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Animals and Emotions in Medieval German Literature

The Various Functions of Bestial Imagery in the Staging of Emotions

by

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Abstract

This article, which continues ideas developed in the context of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft: Graduiertenkolleg 1876—215342465 (GRK1876), examines how animals are used in medieval texts to (re)present, shape, and develop the literary representation of emotions. On the basis of selected examples, it shows how diverse the literary functions of animal imagery can be and how many different poetic and aesthetic strategies can be found for staging animals, connecting them with human characters and the recipients of the tale. In this way, animals can serve as objects of cultural self-reflection and as models for philosophical orientation.

About the Author

After studying literature and cultural studies in Berlin in 2020, Sandra Hofert completed her doctorate on nature in medieval didactic literature as a member of the Research Training Group "Early Concepts of Humans and Nature". Since 2020, she has been working as a research assistant at the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg.

Keywords animals, emotions, metaphors, fables, natural philosophy, reflection figures

1. Emotions between universality and particularity

This paper deals with the central question of how animals are employed in medieval texts in order to (re)present, shape, and develop the literary depiction of emotions. Questions about emotions always move between universality and particularity. In research on medieval emotion, it is mostly integrated approaches that are pursued, approaches that start from universal aspects but at the same time take historical and cultural forms into account.[1] One of the central sources for studying emotions of former times is literature. The analysis of literary sources raises questions, in particular, about the linguistic mediation of emotions.

Schnell 2004 and 2015 propose a differentiation of emotions as they are from their expression and representation. He assumes that there is an uncrossable barrier between emotions, which are inner experiences, and their coding. Whether this is true or not, when dealing with literature one cannot reconstruct supposedly authentic emotions behind the characters as they are represented—especially because in literature the level of coding is more complex. It is instead fruitful to ask how historical texts position themselves in this area of tension: whether and how they problematize the topic or, conversely, try to imply clarity. From this perspective, the depiction of emotions in texts—often combined with a special form of poetical transformation—can be understood as a literary strategy that can multiply the levels of interpretation, as we will see.

Based on these considerations, I begin my paper with a brief overview of emotion research in the field of medieval studies in general, highlighting core approaches in the analysis of emotions in medieval literature [§2]. I select one strategy employed in the literary depiction of emotions, namely, the use of animals. Here, the animal world can function as a source domain

[1] For an overview, see Eming 2007; Kasten 2010. For more detail, see Koch 2006, 26 and Trepp 2002. For an overview of medieval emotions in various discourses, see Feros Ruys and Monagle 2019. Lynch and Broomhall [2021] give an overview of strategies in current research in the field of premodern emotions from an interdisciplinary perspective with special emphasis on theoretical and methodological aspects.

from which metaphorical expressions are drawn.[2] In metaphorical imagery, animals serve as supposedly concrete concepts that allow us to map various properties usually assigned to animals onto human emotions. But the correspondences are not always so simple. There are many different levels of complexity encountered in the integration of animals into literary texts: they can be used as a simple point of reference, but they can also be part of a complex metaphorical network. Besides, animals can appear as agents in a text and as such be part of an intricate semantic structure. Emotions can be attributed to them, and they can also cause emotions in other characters.

So the functions that animals have in the literary depiction of emotions are diverse. In order to deal with the topic, I will address different research questions: first, I will present a brief discussion of medieval scholarly discourses on animals and emotions, leading to the question of whether animals themselves are capable of emotions [§3.2]. This scholarly knowledge had considerable influence on the literary depiction of animals, but there are also examples in which connections between the literary and the scholarly discourses are hardly visible. Thus, the depiction of an animal can be linked to knowledge from natural philosophy or function as a linguistic picture without further explanations. Thereby different degrees of metaphoricity can be found in the literary depiction of animals. I would like to show how diverse these literary functions of animals can be.

To do so, I offer a close analysis of exemplarily passages selected from different literary genres. In numerous texts (of various genres), animals are used as a more or less conventional source domain. Sometimes they provide an image for shorter comparisons, symbols, or metaphors [§3.3]. Furthermore, in the so-called *Physiologus* tradition, animals function as complex allegories. In this tradition, their characteristics and behavior are understood as signs that encode a divine message to be deciphered by humans. In this context,

[2] Fundamental for conceptual metaphor theory in general is Lakoff and Johnson 2000. In this work, the authors show how metaphors are omnipresent phenomena that influence our construction of reality. Metaphors project properties from one domain onto another. In doing so, they can convey meaning from a known to an unknown context or from a concrete domain to a less concrete one. Kövecses 2000, e.g., pursues a synthesis of research on the human body, social and culture factors, and a cognitive linguistic perspective. Surprisingly, literary emotive metaphors do not play a major role in these studies. This leads to the questions of whether there are special structures of poetical metaphoricity and how the perception of diegetic representations differs from how we conceptualize emotions in life. On that topic, see Lakoff and Turner 1989.

not only are emotional attributions to animals an anthropomorphization of the figurative side of the allegory, they also influence its interpretation [§3.4]. Another genre in which emotions are attributed to animals is the fable. In contrast to the religious allegories in the *Physiologus* tradition, fables do not focus on a salvific interpretation; instead, animals serve as objects of projection, directly holding up a didactic mirror to readers and thus raising the question of the extent to which emotionality is attributed to them as animals and how they relate to the emotionality of humans [§3.5]. Finally, I will present an example from an epic text in which we encounter an interaction between an animal and a human being at the level of the narrative [§3.6].

2. Emotion research in medieval German literary studies

Fundamental to medieval literary studies are the works of the historian Gerd Althoff on the role of emotional coding in the Middle Ages.[3] Analyzing numerous historical sources, he shows that the expression of emotions in public and political contexts does not take place spontaneously but is planned, staged, and ritualized.[4] Emotional displays can aim at dispelling ambiguity and creating clarity, which is why they may seem effusive and exaggerated from today's perspective. However, far from being uncontrolled, the display of emotions was used carefully and in a self-conscious manner

[3] On how his works are most fruitful when understood as studies about the coding of emotions rather than about the emotions themselves, see Schnell 2015, 623–625. Nevertheless, the assumption that language, on the one hand, and the embodied physical experience, on the other, can exist independently is highly debatable: see, e.g., Cairns in Cairns and Nelis 2017, 15f. In addition to the theories mentioned in the following, see, e.g., Nagy 2009, who (following Reddy) wants to get closer to the emotions of people of former times by thinking about the connection of words and the emotional processes, *inter alia*. The specific realities of depicted emotions during the Middle Ages in pictorial and literary sources are further investigated by Boquet and Nagy 2018. Moreover, Rosenwein [2002] takes cognitivist and social constructivist approaches that are fruitful for historical emotion research. Noteworthy is her assumption of "systems of feeling" and "emotional communities", with which she especially objects to Norbert Elias' theory of historically progressing self-control. Doubts about Rosenwein's model of "emotional communities" are expressed in Schnell 2015, 278–281.

[4] See for the following, e.g., Althoff 2000 and 1997.

with the aim of conveying certain messages to all persons present. It is essential to follow certain *Spielregeln* (conventions/rules of interaction).[5]

For literary scholars, this raises the question of whether and to what extent Althoff's observations can be applied to fictional texts: What role can emotional displays play in a literary context? This question is associated with the discussion of the semiotic character of emotions in general[6] because in literature we find only linguistically mediated signs of emotions. Moreover, these literary depictions of emotions are influenced by the prevailing paratextual frame on the one hand;[7] on the other hand, especially in fictional literature, they become part of the wider context of the narration and are influenced by the poet's more or less deliberate depiction.

So a fictional narration is often enriched with syntagmatic and paradigmatic significance, and in this way emotions become part of the complex semantic network of references that characterizes many fictional texts. With this in mind, it is understandable that the focus of interpreting emotions as depicted in literature does not lie primarily in their reference to the emotional state of an individual character but in their function as a narrative signal. Consequently, my main research interest here is not to trace the psychological dispositions of historical figures but to understand the specific logic of emotions in medieval texts. Thus, my research questions focus mainly on the role of emotional expression in social communication, the rules underlying these forms of communication, and the functionalization and semanticization of emotional displays within a narration.[8]

[5] Similar ideas can be found in the context of general emotion research. Scheer 2017, e.g., develops an implicit theory of emotion in discussion with the work of Pierre Bourdieu. She starts from the idea that emotions can be understood as learned performances, which are, however, not inauthentic. If one understands the act of expressing emotions as a practice in the sense of Bourdieu's habitus theory, emotions can be positioned between activity and passivity.

[6] Meaning that the emotions of other people can be accessed only through body signs and/or linguistic utterances. For the semiotic character of emotions in general, see Eming 2007, 256–260; 2006, 65–71.

[7] So, e.g., the title, the manuscript context, and so on can cause specific attitudes of expectations.

[8] See, e.g., Eming 2017, 155; 2007, 251–253; Kasten 2010, 8; Koch 2008, 39–53 and 2006, 48. For the special role that gestures play in this context, see Eming 2006, 108; Schnell 2015, 81–85. Directly connected to this is the discussion about the relationship of inside and outside and questions about the reliability, credibility, and authenticity of emotional expressions; see, e.g., Eming 2006, 36–42, 51, 110; Schnell

With all this in mind, let us ask which functions animals can have in this context. But first, some preliminary considerations are necessary.

3. The functions of animals in literary depictions of emotions

3.1 Preliminary considerations

According to common medieval ideas, humans are determined by a dualism between body and soul and—closely connected with this—by a dualism between *sensus* and *ratio*: there are both reason and unreflective passions and drives [see Friedrich 2009, 16; Schnell 2015, 839–853]. The interplay of *sensus* and *ratio* not only distinguishes humans from animals, since animals apparently do not have the capacity of rational thought, it also means that humans themselves are constantly at risk of *Vertierung* [Friedrich 2009, 62] (becoming an animal). This concept has a long tradition. Plato, for example, argues in the fourth book of his *Respublica* that the soul comprises three parts, namely, the desiring, the spirited, and the rational parts [see Plato, *Resp*. 419a–445e]. This corresponds to his chariot allegory given in his dialogue *Phaedrus* comparing reason to the charioteer [see Plato, *Phaedr*. 246a–254e]. This powerful picture has a great impact on thinking and speaking about the relation of body and soul in the Middle Ages,[9] as, e.g., Thomasin of Zerklaere indicates in his didactic poem *Der Welsche Gast*:

> die ſporn vüerent durch die boume
> daz ros daz dâ vert âne zoume:
> alſam vert der der âne ſinne
> wænt ſpiln mit der vrouwen minne [*Welsche Gast* 1183–1186].

(Without control of their reason, humans are driven by emotions—here, courtly love, which is compared to a wild horse without bridle).

2015, 409f. Furthermore, the processual and performative character of literary depictions of emotions is discussed: see Eming 2006, 112–120; Kasten 2010, 4–7; Koch 2006, 55–63.

[9] And influences even modern ideas, leading to, e.g., evolution theories like Paul D. MacLean's triune brain theory:

> The desiring part of the soul is the crocodile brain (desire for food, conquest, sex and safety), the spirited part of the soul (the thymus) is the limbic system, and the rational part of the soul is the computer brain. The Platonic rational charioteer struggles to manage the two horses of desire and spirit, just as the rational computer brain struggles to control the emotional horse brain and the instinctual crocodile brain. [Weishaupt 2011]

The bodily desires unite humans and animals and, without rational control, the human becomes wilder than the wildest animal, as Heinrich the Teichner writes in his poem:

> Der menſch iſt recht als anderew tyer
> mit natůr und mit der gier.
> wann er lebt nach ſeinem můt
> daz er ſich nicht twingen tůt,
> ſo iſt er ein viech in menſchen pild,
> und ward nie chain tỹr ſo wild
> der menſch mocht dannoch wilder ſein [Niewöhner 1954, 357.1–6]

(If humans do not tame their nature, they are only animals in human form, even wilder than any animal).

This *animalische Substrat* [Friedrich 2009, 63] (bestial substratum/bedrock) of human behavior is reflected in the idea of the "inner animal"—a formulation that is often, especially in theological and ethical discourses, connected with a warning of sinfulness. With this in mind it becomes clear that the idea of an inner animal is a spoken image with an ontological substratum. So, if we want to understand animals as a kind of source domain for speaking figuratively about human qualities, especially about emotions, it is important to integrate this approach into the context of medieval concepts of humans and nature in general. If one follows the view of medieval scholars, there are basic qualities that humans and animals share. Therefore, the use of animals as a source domain is not only a question of properties that are assigned to the animals and could be mapped onto humans. To a certain extent, source and target domain share an ontological connection: if they do not use their reason, humans are in danger of becoming animals. Hence, using animals to describe human emotions is not necessarily accompanied by a process of mapping or transferal.[10] This leads directly to another question: Are emotions one of the properties animals share with humans? Can this question be answered, or does it need to be reformulated? Let us have a brief look at the medieval scholarly discourses.

[10] The assumption of such an ontological connection between humans and animals, as understood by medieval scholars, could itself be the result of a conceptual mapping from the human to the animal domain, so a second mapping from animal to human would be only partly metaphorical. In this context, compare Lakoff and Johnson 2000, 127–129 and their critical remarks on the "abstraction thesis". They argue that abstract concepts such as Love do not have a clearly defined structure but get their structure only through metaphors.

3.2 Emotions as a human privilege? Animals in the context of medieval temperament theory

The theory of the four temperaments, meaning the idea of the four *humores* (yellow bile, black bile, blood, and phlegm) and the four temperaments related to them (choleric, melancholic, sanguine, and phlegmatic) is also applied to animals. However, in contrast to humans, animals are not assumed to have a variable mixing ratio; instead, a definite complexion is attributed to each species [see Friedrich 2009, 64].

Wilhelm of Conches describes the sanguine temperament as the prerogative of humans over animals. In his *De philosophia mundi*, Wilhelm brings the ancient temperament theory into a Christian cosmological context and explains that there are only melancholic, choleric, and phlegmatic animals, for example, he speaks of choleric lions, phlegmatic pigs, and melancholic donkeys and cows [*De phil. mundi* 1.23.55]. Humans, on the other hand, were originally created with a balanced mixing ratio and only after their fall did they degenerate into sin. Now this ideal of balance is unattainable for humans, and the only temperament that could come close to this original condition is the sanguine, which is connected with the qualities hot and wet. Thus, medieval medicine names the physiological basis corresponding to the theological postulate of the "lost unity of humans" after their fall.[11]

In addition, medical discourses often negotiate the boundaries between the human and the animal and the risks of overstepping the boundaries; for example, fumes of black bile could rise to the brain and darken the mind [see Wittstock 2011, 41]. As a result, as is described by Constantinus Africanus in his work *De melancholia*, some melancholics might suffer from *melancholia leonina* [page 284; Friedrich 2009, 65f.]. In addition to outbursts of anger, an excessive amount of black bile could also heat the stomach and cause an insatiable appetite, an *appetitus caninus*, as Vincenzo

[11] See Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl 2013, 172–175; Friedrich 2009, 44, 65. So the connection of negatively influenced health and sinfulness is a specific medieval concept; in ancient tradition, the ideal mixture is not an unavailable Utopia from a past time (which can be reached only in a less ideal form) but the basic precondition for human health; see, e.g., Hippocrates:

> The human body contains blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. These are the things that make up its constitution and cause its pains and health. Health is primarily that state in which these constituent substances are in the correct proportion to each other, both in strength and quantity, and are well mixed. [*De nat. hom.* 4; Lloyd 1983, *ad loc.*]

Beauvais describes it [see *Spec. mor*. 3.1.8.1345D; Friedrich 2009, 66]. Galen, whose works are fairly important for medieval philosophy, emphasizes the delusions that can seize the melancholic that cause him to imitate the crowing of a cock with his voice and the beating of its wings with his arms [see Demont 2005, 36]. There are many such examples.

Furthermore, while speaking about the expression of emotions via physiognomic signs, animals are often understood as representations of basic characteristics.[12] In the Middle Ages, physiognomic knowledge was influenced by the ancient tradition that began with pseudo-Aristotle and developed in Greek, Latin, and Arabic, as well as in western medieval sources. As such, it is part of the temperament theory: external signs allow conclusions to be drawn about inner characteristics, and so physiognomic features are assigned to different temperaments. In this context animals can function as a matrix: external similarities to animals can show internal parallels. But whereas animals are supposed to have fixed complexions, humans are formed by a complex interplay of different influences: elements of body and soul, nature and culture interact with one another. So, physiognomic signs can resemble bestial appearances and indicate special internal characteristics, but because humans are defined by complex interdependences, they have a scope for physiognomic dispositions [see Friedrich 2009, 72–79].

To sum up, the idea of the four humors and the four temperaments describes the physical predisposition of each person, which in turn means that certain people feel certain emotions more quickly, more often, and more powerfully than others. Various specific emotional tendencies are attributed to the different temperaments. Thus a prevalence of blood constituting the sanguine temperament lets a person be more happy and cheerful; cholerics are considered to be easily angered; melancholics are affected by an excess of black bile and tend toward sadness and envy; and, finally, phlegmatics are considered to be sleepy and dejected.[13] Since animals are also covered by the temperament theory, emotionality is also assigned to them, which means that reason does not seem to be understood as a constituent part of emotion. But their emotions are less differentiated: the focus remains on the human being. Only humans are regarded as creatures endowed with reason and thus with the ability to reflect on their own emotionality. And

[12] For the methods of physiognomic interpretation in antiquity, see Herzog 1991, 166–169, 180f.

[13] See, e.g., Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl 2013, 118–120; Plamper 2015, 16.

with these properties come the Christian moral and ethical obligations to tame one's body and one's feelings with the help of the mind.

3.3 Comparisons, symbols, and metaphors: the angry lion

In the context of controlling the passions by human rationality, one metaphor is very popular, namely, that of a rider who has to master his horse as reason has to master the body. Literary images such as this one are very common in many different medieval texts. There are countless examples in which animals function as a source domain to illustrate human emotions by means of comparison or symbolic or metaphorical references. In the following, I will comment on just one example: the connection of anger with lions.[14]

According to the prevailing medieval Christian belief, certain emotions can lead a human being into sin, and one of the mortal sins is anger. In very early texts, animals are symbolically associated with vices and virtues, and from the 12th century onward one encounters whole series of such animal symbols. Although the exact number and combinations of virtues and vices and their connection to specific animals are variable, some combinations are found more often than others. Thus, one animal often associated with anger is the lion [see, e.g., Boethius, *Cons*. 4.3.62].

In scholarly discourses, the lion is associated with the choleric temperament, so its connection to anger is also based on contemporary natural knowledge. But in the Middle Ages, anger was regarded not only as a sin to be combated but also as a necessary prerequisite to being a good lord and judge. Closely linked to the idea of the "righteous wrath of God", the supreme lord and judge who will punish all sinners, the question of how much wrath may and must be allowed for earthly rulers is often discussed in medieval literature [see, e.g., Brungs 2009, 34–36; Freienhofer 2010].

A key concept in this context is that of right balance, the *mâze*. This is how Thomasin of Zerklaere, for example, presents it in his medieval didactic poem *Der Welsche Gast*. In the course of his remarks on fair judgment, Thomasin inserts a short comparison: If a ruler had to judge a person who *übel hât getân* (has committed some evil deed) [*Welsche Gast* 12980] but is not sufficiently enraged, he first has to *zühtigen* (beat/chastise) [*Welsche Gast* 12978] himself like the lion. That the lion beats himself with his tail

[14] For an overview of the many different aspects of the medieval concept of anger, see, e.g., Freudenberg 2009. Martini 2009 analyzes different depictions of anger in the literature of the 12th and 13th centuries.

and thereby arouses his anger is a motif known from scholarly discourses and can be found in Pliny [see *Nat. hist*. 8.19.49]. Here, Thomasin integrates this simile into his secular teaching doctrine.

In addition, anger—when aroused to the right extent—is not only an essential attribute of the sovereign and judge but also necessary for being a successful warrior.[15] Medieval authors distinguished between an *ira rationalis* and an *ira bestialis* [see Friedrich 2009, 291]: the first indicates reason as a human faculty that participates in the emotion; the latter, the absence of control by reason leading to an extreme *furor*. How closely these two types of anger interacted and how permeable the line was between moderate and necessary anger, on the one hand, and uncontrolled rage, on the other, was discussed in various medieval texts, especially in heroic epics. There, the hero has options for displaying unleashed violence, which make his social involvement precarious right from the start. His propensity to outbreaks of violence connects him more than metaphorically to animals [see Friedrich 2009, 292].

For example, in the *Eckenlied* (Song of Ecke), a text of the *Aventiurehafte Dietrichepik* (Epic about Dietrich of Bern), the hero meets a giant named Ecke. Dietrich is known as a knight with *lo͡wen mu͡t* (the courage of a lion) [*Ecken*. 55.13] with a chest *harte wit,/gestalt alsam die lo͡wen* (built like a lion's chest) [*Ecken*. 29.7f.]. In addition, Dietrich also has a lion on his shield. In heraldry, the lion was a common symbol of courage and bravery because even a knight needs a share of bestial force; thus, dimensions of rulership and heroism are combined [see Friedrich 2009, 207; Schulz 2015, 33; Zerling 2003, 196]. As a heraldic emblem, the choleric wild and royal animal is controlled and subjected to Dietrich as its carrier. He bears the lions as his ratio controls his anger. But Dietrich's courtly shield is destroyed in the fight against Ecke, and the unleashing of his lionlike courage leads to a bloodbath [see *Ecken*. 108.2–4, 121.12f.]. The heroic motif becomes more and more intense, until the *furor* escalates into the extreme physicality of the two opponents pushing their bodies against one another [see *Ecken*. 132ff.].

[15] For an analysis of the heroic anger in the *Nibelungenlied*, see Gephart 2009, 2005. Furthermore, White describes the strategic and political aspects of using violence and shows how medieval poets "made a clear distinction between, on the one hand, legitimate vengeance animated by righteous anger based on a clearheaded legal appraisal of acts to be avenged as 'wrongs', and on the other, illegitimate vengeance driven by animalistic fury and an unrestrained emotional impulse to avenge shame" [White 2013, 306].

Ecke is also compared to a big predatory cat: on his way to Bern, he walks *ungefüge* [*Ecken*. 34.6] *alsam ain lebart in dem walt* (clumsily/awkwardly, like a leopard in the forest) [*Ecken*. 36.7]—a comparison that especially serves to emphasize Ecke's savagery. In this way, the animal comparisons in the *Eckenlied* seem to reinforce the relationship between Dietrich and Ecke as simultaneously parallel and contrasting characters—at least until the moment when Dietrich gets the decisive *löwen mût* (rage of a lion) [*Ecken*. 120.10]. At this point, the duel becomes more and more bloody [see *Ecken*. 126.2f., 128.11, 133f.], and we find no more animal comparisons: Ecke and Dietrich seem to have exceeded even the measure of beastly violence. They thus become incomparable and—at the same time—strictly alike: both fight without rational control and do not follow courtly rules. Where the animal comparisons before showed an interaction of human and bestial forces, perhaps symbolizing a battle between two kinds of anger, now Dietrich and Ecke are dominated by an *ira bestialis*.

3.4 Christian allegory: the loving pelican and its hatred of the serpent

In the medieval view, an appropriate amount of wrath makes a good warrior as well as a good ruler. With the righteous wrath of God mentioned above, such wrath is also attributed to the supreme ruler of all, God. So the question arises: Can animal imagery also be used to speak of emotions attributed to God?

Central to this question is the idea of the Book of Nature and with it the animal allegory in the tradition of the *Physiologus*. In the Middle Ages, not only the Bible but also all of creation were considered to be God's book, written with the signs of nature. However, this does not mean that you can automatically read the Book of Nature just by looking at your surroundings. Reading here means having the ability to perceive nature as a communication space of God and to understand the components of nature as signs pointing to divine messages. But how do we read this book and how do we understand animals as signs of God?

One answer is provided by the so-called *Physiologus* tradition, which refers to early Christian teachings on nature, the first records of which date from the 2nd to the 4th centuries. In this tradition, various animals, plants, and stones are named, described, and allegorically interpreted in relation to the events of salvation. Over time, the text was translated into many languages, found its way into different cultures, and was expanded with variations

added in the process.[16] Thus, not only were there Middle High German versions of the *Physiologus* itself, but its descriptions and interpretations found their way into a variety of textual genres.

Let us take an example, a *Sangspruch* (sung verse) by the medieval poet Meißner is a kind of lyrical bestiary in the vernacular.[17] The first two strophes of this four-strophic song briefly name several animals and allude to the *Physiologus* tradition, while the last two strophes present a detailed image and its allegorical interpretation:

> Der pellicanus unde der slange die zwe sich niden.
> der slange der ne mac sine ungunst nicht vermiden,
> her todet dem pellicane sine jungen gar.
> So des der pellicanus wirt innen, merket wunder,
> her walgert sich in dicken phůle oben unde under
> unde let den slim an im irdurren, daz ist war.
> Daz tůt er, e er zů dem slangen striten get,
> of daz er im geschaden müge nicht.
> So daz geschicht, den slim her schiere abe getwet.
> alsus gotes gebot an im geschicht.
> So vliuget her hin wider zů neste in vrohen můte
> unde machet sine jungen lebende wider mit sinen blůte.
> des wil ich ü bescheiden baz, des nement war. [Objartel 1977, 12.3]

(The pelican and the serpent hate each other. The serpent kills the pelican's young, so the pelican buries itself in dirt and lets the slime harden on its body to protect itself. It then fights the serpent, causing the slime to fall off. The pelican defeats the serpent and then revives its young with its blood.)

> Der pellicanus der sol gotes sun bediuten,
> der slange den tiubel, der ist gram allen liuten.
> er sterbet uns, wir sint die kint, die er betrouch.
> Des můste gotes sun die erde an sich klieben.
> sin tot lost uns von tode… [Objartel 1977, 12.4]

(The pelican is Christ, the serpent is the devil, and we are the children. To save us and to give us back our lost lives, God's Son had to put on a "garment of earth" and die.)

[16] On the tradition of *Physiologus* in general, see, e.g., Schmidtke 1968, 51–68. A fundamental study of the *Physiologus* tradition in the Middle Ages (with numerous references) is given in Henkel 1976. On the Latin and French tradition in particular, see McCulloch 1960.

[17] For a detailed analysis of this song (no. [1]Mei/12/1–4) and its position in Meißner's polemic against the Marner, see Hofert 2023.

The struggle between good and evil, between God and the devil, is captured here in the image of a fight between the pelican and the serpent. Emotional attributions to the animals increase the force of the narrative: the two antagonists hate each other (*niden*), and the serpent kills the pelican's young because of a grudge (*ungunst*), like the grudge of the devil, who kills (*sterbet*) humans out of anger and hostility (*gram*) towards God.

It is interesting to compare this with the tradition of the *Physiologus*. Although the serpent is a well-known image for the devil, it does not play such a role in the chapter of the *Physiologus* on the pelican. Rather, the *Physiologus* focuses on the struggle between the pelican and its young. Soon after birth, the young pelicans begin to attack their own parents, who defend themselves and kill the children. But, as written in the *Millstätter Physiologus*, a Middle High German version circulating around 1200, one of the parents (the mother) rips open her chest and lets the blood flow over the dead children, who are thus brought back to life. In the following, this self-sacrifice of the pelican is interpreted as a symbol of Christ's death on the cross. As God's children, human beings have fallen away from their Creator. But by being martyred and shedding His blood, He brought man back to life and redeemed Christianity [see *Mill. Phys*. st. 137–143].

So, the *Physiologus* focuses on the love of parents for their young. This love drives them to mourn the death of their young and to sacrifice themselves to save them. The God portrayed here is primarily a merciful, loving God who does not abandon His children even when they turn against Him. The Meißner, on the other hand, emphasizes the devil's malevolence and shows a God who takes up the fight against him. Perhaps this shift has a didactic intention. More than in the *Physiologus*, the image of the Meißner implies that evil is a constant danger that threatens humanity and must be resisted. This more active component may perhaps serve to encourage the audience to fight against evil themselves, against the insidious enemy that must be overcome in order not to lose again (and thus permanently) the life that they have regained.

This example shows that in the Middle Ages animals were also seen as signs of God. Thus, interpreting their characteristics and behavior correctly entails deciphering divine messages. The epistemic elements of the scholarly tradition are to a certain extent variable and combinable: they can be transferred to new contexts and they can be enriched with different emotions. Emotions attributed to the animals not only make the figurative side of the allegory more impressive but also set certain emphases that can influence the interpretation and vary the allegorical meaning. To understand nature is

to understand God, and emotions seem to play an important role in making sense of the world. By attributing emotions to animals, not only are they anthropomorphized, but God is as well.

3.5 Anthropomorphized animals as a didactic mirror: the pitiful fox and the gloating stork

Another genre of text in which emotions are attributed to animals is the fable.[18] Unlike the allegories in the *Physiologus*, the focus here is not on a salvific interpretation from which didactic moral instructions can be derived in a second step. Instead, in fables animals can serve as objects of projection, directly holding up a didactic mirror to the recipients. This raises the question of how emotionality is dealt with in this context: To what extent are emotions attributed to animals in the course of anthropomorphization? Do emotions become part of the didactic process that lies at the heart of the fable?

I should like to take a brief look at one ancient fable that was also quite popular in the Middle Ages:[19] the fable of the fox and the stork (or crane).[20] In this fable, the fox invites the stork to a meal that he serves on a flat stone—impossible for the guest to consume. The stork then takes revenge for the inhospitable banquet by inviting the fox to a meal that he serves in a bottle—impossible for the fox to reach.

We find one medieval version of the fable in the *Edelstein* (Gemstone) written by Ulrich Boner [no. 37]. This version is rather detailed and has a more distinctive narrative structure than the ancient version as well as than most medieval versions. With that, the anthropomorphization of the animals is shaped in a more detailed fashion, and the attribution of emotions to them is more accentuated: each animal is glad about the other's invitation [see *Edelstein* 2, 26] and both remain hungry [see *Edelstein* 13, 18f., 31]. But where the stork has thoughts of revenge and thus actively repaying the suffering caused by the fox's behavior [see *Edelstein* 16], the fox in the end appears incapable of any action. Faced with the inaccessible food, *wart betrüebt des vuchſes muot* [*Edelstein* 34] and *ſîn lîp geluſtes vol* (the fox became sad and full of desire/longing) [*Edelstein* 36]. His suffering is emphasized and

[18] For a definition of the fable, see Dicke and Grubmüller 1987, xxii.

[19] For an overview of the tradition of Latin fables and their role in the Middle Ages, see, e.g., Elschenbroich 1990, 3–7; Grubmüller 1977, 48–111.

[20] Ancient versions can be found in *Phädrus* no. 1.26 [see Irmscher 1987, 177] and *Romulus* no. 43 [see Irmscher 1987, 369 (Recensio gallicana)]. For an overview of the tradition of the fable, see Dicke and Grubmüller 1987, 248–251 (no. 212).

generalized in the following verses, where it is said that unrealizable desires only cause *kumer* (grief) [*Edelstein* 39] in the heart. This reaction is applied explicitly to the fox, who suffers *grôzen ſmerzen* (great pain) [*Edelstein* 40] and, in the end, has to go away hungry and mournful.

In the *epimythion*, or statement of the moral at the fable's conclusion, there is no call to retaliation—an element encountered especially in the ancient versions of the fable. Instead, in the *Edelstein*, Boner condemns *every* liar and swindler because through their own actions they harm only themselves. So, Boner's fable is not about the animals depicted, their behavior, and their emotions but about the human recipients, whose representatives and mirror images the bestial characters are. Thus, the behavior of animals is transferred to the Christian context of human sin, where there is just one authority responsible for punishment, God [see *Edelstein* 43–58]. No human being has the right to take retribution into his own hands. This right belongs to God alone. So, in Boner's version, the fable condemns not only the action of the fox but also the reaction of the stork, and so it undermines the clear opposition between the fox and the stork. Another aspect is mentioned in the *epimythion*: not only does God punish sinful behavior, but he also rewards virtuous deeds. For such a prospect of reward, there is no figurative equivalent in the narrative. Thus, Boner's interpretation transfers the narrative to the context of fundamental Christian beliefs: the need to follow God's commandments, to trust in God, and to have faith in His justice.

In sum, the anthropomorphized actors represent figures to identify with. It is important to note that this potential for identification applies to both actors: the stork becomes the positive, the fox the negative role model, although this clear opposition can be undermined by an interpretation in a Christian context. Although the extent of the narrative and the comprehensiveness of the anthropomorphization and the extent of attributed emotions can vary, it becomes clear that in the fable no multifaceted range of emotions is shown. The shaping and allocation of emotions is as clear as the plot: first, it is about the stork's suffering and his desire for revenge; second, it depicts the fox's even greater suffering and the *schadenfreude* of his host. The emphasis lies on the suffering and the final powerlessness of the fox. His sorrows are part of the necessary punishment of the wrongdoer, and they underline the deterrent function of his character.

3.6 Animals as partners in interaction: the knight and the lion

Finally, I will comment on another way animals may be deployed in the literary representation of emotion, namely, by interacting with humans at

the level of the narrative. Often, such a relationship between a human character and an animal mirrors in a complex way the relationship between the character and another human figure. Thus, in interaction with the animal, emotions that are actually directed toward another human being can become visible.[21] But the interaction between beast and human does not necessarily refer to another concrete relationship. Thus a complex structure of meaning can arise, and the animal can serve to express certain emotions to try out and work through certain patterns of action. I will illustrate this through one of the most popular human-beast interactions in medieval literature: Iwein and his lion.

Knights do not have horses and animals as heraldic symbols on their coats of arms only. In medieval literature, there are also several knights whose companion animals are living beings within the narrated world. These animals, like Iwein's lion or Wigamur's eagle, occur as animals. They are not anthropomorphized, or they are anthropomorphized but only a little bit.[22] These animal companions stand in a complex relationship to the protagonist. As a counterpart and partner, they trigger different emotions in the knight and thus motivate him to perform certain actions. They contrast and mirror the protagonist and play a symbolic role in his identity construction. They may also be read as a kind of (ideal) alter ego of the knight, which enables him to express and negotiate internal conflicts while dealing with the animal counterpart.

Iwein, protagonist of the eponymous medieval Arthurian novel written by Hartmann of Aue, meets the lion for the first time while the animal is fighting a dragon. He saves the beast and from then on the lion is his faithful companion. Iwein becomes the *rîter mit dem leun* (knight with the lion) [*Iwein* 5502]; the lion becomes his identification sign and thus part of his identity [see *Iwein* 5123–5126, 5819–5830: Friedrich 2009, 205].

In medieval thought, the lion is understood in very different ways. Often its symbolic function is emphasized. Sabine Obermaier observes that the

[21] One could think, e.g., of Enite in Hartmann of Aue's *Erec*. Her interaction with different horses can be interpreted as a chance to show her emotions and to mirror her relationship with her husband Erec. For a detailed interpretation, see Kragl 2017.

[22] For animal companions in medieval literature, see Obermaier 2004. She analyzes the functions of Iwein's lion in *Iwein*, Wigamur's eagle in *Wigamur*, and Gauriel's ram in *Gauriel von Muntabel* by Konrad of Stoffeln. Lohengrin's swan in the tale of the Swan Knight and Artus' parrot in *Le Conte du Papegau* are similar examples.

relationship of Iwein and the lion becomes a symbol of the untiring commitment to fight for righteousness, a fight motivated by the voluntary decision to be merciful toward sufferers and to act relentlessly against enemies. In his companionship with the lion, the knight can show qualities that confirm his suitability to rule and his worthiness to become his wife's husband [see Obermaier 2004, 126f.]. According to Udo Friedrich, the lion is *inter alia* a heraldic sign of a predestined ruler brought to life, a domesticated hunting tool,[23] a brother in arms, and a symbol of righteousness and loyalty. This follows the *Physiologus* tradition of the lion as an allegory of Christ, a cipher of the wilderness, and an external personification of the hero's potential for bestial violence. Thus the lion is a necessary complementary counterpart [see Friedrich 2009, 374, 394].

In the novel *Iwein*, the lion is much less anthropomorphized in appearance and behavior than the original written by Chrétien in Old French.[24] But the narrator and other characters repeatedly attribute different kinds of emotions to it. Thus, after being rescued by Iwein, the lion throws himself at the feet of his savior:

> unde zeiget im unsprechenden gruoz
> mit gebærden unde mit stimme
> âne aller slahte grimme
> unde erzeicte im sîne minne
> als er von sînem sinne
> aller beste mohte
> unde einem tiere tohte [*Iwein* 3870–3876]
>
> (With a wordless greeting, the lion showed Iwein his gratitude and as far as he could as an animal, showed him his deep attachment without any fury.)

The lion clearly retains his animal status, but at the same time he shows gratitude and friendly benevolence up to a point. Shortly thereafter, Iwein is wounded so badly that the lion considers him dead. Full of *unmuote* (despair) [*Iwein* 3950], he wants to take his own life. Iwein, however, stops

[23] The parallels between Iwein's lion and the traditional depiction of a dog are especially noticeable. Such a similarity is often pointed out: see, e.g., Kraß 2017, 163. In Hartmann's *Iwein*, the concept of domestication that often is embodied by the dog seems to be transferred to the lion.

[24] See Friedrich 2009, 372. It is also interesting that, unlike for Chrétien, for Hartmann it is less the heraldic pattern that seems to be the backdrop for the union of knight and lion and not the tradition of saints and their animal companions: see Friedrich 2009, 372. For saints and their animal companions in general, see Obermaier 2007.

him and understands this reaction of the lion as an act of mourning and faithfulness:

> daz er vor herzeleide sich
> wolde erstechen durch mich,
> daz rehtiu triuwe nâhen gât. [*Iwein* 4003–4005]

For Iwein, the lion becomes a model of true loyalty, which he himself contrasts with his own faithless behavior toward his wife in a self-reflexive monologue [see *Iwein* 3961–4010]; he did not show the same loyalty to his wife as the lion showed to him. Feeling great remorse and pain, he sentences himself to death. Iwein is aware of his misdemeanors and is willing to end his life when a lady named Lunete approaches him and asks for help. She is looking for Iwein to fight for her and save her from her death sentence. So Iwein gains self-recognition and reveals his identity, and in the end both death sentences, Iwein's and Lunete's, are averted.

In his fights, the lion supports Iwein. The beast and the knight fight together. When Iwein is injured, the lion worries so much that he intervenes quickly [see *Iwein* 6737–6751]. At the same time, an injury lion incurs causes Iwein such great fury that he wins the fight immediately [see *Iwein* 5418–5422]. Both fight with anger [see *Iwein* 5050–5059, 6693–6695], but no further animal metaphors are used. The extent of bestial violence necessary for a victorious warrior seems to be personified by the lion fighting on Iwein's side [see Friedrich 2009, 393f.]. But it is not an extreme and inappropriate form of violence. For Iwein, the lion is not an unpredictable and dangerous wild animal; rather the lion has very human sentiments but within limits. Thus, the knight and lion repeatedly trigger certain feelings in one another, which leads to concrete actions. The lion is Iwein's counterpart and can be understood both as a part of Iwein's self and as an ideal image of Iwein. Thus, in interaction with the lion, Iwein can show certain qualities that are decisive for him as a knight, as a husband, and as a sovereign.

Ultimately, the lion is anthropomorphized inasmuch as it experiences various feelings as a human would, and especially as Iwein would. The feelings and actions of knight and animal seem to be closely linked and to influence each other. The lion is part of the action dynamics. He directly intervenes in the events, signifying an interplay of action and reaction between animality and humanity. Between Iwein and the lion a close coexistence is described.

Each is emotionally related to the other, and together they embody a complex, significant interaction.[25]

4. Conclusion

Now that I have outlined the different ways in which animals may be instrumentalized in the literary staging of emotions, it is time to summarize the discussion. We have seen that animals are an important source or domain from which metaphorical expressions can be drawn in thinking about humans, especially about human emotions. We have discussed the example of the angry lion but there are countless other examples, for instance, the popular role birds play in the context of courtly love.[26]

But not only are the examples of the use of animals as a source in speaking about human emotions diverse and innumerable, there are also many different poetic and aesthetic strategies for staging animals and connecting

[25] Here the relationship between Iwein and his lion differs from that between Wigamur and his eagle: Wigamur also saves his animal companion in a fight against another animal, i.e., a vulture. But unlike in *Iwein* the fight gets a short backstory: the vulture had stolen the offspring of the eagle—an event with parallels to Wigamur's own past, because as a child he was kidnapped by a *merwîp* [*Wigam.* 168] and a *merwunder* [*Wigam.* 170]: see Obermaier 2004, 130. So, the eagle could be understood as a symbol for the unknown origins of Wigamur, and his presence is a constant reminder of the importance of the genealogical principle in general [see Obermaier 2004, 128–132]. After his rescue, the eagle becomes Wigamur's faithful companion, but—unlike Iwein's lion—the eagle does not intervene in the action. Knight and beast are not comrades-in-arms; their relationship is less friendly. Although the eagle seems to feel great *vreude* [*Wigam.* 1485] about his rescue and although the narrator interprets the behavior of the eagle as an expression of gratitude [see *Wigam.* 1491–1493], his relationship with Wigamur is not characterized by mutual affection but by service and consideration. The eagle is hardly part of the action dynamics: he is not part of a complex semantic interplay of action and reaction but has a symbolic character. Thereby Wigamur—unlike Iwein—is also described with classical animal metaphors, as, e.g., with the stereotype *lewen muot* [*Wigam.* 3891]. Where Iwein and the lion are emotionally related and both embody a complex, meaningful interaction, Wigamur and the eagle remain emotionally distant from one another. Where the lion moves between animality and humanity, the eagle mostly retains the status of a more unambiguous symbolic character.

[26] Hunting metaphors are especially often used, e.g., in his poem *Der Welsche Gast*, Thomasin compares the man with a bird catcher and warns the woman not to dress up because this would show the man that she is ready to be caught like a bird [see *Welsche Gast* 889–892].

them to human characters and, of course, to the recipients. Animals can be staged as objects as well as subjects. They can interact with human characters and thereby mirror, contrast, and shape their relationships with other characters. In complex ways, animals can become part of the construction of a figure's identity. Their speechlessness can give a character the opportunity to project different roles onto the animal counterpart, to work through different patterns of interaction, or to externalize an inner monologue and, by doing so, organize his own emotions. However, animals can also come together in conversation as intelligible, anthropomorphized figures, appearing as emotional beings and becoming a mirror for the recipients.

In all this, it is important to keep in mind the contemporary discourses of medieval scholars that define animals and their ontological connections to humans. This scholarly knowledge often influences the literary staging of animals. By integrating specified epistemes into fictional texts, figurative ways of speaking and literal meaning can interact and lead to complex semantic structures.

Basically, animals can function as objects for cultural self-reflection, as models for philosophical orientation, as a means to confront the Other, and as models of social order [see Friedrich 2009, 36]. In all these ways, animals also serve as models for reflecting on and dealing with one's own emotions. Animals can be familiar, but at the same time they stay strange—and perhaps this is one of the characteristics that makes animals so suitable for describing human emotions because emotions can also be strange and familiar at the same time. So we can find a whole zoo of animals used as a source—local animals as much as other species. Animals in their diversity make it possible to illustrate the whole spectrum of human emotions.

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