female shaming (Pugh 113). To highlight the discrepancy of Marie de France’s usage of the tales, one can read Bisclavret as a pseudo-androgynous figure himself. Michelle Freeman argues that Bisclavret’s confession to his wife feminizes him: the wife is aggressive in her suit, while Bisclavret is hesitant and enacts “a kind of striptease” in his slow revelation just as he might remove his clothes in the forest to transform (293). This stripping is a submission of Bisclavret to his wife, granting her the dominant (and traditionally masculine) role in their relationship (Freeman 300).⁷⁸ He is, thus, marked by the feminine, highlighting the “fluidity of gendered identity” as he inhabits a masculine appearance with “female behavior” (Pugh 113; Freeman 300). And yet, even if Bisclavret acts as an androgynous figure, the wife is not absolved from her shame or her bestial duality: she is, in fact, exposed and shamed by the very androgynous figure who could have spared her. However, instead of transferring the bestial mark of transhumanity, as Bisclavret does to his wife, Muldumarec confers onto his beloved the androgyny that allowed him to inhabit

⁷⁸ Freeman also argues that the wife is a figure of failed androgyny, one that is “false and perverted”: she is a “destructive fusion of female appearance and masculine motivations,” creating a “wrongful combining of a dual nature” as she misuses her “female privileges in order to achieve masculine ends” (299-300). Her failure to manipulate her androgenic potential, then serves as a warning. Freeman also notes that Marie’s own interjection of her female voice in an “exclusively male domain” shows that women can indeed take the roles that the Lady abuses (301).

both female and male sexes—and the powers found therein. Thus, he is able to perform sexually-driven transformations like a female, yet avoid the consequences like a shapeshifting male; it is only through his occupying both categories that he successfully navigates and rises above the pattern explored in this project. His beloved is likewise able to break the pattern through Muldumarec's androgyny, which he symbolically transfers to her in the tale. In this way, the transhuman lovers of *Yonec* escape the pattern previously established, breaking from the patriarchal anxiety exhibited therein.

This breaking away from the pattern is not without complication: Muldumarec, androgynous as he is, is nonetheless a male who must transfer his androgyny onto his female beloved; she cannot escape the repressive system without it. Marie de France's *lai* falls back into the “more masculine narrative agenda” (Griffin 53).⁷⁹ While Marie de France seems to be searching for a way to rupture this pattern of female repression by usurping the very system that perpetuates it,⁸⁰ having the beloved literally absorb the masculine legitimacy via her trans-gender lover, she still cannot conceive of a female shapeshifter who naturally possesses the key androgyny. And yet, Marie de France herself fulfills the role of an androgynous figure in the meta-text of her *lais*.⁸¹ In her

79 Miranda Griffin's argument focuses on the presence of Marie de France, as the author and the narrative voice, when making this conclusion; she looks at *Yonec* with suspicion: she asserts that Muldumarec is the “lady's fantasy...nothing but the product of the imagination of a frustrated wife” (52). This throws into uncertainty Yonec's lineage: if Muldumarec is a figment of the beloved's mind, then he cannot be Yonec's father; yet, the verbal and public assertion of his paternity by the beloved leaves no other option: she creates that lineage in her speech and its effects are not played out in fantasy (52). Even so, this act of creation, which frees her from her unwanted husband, is mitigated by her immediate death (Griffin 53).

80 This appropriation of masculine language/linguistic tools is perfectly in line with Irigaray's theories of female separatism, and not unlike Cixous's call for a new feminine tongue that is “stolen” from the dominant masculine rhetoric (Irigaray 795; Cixous 1953). Ultimately, it seems Marie de France's attempt to appropriate and transform, to steal and reinvent, nonetheless assumed a male primary giver to the female recipient.

81 Scholars have also attributed androgynous traits to Marie de France's self-depictions and poetic voice, in her establishment of authorship and identification with both male and female characters (Krueger 83; Freeman 289).

prologue, she establishes the importance of the authorial tradition: she cites the “[c]ostume fu as anciens,/Ceo tes[ti]moine Preciens,/Es livres ke jadis feseient” [“It was customary for the ancients, in the books which they wrote (Priscian testifies to this)”] (9-11). She goes on to extoll the necessity of glossing texts and “[a]ssez oscurement diseient” [“to express themselves very obscurely”] so that future generations can learn from the texts (12). It is this purpose that she seeks to imitate in her own writing:

Pur ceo començai a penser
 De aukune bone estoire faire
 E de latin en romaunz traire;
 Mais ne me fust guaires de pris:
 Itant s'en sunt altre entremis.

[For this reason I began to think of working on some good story and translating a Latin text into French, but this would scarcely have been worthwhile, for others have undertaken a similar task.]

(28-32).

It is “[p]ur ceo començai” [“[f]or this reason”]--the purpose of the ancient authors—that Marie de France undertakes her work. She is aligning herself with “Li philosophe” [the “Men of learning”] (17); Marie has essentially identified herself with the archetype of the male scholar, claiming “her own authority in vernacular clerical culture” (Kinoshita and McCracken 11). But it is not enough to merely participate in the masculine tradition of authorship: she thinks to translate a Latin text into her native French, but decides “ne me fust guaires de pris:/Itant s'en sunt altre entremis” [“this would scarcely have been worthwhile, for others have undertaken a similar task”] (31-32). Marie de France does wish to imitate her predecessors, but to break away and do something different: “Des lays pensai k'oï aveie” [“So I thought of lays”] (33). Marie devotes herself to “des lays assembler,/Par rime faire e reconter” [“to assemble lays, to compose and to relate them

in rhyme”] (47-48); she undertakes a task of preservation, versifying *lais* that she does not “*voil laisser nē oblier*” [“wish to overlook or neglect”] (40). In this way, Marie is not only integrated into the masculine authorial world, but also trying to differentiate herself from it; she paints herself as an active agent in the creation of her tale collection, though she is careful to cite outside authority: they are stories that she “[p]lusurs en ai oï conter” [“I myself have heard a number of them”], but also ones that she herself “[r]imez en ai e fait ditié,/Soventes fiez en ai veillié” [“I have put them into verse, made poems from them and worked on them late into the night”] (39; 41-42). Nonetheless, this deferment of authority serves to further align Marie to the masculine tradition of scholarship. The citation of previous authority is a common trope in medieval works, and so Marie's claim to be merely a conduit to the tales is fully appropriate to her time period (Burgess and Busby 25). It serves to place her more firmly in the masculine tradition of medieval authorship: she knows the narrative customs and performs them without fail. She is presenting herself as androgynous in that she is a female body performing a masculine behavior, transgressing the boundaries of traditional gender roles.⁸² And, unlike Muldumarec's beloved, Marie de France's androgyny seems entirely of her own creation. She performs as a female exhibition of androgyny and, arguably, as Muldumarec's source of his own androgyny via her authorship of him. The root of the key to breaking the patriarchal pattern, then, is ultimately a female trans-gendered figure.

⁸² This is assuming, of course, that Marie de France is actually female; recall that very little is known of this figure, with the majority of information derived from her own self-references in her works. It is possible that Marie de France is an example of a ventriloquised female, with a male author presenting a female narrator for the text. Even so, this still provides an androgynous figure (a male body pretending to inhabit a female one); admittedly, the possibility does further convolute the identification of the narrator as the root androgyny: a female narrator as the conferrer of androgyny onto Muldumarec, but then there is a male author who ultimately created the androgynous female narrator. In the interests of clarity if not sanity, this project will assume a female author.

The social anxiety of female transgression is spread over these distinct but incontrovertibly connected cultures, indicating a shared concern about female power. Male transgressive power is depicted as nonetheless legitimate, with Bisclavret, Sinfjotli, and Gerald's male werewolf as enjoying a privileged status in their shapeshifting abilities: none are shamed but, in various ways, benefit from their transformative powers. The patriarchal foundations preserve the male-dominant paradigm, allowing for the masculine transgressors to utilize their abilities for their own gain. However, for a female to employ such ambitions results in severe backlash onto the character: Bisclavret's wife, Signy, and Siggeir's mother are all subject to condemnation and shame. They used their transformative powers for their own benefit and were consequently met with fierce resistance from a masculine society. Even Gerald's female werewolf, whose shapeshifting is mostly passive, is punished for her association with the transgressive ability while her male companion peacefully “share[s] a fire” with the priest (72). While Marie de France does break this pattern, leaving Muldumarec's beloved unshamed, she still required the root of the power to be male, separating the beloved from the androgyny via a masculine intermediary; Marie de France herself seems to do so as well: she disclaims authorship of the *lais*, citing Breton oral tales as her sole sources and inspiration. However, the reliance on authority is less an acquisition of androgyny via a male intermediary and more a tool for Marie's androgyny. Marie de France is utilizing the masculine tradition to tell her tales, fulfilling the authorial role with all its necessary customs.

While the scope of this particular project did not allow for examinations of a larger sample of source texts, the prominence of shapeshifting in Icelandic sagas, the

bestial/hybrid creatures in Gerald's *Topography*,⁸³ and the rarely-touched-upon texts of Marie de France's *Fables* provide ample room for expansion and exploration. To use her *Fables* as an example, it would appear Marie de France is more outspoken here than her *lais*: the previous discussion of Cixous and Irigaray and the issue of patriarchal language is also relevant to Marie's handling of her *Fables* (a traditionally masculine genre); Harriet Spiegel argues that Marie ultimately supports the patriarchal system despite her *Fables*' careful attention to the depiction of individual characters (particularly the female and male victimization thereof), "perhaps for lack of alternative" (Spiegel 113, 119, 123).⁸⁴ Such a language problem could be analogous to Marie de France's perpetuation of the pattern of female exposure and social shaming: it is less an endorsement of the trend and more a struggle to break free of the patriarchal motif—a breaking free that she failed to fully achieve through Muldumarec and his communicable androgyny. However, it is a freedom that Marie de France herself, outside of the text, accomplishes.

83 These creatures, amalgamations of human and animal parts coalescing into a single, monstrous figure, are rather fitting to view as reminiscent of Pliny's races or other wondrous hybrids of travel narratives; these creatures are considered the product of inter-species mating, the "ancient Western dream-in-nightmare" and the "ultimate violation of category" (Cohen, "The Order" 44). This is similar to shapeshifters' own definition- and boundary-transgressive natures via the long-discussed bestial/human duality.

84 Spiegel examines Marie's use of female characters (often marked as such by grammar alone) where her analogues utilize males and the more intimate "social world" of these females (122); still, the *Fables* accept and assume a male-dominated hierarchy, despite this focus on the feminine and its apparent criticism of the patriarchal system. See "The Male Animal in the Fables of Marie de France" in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, edited by Clare Lees, Thelma Fenster, and Jo McNamara, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994; 111-126.

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