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Author: Anna Czarnowus

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Ministerstwo Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

Anna Czarnowus

INSCRIPTION ON THE BODY
Monstrous Children
in Middle English Literature

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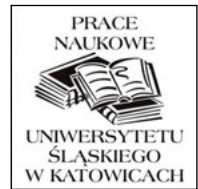
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Contents

Acknowledgments

Introduction

> Searching for the monster is a productive hunt whose
> course is impossible to predict: the monster tends to es-
> cape constantly, which is one of the attractions of that
> never ending pursuit; it is better to devote oneself to it
> with flexibility, pleasure and even imagination, than to
> blindly persist in an inadequate logic; it is better to treat it
> as art rather than a duel, which would be won in advance
> by that protean adversary.
>
> Claude Kappler *Monstres, démons et merveilles à la fin du Moyen Age*[1]

Any discussion of monstrosity, elusive as the subject of such scrutiny is, should involve the question of corporeality. The monstrous carnality is of the most extreme nature: monsters are simultaneously not human enough and trans-human, in the sense of transcending the limiting borders associated with the "normal" body. The non-normativity of their bodies, however, does not exhaust the wealth of definitions which could be provided in order to account for the scope of their deformity. Not exclusively a body, but also a spirit may undergo deformation, transforming itself into a warped morality that leads to destructive acts. In this study the ultimate emphasis will be placed on both, but the idea of extra-normal corporeality will always be present.

Even for ancient philosophers humans were potentially bestial creatures. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* involves a delineation of the par-

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[1] [Chercher le monstre est une chasse fertile et imprévus: le monstre, constamment, tend à s'échapper et c'est là l'un des charmes de cette poursuite sans fin; mieux vaut s'y adonner avec souplesse, avec plaisir et même avec fantaisie, que s'obstiner aveuglément dans une <logique> inadéquate; mieux vaut en faire un art qu'un duel, lequel serait gagné d'avance par cet adversaire protéiforme]; Claude Kappler, *Monstres, démons et merveilles à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Payot, 1980), p. 14; the translation of the quotation into English is mine.

allelism between human children and animals. The Philosopher, if we use Aristotle's medieval epithet, indicates the children's deficiency manifested in their inability to make choices, which renders them more similar to animals than to adult humans.[2] The bestiality suggests a degree of monstrosity, subtle as the indication is. Aristotle did not perceive children as human beings, since their nature was allegedly unreasonable, which made their evolution into the state of adult reason indispensable.[3] This view on the malleable quality of children's awareness of the surrounding world found its reflection in the medieval notions of childhood: children were then envisaged as not only physically weak, but also devoid of reason.[4] Nevertheless, such characteristics did not render them innocent in the spiritual sense, as St Augustine insisted in his *Confessions*. If, according to the Church Father, "the weakness... of infant limbs, not its will, is its innocence", then newborn babies are only physically innocent, which indicates their vulnerability.[5] Still, they have to undergo purification through baptism, as they are not impeccable. In the course of the children's lives their nature has to be improved by nurture, since only in that way can they become good Christians. Therefore it may be postulated that the negative attitude to childhood, as is observable in the medieval culture alongside a more positive view on it, originated in antiquity.

This study of monstrous children in Middle English literature could be perceived as an attempt to account for the ambivalent image of childhood in the Middle Ages. Focusing on those literary representations, the considerations below may constitute a small part of the more all-inclusive project that Mary McLaughlin defined as the "Discovery of Childhood".[6] Particularly the negative, frequently monstrous, representations of chil-

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[2] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 53.

[3] Ibidem.

[4] Doris Desclais Berkvam, *Enfance et maternité dans la littérature française des XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1981), p. 138.

[5] *The Confessions of St Augustine*, trans. Edward B. Pusey (New York, London: Collier Books, Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1961), p. 15.

[6] Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries" in: *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd de Mause (London: Souvenir Press, 1974), pp. 108—181.

dren deserve a close critical attention due to their equivocal nature. The ambivalence is enhanced by the overtones of holiness that exist in those representations: young Jesus from the Apocrypha is a good example of what could somehow anachronistically be seen as moral monstrosity, if it did not verge on sainthood. Particularly in the Gospel of Thomas Jesus represents the topos of *puer senex,* violent towards all those who oppose him and thus resembling the Old Testament God the Father rather than a mild and docile child.[7] The monstrosity might be read in the context of medieval culture from two perspectives: Jesus was either a typical representative of children with their incomprehensible vice, as it was thought in the Middle Ages, or he was expected to act like the vengeful Lord. Hugolin Langkammer adds another hypothesis about the source of such mysterious representations when he indicates their pagan and Gnostic origin. Langkammer states that the child's harmful behaviour may originate from his identity of a *theios aner*, the man of God, while his "adult" pride derives from the fact that, in a Gnostic mode, he already knew everything once he was born.[8] Whatever interpretation we accept, Jesus' behaviour, conventionally seen as immoral, and holiness accompany each other in this representation so closely that similar instances of monstrosity followed by holiness in such texts as *Sir Gowther* should not surprise us greatly.[9] Another example of such combination, this time of a more literal monstrosity with sainthood, appears is *The Prioress's Tale*, where Chaucer's "litel clergeon" (VII: 503)[10] becomes physically deformed due

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[7] *The Gospel of Thomas*, trans. Stephen Patterson and Marvin Meyer, at: <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/bible/noncanon.stm>

[8] Hugolin Langkammer, *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu* [*Apocrypha of the New Testament*] (Katowice: Księgarnia św. Jacka, 1989), p. 33.

[9] Further commentary on the apocryphal Jesus' behaviour may be found in, for instance, Marek Starowieyski's introduction to the texts treating of Mary's and the Saviour's youth; see Marek Starowieyski, "Wstęp" [Introduction] in: *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Ewangelie apokryficzne* [*The Apocrypha of the New Testament. Apocryphal Gospels*], vol. 1, *Fragmenty. Narodzenie i dzieciństwo Maryi i Jezusa* [*Fragments. The Birth and Childhood of Mary and Jesus*], ed. Marek Starowieyski (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2003), pp. 19—59.

[10] All the quotations from *The Canterbury Tales* will come from: *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); the notes will also be taken from that edition.

to his severed throat and is consequently transformed by the Virgin into an automaton, which turns out to be a direct path to his sainthood.[11] Nevertheless, Chaucer's character cannot be perceived as a monster in the same understanding as the literary figures we shall focus on here: as offspring born deformed (or accused of deformity by those who use calumny as a weapon directed against the mother). Still, the monstrous children who will be of interest for us share with the characters broached above the potential for holiness and the religious background of their deformity. Those representations of children are multifaceted and hence they bear a number of similarities to the Janus-faced image of a monster that emerges from the ancient, medieval, and Renaissance culture. The malformed or deformed being represents there both the sinfulness of the world and the unfathomable character of the divinity.

What undoubtedly needs more exploration is the function, or rather the functions of monstrous children, to restate the issue investigated by David Williams in his study *Deformed Discourse*: *The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature*.[12] The religious, moral, and finally ideological message that those representations entail has to be investigated, particularly due to the context of conversion and the sacrament of baptism that consistently appears in the narratives that will be interpreted in the ensuing sections of this study. Monstrosity thus becomes a text inscribed onto bodies for a reason; the purpose of the inscription has to undergo a serious questioning. Deformity may be subject to metaphorization as an instance of writing that needs deciphering. The metaphor in turn might be conducive to more general reflection on the *nature* of the

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[11] Andrzej Wicher thus comments on the machine-like quality of the boy's body in his life-in-death state: "The child's life is not, however, truly prolonged, he is turned into a sort of cyborg designed to reproduce incessantly and monotonously the anthem, *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, a paradoxical state which the boy himself accurately describes as 'singing in my death' (l. 660). The paradox consists here also in the fact that the boy's only bodily function that is left, apart from his brief statement just before the ultimate death, is singing aloud, i. e. something that he is the least likely to be able to do because of the nature of his wound"; Andrzej Wicher, "Sounding the Limits of Eroticism in Chaucer's *The Prioress's Tale*" in: *Representations of the Erotic*, eds. Tadeusz Rachwał and Tadeusz Sławek (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1996), pp. 29—37.

[12] See David Williams, *Deformed Discourse*: *The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996).

deformed and the role of *nurture* in the process of becoming (or, alternatively, un-becoming) a monster.

While interpreting the figures, or rather illusory images, of monstrous children, navigating one's way through the sphere of the imaginary becomes crucial. In *The Medieval Imagination* Jacques Le Goff insists that the sphere of representations is more interesting as an object of study in giving readers more insight into the past than concrete historic sources.[13] A study of the purely fictitious monsters from medieval literature might therefore result in a more productive outcome than concentrating on the actual deformed offspring which was born to meet its frequently dreadful end, if one remembers that abandoning such children was a usual practice in Roman antiquity and in the Middle Ages. Fiction, often tinged or even suffused with ideology(ies), could tell us more about the mentality prevalent in the epoch in question than historical records. The monstrous child that will be the object of our attention here repeats the pattern that Reinhard Kuhn observed in child figures in Western literature: the child can be treated as a "cultural invention, a product of the imagination". Moreover, Kuhn describes that construct as a "protean figure": the one that undergoes constant changes.[14] As we shall see, the monstrous child in medieval, and specifically Middle English literature, is no different from the more abstract figure of any child emerging from Kuhn's study. It is also an elusive construct, always in the making and undergoing unpredictable transformations.

The figures of monstrous children that will be referred to here may seem very illusory. A few of them are pivotal characters in the plot, which is naturally not the case with the reported offspring of queens falsely accused by their sinister adversaries (the enemies interestingly often being women exercising power in the real sense of the phrase, since they are mostly the unfortunate heroines' regal mothers-in-law). Thus the word "representations" that should refer to all the figures discussed here becomes to a certain extent inadequate. Nevertheless, the monsters figuring in the falsified letters may still be referred to as "representations", since they are concre-

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[13] Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), particularly pp. 1—17.

[14] Reinhard Kuhn, *Corruption in Paradise*: *The Child in Western Literature* (London: University Press of New England, 1982), p. 3.

tizations of ideas, even if they belong to the realm of imagination. Some of the literary works mentioned here even involve elements of description that specify the child's deformity; hence including them in a study of representations becomes justifiable due to the realistic quality of the imagery. Even when they are solely products of false accusations, the monstrous children from those reports function similarly to real monsters in other narratives: they symbolize the alleged sinfulness of the mother, but on a different level they also provide evidence for her holiness. Not incidentally are the heroines of the "Constance group" typically presented as emulating the Virgin Mary, particularly in the Piétà-like scenes that appear in those stories at the point when the women float in rudderless boats at sea.

The body of texts that have been chosen for our discussion here by no means exhausts the list of possible sources of the representations in question. The false accusation of an unnatural birth also appears in, for example, Marie de France's *Le Fraisne* and its Middle English version, *Lay le Fresne*. There a "levedi milde" (33) is accused of infidelity due to bearing twin girls instead of one child.[15] A similar accusation occurs in the fourteenth-century romance *Octavian*.[16] Nevertheless, the discussion of monstrosity in the texts above does not entail any ideologically laden considerations of religious and ethnic nature, hence they are not close analogues of the texts that will be of interest for us here. As for examples of the real monsters from literary texts and not the quasi-monstrous offspring, Mélusine in the romances by Jean d'Arras and La Couldrette mothers at least two monsters, Geoffroy *à la grand dent* (the large-toothed) and Horrible, which directly results from her own supernatural origin.[17] Yet, again the issue of deformity does not appear central there; neither does ethnicity come into play as a factor causing monstrosity. The romances that have been chosen for this analysis seem to be fairly representative in terms of involving specific types of monstrous children, arbitrary as such a se-

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[15] "Lay le Fresne" in: *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Donald B. Sands (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1993), pp. 233—248; the numbers of the lines refer to that edition.

[16] See "Octavian" in: *Six Middle English Romances*, ed. Maldwyn Mills (London and Rutland, Vermont: J.M. Dent & Sons and Charles E. Tuttle, 1992), pp. 75—124.

[17] See *Romans of Partenay or of Lusignen*, ed. W.W. Skeat (London: The Early English Text Society, 2002).

lection may appear. Characteristically, popular literature supplies us with a wealth of texts on the subject.[18] The sensational dimension of juvenile monstrosity, however, did not hinder inclusion of more serious topics into the plots. Monsters are viewed in the light of early scientific theories of generation, paganism and conversion, devilish interventions in human procreation, and, last but not least, miscegenation.

Externalization of a monster is entangled in the intricate web of dependencies, with the gesture of "othering" not only of children, but also of their mothers as potential sources of deformity or at least difference. Any female body means potential peril, not to mention the threat of spoiling what we would nowadays call the "white race" through unions with religious and ethnic others. A monstrous child may be a punishment for the transgression of its parents, but also a sign demonstrating God's inscrutability. A degree of ecumenist attitude might even be involved, since in the narratives in question the others also have their function in the plan of salvation.

Chapter One tries to reveal the complexity of terminology referring to the monstrous and etymological intricacies associated with the term. Divagations on the function of the monstrous in the medieval and Renaissance cultures subsequently follow. The scientific theories of monsters' origin, often continuing misogynist discursive practices of antiquity, will be summarized at that point as well. It will be hypothesized that representations of monstrous children may be read in the context of medieval ambivalence over childhood as related to the Christian ideal of ascetic life and the hardships associated with parenthood. Philip Ariès' concept of the non-existing awareness of childhood as a separate stage of human life will be repudiated. Nonetheless, the affirmative stance on monstrosity, paradoxically based on Pseudo-Dionysius' apophatic, that is negative, theology, is confirmed as dominating in the Middle Ages. Despite its generally apocalyptic attitude to deformity, the Renaissance in turn clearly developed the idea of a carnivalesque dimension of monstrosity.

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[18] On the qualities of medieval popular romances, their sensationalism, and the possibilities of a more serious theoretical analysis of those "ugly ducklings of medieval English studies" see Nicola McDonald, "A Polemical Introduction" in: *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England*: *Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 1—21.

In Chapter Two *The Man of Law's Tale*, one of the few tales of Chaucer where children appear, is analyzed as not exclusively the record of a monstrous birth resulting from an inter-faith marriage, but also as a narrative on religion, race, and missionary practices. Constance is accused of "unnaturalness" by her two subsequent mothers-in-law, themselves "unnatural" in their craving for authority and in their non-female characterization. Furthermore, the question of ethnicity is foregrounded in the descriptions of Constance's pallor and the religious difference manifested by her adversaries. The heroine's two subsequent marriages with pagans result in conversion and, later, the prominent position in Christendom of her quasi-monstrous son, Maurice. Like Constance, the title character of *Emaré* also undergoes the process of "othering", here visible in a different perception of her due to the oriental dress she wears, which makes otherness not only similar to a text written on the body, but also to a clothing item that alters one's physicality. What is more, the latter romance exemplifies the affirmative, therefore truly Christian, treatment of a monster by the parents. The two analogous romances deal with inscriptions on the body in the form of alleged monstrosity or ethnic difference.

Chapter Three openly focuses on the question of miscegenation, since the deformity of an infant is no longer fictitious here. An inter-faith and interracial union leads to malformation of the couple's child, perhaps due to the infidel father's inability to endow the matter with life, if Aristotle's theory of the male giving the form to the female matter is considered. Biracial origin metaphorizes otherness, visualized either in the formlessness of the body or, alternatively, in its particoloured quality. In *The King of Tars* the sultan, bestial in accordance with the metaphor of Muslims' canine nature, witnesses the child's magic beautification through baptism and consequently decides to subject himself to the sacrament as well. His multi-coloured body has to be read as a text parallel to the representation of Saracen Feirefiz in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. The two ideologically laden images function as evidence for the necessity of conversion.

In Chapter Four monstrosity signals individual vice. Demonic intervention in procreation demonstrates the adequacy of reading fiends in visual representations as yet another group of ethnic others. The demonic origin determines the life of Robert le Diable and his Middle English equivalent,

Sir Gowther. Like the child in *The King of Tars*, they represent the Wild Folk type with its propinquity for holiness: a quality more easily attainable for them due to their secluded, meditational life in the woods. Adopting the life of a dog becomes an adequate form of penance for moral deformity. Instead of *cynocephali's* monstrosity, Gowther lives up to the canine aspect of the Christian ideal, present also in St Christopher's legend.

Thus finally deformation is received with affirmation, confirming the possibility of a positive Christian response to the monstrous. Towards the end of this study monstrosity emerges as a religious ideal, a condition allowing for a faster development of sanctity and a path to salvation, not only of the individual, but also of the world. It is a text written on the body alongside other inscriptions, indelible but potentially ennobling. Even though it might initially seem that a monster is merely a being "not conforming to the divinely ordered scheme", as Jane Gilbert defined it, the final conclusion of our analysis might testify to a different truth: perhaps God also speaks through monsters, or they are even closer to holiness than ordinary humans.[19] Monstrosity thus becomes a system of signs inscribed onto bodies, the system which has to undergo deciphering and be read as a text demonstrating the complexity of creation. The inscription on the body transmogrifies into a text affecting what is dormant within. The body thus frequently materializes the world of the spirit and the relationships between the two, body and soul, may be perceived as complementary.

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[19] Jane Gilbert, "Unnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in *The King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*" in: *Medieval Women*: *Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain. Essays for Felicity Riddy*, eds. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol M. Meale, and Lesley Johnson (Turhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 329—344.

Chapter One

Monstrous Images, Monstrous Selves: Medieval and Renaissance Ideas

> The world may be defined as *a thought of God realized through the Word*. If this be so then in each being is hidden a divine thought: the world is a book written by the hand of God in which every creature is a word charged with meaning.
>
> Emile Mâle *The Gothic Image*[1]

The medieval affirmative attitude expressed in the epigram above has regretfully not found its fully deserved place in the popular imagination yet. Those precepts of the medieval proto-semiotics embrace an acceptance of every creature, while the most widespread versions of present-day medievalism are still tinged with the long shadow cast by the religious intolerance of the time, manifested for instance in the unscrupulous violence towards Muslims that looms large from chivalric literature. Nevertheless, the stance directed towards perceiving every creature as purposefully created by a loving God transcends those limiting medievalist images and demonstrates progress not only in comparison with the ancient attitudes to otherness, but also in comparison with the Reformation ones. Medieval fascination with the variegated nature of all creation manifested itself also in the treatment of monstrosity, a multifaceted and ambiguous sign coexisting with other, less unusual, ones. Interpreting the world surrounding humans, particularly the world of nature, as manifestations of the divine stood in the centre of medieval thinking about human existence. Furthermore, the products of creation offer a reflection of themselves to discerning observers, as the well-known quotation from Alanus ab Insulis' *Planctus Naturae* demonstrates:

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[1] Emile Mâle, *The Gothic Image*: *Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Dora Nussey (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1958), p. 29.

Omnis mundi creatura
Quasi liber, et pictura
Nobis est, et speculum.
Nostrae vitae, nostrae mortis,
Nostri status, nostrae sortis,
Fidele signaculum.

[Every creature in this world is to us like a book and a picture and a mirror. Our lives, our deaths, our situations, our fates are truly signified.][2]

Hence excessive products of creation, such as deformed creatures, could also be deciphered as signs. In medieval attempts at semiotic investigation, no symbol denoted exclusively one phenomenon or notion.[3] Recapitulating the tenets of medieval typology and proto-semiotics, one and the same symbol could function on diverse levels of denotation and embrace both positive and negative associations. In order to demonstrate the complexity of medieval symbolism Joan Cadden provides her readers with an example from the Latin *Physiologus*, where a beaver is discussed in terms of the medicinal effects of its bodily parts, in the context of the legend according to which it cuts off its own testicles in order to save its life from the hunter, and as a metaphor of a Christian casting off the sins in order not to be intercepted by the devil.[4] The monster as a polyvalent figure suits such a multi-dimensional medieval semiotic system well, since it functions at the intersection of various levels.

The liminality of a monster perhaps did not pose a considerable threat to the cognitive system of medieval audiences, which stands in contrast with the modern reception of monstrosity. While discussing the present-day reaction to the monstrous, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes about the image familiar from multiple versions of Gothicism and generally compatible with the fears prevalent in modern culture. He claims that "the

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[2] Both the quotation and its translation have been taken from: Lisa Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 157.

[3] For multiple instances of the multi-dimensional medieval symbolism see Jean Feuillet, *Lexique des symboles chrétiens* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004).

[4] Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*: *Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 49.

monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions".[5] Simultaneously the "ontological liminality" of the monster well reflects the concerns of our world and its cultures, hence the captivating slogan "monster culture" that Cohen applies to our age appears adequate.[6] The modern versions of Gothicism might then be reverberations of medieval attraction to the monstrous and an aftermath of the idea's exploration in the Middle Ages (and in the Renaissance, which continued certain modes of cognition of monstrosity constructed in the preceding epochs).

The affirmative approach to monstrosity noticeable in the medieval culture is usually illustrated with its delineation and etymological explication presented in St Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, where the following is stated:

> …just as it was not impossible for God to set in being natures according to his will, so it is afterwards not impossible for him to change those natures which he has set in being, in whatever way he chooses. Hence the enormous crop of marvels, which we call "monsters", "signs", "portents", or "prodigies"… The name "monster", we are told, evidently comes from *monstrare*, "to show", because they show by signifying something, "sign" (*ostentum*) comes from *ostendere*, "to point out", "portent" from *portendere*, "to portend", that is, "to show beforehand" (*praeostendere*), and prodigy from *porro dicere*, "to fortell the future".[7]

For Augustine even the word "monster" itself is synonymous with "sign", here ostensibly a divine sign of the Almighty's will. His definition also embraces the possibility of deformed creatures indicating future events. While the Renaissance writers abandoned enthusiasm for the monstrous visible in *De Civitate Dei,* they perpetuated the idea of its portending future events, then in the form of apocalyptic visions characteristic of the Reformation version of religiousness. Augustine dis-

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[5] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" in: *Monster Theory*: *Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996), pp. 3—25.

[6] Ibidem.

[7] St Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 982.

cerns a divine plan in the existence of a monster. The creature acquires a degree of liminality if it connects the world of humans, otherwise ignorant of the temporarily remote events, with the sphere of omniscient God. The deformed thus transcends ordinary existence and functions outside it in order to enhance the perception of those whose bodies are normative. From that picture God emerges as unfathomable, while his plans are exposed as inaccessible to full comprehension by the humans. Nevertheless, everything is created purposefully and the result of that act is the world's beauty materialized in its harmony. "God is the creator of all, and he himself knows where and when any creature should be created or should have been created. He has the wisdom to weave the beauty of the whole design out of the constituent parts, in their likeness and diversity", to quote the Church Father again.[8]

St Augustine's monstrous entails the world picture as it was constructed by Pseudo-Dionysius (Denys) the Areopagite in his apophatic theology. David Williams pinpointed the intricate relation between that area of medieval philosophy and what he termed "deformed discourse".[9] In the often discussed *Divine Names* Pseudo-Dionysius, an author purporting to be St Paul's disciple and the first bishop of Athens while he actually wrote his work in the fifth century, delineates the division of theology into the cataphatic (positive) and the apophatic (negative). The limitations connected with the positive theology, which tends to formulate definitive statements on the divine nature due to its alleged possibility of full cognition of God, may be overcome by the apophatic approach, whose essence hinges on the obscure status of the divine. What Paul Rorem terms "dissimilar" symbolism is thus more adequate than the similar one: "… through its very dissimilarity, its ugliness or monstrosity, and by the natural repugnance it aspires, [it — A.C.] proves from the very first to be better adapted to the method of negation that it demands".[10] No words are adequate when one refers to God, hence silence becomes more telling than any language humans can speak.

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[8] Ibidem, p. 662.

[9] David Williams, *Deformed Discourse*: *The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), p. 23 *et passim*.

[10] Paul Rorem, "Preface" in: Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987), pp. 5—7.

Quoting Pseudo-Dionysius himself, "we must not dare to apply words or conceptions to this hidden transcendent God".[11] We express the divine omnipotence more correctly if we do not refer to him at all. Paradoxically, the world image thus constructed is more positive since it embraces the divine superiority and entails the human quality of erring in the relations with God, noticeable in using inadequate terms.

The position of the monster in the divine plan acquires a similar function: if we are not able to portray God adequately with words, we are not capable of comprehending his plan, either. The monster demonstrates inscrutable plans of the Creator and reminds us of our inability to either portray God by dint of any human language or fully understand his design of the world. Dionysius thus summarizes a major point of his argumentation: "… the divinity is not only invisible and incomprehensible, but also 'unsearchable and inscrutable,' since there is not a trace for anyone who would reach through into the hidden depths of this infinity".[12] Dionysius' philosophical framework appears to be particularly productive in the area of medieval literature studies, to write only about Rafał Borysławski's analysis of Old English riddles as a genre demonstrating inscrutability of the divine plan or his juxtaposition of Dionysius' apophatic theology, Boethius' Neoplatonism, and Old English gnomic poetry.[13] As for the monstrous in early medieval culture, even more tellingly, for Augustine the Creator fathers monsters as much as he relates to humans as his children. Augustine presents the following reasoning which stands behind identifying monsters as God's children: monstrous races may not exist, if they exist they do not have to be human, and if they are human then they are also the children of Adam. Therefore they must have their place in the chain of being.[14]

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[11] Pseudo-Dionysius, "The Divine Names" in: *The Complete Works…*, pp. 47—131.

[12] Ibidem.

[13] See Rafał Borysławski, *The Old English Riddles and the Riddlic Elements of Old English Poetry* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 46, 47 *et passim*; see also Rafał Borysławski, "Wordhordes cræft: Confusion and the Order of the Wor(l)d in Old English Gnomes" in: *The Propur Langage of Englische Men, Medieval English Mirror 4*, eds. Marcin Krygier and Liliana Sikorska (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008), pp. 119—132.

[14] St Augustine, *The City of God…*, p. 982.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen indicates Cicero's *De Divinatione* as the source of Augustine's etymological divagations associating the Latin *monstrum* with the verb *monstrare*, 'to show, to reveal'. In contrast, in his encyclopaedic *Etymologiae* Isidore of Seville indicates Varo's *De lingua latina* as the source adequately attributing the etymology of the word to the verb *monere*, 'to warn'.[15] The alternative etymology of the term alters our perspective on the phenomenon, since for Isidore a monster ought not to be viewed as a prodigy, but as an ominous sign forewarning of the dire future. That interpretation acquired a distinct religious signification later, when monsters became indications of the divine wrath directed against human actions and an omen of the apocalypse. It did not remain without impact on the folk imagination, where the outlook on deformed children as a punishment for their parents' sinfulness emerged early. As Valeria Finucci indicates, the two readings of the monstrous as a sign shared one significant aspect: for Isidore monsters were also created by God for a reason. Still, the author of *Etymologiae* maintained that they fulfilled their function by being born, hence they often died soon after seeing the light.[16] Lisa Verner, however, indicates that even in the encyclopedic definition above a monster is, after all, one of the diverse signs that ought to be interpreted by the observers.[17] Consequently, as in Augustine's theorization of the idea, the definition demonstrates that all creation is purposeful in accordance with the divine plan.

Verner penetratingly attempts to demonstrate the elements that link Isidore's etymology with that of Augustine. She shows that Isidore conceived exclusively individual monsters as warnings issued by the divinity, while monstrous races constituted an inseparable part of God's plan to reveal his omnipotence and the wisdom incomprehensible to any human.[18] The latter conception of deformed creatures thus reconciles the theories constructed

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[15] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants*: *Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 187.

[16] Valeria Finucci, "Maternal Imagination and Monstrous Birth: Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*" in: *Generation and Degeneration*: *Tropes of Reproduction in Literature and History from Antiquity to Early Modern Europe*, eds. Valeria Finucci and Kevin Brownlee (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 41—80.

[17] Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous*…, p. 31.

[18] Ibidem, p. 37.

by the two Christian thinkers, imperfect as the term might be in the case of Isidore, customarily seen as a compiler of the ancient theories, but also an author combining them with Christian theology.

The actual etymology of the term might be more related to the explication provided by Isidore in the primary sense of his idea rather than that of Augustine, but the two might indeed be interrelated. Other languages supply us with an even more intricate delineation of the concept: when such terms as Polish *potwór*, German *Ungeheuer*, Russian *urod*, and Czech *nestvura* are analyzed, it seems that the idea of unnatural creatures generated outside the course of nature dominate in other European equivalents of the world. Monsters appear to be products of unnatural creation, the results of generative acts going awry, and highly disturbing demonstrations of the imperfect nature of any engenderment. The idea of the monstrous itself thus endangers our vision of the world as orderly and predictable. A creative process may result in deformity any time, while its effect will always be marginalized due to its unsuitability. Particularly the Polish word *potwór*, deriving from Old Slavic *potwor*, etymologically relates to the theme of calumny that is involved in the case of accused queens, or even more tellingly, calumniated wives that will be referred to here later in our discussion of the Constance group.

Interestingly for our considerations here, the Latin word in turn derives from the Greek one implying what Julia Kristeva termed "abjection", which Rossi Braidotti examines in her discussion of monstrosity and maternity:

> Monsters are human beings who are born with congenital malformations of their bodily parts. They also repeat the in between, the mixed, the ambivalent as implied in the ancient Greek root of the words 'monsters', *teras*, which means both horrible and wonderful, object of aberration and adoration.[19]

From the considerations above it appears that the medieval infatuation with monstrosity reflected the ancient notions of attraction and repul-

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[19] Rossi Braidotti, "Mothers, Monsters and Machines" in: *Writing on the Body*: *Female Embodiment and Feminist Tradition*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina, and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 59—79.

sion combined in the Greek term. If we analyze Julia Kristeva's concept from her magisterial *Powers of Horror* and her idea that " 'Something maternal' happens to bear upon the uncertainty that I call abjection", the relationship between the monster and its mother will become more transparent.[20] The female body, abject itself in its psychoanalytical identification with threatening hollows and impurity, while simultaneously seen as holy in its ability to participate in the production of new life, might generate incomplete or deformed bodies. The intermingling of a repulsive form with holiness may be projected onto a creature generated by the female body. Braidotti thus indicates the power of the holy discernible in the abject:

> Most abject beings, animals or states are also sacred, because they mark essential boundaries. First and foremost among them is the boundary of origin, that is to say the interface between life and death. The mother as life-giver is an abject figure: a symbolic signpost marking the road to sunny daylight, thereby also the way to dusty death… Abject beings are eternal in the sense of being the same as they were when they were created: they are essential and therefore sacred, feared, totemic. They correspond to hybrid and in-between states and as such they write about both fascination and horror, both desire and loathing.[21]

The authors of the introduction to *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, maintain that monstrosity and gender were inextricably linked to each other: women were often perceived as monstrous in diverse discourses of the Middle Ages, while maternity loomed large from those images as particularly closely related to deformity.[22] Again, the association between maternity and monstrosity found its reflection in the popular lore of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. As

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[20] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 208.

[21] Rossi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 162.

[22] Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, "Introduction: Conceptualizing the Monstrous" in: *The Monstrous Middle Ages*, eds. Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), pp. 1—27.

a matter of fact, a woman, already in Aristotle's *Generation of Animals* called *mas occasionatus*, "an imperfect man", was customarily blamed for her child's monstrosity, which will be addressed here in our discussion of the monsters' origin.[23]

Monstrous births should not be considered without addressing their cultural background, as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen states. If "monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of cultural relations (social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them", then the process of producing monsters is attributed to culture itself.[24] They function as signs of diverse ideas in various epochs and serve specific purposes, often ideological, as the exploration of the monstrous in gothic tradition reveals.[25] Since they appear there in the context of their origin and birth, they will unchangeably be "monstrous children", at least initially. Also in the case of medieval literature the cultural and social context of childhood cannot be overlooked. The vision of childhood must have been influential in constructing the identity of monstrous offspring in the same mode as the changing cultural epochs determined the perception of all monsters, not only the infant ones.

The proliferation of infant monsters in the Middle Ages ought not to be detached from the ambivalence over childhood noticeable in the culture of the time.[26] Philippe Ariès' classic *Centuries of Childhood* started the continuing debate over the medieval attitude to children.[27] The primary thesis of his study was summarized in the following words:

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[23] ["For the woman is as if an imperfect man"]; Aristotle, *Generation of Animals,* trans. Arthur Platt, at: <etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/a/aristotle/generation/>.

[24] Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)…," pp. 3—25.

[25] On the ideological uses of monstrosity see, for instance, Fred Botting, *The Gothic* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

[26] The question of the ambivalence has been addressed in more detail in, for example, Anna Czarnowus, " 'Happy Is He Who Has No Children, for Babies Mean Nothing but Crying and Stench': Medieval Ambivalence over Childhood" in: *Studies in English Drama and Poetry*, vol. 1, *Reading English Drama and Poetry*, ed. Joanna Kazik (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2007), pp. 45—54.

[27] The debate on the historical medieval childhood has been summarized, for instance, by Małgorzata Delimata, *Dziecko w Polsce średniowiecznej* [*The Child in Medieval Poland*] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2004), pp. 5—28.

> In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness of the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society, this awareness was lacking.[28]

One of Ariès' major arguments against the existence of any such awareness in the Middle Ages is the supposed superficiality of the tradition associated with the subject of the Ages of Man. Within that tradition, which was started in antiquity and continued later, there existed separate names for each period of human life. Ariès accuses the tradition of being pseudo-scientific and arbitrary, since according to him it did not mean that there actually existed an awareness of the specificity of childhood in the society.[29] Indeed, the periodization of human life, and specifically the concrete division of childhood into separate stages, appeared in the work of various authors and there existed no uniform outlook which was shared by all of them. Yet, both Elizabeth Sears and J.A. Burrow convincingly demonstrate that the Ages of Man theory was widely known in the Middle Ages, which must have contributed to children being treated differently than adults.[30] Sears provides the reader with a description of the phenomenon which negates the tenets of Ariès' study: "The theme of the ages of man, *aetas hominum*, was well and precisely defined …[medieval thinkers — A.C.] defended several different systems of age division, but in all their descriptions followed a fixed formula. Proceeding from birth and infancy to decline and death, they duly considered each phase in turn".[31] Shulamith Shahar confirms the aforementioned statement, since she compares the medieval perspective on children and periodization of childhood to modern developmental psychology, and specifically to the

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[28] Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Pimlico, 1996), p. 125.

[29] Ibidem, p. 16, 17 *et passim*.

[30] See Elizabeth Sears, *The Ages of Man*: *Medieval Interpretations of the Life Cycle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); J.A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man*: *A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

[31] Ibidem, p. 1.

theories created by Piaget and Brown in the twentieth century.[32] Thus the theses above refute Ariès' theorization of the hypothetically non-existent childhood, attractive as the idea may seem.

In order to negate Ariès' theory fully it has to be observed that medieval children have not only been elaborated on copiously in the criticism, but the existence of the "culture of children" was postulated by Nicolas Orme. By the "culture" he understands all the spheres of everyday life related directly to children, to mention only the material objects designed exclusively for children, such as toys, the games played by them and recorded in the historical documents, and even the "practical" children's literature, nursery rhymes.[33] Such evidence suffices to negate the alleged medieval ignorance of childhood as a distinct part of human life and of the special needs that differ children from adults.

Nevertheless, Shulamith Shahar insists on the existence of a negative attitude to childhood in the medieval culture, conspicuous at least in the religious discourse of the epoch. All children, not merely the deformed ones, were perceived as an obstacle in pursuing the way of life devoted to prayer, meditation, and deep religiousness.[34] According to Shahar this stance continued the negative attitude to procreation as such: "Medieval Christian thought was marked by ambivalence with regard to procreation. Asceticism was considered the more Christian way of life and those who chose total dedication to the service of God — priests, monks, and nuns — renounced family life".[35] The poetry of Eustache Dechamps in turn expresses the disappointment with parenting, as maternity and fatherhood constitute an impediment in leading a carefree life, thus being a curse rather than a joyful experience. Instead of simply reflecting the late medieval pessimism and "sombre melancholy", as Huizinga once called it, it also expresses the concern with parents devoting too much time to their offspring and thus neglecting their own salvation.[36] The negative

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[32] Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 6.

[33] Nicolas Orme, "The Culture of Children in Medieval England", *Past and Present,* vol. 148, No. 1 (1995), pp. 48—88.

[34] Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages*…, p. 5.

[35] Ibidem, p. 9.

[36] Johann Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 30.

portrayal of parenting from the social and personal perspective must have derived from anxiety over marriage and procreation, while they in turn constituted the products of medieval misogyny.[37]

The historical truth, not directly reflected in literature, as is commonly the case, oscillated between slight neglect of one's offspring, almost advised by preachers for the sake of spiritual perfection, and the caring attitude that started to be a must in the twentieth century, the age of the child. According to Barbara Newman,

> Care of children … presented a mean between extremes: too much affection could be as bad as too little. Although the average couple were required to nurture and protect their offspring — who, after all, supplied the chief justification for their marriage — parental duty occupied a halfway position rather like the "ethical level" in Kirkegaard's scheme… On the end of the scale was criminal neglect or infanticide, perpetrated by sinful mothers; on the other was benign neglect or abandonment, practiced by saintly mothers. The crucial factor, here as elsewhere in medieval ethics, was not the effect of an action on its object, but the motive of the agent.[38]

In real life extremities, ranging from infanticide to the abandonment of one's children in quest of holiness, rarely occurred. As Barbara A. Hanawalt points out, care for the youngest members of the community was demonstrated not only in private, but also in its social context, which was projected onto literary texts replete with missing progeny and their parents in despair, to write about only the widow searching for her son within the boundaries of the Jewish district in Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale*.[39]

If the birth of healthy children could be a misfortune for the parents overburdened with the care of numerous offspring, the sight of a new-

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[37] Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*: *A History of Women in the Middle Ages,* trans. Chaia Galai (London and New York: Methuen, 1983), p. 69 *et passim*.

[38] Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*: *Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 84.

[39] Barbara A. Hanawalt, "Narratives of a Nurturing Culture: Parents and Neighbours in Medieval England" in: *Children and the Family in the Middle Ages*, ed. Nicole Clifton, *Essays in Medieval Studies*, No. 12 (1995), at: <http://www.illinoismedieval.org/ems/VOL12/hanawalt.html>.

ly-born deformed child was able to provoke the thoughts which are re-
called by Doris Desclais Berkvam: according to medieval thinkers such
offspring should not have been born at all.[40] Such a birth may have been
treated as an ultimate calamity, while the causes of the disaster required
some investigation. In accordance with the old principle *cherchez la
femme*, the physiology of mothers and nurses started to be identified as
the source of pathology in medical discourse. The female body was thus
indicated as a major cause of deformity. The metaphorical association of
female body with monstrous progeny that was observable in the Middle
Ages must have been shaped by the Aristotelian and Hippocratic theory
of the role of women in generation. Since already for Aristotle a woman
was an imperfect male, a product of the generative processes going astray
and resulting in the birth of a woman rather than that of a man, the ma-
ternal role in procreation also had to be viewed negatively. In *Generation
of Animals* the philosopher describes a woman's inferior status by grant-
ing her a passive role in the act of generation. According to Aristotle her
body is merely a vessel used by the male generative principle.[41] Once the
fetus is conceived, it is fed by its mother through her menstrual blood con-
verted into nourishment. The blood transforms itself into milk both in the
mother's womb and later, once the infant has been born.[42] The above diag-
nosis of the female function in procreation was furthered by Hippocrates,
while Galen granted a greater role to women.[43] The three stances were
transferred to the Middle Ages, when such scholars as Albertus Magnus
discussed them at length and commented on them extensively.[44]

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[40] Doris Desclais Berkvam, *Enfance et maternité dans la littérature française des
XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1981), p. 138.

[41] Aristotle attributed the production of seed also to women, but he insisted the female
seed did not play any significant role in the generation; see Dale B. Martin, "Contradic-
tions of Masculinity: Ascetic Inseminators and Menstruating Men in Greco-Roman Cul-
ture" in: *Generation and Degeneration*…, pp. 81—108.

[42] William F. MacLehose, "Nurturing Danger: High Medieval Medicine and the
Problem(s) of the Child" in: *Medieval Mothering*, eds. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie
Wheeler (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 3—24.

[43] For an exhaustive discussion of the ancient theories of generation see Cadden,
Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages…, pp. 13—53.

[44] On Albertus Magnus, *On the Dispute of Galen and Aristotle Concerning the Principle
of Generation* see Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*…, pp. 113—130.

The corruptive status of menstrual blood gave rise to the construction of the menstrual taboo in diverse cultures, including the Western European medieval one. If the blood was the source of nourishment for the fetus/infant, its contaminating qualities could dominate over the beneficial ones and thus distort the formative processes within the young body. Moreover, the emerging medieval medicine owed much to the Arabic science, which included similar statements on the nature of generation. MacLehose defines the coexistence of Arabic theories, here exemplified by Avicenna's *Canon*, with the European ones by citing the following visualization of the process: "Perhaps the most common image used by medieval writers since antiquity to describe the fetus' existence was that of a fruit hanging from a tree: a gravid woman's body contained various substances harmful to the child *in utero*, above all its force, which could cause it to fall from the womb like fruit from a tree".[45] If menstruation was debilitating for women, it could also do irreparable harm to the newly-formed organism, while the fact of being born of a woman was highly dangerous in itself.[46]

William of Conches in *De Philosophia Mundi* and Thomas of Cantimpré in *Natura Rerum* continued the Aristotelian tradition of presenting the female body as dangerous for the fetus.[47] Both of them maintained that the liver had to protect it from the menstrual blood and if it did not perform the role sufficiently, the skin of the newly born would be covered with stains. Even maternal milk was perilous, since it could be transformed into a harmful substance instead of continuing to provide the child with suitable nourishment. The care that was obligatory in the treatment of a pregnant woman had to be extended to wet nurses, whose bodies were also visualized as ambivalent: equally life-giving and destructive. The wet nurses had to subject themselves to a tight system of control embracing physical, dietary, and moral restrictions similar to those imposed on preg-

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[45] MacLehose, "Nurturing Danger…," pp. 3—24.

[46] The danger of menstruation related to the fact that it was viewed as an illness was already developed in the ancient theories about menstruating men; see, for instance, Dale B. Martin, "Contradictions of Masculinity: Ascetic Inseminators and Menstruating Men in Greco-Roman Culture" in: *Generation and Degeneration*…, pp. 81—108; Gianna Pomata, "Menstruating Men: Similarity and Difference of the Sexes in Early Modern Medicine" in: *Generation and Degeneration*…, pp. 109—152.

[47] MacLehose, "Nurturing Danger…," pp. 3—24.

nant women. Immoral comportment could just as well poison the body of the child, hence supervision of wet nurses was perceived as natural under the circumstances of imminent physical danger.[48] Peggy McCracken writes about those three forms of corruption as parallel: the impurity of the female body could become visible in "its monstrous offspring, its polluted milk, its dangerous blood".[49]

Not only defective female physiology, but also immoral behaviour by a future mother could affect the child in her womb. According to Gratian, Saint Boniface suggested that the corruption of monstrous children resulted from the corruption of the unions they originated from. Even if the union was legal in itself, the intercourse at a forbidden time of the year (most frequently Lent), of the week (Sunday), or a period in the mother's life (for example when she was nursing) could ultimately result in monstrous births.[50] In *The Kindness of Strangers,* a study about the abandonment of children, John Boswell quotes Robert of Flamborough warning the readers of *Liber Poenitentialis* that the children conceived at the wrong time could be lame, leprous, given to seizures, deformed, or short-lived. Moreover, the danger of deafness, meanspiritedness, and demonic possession that Berthold of Regensburg referred to can also be added to the list of the cases of deformity.[51] The theory acquired a systematization in the Renaissance writings, but it cannot be seen as non-existent in medieval medical discourse. Lievin Lemnes' *Occulta Naturae* (first published in 1559 and then expanded in 1574) presents a direct relation between Aristotelian theory of generation and monstrous births. Intercourse during menstruation had to result in deformities; thus a direct relationship between the shape of the progeny's body and the parents' behaviour preceding the birth was established.[52] The sinfulness of progenitors corrupted the child's carnality, hence

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[48] Ibidem.

[49] Peggy McCracken, *The Curse of the Eve, the Wound of the Hero*: *Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 72.

[50] John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*: *The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. 338.

[51] *Liber poenitentialis* and *Vollständige Ausgabe Seiner Predigten*, ed. Franz Pfeiffer, quoted in: Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers…*, p. 338.

[52] Ottavia Niccoli, " 'Menstruum Quasi Monstruum': Monstrous Births and Menstrual Taboo in the Sixteenth Century", trans. Margaret A. Galluci, Mary M. Galluci,

a monstrous birth became a form of punishment for them and an indica-
tion of the divine wrath. Furthermore, a monstrous child could be diag-
nosed as the result of an intercourse between a human and a beast, or even
a fiend, which was another folk belief that found its reflection in medieval
romance, to mention only *Sir Gowther* or the Alexander legends recorded
in diverse languages; the two romances will be analyzed here later.[53]

Already in the early modern period Ambroise Paré thus summarized
the causes of the deformity under consideration:

> There are numerous causes of monstrosity.
> The first one is the glory of God. The second one His wrath. The third is
> excess of semen. The fourth is its shortage. The fifth reason is imagina-
> tion. The sixth is the narrowness or smallness of the womb. The seventh
> is when the mother sat in an indecent way when she was pregnant, name-
> ly the situation when she sat with her thighs crossed or pressed against
> her belly. The eighth is a fall of the mother or a punch she received on the
> belly when she was pregnant. The ninth are hereditary or accidental dis-
> eases. The tenth is a contamination or corruption of the semen. The elev-
> enth reason is mixing of the blood. The twelfth is caused by malicious
> agency of ancient warriors. The thirteenth — by demons or devils.[54]

Doctor Paré also wrestled with the problem of interpreting the monster ei-
ther as a sign of God's omnipotence or as an indication of the divine wrath
directed against recalcitrant sinners. In his discourse there occurs an evo-

and Carole C. Galluci, in: *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective*, eds. Edward Muir
and Guido Rugiero (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990),
pp. 1—25.

[53] Ibidem.

[54] [Les Causes des monstres sont plusieurs. La première est la gloire de Dieu. La
seconde, son ire. La troisième, la trop grand quantité de semence. La quatresième, la trop
petit quanitité. La cinquiesme, l'imagination. La sixieme, l'angustie ou petitesse de la
matrice. La septiesme, l'assiette indecente de la mere, comme estant grosse, s'est tenue
trop longuement assise le cuisses croisées ou serrees contre le ventre. La huictiesme, par
cheute ou coups donnez contre le ventre de la mere estant grosse d'enfant. La neufiesme,
par maladies hereditaires ou accidentales. La dixiesme, par pourriture ou corruption de
la semance. L'onziesme, par mixtion ou meslange de semence. La douziesme par l'artifice
des mechans belistres de l'ostière. La treiziesme, par les Demons ou Diables]; Ambroise
Paré, *Des monstres et prodiges*, ed. Jean Céard, quoted in: Kappler, *Monstres, démons et
merveilles à la fin du Moyen Age…*, p. 224.

lution from the notion of monsters existing *contra naturam* to the view of their being *extra naturam*. It is particularly noticeable in the two prefaces to his *Des monstres et prodiges*. In 1573 he specifies as monstrous "the things that occur *against* the course of Nature" [*contre le cours de Nature*], whereas in the edition from 1575 the definition is transformed into: "…monsters are the things that occur *outside* the course of Nature" [*outre le cours de Nature*].[55] The later formulation very likely derives from the medieval idea of the monstrous as a phenomenon existing *non contra natura, sed supra,* and consequently as an entity complementing the artful design of the universe.

Especially the fifth cause mentioned by the early modern theoretician of monstrosity ought to be of interest for us here, since it identifies the future mother's imagination as a decisive factor in the shaping of a fetus' body. The belief that images that the future mother observes or that her desires during pregnancy are conducive to the unusual bodily form of the child reverberated in literature, to mention only the subplot of Clorinda in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*. Clorinda, whose very name suggested purity (as it denotes "pale", "yellow", "greenish-yellow"), was born white-skinned despite her parents' Ethiopian origin. The white Saracen's mother perused the image of St George saving a virgin from a dragon, which influenced the complexion of the infant to be born.[56] Obviously the heroine's physicality was not enough to define her as civilized: the theme of the love which erupted between Christian Tancred and Saracen Clorinda terminated with the accidental death of the lady caused by the man and her request to be baptized by him before she died. As to Clorinda's dissimilarity, any child resembling the image its mother observed more than its father was a monstrosity in the Aristotelian sense of the word: it did not replicate the physical appearance of its progenitor, but was a result of resemblance going awry. Citing Marie-Hélène Huet, such a child was monstrous since it "erased paternity and proclaimed the dangerous power of the female imagination".[57] Huet describes the mother using her imagination excessively as a willful

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[55] Ibidem, p. 216; the emphasis is mine.

[56] Valeria Finucci, "Maternal Imagination and Monstrous Birth: Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*" in: *Generation and Degeneration…*, pp. 41—80.

[57] Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 9.

artist creating her own image by imprinting the workings of her mind onto the child. An obedient wife follows nature by generating offspring resembling the father, whereas a wily woman leads to the situation when "Nature imitates Art" despite the rule that the Art must imitate nature.[58]

Despite the later attempts at scientific investigation of monstrosity, the imagination theory was set aside as late as the early 1800s, with certain of its elements continuing in the popular lore as superstition even nowadays.[59] Particularly the issue of the future mother's desires during pregnancy was elaborated on in it. Birthmarks were perceived as reflecting the objects that the woman desired, while bestial elements could become incorporated into the child's body if she toyed with an animal at any stage of generation, to mention only the example of the child with a frog's face described by Huet. The child's deformity resulted there from the situation in which the woman held a frog in her hand during the coitus.[60]

The offspring whose body included non-human elements, either bestial or non-animate, became object of special scrutiny in the early-modern epoch, where the so-called broadside ballads narrated the tales of monstrous births and the deformities' sources. To be specific, the Renaissance may be identified as the epoch when the term "monstrous babies" entered the lexicon of wider social circles.[61] Nevertheless, the writers of those popular poems diagnosed the parents' (or the whole humanity's) sinfulness as the direct cause of the wrong shapes the progeny adopted. Quoting Helaine Razovsky:

> All of the broadside ballads read monstrous births as signs from God, reflecting examination of the context; all of the texts also read the mon-

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[58] Ibidem, p. 7.

[59] Katharine Park and Lorraine J. Daston describe the early modern apocalyptic interpretation of monstrous births and the subsequent medicalization of the discussion, influenced by the initiatives of the Royal Society towards the end of the seventeenth century; see Katharine Park and Lorraine J. Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England", *Past and Present*, vol. 92, No. 1 (1981), pp. 21—54.

[60] Huet, *Monstrous Imagination…*, p. 16.

[61] Helaine Razovsky, "Popular Hermeneutics: Monstrous Children in English Renaissance Broadside Ballads", *Early Modern Literary Studies*, vol. 2, No. 3, at: <www.shu.ac.uk/emls/02-3/razoball.html>.

strous births as figurative expressions of human sinfulness, thus distinguishing between literal and figurative expressions. All of the texts either explicitly or implicitly consider cause and circumstance by suggesting that either the parents' sin or all humanity's sins are embodied in the monstrous child.[62]

The narratives were therefore manifestations of austere religiousness rather than stories of the divine omnipotence and the incomprehensibility of creation. Again strictures were passed on those mothers who allegedly contributed to the malformation of their offspring. The viewpoint is discernible in those broadsides which describe excessively fashionable garments of pregnant women resulting in the unusual shapes of their fetuses. The mother's transgression in the field of fashion may deform the fetus' body into an entity indicating the nature of her sin to all the observers. Kate Chedgzoy cites the following fragment in her discussion of the relationship between the abjected monstrous and the carnivalesque:

> And ye O England whose womankinde
> in ruffes do walke so oft
> Parsuade them stil to bere in minde,
> This childe with ruffes so soft.[63]

The True Description of a Child with Ruffes involves a critique of excessive adornment of the future mother's body as it results in the clothing elements mirrored in the child's earthly form. The imagination theory might be at play here, since the woman's fascination with garments materializes in her child's deformity. Here even when women think, they imagine merely mundane pleasures instead of focusing on the spiritual sphere of existence.

Still, Chedgzoy perceives a carnivalesque element in that deformity.[64] The mother rebels against the social order which does not grant her any authority, whereas her fetus' body becomes the sole ground over which she exercises power. She may imprint it with the quality indicating her in-

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[62] Ibidem.

[63] Kate Chedgzoy, *Shakespeare's Queer Children*: *Sexual Politics and Contemporary Culture* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 67.

[64] Ibidem.

ner life: the workings of her imagination and her desires. Deformity thus becomes a text written on the body, or inscribed onto the body, indelible despite the intentions of rectifying the state of things on the part of those who have the real power. If the carnival grants temporary authority to those customarily underprivileged, the monstrous child demonstrates the quality all women have: they may influence their children's physicality. Such an interpretation supports Chedgzoy's view on the relation between abjection and carnivalization. Since "the grotesque body… is epitomized by liminality", we get the full view of the monster if we "read" it in the light of both the abject and the carnivalesque.[65] The two phenomena in turn complement each other: "…carnival politicizes and historicizes abjection; abjection restores the psychic dimension to carnival".[66] Investigating into Bakhtin's classic study, the author indeed wrote about the carnival when "a gay carnival monster" originates from abandoning "gloomy seriousness".[67] Even if the monster here acquires a metaphorical denotation, it still stands for the reversed order in the topical "world-turned-upside-down" from the wandering clerks' poems.[68]

The monster evades all classification through the fact that it exists on the borders. Even the medieval and early modern attempts to diagnose the source of its deformity are highly inadequate as they never achieve the completeness they aspire to. Teratology as a classification of monsters, real or imagined, was a failed attempt to grasp the ungraspable. Isidore's *Etymologiae* include the often-cited classification of the monstrous on the grounds of the following characteristics: hypertrophy of the body, atrophy of the body, excrescence of bodily parts, superfluity of bodily parts, deprivation of parts, mixture of human and animal parts, animal births by human women, mislocation of organs or parts of the body, disturbed

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[65] Ibidem, p. 64.

[66] Ibidem, p. 51.

[67] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 395.

[68] The practical dimension of early modern monsters' existence and the scientific fascination with freakery have been described by Paul Semonin; see Paul Semonin, "Monsters in the Marketplace: The Exhibition of Human Oddities in Early Modern England" in: *Freakery*: *Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Bodies*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York and London: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 69—81.

growth (being born old), composite beings, hermaphrodites, and monstrous races.[69] Nevertheless, those futile attempts to distinguish and label "monster types" had to be abortive, since deformed creatures elude such simplistic classificatory grids. The tendency above in turn reflected the two-fold direction of teratological investigations. On the one hand, the divine role in the conceptualization of the monstrous had to be delineated.[70] On the other, the monster belonged to the world of nature, which found its reflection in the ancient *Physiologus* and the later bestiaries, but also in the *Liber Monstrorum*.[71]

Significantly, the monstrous races discussed, among others, by Isidore of Seville, were believed to physically exist in geographically remote regions, which is reflected in the medieval cartography where monsters function on the margins of *mappae mundi* side by side with blank spaces associated with geographically unexplored areas. Williams insists that such a location was convenient since their existence could not be verified or questioned.[72] Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* is often seen as one of the main sources for the medieval lore of monsters, and it is the work that pinpoints India and Ethiopia as the regions particularly inhabited by marvelous creatures, which was also a commonly-held belief in the Middle Ages.[73] Other sources listed as elaborations on the idea are the treatise on India written by Ktesias from Knidos at the beginning of the fourth century BC, the account produced by Megasthenes in the same century, Solinus' report, and the works of two medieval encyclopedists, Isidore of Seville, and Hrabanus Maurus, followed by Vincent de Beauvais' *Speculum*.[74]

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[69] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, quoted in: Williams, *Deformed Discourse…*, p. 107.

[70] To quote Claude Kappler, "Tout mystérieux qu'il soit, le monstre est une manifestation de Dieu. Toutefois, cela ne suffit pas à définir le monstre: c'est par rapport à la Nature qu'on cherche, le plus souvent, à le situer"; [As mysterious as it is, the monster is a manifestation of God. However, that does not suffice to define the monster; it is through its relationship with nature that it is most often described]; Kappler, *Monstres, démons et merveilles…*, p. 215; the translation into English is mine.

[71] For a summary of ancient attempts to describe monstrosity see Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages…*, pp. 11—44.

[72] Williams, *Deformed Discourse…*, p. 14.

[73] Rudolf Wittkower, "Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, No. 5 (1942), pp. 159—197.

[74] Ibidem.

As for the iconographic tradition reflecting the tendency to situate monsters in the geographically remote regions, Wittkower writes about the Hereford map of the last quarter of the thirteenth century as the "most outstanding example" of iconography that is associated with geography.[75] On the map in question the pictures of the monstrous races are scattered all over the globe; yet, they always inhabit the parts of the world that could not be easily reached by medieval travelers. Characteristically, India and Ethiopia are the regions that are densely inhabited by monstrous races.[76] It is hardly surprising if one notes that as early as in Virgil's poetry India functioned as a *pars pro toto* for the whole world, meaning here particularly its most remote and exotic regions. Ernst Robert Curtius remarks that in the Middle Ages India was a symbol that was often exploited in reference to the geographically and culturally remote regions.[77] Such a perspective on the physical location of monstrous races creates a strong relationship between deformity and the colonial discourse: the deformed is inextricably bound with the Orient, meaning here most of the geographically remote areas.[78]

The Wonders of the East and the *Liber Monstrorum* derive their conceptual framework from Isidore's and Augustine's teratological concepts and simultaneously are immersed in the medieval English tradition. *The Wonders of the East* is a text written originally in Latin and then translated into Old English and incorporated into the so-called *Beowulf*-Manuscript (British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv). The other texts included in that manuscript are *The Passion of St Christopher*, *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, *Beowulf*, and *Judith*. *The Wonders of the East* devotes

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[75] The Hereford map has been one of the sources for Katarzyna Zalewska-Lorkiewicz's study of representations in medieval cartography; see Katarzyna Zalewska-Lorkiewicz, *Ilustrowane mappae mundi* [*Illustrated Mappae Mundi*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo DiG, 1997).

[76] Wittkower, "Marvels of the East…," pp. 159—197.

[77] Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 161.

[78] Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills even maintain that "medieval monsters themselves might be comprehended as the products of an early colonialist mentality, a blueprint for the systematic creation of distinctions between territories, nations, and peoples"; see Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, "Introduction: Conceptualizing the Monstrous" in: *The Monstrous Middle Ages…*, pp. 1—27.

extensive passages to monstrous creatures, which makes it similar to *Liber Monstrorum de Diversis Generibus*. The latter text is typically attributed to an insular author who wrote his work on the continent, or his text was exported from England; consequently, there undoubtedly exists a relationship between *Liber Monstrorum* and medieval English literature. The Latin manuscript consists of a catalogue of 120 monstrosities divided into three books. The book about monstrous people derives its ideas from Augustine, whereas the remaining two, treating of beasts and serpents, have been perceived as indirect quotations from Isidore. The clear geographical guidelines of the location of monsters are particularly relevant here: monstrous races can be found "in the hidden parts of the world, throughout the deserts and island of the Ocean, and in the recesses of the farthest mountains".[79] The two texts, which we will return to in our discussion of dog-heads in the later sections of this study, contain catalogues of monstrous races and the geographical setting where they can be found.

In terms of both literature and visual arts, bestiaries are another manifestation of medieval fascination with the monstrous and a phenomenon associated with the fact that monstrosity functioned as a sign representing the variegated nature of the reality. Emile Mâle writes about them as "the most curious of the symbolic works devoted to nature" and indicates the originality of Christian and pagan elements intermingling in them.[80] The Latin *Physiologus* was the primary source of representations in the bestiaries, which characteristically included both the species actually existing in nature and the monstrous ones, not physically but conceptually present in the medieval culture. There exists a specific trace indicating the presence of that tradition also in the medieval English literature: the Old English *Physiologus* constituting a part of the *Exeter Book* included chapters about the panther, the whale, and a bird currently identified as the partridge. Literature must have influenced the iconography of the subject, since Wittkower indicates those two phenomena, the medieval *mappae mundi* and bestiaries, as two traditions that were used as sources for the

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[79] See Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf — Manuscript* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995); particularly pp. 86—115.

[80] Mâle, *The Gothic Image…*, p. 33.

authors of the visual representations of monsters produced at the time. He maintains that such iconographic texts are very often difficult to interpret when one wants to state which of the two traditions was the source for a given craftsman.[81] Nevertheless, visual arts adopted the concept of the monstrous that had already existed in literary works.

If the monster as such cannot undergo any straightforward classification, neither can the ancient, medieval, and Renaissance theorizations of the concept. The elusive quality of the monstrous may be exemplified by the sole fact that in the medieval *mappae mundi* their races coexisted with the species which were presented realistically. Furthermore, even the function of their representations in visual arts was multi-dimensional: they demonstrated the unfathomable plan of the Lord and appeared in the fearsome apocalyptic visions forewarning the faithful about damnation of all the sinners at the end of times. The monster thus became a highly polyvalent icon early in European culture. As for monstrous children, they acquired even more ambivalent functions in what David Williams termed "deformed discourse". Present in a variety of literary texts, their representations served diverse purposes, including the ideological. The remaining part of this book will try, at least partly, to account for that multiplicity.

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[81] Wittkower, "Marvels of the East…," pp. 159—197.

Chapter Two

The Fictions of Monstrosity
in *The Man of Law's Tale* and *Emaré*

> Thi wif, which is of faierie,
> Of such a child delivered is
> Fro kinde which stant al amis:
> Bot for it scholde noght be seie,
> We have it kept out of the weie
> For drede of pure worles schame,
> A povere child and in the name
> Of thilke which is so misbore,
> We toke, and therto we be swore,
> That non bot only thou and we
> Schal knowen of this privete:
> …
> (II: 964—975)
>
> John Gower *Confessio Amantis*[1]

European medieval literature includes a host of children whose monstrosity remains fictitious, even though the accusations of their deformity result in real-life consequences for the mothers. The latter are the "accused queens", once discussed in detail by Margaret Schlauch in the context of characters appearing in analogous folktales, while the literary work which gave a name to the so-called "Constance group", alternatively termed "Eustace-Constance-Florence-Griselda Legends",[2] is Chaucer's *Man of*

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[1] John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. G.C. Macauley, at: <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/GowConf.html>; the numbers of the lines refer to that edition.

[2] The saga's representatives have been written in French, Spanish, German, Italian, Arabic, Persian, and Latin; Carol F. Heffernan in *The Orient in Chaucer and Medieval Romance* lists that cycle alongside "English and Germanic Legends", "Arthurian Legends", and "Charlemagne Legends"; see Carol F. Heffernan, *The Orient in Chaucer and Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2003), p. 4; apart from *The Man of Law's*

Law's Tale.[3] The narrative consists of not exclusively the fiction of monstrosity, since it also encompasses "the fictions of gender", using the title of Elaine Tuttle Hansen's study, and, even more importantly, the fictions of differences resulting from religion and ethnicity.[4]

In the Man of Law's story the issues of marriage and religion combine, thus forming a work which simultaneously attracts interest on the part of those who continue investigations into marital relations in Chaucer (started by Kittredge in his postulation of the so-called "Marriage Group" and including such tales as *The Wife of Bath's*, *The Clerk's* and *The Miller's Tale*, and others)[5] and those who explore the postcolonial themes in his work.[6] Due to the recent proliferation of postcolonial readings of the tale Patricia Clare Ingham even classified the work as belonging to the "canon of postcolonial literature" along with such classic texts as Joseph Conrad's *Heart*

Tale and *The Clerk's Tale* along with their analogues, the cycle includes St Eustace legend that in the Middle English literature was mainly known from *Sir Isumbras* (see *Six Middle English Romances*, ed. Maldwyn Mills (London and Rutland, Vermont: J.M. Dent & Sons and Charles. E. Tuttle, 1992), pp. 125—145), and the Old French romance *Roman de Florence de Rome*, whose list of close analogues of *Florence* includes *Le roman de la Violette, La chanson de Florence de Rome,* and *Le Bone Florence of Rome*.

   [3] See Margaret Schlauch, *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens* (New York: The New York University Press, 1927).

   [4] See Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley, L.A. and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992).

   [5] See George Lyman Kittredge, "Chaucer's Discussion of Marriage" in: *Chaucer Criticism,* vol. 1: *The Canterbury Tales*, eds. Richard J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1960), pp. 131—159.

   [6] The validity of using the term "postcolonial" in reference to the literature created before colonization itself has been established by, for instance, Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen; see Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren, "Introduction: Postcolonial Modernity and the Rest of History" in: *Postcolonial Moves*: *Medieval Through Modern*, eds. Patricia Clare Ingham and Michelle R. Warren (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 1—18, and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Introduction" in: *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 1—17; Keiko Hamaguchi summarizes the discussion over postcolonial (rather than "post-colonial") studies of medieval literature in her study combining postcolonialism (as opposed to "post-colonialism", chronologically coming after colonialism) with gender studies; see Keiko Hamaguchi, *Non-European Women in Chaucer* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2006), particularly pp. 1—17.

of Darkness.[7] As a matter of fact, Chaucer's tale delineates the complexity of problems related to inter-faith and interracial marriage. The monstrous looms large from it as a consequence of interracial or inter-faith unions and subsequent miscegenation, while certain adult characters appear monstrous or at least represent "the other" at diverse points of the plot.

It has been suggested that many romances where maternity and fatherhood constitute topics central for the plot may be analyzed as an example of Freud's "family romance".[8] *The Man of Law's Tale* perhaps also qualifies for such an interpretation, particularly if we consider the role of Constance's two mothers-in-law in the narrative and their relations with their sons, strongly tinged with Oedipal conflicts. Moreover, the tale is one of the few in Chaucer's *oeuvre* where a child appears prominently in the plot and it even has the function of influencing the course of events. Another such tale, where this time monstrosity is a quality attributed to adults and not to children,[9] is *The Clerk's Tale*, one of the multiple versions of the so-called "patient Griselda" story.[10] Griselda, a saintly character similar to Constance, marries morally "monstrous" Walter, bent on testing her wifely obedience and loyalty: he deprives her of their two children and declares he had them murdered. The marquise, a character acting inhumanly, victimizes his own wife so as to test her, while he simultaneously subjects his children to alienation from their loving mother and separation

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[7] Ingham, "Contrapuntal Histories" in: *Postcolonial Moves…*, pp. 47—70.

[8] Sarah Kay presents such a mode of reading medieval romances; see Sarah Kay, "Motherhood: The Case of the Epic Family Romance" in: *Shifts and Transpositions in Medieval Narrative*: *A Festschrift for Dr Elspeth Kennedy*, ed. Karen Pratt (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994), pp. 23—36.

[9] See James Sledd, "The *Clerk's Tale*: The Monsters and the Critics" in: *Chaucer Criticism*, vol. 1…, pp. 160—174; Dolores Warwick Frese, "Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*: The Monsters and the Critics Reconsidered", *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 8, No. 2 (1973), pp. 133—146.

[10] See Giovanni Bocaccio, "From the *Decameron*, Tenth Day, Tenth Tale" in: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*: *Nine Tales and the General Prologue*, eds. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), pp. 370—377; Francis Petrarch, "A Fable of Wifely Obedience and Devotion" in: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales…*, pp. 378—387; Francis Petrarch, "[Two Letters to Bocaccio]" in: Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales…*, pp. 388—390; "From *Le Ménagier de Paris*", in: Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales…*, pp. 391—392.

from the surroundings where they were born.[11] In that context Jill Mann's thesis that "the parent-child relationship is one of the central motifs of the *Canterbury Tales*" appears entirely justifiable.[12] In *The Man of Law's Tale* the relation between the heroine and her son corroborates with such a suggestion. Even more significantly, the child functions similarly to other children in Chaucer: he is another representative of what D.S. Brewer described as "pathetic victims of death or separation or hardship, objects of their parents' joy and grief, with grief predominating, and arousing in the reader sensations of tenderness and sorrow".[13] The allegedly monstrous Maurice will therefore be another multidimensional sign on the map of Chaucer's characters: appearing loathsome, he is in truth pitiable and described with affection verging on pathos in the forged letter.

Naturally, marriage does not necessarily lead to parenthood in all Chaucer's tales. The critics have already noted the mysterious shortage of children in *The Canterbury Tales*, especially under the circumstances when love appears as one of the poet's major topics. To quote Helen Philips' diagnosis:

> Love is Chaucer's most important subject. Not only does his writing encompass most elements of human love — desire, delight, obsession, selflessness and sensuality — as well as some aspects of religious love, but his exploration of other subjects, particularly literature, political power relations and philosophical issues, is frequently conducted through consideration of the subjects of love and sexual relations.[14]

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[11] However, the question of Griselda's authority should not be overlooked. In her highly engrossing discussion of *The Clerk's Tale* Elaine Tuttle Hansen devotes a lot of critical attention to the question of Griselda's powerlessness and simultaneously to the power she demonstrates through her silence; see Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender…*, pp. 188—207.

[12] Jill Mann, "Parents and Children in the *Canterbury Tales*" in: *Literature in Fourteenth-Century England*: *The J.A.W. Bennett Memorial Lectures in Perugia, 1981—1982)*, eds. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Tübingen and Cambridge: Gunter Narr Verlag and D.S. Brewer, 1983), pp. 165—183.

[13] D.S. Brewer, "Children in Chaucer", *Review of English Literature*, vol. 5, No. 39 (1964), pp. 52—60.

[14] Helen Phillips, "Love" in: *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 281—295.

Nevertheless, love in Chaucer is not necessarily parental or filial. In *The Franklin's Tale* the affection between Arveragus and Dorigen evolves without any reference to the potentiality of their having progeny. The tale constitutes a striking example of the frequent exclusion of offspring from Chaucer's *oeuvre*, as the love in question materializes the ideal of courtliness. Both Jane Cowgill and Daniel T. Kline observe that lack in some of the narratives, but they provide us with two distinct explanations of the phenomenon. In *Chaucer's Missing Children* Cowgill explains that the child characters are inappropriate for some of the tales due to the nature of the genres they represent: romance and *fabliau*, which might be a more convincing explanation.[15] Kline's perspective draws on the cultural context of medieval childhood. In *Textuality, Subjectivity and Violence*: *Theorizing the Figure of the Child in Middle English Literature* he describes the victimization of children once they appear in Chaucer as independent figures and stresses the subsequent discursive colonization of that type of subject in Middle English literature. The phenomenon is attributable to the practice typical of medieval culture, in which "the child's subjectivity is voided by powerful socio-political forces, often embodied in specific adults, parents, or parent-surrogates, who usurp the child's subjectivity for their own purposes".[16] Thus children are missing from Chaucer's work because they appear there only when they can be appropriated by or applied to the benefit of an adult character.

Medieval children, if they are characters in a given text, are not its exclusive subject matter, either. *The Man of Law's Tale* is not only a narrative devoted to marriage and procreation. The union which Constance enters is established for mercantile reasons, as Carol F. Heffernan indicates.[17] The Sultan of "Surrye" (II: 134) fantastically falls for Constance as a result of "the commune voys of every man" (II: 155) about her virtues, which is spread by the merchants' visiting the Sultan's country on business. The merchants from Rome testify to the em-

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[15] Jane Cowgill, "Chaucer's Missing Children", in: *Children and the Family in the Middle Ages*, ed. Nicole Clifton, *Essays in Medieval Studies*, No. 12 (1995), at: <http://www.illinoismedieval.org/ems/VOL12/cowgill.html>.

[16] Daniel T. Kline, "Textuality, Subjectivity and Violence: Theorizing the Figure of the Child in Middle English Literature" in: *Children and the Family…*

[17] Heffernan, *The Orient in Chaucer and Medieval Romance…*, pp. 23—44.

peror's daughter's superior qualities, which induces the sultan to declare his love for her. The merchants act as go-betweens, which results in the marriage for reason instead of for affection. Constance sacrifices herself for the sake of peace between her nation and the Muslim one. Still, she is probably less reluctant to enter the union due to the Sultan's vow "I wol be cristned" (II: 226), which is subsequently fulfilled. The princess, so far indirectly related to the East, as her Byzantine origin is hinted in the Arabic designation of Constantinople, *rûm,* now enters the boundaries of an oriental country as its ruler's spouse.[18] Even if she is "sold" into marriage (initially violating her own idea about marriage as the union of two people born Christian), she accepts the situation as propitious for her missionary agenda. Nevertheless, the tale about a saintly character converting the infidels includes a subordinate text: it is a narrative about the religious and ethnic otherness and the iniquity it is invariably related to, citing Glory Dharmaraj's thesis from her postcolonial study.[19] In our discussion of monstrosity that subordinate text will become focal.

Otherness, primarily religious and only secondly ethnic, as medieval culture defined it, looms large from the tale.[20] It appears in the respective two settings ("Surrye" and Northumbria), the characterization of those among whom Constance is doomed to live, and the accusations concerning the heroine's "elvishness" and her child's monstrosity. Constance justifies her decision to travel to the East as a moral obligation. "Allas, unto the Barbre nacioun/I moste anoon, syn that it is youre wille" (II: 281—282), as she announces to her parents. The "pagan world" she refers to well designates her mission.[21] As Patricia Clare Ingham showed, the "Surrye"

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[18] Dorothee Metlizky, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 153.

[19] Glory Dharmaraj, "Multicultural Subjectivity in Reading Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*", *Medieval Feminist Newsletter*, vol. 16 (1993), pp. 4—8.

[20] In perception of difference the domination of religious perspective over the ethnic one in the Middle Ages has been noticed by Ania Loomba, who notes that Christians defined themselves in opposition to Islam, Judaism, or heathenism and they postulated the need for conversion even in the case of the believers of the Orthodox Church; Ania Loomba, *Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 106.

[21] For a discussion of Constance's missionary accomplishments see, for instance, Andrzej Wicher, *The English Breton Lay and Some Related Tales*: *Their Relationship to the Tale of Magic*, University of Łódź Unpublished PhD. Thesis (1986), pp. 181—183.

might just as well suggest an area in southeastern England, while such interpretation embraces the image of those two settings, the oriental and the English one, as alike.[22] Glory Dharmaraj puts those two locations on a par and states that not only England, but also the Orient itself has to be further "orientalized" in order to suit the poem's ideology.[23] The "Surrye" is not only inhabited by ethnic others worshipping Mohammad, but also by the Sultan's mother, "roote of iniquitee" (II: 358), "virago" (II: 359), "serpent under femynynytee" (II: 360). Thus she stands in opposition to Constance, who emblematizes virgin-like purity and impeccable moral constancy, as is implied by her Middle English name, "Custance". Muslim women inhabiting the Orient are diagnosed as vulnerable to gender transgression, a *clichéd* accusation related to what Edward Said termed "Oriental desire".[24] Belief in Mohammad and other Muslim "gods" (such as Apollo and Terguant, the deities most frequently identified as Islamic and, according to medieval Europeans, forming the "Muslim trinity" of sorts) results not only in a warped morality, but also in gender instability verging on cross-gender behaviour.[25] The oriental mother-in-law becomes obsessed with spoiling the princess's (feminine) cleanliness:

> "We shul first feyne us cristendom to take-   feign
> Coold water shal nat greve us but a lite!-
> And I shal swich a feeste and revel make
> That, as I trowe, I shal the Sowdan quite.
> For thogh his wyf be cristned never so white,

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[22] Patricia Clare Ingham, "Contrapuntal Histories" in: *Postcolonial Moves*: *Medieval Through Modern*, eds. Patricia Clare Ingham, Michelle R. Warren, (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 47—70.

[23] Glory Dharmaraj, "Multicultural Subjectivity in Reading Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*…," pp. 4—8.

[24] ["… the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies"]; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. 188.

[25] The "trinity" appears in numerous *chansons de geste*, among others in the most famous of them, even if not the most representative one, *The Song of Roland*; see *The Song of Roland*, trans. Dorothy L. Sayers (London: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 51; on the non-representative nature of the work see Sarah Kay, *The Chansons de Geste in the Age of Romance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 1.

> She shal have need to wasshe awey the rede,
> Thogh she a font-ful water with hire lede."   baptismal font full of; bring
>
>   (II: 351—357)

Her ruse shifts dangerously far from the stereotypical female naturalness. If a woman is crafty, she transcends the limitations attributed to her sex. Nonetheless, her scheming does not qualify as "culture" in any respect, even if she abandons the boundaries of the "female nature". She does not became masculine due to her aspirations, but she situates herself outside the nature/culture system by becoming unnatural. The Sultaness becomes obsessed with deluding Constance into thinking that real conversion of herself and the Muslims supporting her took place. As a consequence of the stratagem the mother-in-law will be capable of staining Constance's "whiteness" with the unwashable "rede". Consequently, it may be deduced that if the virtuous wife of the Sultan cannot be made Muslim, her good reputation has to be sullied at least.

Interestingly, Constance's otherness manifests itself not only on the level of religion, but also on that of physicality. The references to the Roman/Byzantine princess's pallor occur several times in various contexts, starting with:

> Custance, that was woth sorwe al overcome,
> Ful pale arist, and dresseth hire to wende;   arises
> Fol wel she seeth ther is noon oother ende.
>   (II: 264—266)

The juxtaposition of Constance's white skin with the red symbolizing murderous intentions of Muslims appears also in the fragments other than those referred to above. When the saintly heroine prays, she underlines the religious dimension of redness in the context of Passion:

> "O cleere, o welful auter, hooly croys,   blessed altar
> Reed of the Lambes blood ful of pitee,   red with
> That wessh the world fro the olde iniquitee,   washed
> Me fro the feend and fro his clawes kepe,
> That day that I shal drenchen in the depe.
> …"
>   (II: 451—456)

The red stands not exclusively for the imminent slaughter of Christians and their supporters, but also for the blood with which Jesus purified the world. Constance is able to transform even the idea of blood, primarily connoting murder, into a religious symbol embracing the concepts of purity and holiness. In her speech the heroine combines the symbolism of the two colours in the vision of Jesus as the lamb of God, "the white Lamb, that hurt was with a spere" (II: 459). The symbolism of pallor opposed to (or complemented with) redness culminates in what Margaret Schlauch named "one of the finest passages in the *Canterbury Tales*".[26] According to Schlauch Constance is the heroine "whose loneliness and dignity under persecution have aroused sympathy in generations of readers" and her white face functions as a symbol of innocence.[27] The passage that is referred to in Schlauch's analysis runs as follows:

> Have ye nat seyn somtyme a pale face,
> Among a prees, of hym that hath be lad   crowd
> Toward his deeth, wher as hym gat no grace,
> And swich a colour in his face hath had
> Men myghte knowe his face that was bistad   in trouble
> Amonges alle the faces in that route?
> So stant Custance, and looketh hire aboute.
>
> (II: 645—651)

Constance, likened to a convict, is here not accused of bearing a monster, but of slaying Hermenegild, her hostess in Northumbria, where she was stranded after being exiled by the Sultaness in a rudderless boat. The mother-in-law murdered her own son and the guests during the wedding feast, and subsequently accused Constance of the deed. After her long drifting through perilous seas, Northumbria, another "hethenesse" culturally not dissimilar to what geographically belonged to the Orient, welcomed the heroine with all its hospitality.

The construction of Northumbria as another wilderness populated by heathens has been noted by numerous critics.[28] Moreover, the parallel-

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[26] Schlauch, *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens…*, p. 3.

[27] Ibidem.

[28] See, for instance, Brenda Deen Schildgen's analysis of space and religion in the chapter " 'Heathenesse' in the *Canterbury Tales*: Christian and Pagan Space in the *Man*

ism of the two parts of the plot also hinges on the similarity discernible in the events set in "Surrye" and in the north of pre-Christian England. It may even be suggested that the Northumbria from the tale becomes orientalized almost to the same extent as it happens with the actual Orient, and without that exoticization it would perhaps be too realistic to provide an adequate backdrop for the heroine's missionary Christianity. The pre-Christian version of England is thus put on a par with Islam, as Susan Schibanoff noticed.[29] Even the two mothers-in-law behave in relation to Constance as if they were united by the common goal of disrupting her life and thus hindering her "civilizing" mission. Apart from being "Chaucer's most detailed representation of Islam", to cite Ingham, the tale provides us with an insight into the imaginary life of ancient Britons, the life analogous to that of Muslims.[30] The similarities are multiplied in the other accusation that is made against Constance, this time related not to her husband's unnatural death, but to the unnatural birth of her child.

Carolyn Dinshaw noted how obsessed Chaucer must have been with the "unkinde abhomynacions" he mentioned as inadequate for the plot of *The Man of Law's Tale*.[31] The unnatural relations within the family, namely the incest he denied as a possible subject matter for the tale, could have found their place elsewhere, since they were only suggested in the unwritten part of the unfinished *Squire's Tale* set exclusively in the Orient and devoted to Canacee "that loved hir owene brother synfully" (II: 79). The stereotype involving incest as a type of relations widespread in the East is rejected by the Man of Law as unsuitable for the tale about Constance, alternatively classified as the hagiographic legend of a fictitious saint. In other stories from the "Constance saga" incest initiates

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of Law's Tale" in her study of religious otherness in *The Canterbury Tales*; Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Pagans, Tartars, Moslems, and Jews in Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales"* (Gainsville: University Press of Florida: 2001), pp. 48—68.

[29] Susan Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism and Heresy in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*", *Exemplaria*, vol. 8, No. 1 (1996), pp. 59—96.

[30] Ingham, "Contrapuntal Histories…, pp. 47—70.

[31] See the chapter "The Law of Man and Its 'Abhomynacions' " in: Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 88—112.

the course of events, since the heroine flees from her voluptuous father obsessed with the desire he feels for her. The motivation of Chaucer's Constance is obviously different. Still, unnaturalness looms large from the plot, thus showing that the narrative combines the Western with the Eastern elements as much as Rome connects the Orient with the Occident. Citing Brenda Deen Schildgen, in *The Man of Law's Tale* Rome is where East meets West.[32] Even if Constance is not unnatural in the same sense as incestuous Canace or as unnatural mothers committing incest with their sons from other medieval narratives, she still does not conform to the naturalness pattern through the very suggestion that her child could be born monstrous.[33] The possibility of monstrosity is already implied by Constance's likely Byzantine origin, at the time of the crusades undergoing orientalization in European imagination and thus diagnosed as belonging more to the East than to Western Europe.[34] The relations between Franks and the Byzantines during the expeditions only confirmed such a stance.

Moreover, unusual physicality of offspring was already suggested by the spectre of miscegenation visible in Constance's union with the Syrian sultan and subsequently by her second marriage with the heathen king Alla. The characterization of the second spouse as yet another infidel confirms that hypothesis, even if his name has been discovered to be authentic, deriving from the historical Aella of Northumbria (who died in 580)[35] and not orientalized, as it is still frequently thought.[36] The fear of deformity dormant in the bodies of Constance and either of her two husbands resonates with the racial discourse already present at the point when the princess's pale complexion is consistently underlined, thus emphasizing the issue of ethnicity. Racial anxiety also visible on the level of perceiving

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[32] Schildgen, *Pagans, Tartars, Moslems, and Jews…*, p. 49.

[33] On unnatural mothers and their incestuous desires in *Troilus and Criseyde* along with its mythological background see Jane Chance, *The Mythographic Chaucer: The Fabulation of Sexual Politics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 129.

[34] Heffernan, *The Orient in Chaucer and Medieval Romance…*, p. 108 *et passim*.

[35] Metlizky, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England…*, p. 153.

[36] Patricia Clare Ingham treats the name as a pun on "Allah" or alternatively a pun on the name of Mohamed's successor and ruler of Syria, "Ali"; Ingham, "Contrapuntal Histories…," pp. 47—70.

Constance as possibly the mother of a monster distorts the positive image of the heroine to the advantage of stressing her unusual nature when her mothers-in-law suspect her of supernatural qualities.

"This creature" (II: 463), arriving in England in a rudderless boat, is consequently perceived as a fairy by her second mother-in-law, Donegild. Acquitted from the accusation of murdering her Northumbrian hostess Hermenegild, Constance appears "so benigne a creature" (II: 615) in the eyes of Alla that he subsequently intends to marry her. Donegild's rejection of the princess is justified by the following argumentation: "Hir thoughte a despit that he sholde take/So strange a creature unto his make" (II: 699—700). On the one hand, Constance's Christianity, otherwise completely forgotten in England, a land undergoing (unsuccessful) conversion in the past, may inspire such externalization. On the other, the difference that Constance represents might be of otherwordly nature. The Christian dimension of the heroine was grasped by V.A. Kolve, who analyzed the allegorical dimension of the double scene of Constance floating in a boat at sea. His interpretation was a reading exploring the relation between the recurrent sea voyage in a boat propelled by providence and the metaphor of the Church as a ship. For Kolve Constance was an icon of the Church's missionary task, perilous as it had always been.[37] The image of Constance as an elvish, strange creature was in turn brought to light by Carolyn Dinshaw, who looked for alterity in the contrast established between the saintly heroine and other characters.[38] The coexistence of those two dimensions, the holy and the supernatural one, is indubitable in that literary character. The supernatural qualities introduce anxiety into the atmosphere around apparently saintly Constance.

That two-fold identity becomes instrumentalized by Donegild, "ful of tirannye" (II: 696) and vengeful. Once a "knave child" (II: 722), baptized Maurice, is born by Constance during the absence of Alla, the king's mother decides to influence the course of events by counterfeiting the message intended for him. She attempts to regain her political authority and power over human lives, especially those of her foes, through writ-

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[37] V.A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative*: *The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), pp. 297—358.

[38] Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics…*, p. 110.

ing a forged letter which confirms the doubts she once showed towards Constance. The narrative at this point confirms Aristotle's diagnosis of female power as opposed to the male one. In *The Nicomachean Ethics* he maintains that women become rulers merely because of their social position and not because of their own virtues, as it happens in the case of men. Donegild cannot be defined through any virtues which might distinguish her, hence she ruthlessly exploits the situation of dependency that Constance found herself in:[39]

> The lettre spak the queene delivered was
> Of so horrible a feendly creature
> That in the castel noon so hardy was
> That any while dorste ther endure.
> The mooder was an elf, by aventure   evil spirit
> Ycomen, by charmes or by sorcerie,
> And every wight hateth hir compaignye.
> (II: 750—756)

Monstrosity is thus inscribed onto the normative body of Maurice, even though he was previously safeguarded from the destructive impact of (at least potential) miscegenation through the sacrament of baptism. The sacrament itself functioned as a powerful weapon against the misfortune of deformity and was perceived as an act as natural and obvious as the birth itself. Here numerous hagiographic legends narrated by C. Grant Loomis exemplify that regularity, since he convincingly demonstrates that baptism functioned as an act strengthening sanctity and erasing otherness along with its signs.[40] The act of christening also had a remedial function: it cured illnesses of the body and the spiritual ones. Moreover, in the case of ethnic others it could even improve their physicality, as we shall see later in another representative of the "Constance group", the thirteenth-century romance *The King of Tars*. Baptism restored order to the world, thus firmly guaranteeing a position for Christianity in the discourse of pu-

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[39] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 210.

[40] C. Grant Loomis, *White Magic*: *An Introduction to the Folklore of Christian Legend* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Medieval Academy of America, 1948), p. 23.

rity and stability. The baptismal waters cleansed the one subjected to the sacrament from metaphorical filth of paganism and heresy, often transferred from one generation to another through the very fact of being born among heathens or dissenters from the true faith. In the case of Maurice the sacrament fulfilled the role of successful identity formation: "Mauricius at the fontstoon they hym calle" (II: 723), thus endowing him with an independent (Christian) self.

Nevertheless, Maurice, a child protected against the chaos of paganism, could still be falsely accused of deformity. Through writing a forged letter Donegild acquires the power of the word as she gains access to a pen, symbolically representing masculine power, as Jill Mann insists.[41] The mother-in-law thus adopts the position similar to that of God the Creator. She is able to bring to life the fiction of monstrosity, craftily externalizing her own grandson Maurice, which subsequently leads to rejection of his mother. Being mothered by an elf repulsive to all that surround her is tantamount to being effected by the alterity in the form of monstrosity, visible either in one's body or in one's spirit. Monstrosity becomes a text artificially incorporated into Maurice's identity, almost indelible at the point when the ruthless accusation is voiced.

The monstrosity written on the body of a non-monstrous child becomes a vehicle of more efficient propaganda than any actual deformity, a condition in fact potentially inspiring compassion and pity rather than outright rejection. The fiction inscribed onto normativity thus leads to a more effective attack on the mother, one of Schlauch's "accused queens". The theme itself was recurrent in literary texts, including a host of stories about (malevolent or innocent) mothers known from folklore. Margaret Schlauch writes that

> In a certain body of folk-tales, a queen is falsely accused of killing, or killing and eating, her own children… the king's jealous mother is usually the malignant accuser. In other tales, the heroine is persecuted by a witch or a dragon or a stepmother or a rival or a rival wife… Side by side with the stories in which the mother did not commit the crime of infanticide, there are tales in which the crime is actually committed, or at least contemplated… A second accusation brought against unhappy,

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[41] Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), p. 107.

nameless queens in fairy tales is even more fantastic than the first, to our present way of thinking, although it is to be found in Chaucer. It is the accusation, namely, that the unfortunate lady has brought into the world monsters or animals instead of children.[42]

In those folktales the child's monstrosity, if it actually occurs, derives directly from the mother's gruesome nature. A woman, potentially murderous or even cannibalistic in her degeneration, constitutes a threat to her own offspring, who should be isolated from the body which nurtured them as soon as they were born.[43] An unnatural birth may in turn result in deformed or bestial progeny, the latter bringing us close to the teratological theorization of deformity and numerous classifications of monsters, including hybrids of humans and beasts. Nevertheless, the alterity of femininity imperils the children physically, while the accusation of monstrous birth is an efficient instrument in the fight for political power.

Despite Donegild's intentions Alla does not sentence his son to exile, but accepts the predicament with Christian serenity. He annuls the malicious plan of his mother by dint of recording his will in writing himself, thus depriving her of the authority she usurped through intercepting the true letter from Constance and then forging it. Alla's pen is more powerful than hers, since the validity of the former cannot be questioned. His power is grounded in the actual masculine authority, contrasted with the fake male-like behaviour of Donegild. Alla's letter refuses to marginalize the deformed child, even if a future intention of fathering healthy progeny is simultaneously expressed:

> "Kepeth this child, al be it foul or feir,
> And eek my wyf, unto myn hoom-comynge.
> Crist, whan hym list, may sende me an heir
> Moore agreable than this to my likynge."
>
> (II: 764—767)

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[42] Schlauch, *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens…*, p. 20.

[43] Doris Desclais Berkvam evokes the example from Old French *Guillaume d'Angleterre*, where the mother, a queen, almost devours her new-born baby out of insatiable hunger and is only restrained from committing the dreadful act by her spouse, the king; Doris Desclais Berkvam, *Enfance et maternité dans la littérature française des XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1981), p. 43.

As a good Christian, he strongly believes he will be rewarded with a child having a normative body. Again a difference between Christians and pagans is underlined, since Christian Alla perceives the purposefulness of every sign sent by God, be it ordinary or monstrous. The trust placed in the Creator leads to full acceptance of each phenomenon endowed with life by him. Incomprehensible as it is, a monster speaks for the Lord and concurrently constitutes a test of its parents' faith. They will be rewarded with the offspring which they will welcome if the test is passed by them positively: by acceptance of difference instead of its rejection.

Alla, the ruler whose very name suggests an affinity with the oriental world despite the historical source of that misnomer, may be at least partly suspected of generating that deformity himself, fictitious as it is. Dorothee Metlizky insists that monstrous births from medieval oriental romances symbolize ethnic difference characteristic of their fathers, while deformed offspring often function as a factor uniting the two religious and subsequently ethnic groups. Metlizky notices reconciliation of two religions, Christianity and Islam, as the goal of such births, with which the anonymous romance writers appear particularly obsessed.[44] In *The Man of Law's Tale* the problem of true and false conversion emerges in the first part of the plot, with the feigned baptism of the Sultaness. It does not disappear from the plot completely since any convert may be suspected of opportunism rather than fostering true faith. There continues the risk of Alla still remaining pagan at heart, but it is annulled by the birth of the couple's Christian son and the king's positive reception of his physical otherness. At his birth Maurice permanently unites Constance with her second husband on the symbolical level, thus reconciling Christianity with Alla's one-time paganism.

Nonetheless, the (fictitious) monster ultimately has to be exiled, as it is traditionally the only role reserved for it in the hostile world. John Boswell claims that abandonment was a usual procedure in the case of not only deformed, but also otherwise normal children rejected by their parents, and he supports his thesis with examples from literature, some of which belong to the "Constance group" (to take only the romance of Ap-

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[44]   Metlizky, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England…*, p. 140.

polonius of Tyre as an example)[45] and from real life, since Peter Damian as an infant suffered abandonment by his mother as well.[46] The custom frequent in antiquity found its continuation in medieval culture, where monsters were customarily rejected as often as other representatives of otherness. The physical removal of deformed offspring stemmed from the fear and revulsion that monstrosity generated. Yet, even the act situating the child in the core of the discourse of abjection reflected the affirmative attitude to creation: it was widely believed that if the newly-born monster constituted a sign sent by God, it would be rescued by the divinity so that it could spread the message of divine omnipotence through its very existence.[47]

Maurice is no sign of God's authority, but his miraculous survival despite the exile testifies at least to the divine protection. On intercepting the letters from Alla Donegild again destroys them, replacing them with a message testifying to the king's condemnation and rejection of his closest family:

> Eft were his lettres stolen everychon,   *again*
> And countrefeted lettres in this wyse:
> "The king comandeth his constable anon,
> Up peyne of hangying, and on heigh juyse,   *on the penalty of;*
>   *judicial sentence*
>
> That he ne sholde suffren in no wyse
> Custance in-with his reawme for t'abyde   *realm*
> Thre dayes and o quarter of a tyde";   *hour*
>
> "But in the same ship as he hire fond,
> Hire, and hir yonge sone, anad al hir geere,
> He sholde putte, and croude hire fro the lond,   *push*
> And charge hire that she never eft coome   *command*
>   theere."
>
> (II: 792—802)

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[45]   John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*: *The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. 354 *et passim*.

[46]   Ibidem, p. 284 *et passim*.

[47]   David Williams, *Deformed Discourse*: *The Function of the Monster in Medieaval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), p. 253.

In the folktale manner Constance is subjected to the second exile, this time shown against the background of the events from Christ's life. The saintly heroine undergoes rejection on the part of the people among whom she was to live, while her infant son becomes an outcast protected only by his mother and the divine assistance of the Virgin. The position of an outcast identifies Maurice as close to Jesus, while the lament of his mother over their misfortune has already been described by Jill Mann as a Piétà-like scene.[48] The character of the allegedly monstrous child thus combines the two temporal levels and emulates the model from the Scriptures, Jesus Christ. Rejected by the community which should have accepted him at his birth, he also unintentionally causes the grief of his mother. She wails the hardship and peril they are exposed to by rhetorically negating any relation between her misfortune and the one that befell Mary on the death of her son:

> Hir litel child lay wepyng in hir arm,
> And knelynge, pitously to hym she seyde,
> "Pees, litel sone, I wol do thee noon harm."
> With that hir coverchief of his heed she breyde,   kerchief; drew off
> And over his litel eyen she it leyde,
> And in hir arm she lulleth it ful faste,
> And into hevene hire eyen up she caste.
>
> "Mooder," quod she, "and mayde bright,
>   Marie,
> Sooth is that thurgh wommanes eggement,   instigation
> Mankynde was lorn, and damned ay to dye,
> For which thy child was on a croys yrent.   stretched
> Thy blisful eyen sawe al his torment;
> Thanne is ther no comparison bitwene
> Thy wo and any wo man may sustene.
>   …"
>
> (II: 834—848)

Negation of the parallelism nevertheless produces the effect of similarity, especially when a carol-like scene of Constance caringly protecting

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[48] Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer…*, p. 109.

her infant from cold precedes her address to Mary. The aura of sanctity commences to envelop the child stigmatized by fictitious monstrosity at his birth. The transformation from horror and revulsion to adoration and holiness is exposed as more instantaneous than it might initially seem. An allegedly monstrous entity may become holier than that which seems normal and thus, on the surface, closer to the divinity. Maurice demonstrates the inscrutability of the Lord's ways, while Constance follows Mary in her suffering caused by the exile and the danger of death in a boat controlled only by the providence.

In Rome, where the two exiles are miraculously stranded, Maurice's loathsomeness becomes ultimately negated when he metamorphoses into a mirror image of his mother with years. Aristotle's theory of monstrosity cannot find its confirmation in Maurice: even if the child's physicality does not reflect that of his progenitor, king Alla, it does not divert from any resemblance altogether.[49] The holy mother is rewarded with a holy son, a faithful reflection of her sanctity. That reproduction of virtue becomes confirmed in Maurice's physical similarity to his mother. Even though he does not resemble his (once pagan) father, he does not reveal his mother's unruly imagination during pregnancy, either. His is a face that resembles the superior of his parents. The soul only follows suit in that emulation of Constance by her son's body.

Once Alla slays Donegild in wrath on his return and has to repent for the matricide, he goes on a pilgrimage to Rome, where he unknowingly meets his own son. Amazed by the disconcerting similarity to his missing wife, he interrogates his host, the senator, about the child:

> This Alla kyng hath of this child greet won-
> 	der,
> And to the senatour he seyde anon,
> "Whos is that faire child that stondeth yon-
> 	der?"
> "I noot," quod he, "by God, and by Seint John!
> A mooder he hath, but fader hath he noon

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[49] Marie-Hélène Huet elaborates on dissimilarity as the factor determining a child's monstrosity in Aristotle; see Marie-Hélène Huet, *Monstrous Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 7.

> That I of woot" — and shortly, in a stounde,   little time
> He tolde Alla how that this child was founde.
> (II: 1016—1022)

The family romance comes full circle here. Constance finds a peaceful abode in the place she once decided to abandon for the sake of peace between Christianity and Islam, while the family is reunited: Alla finds his missing family due to the mysterious story of a fatherless child. The face of Constance haunting her husband ("This Alla hath the face in remembrance/Of dame Custance…") (II: 1032—1033) emerges before his eyes in the form of a child whose face is the likeness of his mother:

> Now was this child as lyk unto Custance
> As possible is a creature to be.
> (II: 1030—1031)

The inconvenient issue of Alla's obligation of loyalty to both his mother and Constance has been pushed aside, since the former was physically eliminated from their life. Anxiety over religion and ethnicity thus ceased to exist instantaneously, while Maurice again became an element uniting the one-time heathen king with his authentically Christian wife. The authenticity of Constance's faith is in turn rewarded with the triumph of Maurice in Christian world once he becomes an adult. The exile he was sentenced to when still an infant was conducive to his success. As holy as his mother, he receives the necessary support of the pope and becomes emperor:

> This child Maurice was sithen Emperour
> Maad by the Pope, and lyved cristenly;
> To Cristes chirche he dide greet honour.
> (II: 1121—1123)

Political power religiously validated and the position of utmost authority blessed by the pope become a reward for the hardship that Constance and Maurice had to undergo. What was once the sign of estrangement opens a leeway to participation in the religious community and ultimately they stand at the head of it. The fiction of monstrosity is conducive to being singled out as a near-saint who adorns with his presence what

was metaphorized as the *Corpus Christianum* in the twelfth-century discourse.[50] The physical threat that such pagan foes as Donegild posed towards it is annulled, as the tormentors of Christians do not exist any more. Carolyn Dinshaw perceives those two characters, Constance and her son, as belonging to two distinct groups:

> The vital distinction is rather between all women and all men, or, more precisely, all not-men and all men. *Woman* in the ideology of the *Man of Law's Tale* is an essential blankness that will be inscribed by men and thus turned into a tale; she is a blank onto which men's desire will be projected; she is a no-thing in herself.[51]

The metaphor of inscription returns again to our considerations. The mother's body was merely a text inscribed with the calumny of a monstrous birth, and then it became a blank page sanctified through her son's position in secular and ecclesiastical circles. Hence it is not surprising that such writers as Christine de Pizan perceived their own sex as a monstrosity which should be erased from their tainted bodies. At the beginning of *The Book of the City of Ladies* Christine is writing: "…a great unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities of nature".[52]

A woman, loathsome through her nature, cannot aspire to real authority. The thought of Constance becoming "of al Europe the queene" (II: 161) that her father once cherished now materializes in her son Maurice, as remote from any monstrosity as it may possibly be, endowed with the highest dignity on the continent. The skillful playing with the ideas of the natural and the supernatural that, according to D.S. Brewer, is so widespread in Chaucer's *oeuvre* generates a quick conversion of the supernatural into the

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[50] On the metaphor of *Corpus Christianum* see Michael Uebel, "Unthinking the Monster: Twelfth-Century Responses to Saracen Alterity" in: *Monster Theory*: *Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996), pp. 264—291.

[51] Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*…, p. 110.

[52] Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), p. 5.

natural, normal, and highly esteemed.[53] Excess, the principle of anything deformed and thus monstrous, characterizes merely everything oriental and pagan within the plot, while the allegedly monstrous Maurice embodies the perfect harmony of the secular with the religious. The potentially disruptive force of a deformed creature is thus converted into the vision of the world where disruption is soothed. Instead of incest signaled by the narrative's teller through outright negation, *The Man of Law's Tale* is rounded off with the image of (restored) Christian order. The disruption dormant in the text that Carolyn Dinshaw noted is soothed, artificial as such an ending is.[54]

The figure of Maurice, a fictitious monster and a near-saint, negates the possibility of unnatural births among righteous Christians. The Islamic other and its pagan Northumbrian counterpart, both of them monstrous according to Elizabeth Robertson, attempt to infect Christianity with their morally loathsome nature.[55] Conversion is the only remedy against the disease of heresy, but it is the child of a couple who committed miscegenation who may restore harmony in the world.

An analogue of *The Man of Law's Tale, Emaré*, deepens the racial and cultural dimension of the "calumniated wives" narratives. The heroine escapes from her mother country in order to avoid incestuous desire on the part of her father and she subsequently marries a heathen prince. In *Emaré* the prince's mother, similarly to *The Man of Law's Tale,* contrives a plot against her, which ends with another exile, this time in Rome. When Emaré is forced to flee from her father's advances, the anonymous romance writer relates her prayer at sea in the mode similar to Chaucer's. Berkvam postulates that such scenes are frequent in that type of romances due to the actual situation of young mothers who could be abandoned by their families and would often resort to praying to the Lord and the Virgin for help:[56]

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[53] D.S. Brewer writes about Chaucer's "amazing juxtapositions of … the natural and the supernatural"; D.S. Brewer, "Children in Chaucer", pp. 52—60.

[54] Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics…*, p. 101.

[55] Elizabeth Robertson, "Nonviolent Christianity and the Strangeness of Female Power in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*" in: *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, eds. Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 322—351.

[56] Berkvam, *Enfance et maternité…*, p. 33.

> The lady fleted forth alone,   floated
> To God of heven she made her mone   complaint
> And to hys modyr also.
>
> (313—315)[57]

The relationship between those two stories goes even further and it is not merely based on the similarity of the plot and the presence of the same scenes in the two romances. The heroine of *Emaré* is also described as a creature "whyte as lylye flour" (205) and the feature is later taken over by her allegedly monstrous son, who in reality is "whyte as flour on hylle" (729).

   The heroine's body becomes not only inscribed with race (or rather the non-race of whiteness), but also with oriental otherness through the robe she wears. Consequently, also clothing may be viewed as a sign written on the body. The robe is bestowed on her by "syr Tergaunte" (85), the king of Sicilly, whose name sounds familiarly oriental. As a result her father, king Artyus, exclaims that "So ryche a jwell ys ther non/In all Crystyanté" (107—108). Afterwards the narrator refers to the dress's origin in the following description:

> The amerayle dowghter of hethenness   the daughter of the heathen emir
> And wrowghte hyt all wyth pryde,   made thys cloth wythouten lees, truly
> And putreyed hyt wyth gret honour   and formed splendid pictures on it
> Wyth ryche golde and asowr   assure
> And stones on ylke a side.
> And as the story telles in honde
> The stones that yn thys cloth stonde
> Sowgthe they wer full wyde.   searched out
> Seven wynter hyt was yn makynge
> Or hyt was browght to endynge,   before
> In herte ys not to hyde.
>
> (109—120)

Geraldine Heng stresses the significance of the clothing item by stating that it constitutes a synecdoche for its wearer, "luxuriantly beautiful and

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5 Inscription…

exotic."[58] Besides discerning the oriental origin of the dazzlingly beautiful dress, Emaré's father suspects a supernatural intervention in the making of the clothing item, since he also exclaims: "Sertes thys ys a fayry,/Or ellys a vanyté!" (104—105). The object of non-Christian origin is suspected of belonging to the fairy world, while the act of wearing such a piece of clothing becomes synonymous with adopting another identity, related to the "heathen" and supernatural origin of the dress. That magic quality influences the entire characterization of the heroine, who is afterwards described in the context of the fairy-like identity:

> The cloth upon her shone so bryghth
> When she was theryn y-dyghth,   dressed in it
> She semed non erdly thyng.
>   (394—396)

In *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass emphasize the social dimension of clothing, which they treat as an inscription on the body that is able to provide the wearer with an identity different from the primary one.[59] In the course of the Middle English narrative Emaré is perceived through the intermediary object her dress constitutes. The fact that the object is non-Christian, which from the simplistic medieval point of view meant that it was pagan, endows the heroine with another self, inalienably bound with the setting of the narrative, the Orient at the time of warring against Saracens:

> The kyng of France yn that tyme
> Was besette wyth many a Sarezyne,   harassed
> And cumbered all in tene.   and greatly harmed and hurt
>   (481—483)

Nevertheless, apart from the setting which straightforwardly puts an equality mark between the Islamic religion and paganism, the categories

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[58] Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic*: *Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 194.

[59] See Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

of the civilized/the uncivilized cannot be so easily assigned to the two cultures: the Christian and the Muslim one. Such a problem arises also in terms of the dress that defines Emaré throughout the plot, since it must be remembered that oriental clothing was treated as superior to Western garments both in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance. Jones and Stallybrass provide an example of that attitude by stating that in the latter epoch "a journey to Persia was a journey toward 'higher' form of technology and civilization — toward fabric and dyes and embroideries that surpassed anything … seen in Europe".[60] The long description of Emaré's dress testifies to the existence of such an outlook on the cultural superiority of oriental clothing also in the Middle Ages.

Similarly to the plot of *The Man of Law's Tale*, Emaré's exile ends with her marrying the "kyng of Fraunce" (493) (at that point she is known as Egaré, since she conceals her true identity for fear of being exposed to her father's incestuous desire) and the threat posed by the malicious accusations of her mother-in-law, who at first sight discerns a fairy nature in her and warns her son against the young woman:[61]

> "… Sone, thys ys a fende,   evil spirit
> In thys wordy wede!   splendid
> As thou lovest my blessynge,
> Make thou nevur thys weddynge,
> Cryst hyt de forbede!"
>
> (446—450)

Even though the evil mother-in-law writes about the name of Christ, her Christianity is exposed as superficial, since on the day when her son is away and his wife gives birth to their son, the old queen exchanges the letters. God's will manifests itself not in the actual birth of a monster,

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[60] Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 57.

[61] Anne Savage interestingly delineates the intricate relation between the heroine's oriental dress and the painful issue of incest; see Anne Savage, "Clothing Paternal Incest in *The Clerk's Tale, Émaré* and the *Life of St Dympha*" in: *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain. Essays for Felicity Riddy*, eds. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol M. Meale, and Lesley Johnson (Turhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 345—361.

but in the delivery of a shapely child whose only distinguishing feature is a birthmark, itself a frequent motif in romance since it helped parents to recognize their lost children:

> She wente wyth chylde yn place   there
> As longe as Goddus wyll was,
> That seemly unthur serke;   robe
> Thyll ther was of her body
> A fayr child borne and a godelé;   handsome
> Hadde a dowbyll kyngus marke.   birthmark
>   (499—504)

Even more significantly, in hagiographic legends birthmarks do not merely serve the function of being recognition signs, but may be marks of holiness that certain saints are endowed with from their infancy.[62] Such a mark on the body of Emaré's son indicates his inborn Christianity; this negates the accusation of monstrosity. In accordance with the "true" Christianity characterizing Emaré, she has her son baptized and named Segramour, and the event is summarized as an act making the child even more noble, not only due to his origin, but also because of the civilizing function of the sacrament: the narrator writes that "freely was that fode" [noble was that child] (507). In the exchanged letter Emaré's mother-in-law reports the birth of a "devyll" (536), whose corporeality renders him bestial rather than human:

> Thre heddes hadde he there,
> A lyon, a dragon, and a beere:
> A fowll feltred fende.   shaggy
>   (538—540)

The oriental element in the characterization of Emaré becomes very conspicuous, since the accusation directed against her makes her a powerful fairy who bore a monster because of her relationship with the devil.[63]

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[62] Loomis, *White Magic…*, p. 21.

[63] Andrzej Wicher even claims that the romance author himself "is in fact quite outspoken about the supernatural qualities of his heroine"; Andrzej Wicher, *The English Breton Lay…*, p. 99.

The fictional monster's body is deformed and it may be viewed as bestial because of the diverse species that have been combined in it. When the king reads the message about the monstrous birth, he interprets it as an ominous sign from God since he exclaims:

> That evur Jesu himself wolde sende
> Such a fowle lothly fende
> To come bytwene us too.
>
> (562—564)

His interpretation of the sign that the deformed being constitutes is obviously different from the spiteful explanation insinuated by the old queen. The child becomes for him a prodigy, which, however, does not imply that the mother is monstrous as well, since she conceived during her sexual contacts with Satan. The child merely comes between the parents instead of strengthening the already extant marital bond. Consequently, the king "commanded yn all thynge/To kepe well that lady yynge" [commanded in all respects/To look well after the lady] (568—569), which, in accordance with the plot's design, is not done by his mother. In the end the accuser is executed for having sent Emaré and the child into exile, as it happened with the second mother-in-law in Constance's story, whereas the two penitent knights, Artyus and the king of France, are reunited with Emaré in Rome. Her son's monstrosity is exposed as fictional and even though it once led to the unjust accusation, it did not create doubt about the lady's "naturalness".

The unnatural children from Chaucer's tale and its anonymous analogue acquire their monstrous characterization, which is only slander directed against their mothers, for reasons whose scope extends from the psychological to the political. Fictitious fiendishness and deformity function against the background of complex interracial and inter-faith relationships. Here the family focuses those tensions; the difficulties are gradually overcome, artificial as such a solution of the conflicts seems. Quasi-monstrosity serves the ideological purpose of tying the family bonds tighter together, while the holiness of the mothers (and children) does not undergo any serious questioning. Characteristically, another analogue of *The Man of Law's Tale*, *The King of Tars*, involves actual physically deformity,

a condition that interrogates the mother's (and father's) naturalness. Especially the role of the father is undermined since, quoting Jane Gilbert, in the text "paternity is initially withheld, the child left fatherless".[64] The lucid framework from the family romance will thus be replaced by a more complicated account of strife deriving from miscegenation, which will be discussed subsequently.

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[64] Jane Gilbert, "Unnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in *The King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*" in: *Medieval Women*: *Texts and Contexts*…, pp. 329—344.

Chapter Three

"Stille as ston":
Oriental Deformity in *The King of Tars*

> Rex eciam Thartarorum ibidem venit et obedienciam Romane ecclesie promisit et fidem confessus est, a quo et coronam suscepit. In territorio Cracoviensi natus est puer cum dentibus, qui statim ut natus est cepit loqui; sed cum esset baptizatus, mox et dentes amisit et loquelam. Vixit autem tribus annis et mortuus est.
>
> *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, ed. Pertz[1]
>
> [The king of Tartars also came there and pledged obedience to the Roman Church and made a confession of faith, and he got the crown from the Church. In the area around Cracow a toothed boy was born, who commenced talking directly after being born; yet, when he was baptized, he lost his teeth and speech. He then lived three years and died].

The above record from *Annales Polonorum*, which is a note produced by the anonymous chronicler for the year 1274, cannot have reverberated in the thirteenth-century *The King of Tars* due to the late date of the former, contrary to what Robert J. Geist once claimed.[2] Nevertheless, a similar reference must have been the source of literary accounts of a monstrous birth among the Orientals. Two initially unrelated events, the christening of a Tartar king declaring his subjection to the Church and an unnatural birth, were brought together in a host of literary accounts. The random order of the two references gave rise to a narra-

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[1] "Annales Polonorum" in: *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, ed. Georg Pertz, vol. 19 (Hannover: Kraus Reprint, 1851 [1963]), p. 640; the translation into English is mine.

[2] Robert J. Geist, "On the Genesis of *The King of Tars*", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 42 (1943), pp. 260—268.

tive appearing both in other historical sources and in romances: that of
a Muslim king whose child was born deformed and who subsequently
converted to Christianity.

Judith Perryman, the editor of the Middle English romance, listed
the following historical records containing a similar story: Anglo-Latin
Flores Historiarum, Villani's *Istorie Fiorentine,* Rishanger's Anglo-Latin
Chronica, the letter of 1300—1307 to Jayme of Aragon, the Germano-
Latin *Annales Sancti Rudberti Salisburgenses*, and Ottokar's *Österreich-
ische Reimchronik*.[3] The first three sources were dated as 1299, while all
of them shared the feature of narrating a monstrous birth in the East in
the context of conversion. The proliferation of similar accounts testifies
to the existence of a (literary) tradition: that of the Tartar king fighting
on behalf of Christians. Perryman maintains that the narrative element
of such offspring being born to a Muslim king must have been added to
the legend later.[4] The historical figure who may have been an inspira-
tion for the delineation of that literary character was probably Ghazzan,
a Buddhist or Shamanist convert to Islam demonstrating tolerance for
Christianity and fighting alongside his Christian father-in-law.[5] The bat-
tle between Muslims and Christians recorded in all of the versions could
in turn have been the victory over Egyptians in Syria won by the khan
Abaga, Ghazzan's grandfather, a Mongol ruler in the years 1265—1282.
In all the narratives the child born out of the marriage of a Christian prin-
cess and a Muslim ruler is deformed: half-hairy and half-smooth, half-
human and half-animal, wholly hairy, or a formless lump, as it is in *The
King of Tars*.[6] The deformity is remedied by dint of magic beautification,
here in the form of baptism, which also works wonders for the Muslim,
hence infidel, father.

Magic beautification, which constitutes the climax of the narrative,
impressively rounds off the poem belonging to the "Constance group".

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[3] Judith Perryman, "Introduction" in: *The King of Tars. Edited from the Auchinleck
MS, Advocates 19.2.1*, ed. Judith Perryman (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag:
1980), pp. 1—69.

[4] Ibidem.

[5] Lillian Herlands Hornstein, "A Folklore Theme in *The King of Tars*", *Philological
Quarterly*, vol. 20 (1941), pp. 82—87.

[6] Perryman, "Introduction" in: *The King of Tars…*, pp. 1—69.

Nevertheless, in contrast with, for instance, Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale,* in *The King of Tars* the narrative diverges from the usual false accusation of bearing a monster to the actual unnatural birth resulting from what is termed miscegenation: the fear of corrupting the white race through intermarriage and subsequently through the racially mixed offspring resulting from it. John Gillies, the author of *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference*, uses the term "miscegenation" in his study of the great Elizabethan's work, but he diagnoses it as anachronistic and hence questionable. Still, in order to support the appropriateness of that usage he quotes an entry from *A New Dictionary of Sociology* edited by G. Duncan Mitchell, where the authors trace its origin to the U.S. Presidential elections of 1864. At that time "miscegenation" referred to the mating of people of different stock in order to produce a superior stock. As Gillies indicates, Mitchell provides no alternative for that term and, despite the anachronistic quality of its usage, the word is the most adequate one when discussing the mixing of different races.[7] In *The King of Tars* monstrosity exposes the dire consequences of violating the taboo against marriages between whites and non-whites. The monster is a sign demonstrating the inadequacy of such unions and a form of punishment for those who enter them. Simultaneously the remedial role of Christianity is underlined.

The beginning of the thirteenth-century romance resembles that of Chaucer's tale, that of Nicolas Trivet's chronicle also narrating the life of a character named Constance,[8] of *Le Bone Florence of Rome,* and of St Ursula's legend.[9] A Christian princess is given away in marriage for the sake of peace between the Roman empire and Muslims since a war breaks out between "a trewe Cristen king/& an heþen heye lording,/Of Dames þe soudan" (4—6).[10] She is the daughter of a mysterious "king of Tars", whose historical identity has been an object of investigation for scholars,

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[7] John Gillies, *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 189.

[8] Lillian Herlands Hornstein, "Trivet's Constance and *The King of Tars*", *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 55 (1941), pp. 354—357.

[9] Perryman, "Introduction" in: *The King of Tars*…, pp. 1—69.

[10] The numbers of the lines will refer to Perryman's edition, and all the subsequent translation will be mine.

while the discussion over the meaning of "Tars" was thus summarized by Perryman:

> The king of Tars is a non-specified king whose name implies much deeper Christian roots than those of a Tartar convert, by linking him with the birth of Christ or with St Paul. The fact that the king of Tars is set in opposition to a Muslim sultan presents the idea of the conflict of faiths and of the supreme power of the Christian god with more point and economy than in the analogues, for the battles and the conversion now arise directly out of the bitter religious rivalry between the followers of Christ and the believers of Islam.[11]

Nonetheless, the Christian princess here does not conduct her missionary plan straightforwardly. What in *The Man of Law's Tale* testified to the iniquity of Constance's first mother-in-law, the Sultaness, namely her false conversion signaled by the words: "We shul first feyne us cristendom to take" (II: 351), acquires a positive dimension in the romance about a shapeless child. The Muslim conspirator feigning adoption of Christianity acted ignobly, while the same strategy of the king of Tars' daughter merely displays her intelligence in implementing gradual Christianization of the Orient. Ethical values, such as honesty and truthfulness, undergo relativization: missionary activities of Christians may be carried out stealthily, pretending obedient adjustment to the mores of Muslims. The underhand strategy is ennobled by the praiseworthy plans of leading Saracens away from the religion of Mohammad, customarily represented as a false prophet in medieval tradition.[12]

Initially the (nameless) princess from the thirteenth-century romance sacrifices herself for the benefit of her people, continuously imperiled and fighting so as to protect her against the sultan of Damascus, dead set on

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[11] Perryman, "Introduction" in: *The King of Tars…*, pp. 1—69.

[12] Even the C-Version of *Piers Plowman*, which according to Dorothee Metlizky is a harbinger of the twentieth-century ecumenist attitude of Christianity towards Islam, involves a lengthy passage relating Mohammad's deception of gullible Orientals (XVII: 165—180); see Dorothee Metlizky, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 198; W.W. Skeat (ed.), *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman by William Langland, Text C* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 290—291.

marrying her against anybody's will. The mother despairs at the course of events ("þai mader cri & michel wo") [her mother cried and felt much woe] (325), while the maiden intrepidly declares: "For y wil suffre no longer þrawe/þat Cristen folk be for me slawe" [For I will no longer bear it/That Christian folk is slain because of me] (331—332). Thus she constructs for herself the new identity of a martyr saint: the one who puts at danger not merely her body, but also her soul through the obligatory adoption of Islam, superficial as it is.

The dire consequences of the interracial (and, more significantly at that point, inter-faith marriage) are foreshadowed in the princess's dream; interestingly, the vision veers towards comforting the dreamer in the end. Initially she visualizes herself being chased by "an hundred houndes blake" (423), which is followed by an even more telling oneiric image:

> Ʒete hir þought, wiþouten lesing,
> Als sche lay in hir sweuening,
> þat selcouþe was to rede,
> þat blac hounde hir was folweing
> þurth miʒt of Ihesu, heuen king,
> Spac to hir in manhede,
> In white cloþes, als a kniʒt,
> & seyd to hir, "Mi swete wiʒt,
> No þarf þe noþing drede,
> Of Teruagaunt no of Mahoun.
> þi lord þat suffred passioun
> Schal help þe at þi nede.
>
> (445—456)

[Yet she thought, without listening,/When she lay in her swoon,/Which strange was to tell,/That a black hound was following her,/Through his power Jesus, the heavenly king,/Spoke to her in the shape of a human,/In white clothes, as a knight,/And told her: "My sweet woman/You should not fear/Of Teruagaunt or of Mahoun./Thy lord that suffered passion/Shall help you in thy need].

The black hound chasing her emblematizes an infidel, if one limits oneself only to the numerous references to pagans as dogs that appear elsewhere in the romance: the sultan is initially addressed as one of "heþen hounde" (93), which is reiterated when Muslim soldiers' attack is that of "houndes

on Cristen men" (169). Such canine metaphors appeared in other contexts as well,[13] not only in reference to Muslims, such as the Bishop of Winchester's answer to Henry III's request to help (Orthodox) Russians against the Tartars: "Let us leave those dogs to devour one another, that they may all be consumed, and perish".[14] The comparison between infidels (and also all dissenters from the official faith) and dogs might have indirectly derived from the idea of *cynocephali*, one of the monstrous races customarily included in the Wonders of the East tradition.[15] *The Wonders* (or, alternatively, *The Marvels*) *of the East* are accounts of the journeys made by Alexander the Great, who functioned as yet another monstrous child in medieval literature. The oldest extant medieval narrative is included in the *Beowulf*-Manuscript and it narrates the legend that in the Orient Alexander encountered multiple monstrous races, including giants, savages described by him as animals or at least cannibals, dragons, hybrid animals, hybrids of humans and animals, wondrous plants, and even the Phoenix.[16] In accordance with the strategy of the colonial discourse, the places inhabited by the monsters were thoroughly mapped and therefore described in terms of their geographical location. As for *cynocephali*, they were also called *conopenae* and presented as hybrids. Along with other monsters, they were to be found in Hascellentia, "the land on the way to Babylon", and the author referred to them in the following words: "Also there are born here half-dogs who are called *conopenae*. They have horses' manes and boars' tusks and dogs' heads and their breath is like a fiery flame".[17] The dog-heads, highly hybrid creatures, visualize incomplete humanity: human bodies without sufficient reason. Interestingly, in

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[13] The imagery of "Jewish dogs" has lately been discussed in the criticism; see Kenneth Stow, *Jewish Dogs*: *An Image and Its Interpreters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

[14] Matthew Paris, "English History", trans. J.A. Giles in: *The Portable Medieval Reader*, eds. James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin (New York: Viking Penguin, 1977), pp. 465—466.

[15] For a discussion of *cynocephali* in the context of St Christopher's legend see David Williams, *Deformed Discourse*: *The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), pp. 286—297.

[16] Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*: *Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), pp. 183—203.

[17] Ibidem.

the Middle Ages Saracens commenced to be visualized as *cynocephali* in art, which confirmed their position of the monstrous other in the popular imagination.[18] Dog-headed Muslims symbolized senseless bestiality, justifying the crude treatment of those religious and ethnic others in any real-life confrontation, should it occur at all.

The black hound in the princess's vision may consequently stand for her newly-wedded Muslim spouse, the object of her loathing rather than affection. Puzzlingly, in the dream the dog transforms itself into a white-clad knight reassuring her about the safety of her religious beliefs as no one will imperil them among those who believe in Terguant, Mahound, and Apollo. The princess's bridegroom thus emerges as a figure comforting her, while his words are introduced with the name of Jesus Christ. The sultan's future conversion is already signaled in that dictum, particularly when one considers the association between dogs and holiness frequent in hagiography. C. Grant Loomis records the dream vision the mother of St Dominic experienced during pregnancy: she saw herself carrying a dog which would set the world ablaze in the future.[19] Canine nature would accordingly entail not only monstrosity, but also potential holiness: such Christian virtues as humbleness and submission, humility and loyalty. The world ignited by the dog from the vision above is resuscitated by the revolutionary religious ardour, which rends it from stagnation and rejuvenates it as a result of beneficial spiritual unrest.

The visionary experience of the princess of Tars transforms the nature of the romance: initially chivalric, now it shifts in the direction of what Maldwyn Mills termed "edifying romances", involving not exclusively combating the infidels, but also the emergence of sainthood in the characters.[20] The sultan's bride already displays her deep religiousness and the ability to sacrifice herself for higher values (here being not only inter-religious peace, but also the missionary agenda of the church). Her suffering

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[18] Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*: *Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 160.

[19] C. Grant Loomis, *White Magic*: *An Introduction to the Folklore of Christian Legend* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Medieval Academy of America, 1948), p. 36.

[20] Maldwyn Mills, "Introduction" in: *Six Middle English Romances*, ed. Maldwyn Mills (London and Rutland, Vermont: J.M. Dent & Sons and Charles E. Tutle, 1992), pp. vii—xxxiv.

will culminate with the traumatic experience of mothering a child begotten by the husband more bestial than human, but she will be steadily protected by the divine providence. Accepting a beast-like man for her spouse must be a torment for the saintly virgin. Still, it is the price she has to pay also for the possibility of bringing Christianity to the Eastern wilderness.

The position of the princess in Damascus, where she is queen, appears disconcertingly similar to that of Chaucer's Constance among Muslims. The former's missionary activities, secretive as they are, make her adopt the position of a potential colonizer. The colonization is far from being an obvious and straightforward phenomenon; accordingly, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin visualize its structure as rhizomatic rather than monolithic.[21] The difference between the colonizer and the colonized ones becomes opaque. Superficially colonized herself, the princess undertakes the colonizing mission. She thus emerges as a representative of the Other among the Others, a stranger whose mores are incomprehensible for those who are (from the Eurocentric perspective) strangers. Nevertheless, balance is redressed at the point when the princess conceives. A mother who could be blamed for her child's deformity, as mothers usually were in the Middle Ages, she cannot, however, be the cause of her offspring's possible monstrosity due to her impeccability. It is the father's religious and racial alterity that may result in disturbing the natural growth of the child in its the princess's womb. The lump, despite its being "a powerful image, which repels and fascinates by its very crudity", to cite Jane Gilbert, visualizes the ideological message that is far from any ecumenist spirit.[22] Beauty, moral or physical, may be attributed exclusively to Christians. The primary description of the princess situates her in a row with other righteous heroines whose physical appearance reflected their spiritual perfection:

> þe meiden was schast and bliþe of chere,
> Wiþ rode red so blosme on brere,

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[21] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 207.

[22] Jane Gilbert, "Putting the Pulp into Fiction: The Lump-Child and Its Parents in *The King of Tars*" in: *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England*: *Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 102—124.

& eyʒen stepe & gray;
Wiþ lowe scholders & white swere.

(13—16)

[The maiden was chaste and happy on the face,/Fresh-looking and as red as blossom on a briar,/And eyes bright and shining;/With low shoulders and white skin].

Similarly to the narrative about Constance, where whiteness symbolizes innocence and deep spirituality, it acquires a racial dimension here, since the sultan's dark tan is continuously underlined in such passages as "þan come þe soudan, þat was blac" (799). The princess enhances that association when she dresses in white, as when she "com clad in palle" (220) before laying herself on the altar of truce between Christians and Muslims. Her black-skinned spouse embodies everything she does not stand for, in accordance with the colonial discourse primarily acting on the level of such clear-cut binary divisions as center/margin, white/black, or colonizer/colonized.[23] Characteristically, numerous accounts about the Marvels of the East include Ethiopians as yet another monstrous race, as exemplified by the chronologically late but highly popular account in *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, derivative in nature as it is.[24] The sultan's black skin makes him disturbingly similar to the monstrous races, repulsive in their menacingly unfathomable nature.

The image of his bestiality discernible on the level of physicality is complemented by his comportment. What Jeffrey Jerome Cohen summarizes as Saracens' "monstrous, racialized flesh" acquires a fuller form in the descriptions of how the "soudan fers" (74) acts when enraged.[25] His bestiality astonishes even his own servants, who withdraw from his sight for fear of being slain, as it happens with humans in confrontation with wild animals:

When þe soudan þis wordes herd,
Also a wilde bore he ferd;
His robe he rent adoun;

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[23] Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies…*, p. 207.

[24] See *The Travels of Sir John de Mandeville*, trans. and ed. C.W.R.D. Moseley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 137.

[25] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 191.

His here he rent of heued & berd.
He schuld venge him wiþ his swerd,
He swore bi seyn Mahoun.
þe table so heteliche he smot
It fel into þe flore fot-hot,
& loked as a lyoun.
Al þat he rauȝt he smot doun riȝt;
Seriaunt, squier, clerk & krigt
Boþe erl & baroun.

(97—107)

[When the sultan heard that word/Like a wild boar he raged;/He rent down his robe;/He rent his hair of head and beard./He wanted to revenge himself with his sword,/He swore by Saint Mahound./He smote the table so violently/It fell on the feet rashly,/And he looked like a lion/He smote downright everybody he reached/A servant, a squire, a clerk, and a knight/Both an earl and a baron].

The sultan does not spare any representatives of higher social strata: his violence is directed indiscriminately against those who surround him. His irrational raving transmogrifies him into a senseless beast, similar to a lion only if we consider the negative symbolism of that animal, often put on a par with a leopard rather than presented exclusively as a noble figure in medieval heraldic emblems. For the Church Fathers, to mention only St Augustine, the lion stood for untamed fierceness, brutal violence, and ruthlessness in relation to more civilized creatures.[26] The comparison of the sultan to the animal must be situated within that tradition, which gave room to the positive image of a lion as a symbol of royalty only later.

After the (insincere) conversion of the princess to Islam the couple conceives a child:

þat leuedi, so feir & so fre,
Was wiþ his lord bot moneþes thre
þan he gat hir wiþ childe.

(565—567)

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[26] Lisa Verner points to the lion in *Liber Monstrorum* as an animal only imagined to be the king of beasts; see Lisa Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 108.

[That lady, so fair and free,/Was with her lord/Only three months/When he begot a child on her.]

Thus she practices the virtue of wifely obedience so ardently recommended in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, even when the husband is so inhuman that no communication with him is feasible. Moreover, the princess is granted a chance to mother their child in the future, a circumstance conducive to transformation of their mutual relations. As was stated earlier, the progeny of such mixed couples, whose differences appeared, using a modern phrase, initially irreconcilable, usually functioned as a common denominator in interracial and inter-religious marriages. The child born to the couple would reconcile the two and bring permanent peace in the world otherwise agitated by religious struggle.

Whatever role their future offspring will play, the conception is described as a sacrilegious act committed on the innocent princess, or else as another instance of bestial violence on the part of the sultan. Furthermore, the product of that coupling disappoints all that see it after birth. It becomes a gruesome demonstration of its biracial origin. It takes to the extreme the usual image of the child from a mixed marriage, uncanny in its physicality composed out of conflicting elements. While the mixed Muslim and Christian descent of Digenes Acrites from the eleventh-century Byzantine proto-romance was only signaled in his name, "Twyborn",[27] the child in *The King of Tars* terrifies the beholders with its bodily incompleteness and visible lack of a definable identity:

> & when þe child was ybore
> Wel sori women were þerfore,
> For lim no hadde it non.
> Bot as a rond of flesche yschore
> In chaumber it lay hem bifore
> Wiþouten blod & bon.
> For sorwe þe leuedi wald dye
> For it hadde noiþer nose no eye,

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[27] For a further discussion of the biracial and inter-faith origin and its results in *Digenes Acrites* see Roderick Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 32—51.

Bot lay ded as þe ston.
þe soudan com to chaumber þat tide,
& wiþ his wiif he gan to chide
þat wo was hir bigon.

"O Dame," he seyd biforn,
"Oȝain mi godes þou art forsworn,
Wiþ riȝt resoun y preue:
 þe childe þat is here of þe born
Boþe lim & lif it is forlorn
Alle þurth þi fals bileue.
                    (577—594)

[When the child was born/The women were very sorry/Since it had no limbs/But like a lump cut off from flesh/It lay before them in the chamber/Without blood or bones./The lady wanted to die out of sorrow/For it had neither a nose nor eyes,/But it lay dead like a stone./On that hour the sultan came into the chamber,/And he began to chide his wife/That woe began because of her.
"O Lady," he said before her,/Against my gods you have foresworn,/With the right reason and prayer:/The child that is here of thee born/Is devoid of both limbs and life/All because of your false beliefs.]

The lump-like quality of the infant's body is thus customarily blamed on the mother, even though it is the begetter of the child that represents racial alterity. For the sultan, however, the lump-like infant exposes its mother's false conversion rather than his own ethnic difference. The child is monstrous as it both visualizes the principle of excess (through the exorbitant amount of flesh) and that of insufficiency (through no form controlling the fluid matter, which results in carnal shapelessness). If, according to Aristotle, an authority for the medieval natural scientists, a mother (contributing to procreation through *matrix*) endows her infant with the matter, while the form is guaranteed by the father, in the romance in question it is the paternal function that is not fulfilled well. The shapeless child thus demonstrates deficiency on the part of the sultan, who was unable to bring life to the otherwise lifeless matter. The couple's offspring is born dead, since the principle of life has not been bestowed on it by the Muslim progenitor. Such a reading of the monstrosity (since deformity has to be interpreted like a text) is subtly indicated by the princess, who sug-

gests testing the power of accordingly Muslim divinities and Christian God, since "þe child was ȝeten bitven ous to" (604). In the mode presaging the rejection of anti-feminist stereotypes attributing the fault to any monster's mother, she suggests the sultan's possible role in the monstrous birth of their scion.

The sultan's perspective on the source of his offspring's deformity stands disconcertingly close to the view on monstrosity as a form of punishment for the parents, even if the false conversion he mentions is that into Islam. Nonetheless, the sinfulness of the couple does not have to determine the child's form for good. Although in Christianity it is a possible indicator of godlessness or transgression on the part of the infant's parents, it may just as well constitute an opportunity for the divinity demonstrating his mercy towards the sinners. Hildegard von Bingen's *summa, Scivias* (with its full title being *Scito Vias Domini*, "know the ways of the Lord"), includes a vision of monstrous children inviting God to transform them by means of a miracle. The child not only demonstrates the divine omnipotence, but also creates a situation propitious for demonstrating the potency of the Creator. As God voices that project:

> Often also I let these strange births take place among people for My glory and that of my saints, so that those who are thus deformed are restored to health by help of my elect; My name may be more ardently glorified among people.[28]

Deformed infants are thus put on a par with the disabled older children and adults from the Gospel on whom Jesus (and subsequently the saints) worked miracles. That perspective on (children's) deformity expands the positive view on the phenomenon of monstrosity: the monster does not exclusively have the function of displaying the inscrutable design of the Lord, but also that of allowing him to strengthen the faith of the believers through the wonders that he may work. As numerous hagiographic legends have it, the sacrament of baptism remains the primary event propitious for transformation. In those accounts it indeed becomes the point at which the child's life starts. Then the life he or she lived before the

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[28] Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Culomba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), p. 119.

sacrament is undermined: it is more similar to near-death than the real life whose advent is announced by the christening.

With regard to medieval romances, Lee C. Ramsey remarks that baptism does not have to be crucial for the plot and the characters' predicament, to broach only the secondary role of the sacrament in *Bevis of Hamptoun*.[29] Nevertheless, in *The King of Tars* its role is pivotal: it constitutes a turning point in the narrative as the child's body is transformed into matter endowed with a shape. The remedial power of the sacrament manifests itself in "limes as hole & fere" (705) that the sultan's scion acquires. His initial bestiality, visible on the level of physicality, now changes into full humanity. The anonymous author must have been familiar with the legend deriving from Pliny's *Natural History* and continued in medieval bestiaries, which described bear cubs as shapeless creatures licked into a form by their mother.[30] The child in the thirteenth-century romance initially resembles the bear's young from the legend, even if the myth of the cubs' incompleteness before their mother endows them with a form was frequently forgotten by medieval authors. The authors' knowledge or, alternatively, ignorance of that legend may have resulted in the etymological confusion between *ursus* and *hirsutus.* Quoting Perryman, "one narrator, familiar with bestiary material, thinks of the child as a formless lump, the other, as partly rough and hairy, and the third merely as part animal".[31]

The sacrament demonstrates the potency of Christianity, as contrasted with the impotence of Muslim gods to whom the sultan initially prays. The princess thus expresses her truly devout trust in the divinity: "þe Fader, þat is ful of miȝt,/Mi sorwe schal me slake" [the Father, who is mighty,/ Shall spare me my sorrow] (758—759). The sacrament produces an infant commented on as "feirer child miȝt non be bore" [a fairer child might not be born] (781), a materialization of moral virtue. The message of the poem appears to be a pure product of ideology, rightly classified by Nicola

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[29] Lee C. Ramsey writes about "a bit surprising … casualness with which [the romance — A.C.] treats a Christian sacrament in the midst of the Middle Ages" and "the humourousness of the scene when the giant Escopart is to be baptized, but cannot enter the font"; see Lee C. Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances*: *Popular Literature in Medieval England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 51.

[30] Perryman, "Introduction" in: *The King of Tars…*, pp. 1—69.

[31] Ibidem.

McDonald as one of the "pulp fictions" of medieval English culture. In the romance the sacrament affects not only the soul, but also the bodies of newly baptized Christians, while here it didactically produces an infant as beautiful as its non-heathen mother. The lump "lay stille as ston" (639) when the sultan prayed to his gods, whereas the transformation into a living infant demonstrated what Edward Said once termed "the lifelessness of Islam".[32] The monstrous body of the couple's son thus displayed the difference between Muslim religion and Christianity adequately and questioned the very possibility of unconverted Saracens producing offspring alive in both body and spirit.

The spiritual deficiency is accompanied by the cognitive one, since the lifeless infant lacks not only limbs, but also eyes: it has "no eyȝen forto se" (750). It is unable to move or develop the frail links that potentially connect it with the outside world in any other way. The state into which his father's "infidel" identity has thrust it stunts both its physical and mental development. His somnolent condition has to be overcome somehow: a more potent agent than his own parents has to tear him out of the sleep in which he was born. The princess describes the state of affairs to the only priest in the country, till then imprisoned by the sultan, as the one in which her child has to "wiþ lim & liif to wake" (762). The metaphor of somnolence as opposed to wakening lucidly summarizes the outlook on the two religions that the two parents represent.

The newly acquired Christian identity of the child connects Christianity and Islam, as the name John that the child is baptized with reveals. The outward justification is that the name is given "in worþship of the day/& when þat it cristned was" (774—775). Nonetheless, St John as the patron saint of the Wild Folk inhabiting the woods and thus able to attain holiness in seclusion, who will be discussed in more detail in the ensuing section of this work, implies an affinity between the child and his father, bestial in his senseless rage. "Missomer" (769), as firstly the time of pagan rites and only later a Christian celebration, suggests the child's liminal origin, his coming in between the "rational" Christianity and irrational "paganism". The day of the baptism itself combines the two religious worlds, since it is

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[32] Other qualities attributed to the Orient were its timelessness and forcelessness; see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. 241.

a pagan holiday disguised as a Christian one.[33] Liminality of the monster is thus transformed into that of a child whose body is normative, but his identity has to be situated in between the opposites.

The child's unexpected bodily harmony ("wele schapen it was wiþalle") (783) displays the beauty which which has the new religion as its source, and also manifests the benefits of being a Christian. The attractive carnality constitutes an encouragement to conversion directed to the father. His gradual familiarization with the idea leads to forming an unusual relationship with the priest, who finally grants his own name to the sultan in the mode reminiscent of fathers transferring their names to their sons for the sake of symbolic immortality. In *The King of Tars* "Cleophas" (925) becomes the name the two of them share from the point when the sultan undergoes the sacrament. After appropriation by Christianity through the baptismal name there comes a certain "colonization" of the sultan's body, which miraculously turns white:

> His hide, þat blac & loþly was,
> Al white bicom, þurth Godes gras,
> & clere wiþouten blame.
> (928—930)

[His skin, which was black and loathly,/Became all white, through God's grace/ And clear without blemish.]

Christianity usurps the sultan's body as much as it does his soul, which is visible in his newly-acquired identity: that of the priest's symbolic progeny. Religious alterity erased from his physicality entails the consequent erasure of any indices of racial difference. The skin, repulsive in its dark tan and blemish resulting from it, whitens in order to demonstrate the fullness of the sultan's transformation. He sheds the Muslim identity as if it constituted a set of worn-off garments, unsuitable for further use. Baptism marks a rebirth also in this case and symbolically causes the

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[33] The paganism of Muslims was an idea generally shared by medieval Europeans; at best they perceived Saracens as pagan in the same sense as the ancients were, that is ignorant of the Christian God not entirely out of their own fault; see Susan Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism and Heresy in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*" *Exemplaria*, vol. 8, No. 1 (1996), pp. 59—96.

sultan to shed his skin colour, marking the abandonment of the culture of his ancestors.

Lilian Hornstein places the narrative of the sultan's conversion and its physical consequences against the background of folktale narratives about *Elsternmenschen* or *enfants pies*: pied children, whose bodies are spotted black and white due to their mixed origin.[34] Apart from the literary representations of the phenomenon Hornstein notes that originally half-black and half-white figures appeared both in mythologies and in folklore. In the stories recorded in Wilhelm Grimm's *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* some characters even turned from black to white or at least half-white. At that point considerable scope should be devoted to such a "pied" character in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival,* a rewriting and continuation of Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal.*[35] Feirefiz, who is Parzival's half-brother and whose very name implies his skin colour(s), straightforwardly indicates the benefits of conversion into Christianity and the ensuing alteration of one's position in the world. As his name indicates, he is *vair fils*, a "pied son", initially merely the product of a mixed marriage between oriental queen Belcane and French king Gahmuret.[36]

In contrast with the conception of the King of Tars' grandson, which was tantamount to a submissive subjection of the princess to her Saracen husband, Feirefiz is the product of a passionate relationship embracing the element of oriental lasciviousness verging on lechery. The voluptuous queen mothers a son whose skin colour resembles that of a magpie. Interestingly, Feirefiz's body materializes the symbolism of treachery and valour that Wolfram broaches in the first paragraph of his romance:

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[34] Lilian Hornstein, "A Folklore Theme in *The King of Tars*", *Philological Quarterly*, vol. 20 (1941), pp. 82—87.

[35] Roger Sherman Loomis' *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* contains a still valid introduction to Wolfram's romance; see Otto Springer, "Wolfram's *Parzival*" in: *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 218—250.

[36] *Vair fils,* "pied son", is identified as the etymological source of "Feirefiz" by Hatto; see Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. A.T. Hatto (London: Penguin, 1980), p. 40; yet, Muriel Kinney has shown that *vair* means "expressive", not "speckled"; see Muriel Kinney, "*Vair* and Related Words: A Study in Semantics", *Romanic Review*, vol. 10 (1919), pp. 322—363.

> gesmæhet unde gezieret
> ist, swâ sich parrieret
> unverzaget mannes muot,
> als agelstern varwe tuot.
> der mac dennoch wesen geil:
> wand an im sint beidiu teil,
> des himels und der helle.
> der unstæte geselle
> hât die swarzen varwe gar,
> und wirt och nâch der vinster var:
> sô habet sich an die blanken
> der mit stæten gedanken.
>
> (I: 1: 2—14) [37]

[Shame and honour clash where the courage of a steadfast man is motley like the magpie. But such a man may yet make merry, for Heaven and Hell have equal part in him. Infidelity's friend is black all over and takes on a murky hue, while the man of loyal temper holds to the white] (15).[38]

The motley quality of human nature hinges on the simplistic colour symbolism, in accordance with which whiteness stands for virtue, while blackness denotes nothing else but weakness or even vice. Hence although Feirefiz appears late in the plot, he materializes general wisdom about humans, be they white, black, or of mixed colour, like him. His body becomes a symbol rather than an entity which has to undergo transformation. As it occurred in the case of some monstrous offspring, the permanence of his physicality constitutes a more valuable presence due to its philosophical dimension than if it was a temporary stage, altered through a miracle.

The whole poem demonstrates its author's obsession with skin colour and race, if one insists on using the word occurring in the translation of *Parzival*.[39] As for the poem's Orientalism, it is an innovative element

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[37] Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival. Text und Übersetzung*, ed. Karl Lachmann, trans. Peter Knecht (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003); all the quotations from the original will come from that edition.

[38] The translation of the original into English will be taken from: Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, trans. A.T. Hatto; page numbers will be given in brackets.

[39] The usage of the term "race" in reference to medieval culture is slightly anachronistic, as Robert Bartlett once convincingly argued; furthermore, Margo Hendricks dem-

in comparison with Chrétien's earlier version of the Grail legend, which must have been introduced by Wolfram in order to satisfy the demands of his patron, Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia, a nobleman with a penchant for exotic narratives.[40] Still, Wolfram does not limit himself to treating the Oriental as an adornment of the main body of the plot. On the contrary, the matters set in the East are crucial for the poem's structure. The court of the oriental queen Belacane that the Frankish king Gahmuret visits must accordingly be replete with "manege tunkele frouwen… nâch rabens varwe was ir schîn" (I: 20, 4—6) [many dusky ladies … whose colour resembled the raven's] (23). Belacane in turn swiftly remarks that Gahmuret's skin "ist anders denne wir gevar" (I: 22, 8) [is a different colour from ours] (24). Similarly to clothes, skin denotes certain qualities, depending on the skin colour prevalent in a given group. Nevertheless, the passionate love that develops between the king and the queen overcomes those differences. In that sense Feirefiz will be another child reconciling the two religions, and, in a more all-encompassing mode, two cultures.

The romance indicates that the colour symbolism was an inseparable part of every education, at least in Western Europe, which constitutes the setting for most of the plot. Light and Darkness obviously referred to the divine and the devilish, so the Satan was imagined as black-skinned himself. Gahmuret's Western wife Herzeloyde teaches the religious truth to their son Parzival with the following words:

> «sun, ich sage dirz âne spot.
> er ist noch liehter denne der tac,
> der antlitzes sich bewac
> nâch menschen antlitze.
> sun, merke eine witze,
> und flêhe in umbe dîne nôt:

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onstrated that the term did not function in the same mode as nowadays even as late as the Renaissance; see Robert Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 31, No. 1 (2001), pp. 39—56; see also Margo Hendricks, "Race: A Renaissance Category?" in: *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 690—698.

[40] A.T. Hatto, "An Introduction to a Second Reading" in: Eschenbach, *Parzival*, pp. 412—438.

> sîn triwe der werlde ie helfe bôt.
> sô heizet einr der helle wirt:
> der ist swarz, untriwe in niht verbirt.
> von dem kêr dîne gedanke,
> und och von zwîvels wanke.»
> sîn muoter underschiet im gar
> daz vinster unt daz lieht gevar.
>   (III: 119, 18—30)

['He Who took on a shape in the likeness of Man is brighter than the sun. My child, take this wise saying to heart: pray to Him when in need. … Then there is one called Lord of Hell. He is black, perfidy cleaves to him. Turn your thoughts away from him and treacherous despair.'
His mother told him about Light and Darkness and how different they are. This done, the nimble boy dashed off and far away] (71).

Traditional education of a young knight-to-be involves familiarizing him with the meaning of white and black skin and the essential nature of those differences. Nevertheless, the intolerance of such distinctions is not adopted for good within that culture, since the noble character of a Saracen may alter the stereotypical image and gain the acceptance of Europeans. Gahmuret abandons his oriental mistress Belacane out of "fickleness", not due to any revulsion caused by her physicality: "[…] nu wænt manc ungewisser man/daz mich ir swerze jagte dane:/die sah ich für die sunnen ane./ir wîplich prîs mir füeget leit:/si ist [ein] bukel ob der werdekeit./Einz undz ander muoz ich klagen:/ich sach mîns bruoder wâpen tragen/ mit ûf kêrtem orte" (II: 91, 4—12) [Now many an ignorant fellow may think that it was her black skin I ran away from, but in my eyes she was as bright as the sun! The thought of her womanly excellence afflicts me, for if noblesse were a shield she would be its centre-piece] (56). The queen mothers a child, whose skin will act as a recognition mark for the all-white characters.

Characteristically, Herzeloyde convinces Gahmuret that he should abandon the thought of any future relations with Belacane. She reminds him of baptism as a condition indispensable for marital love: "«Ir sult die Mœrinne/lân durch mîne minne./des toufes segen hât bezzer kraft./ nu ânet iuch der heidenschaft,/und minnet mich nâch unser ê:/wan mirst

nâch iwerr minne wê" (II: 94, 11—16) [In the Sacrament of Baptism there is greater virtue. Now divorce yourself from heathenry and love me as our rites enjoin, for I am desperately in love with you] (57). Being Christian thus distinguishes Herzeloyde as the superior of the two beloveds of the knight. The two-fold structure in terms of characterization follows. The two women, Belacane and Herzeloyde, almost simultaneously give birth to Gahmuret's two sons, who accordingly grow up to represent the ideal of chivalric masculinity, respectively in the Orient and in France.[41] Ethnic difference does not impede their development as two aspects of one and the same identity type. Their selves are closer to each other than the affinity of two half-brothers would suggest.[42] The surroundings in which they grow mature do not determine them considerably: blood happens to be stronger than influences from the outside world. Feirefiz will quickly acquire the fame of an Angevin despite his "oriental" physicality.

Gahmuret's death in battle is marked by Herzeloyde's frenzied "baptism" that she subjects herself to, perhaps so as to stress her superiority over the oriental mistress once abandoned by her lover. By sprinkling herself with milk she symbolically confirms the validity of her widowhood. The widowed Frankish queen thus announces the repeated sacrament: "… 'du bist von triwen komn./het ich des toufes niht genomn,/du wærest wol mîns toufes zil./ich sol mich begiezen vil/mit dir und mit den ougen,/offenlîch und tougen:/wande ich wil Gahmureten klagn' (II: 111, 7—13) [Milk, how loyal of you to have come! Were I not baptized already you would have marked my christening! Often now, I shall sprinkle myself with you, as with my tears, both alone and in the presence of others, for I shall mourn for Gahmuret] (65). The mysterious action leads to the strengthening of the "black/white" dichotomy and results in emphasizing

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[41] It has to be noted that the Eastern culture was not devoid of chivalric ideals; the Arabic equivalent of *chansons de geste, sirah,* also known as "chivalric romances", involve numerous characters whose valiancy and belligerence may be put on a par with those manifested by Christian knights; on *sirah* as a genre see Danuta Madeyska, *Poetics of the Sirah*: *A Study of the Arabic Chivalrous Romance* (Warszawa: Academic Publishing House Dialog, 2001).

[42] Interestingly, Otto Springer even calls Feirefiz Parzival's "foil on the religious plane"; Otto Springer, "Wolfram's *Parzival*" in: *Arthurian Literature…*, pp. 218—250.

Herzeloyde's Christianity. She is capable of remedying her own sorrow through quasi-religious procedures and she demonstrates that if she were to choose again, she would gladly be baptized. Both religion and maternity that endows her with milk bring her succour in the otherwise mournful circumstances of bereavement.

Feirefiz's mixed origin inscribes itself on his body in the mode similar to monstrosity marking the bodies of deformed children. The human body may easily undergo a metaphorization into writing space; Carolyn Dinshaw perceives a distinct relationship particularly between medieval texts, frequently reproduced on parchment, and human bodies which may also be inscribed with a meaning:

> Literary production takes place on bodies — on the animal skins made into pages on cursed scribes' scalps — and the rubbing and scraping that must be done to both suggests a figurative identification here between the human body and the manuscript page, the text.[43]

If texts were once written on animals' bodies, then human bodies could also be conveyors of words or, more generally, signs. Thus from that vantage point there exists a direct relationship between medieval literary production and carnality. Feirefiz's body becomes very directly inscribed with ethnic difference. Moreover, Wolfram even puts the simile reminiscent of such interpretation into the mouth of Parzival, who narrates the legendary appearance of the Saracen hero by stating the following about his complexion: "…als ein geschriben permint,/swarz und blanc her unde dâ" (XV: 747, 26—27) [It is like a parchment, with writing, …black and white, in patches] (372). The Infidel's skin resembles a manuscript to be deciphered by its readers. Significantly, the climax of the scene comes when the description is followed by identification "I am he" uttered by the so-far mysterious interlocutor.

Feirefiz, no longer an anonymous Infidel, continuously appears before our eyes as someone "beidiu swarz unde wîz/über al sîn vel" (XV: 758, 17—18) [a motley man] (377) and the one who is "vêch gemâl" (XVI: 810, 10) [particoloured] (402). The narrator's obsession with the unusual

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[43] Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Politics* (Madison, Wiscousin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 4.

physicality becomes transparent when the image of the Saracen's sudden pallor is conveyed in detail: "… sîn/geselle in pînen was,/des plankiu mâl gar wurden bleich,/sô daz im hôher muot gesweich" (XVI: 811, 18—20) [From the pallor of Feirefiz's white patches, handsome Anfortas saw that his companion was in torment and that his spirit had abandoned him] (403). If only some parts of the skin go pale, they stand for that part of his personality which is "white": civilized and emotionally reacting to the beauty of the ladies. Racial and religious intermingling thus indubitably marks the Saracen's character and his mode of perceiving the world. He represents a new species, which makes him an outsider in both of the communities he belongs to.

Nevertheless, apart from representing the disquieting consequences of inter-faith unions, the pied quality of the Saracen's skin and hair also functions as yet another recognition mark, a device recurrent in medieval romance. Due to such signs the once abandoned children could be reunited with their families and the lost progeny could be found and reincorporated into the units grounded on the bonds of blood. Feirefiz's body thus demonstrates his association with the Angevin dynasty and testifies to the validity of his genealogical claim. Consequently, the deformity visible on the level of skin and hair colour constitutes a quality which gives him an advantage over those whose bodies do not allow them to lay claim to real political power. The straightforward outlook on multi-coloured skin as a mark of sinfulness resulting from half-heathen origin becomes even more complicated at that point.[44] The complexity of Saracens' image has also been noticed in *The King of Tars*, where Siobhain Bly Calkin traces the sultan's "amor de lonh", a love born out of hearsay, and the qualities and behaviour patterns that the Christians and the Saracens share: the conviction that a married couple should represent a uniform religiousness. Moreover, Calkin stresses the moments which make the princess

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[44] The obsession with race and the sinfulness related to it was continued by such medievalizing twentieth-century authors as J.R.R. Tolkien; Andrzej Wicher notices a concern with the characters' skin and genealogy, but also their juxtaposition with "dark forces" in his study *Some Aspects of "Racism" in J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings"*; see Andrzej Wicher, "Some Aspects of 'Racism' in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*" in: *Introducing South African Writing*, eds. Zbigniew Białas and Krzysztof Kowalczyk (Cieszyn: Wydawnictwo Proart, 1992), pp. 35—44.

amazingly similar to the Muslims.[45] With regards to Feirefiz, the character eludes homogeneity and cannot be defined by means of binary distinctions into sinful/spotless, or sensuous/innocent.

His is a body attracting the Frankish ladies due to its irresistible charm, but also its ethnic origin. The oriental desire is at play again in projecting the erotic dreams of the Westerners onto the body of a Saracen, simultaneously repulsive in its alleged transgression and appealing in its physical and spiritual difference. The Western ladies are fascinated with the ethnically different Feirefiz, which, however, results in a Christian marriage rather than sinful sexual practices related to the stereotype of oriental transgression and of the widespread quality of incest in that part of the world. Still, the marriage to a Frankish aristocratic lady has to be validated through Feirefiz's baptism, also functioning as a means of safeguarding the health of the couple's future progeny.

A reader familiar with Hildegard von Bingen's vision of baptism should expect another miracle of conversion here, visible on the level of the convert's physicality. In Book II of Vision Three of *Scivias* Hildegard introduces a personification of Ecclesia as a universal mother to all people.[46] In the image in question those who have been living in the darkness of paganism, inscribing itself on their bodies in the form of physical blackness of their skin, are now willing to convert to Christianity. Those converts or catechumens are represented as literally black children who enter Ecclesia's womb in order to be reborn. Once they are baptized, they emerge through her mouth and shed their dark skin in order to wear white garments of initiation, again confirming a similarity between inscription with monstrosity and that conducted by dint of clothing. Ecclesia's mouth symbolizes the words of blessing and the breath of the Spirit, as Barbara J. Newman interprets that scene.[47] The sacrament constitutes a form of rebirth, while the dark skin discarded in the manner old clothes usually are constitutes an ostensive sign of sinfulness that has to be abandoned. In a fairly racist manner, if we use the term despite its anachronism, white

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[45]   Siobhain Bly Calkin, *Saracens and the Making of English Identity*: *The Auchinleck Manuscript* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 109 *et passim*.

[46]   Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1990), pp. 169—185.

[47]   See Barbara J. Newman, "Introduction" in: Bingen, *Scivias…*, pp. 9—53.

skin constitutes a prize for the righteous ones who do not have to carry the garb of utter negativity any more. Accordingly, if Ecclesia is a mother, all humans should be reunited with her in the end or they should at least aspire to it.

Feirefiz's baptism completes his process of gradual Westernization. Initially he only maintained he was an Angevin, while in the end he became Parzival's equal. The sacrament's salutary qualities are presented on the basis of the symbolism of water. As the aged, grey-haired priest preaches to the Saracen:

> der sprach "ir sult gelouben,
> iwerr sêle den tiuvel rouben,
> an den hôhsten got al eine,
> des drîvalt ist gemeine
> und al gelîche gurbort.
> got ist mensch und sîns vater wort.
> sît er ist vater unde kint,
> die al gelîche geêret sint,
> eben hêre sîme geiste,
> mit der drîer volleiste
> wert iu diz wazzer heidenschaft,
> mit der Trinitâte kraft.
> ime wazzer er ze toufe gienc,
> von dem Adâm antlütze enpfienc.
> von wazzer boume sint gesaft.
> wazzer früht al die geschaft,
> der man für crêatiure giht.
> mit dem wazzer man gesiht.
> wazzer gît maneger sêle schîn,
> daz die engl niht liehter dorften sîn."
>   (XVI: 817, 11—30)

["you must believe in the One and Only God on High," he said, "and snatch your soul from the Devil. God's trinity gives its yield universally, and in even measure. God is Man and His Father's Word. He is Father and Son, Who are held equal honour together with His Spirit, with the furtherance of all Three this water will fend off heathenry from you. With the power of the Trinity He from Whom Adam took his likeness entered the water for His baptism. Trees have sap from water. Water

fecundates all things made that are called "creature". We see by means of water. Water gives many things a splendour not to be outshone by the Angels.] (405)

The heathen nature of the one being baptized continuously comes into play, since he subjects himself to the procedure for the love of an alluring lady. The crucial part of the christening is the baptismal robe, which symbolically whitens Feirefiz's skin despite the lack of any miraculous transformation: "As soon as the Infidel had been baptized and the baptismal robing was over, they supplied him with the young lady, that is, they gave him Frimutel's daughter, an event for which he had waited with cruel impatience" (406). Baptism endows the convert with not only a spiritual life, but also with the spiritual eyesight, allowing Feirefiz to discern the Grail at last. The ultimate reward comes last: Feirefiz will be granted the privilege of fathering the legendary Prester John, the only Christian ruler in the otherwise pagan and dissolute East. Characteristically, the land of Prester John will be customarily populated with monstrous species previously described in *Liber Monstrorum* and the bestiaries.

Drawing on the image of Synagoga, coexistent with Ecclesia due to being its negative counterpart in visual arts, Christine M. Rose paralleled ethnic difference symbolized by the mother of Judaism in *Scivias* with the gesture of "othering" the two mothers-in-law from *The Man of Law's Tale*.[48] Hildegard differentiated the perspective on Judaism by presenting it not exclusively as a symbolic figure blindfolded, hence blind to the truth of salvation, but also as the mother of Christians: as the religion from which Christianity originated. Nevertheless, the evil mothers-in-law in Chaucer resemble Synagoga as opposed to Ecclesia with the former's all dark characteristics rather than by being also the source of good in the narrative. According to Rose the similarity between Hildegard's metaphor of Judaism and the Constance group, striking as it may be, goes even further. Synagoga's skin is multi-coloured, while the body of Maurice from Chaucer's tale might also be pied due to his inter-faith descent.[49]

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[48] Christine M. Rose, "The Jewish Mother-in-Law: Synagoga and The *Man of Law's Tale*" in: *Chaucer and the Jews*: *Sources, Contexts, Meanings*, ed. Sheila Delany (New York and London: Routledge: 2002), pp. 3—24.

[49] Ibidem.

Numerous figures from medieval literature, not merely romances, repeat the trope of differentiated origin as the source of otherness. Biracial origin does not necessarily lead to monstrosity and does not exclusively signify punishment for the parents' sins. Yet, it is a very potent metaphor of otherness, equivocal and multi-dimensional. Furthermore, deformity becomes an individual sign that has to be read in a specific context. The sign of not only negativity, it conveys complex messages about the variegated nature of the world, material and spiritual. Jane Gilbert, however, claims that in *The King of Tars* primary importance is attached to the metamorphosis of the adult Muslim, not to that of his lump-like offspring.[50] The narratives about otherness and monstrosity thus demonstrate their didactic and, going even further in our judgment, ideological quality. Monsters are instruments for teaching the truth of salvation, while the truth is juxtaposed with the lifelessness of Islam. Christianity brings form to the converts, which often manifests itself on their, otherwise monstrous, bodies.

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[50] Jane Gilbert, "Unnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in *The King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*" in: *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain. Essays for Felicity Riddy*, eds. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol M. Meale, and Lesley Johnson (Turhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 329—344.

Chapter Four

From a Demonic to a Canine Self:
Moral Depravity and Holiness in *Sir Gowther*

"…he followed in the paths of monstrosity…"

Umberto Eco *The Name of the Rose*[1]

In her study *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages* Lisa Verner documents a certain progress in the medieval tradition of representing and interpreting monsters. She describes antiquity and the early Middle Ages as the era of fascination with the monsters' ability to materialize divine wisdom and spirituality, while the later Middle Ages were marked by the tendency to depict individual virtues and vices by dint of deformity.[2] The virtues and vices in question would be those characterizing not only the monster's parents, punished for their religion or transgressions by the birth of deformed offspring, but also the crimes committed by the offspring themselves. Inborn monstrosity would thus be followed by evil deeds resulting from that primary unnaturalness. The situation when a natural-born monster certifies that identity through his iniquitous actions would confirm the truthfulness of the popular lore relating outer ugliness to the soul within: physical unattractiveness was customarily identified as a sign of inner defectiveness. Obviously, no medieval philosophers claimed that there indeed existed such a regularity.[3] On the contrary, at times a lack of physical attractiveness served as a demonstration of the

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[1] Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 81.

[2] Lisa Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), p. 8.

[3] See, for example, the texts collected in Tatarkiewicz's anthology; Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Historia estetyki* [*The History of Aesthetics*], vol. 2, *Estetyka średniowieczna* [*Medieval Aesthetics*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Arkady, 1988).

conviction that spiritual beauty could exist also in a deformed body. Spirituality would thus transcend the material form and triumph over the lifeless matter, imperfect as it oftentimes was. As the epigrammatic quotation above demonstrates, monstrosity may be viewed as merely a path that is to a certain extent chosen, instead of being a predicament one is sentenced to if one is born physically monstrous. Paraphrasing the Bible, the path of iniquity is straight, but it leads to damnation, while the path of virtue tends to be tortuous, but eternal reward might be expected at its end.

As it has already been noted here, Ambroise Paré repeated after his predecessors the long list of factors generating monstrosity. One of them was the demonic influence resulting in what would be termed as the Devil Child type. This outlook on demons in the epoch emerges from visual arts, where fiends represent yet another kind of racial alterity due to their disfigurement and dark complexion, usually indicating Jewish or Saracen identity.[4] Characteristically, demons were represented as physically existing in the world, and are thus similar to the monsters inhabiting the regions at the ends of the earth, elusive as such existence was. Accordingly, if demons were as real as ethnic others and acquired a similar status to them in medieval imagination, intercourse with demonic creatures could be tantamount to miscegenation and could therefore produce disturbingly unnatural offspring. Interestingly, demons provoked even more anxiety in medieval audiences than the more ambivalent figures of ethnic others, perhaps due to their unfathomable nature and the direct spiritual peril posed by them. Demons were viewed as directly related to the devil and thus inscribing themselves into the very same type of anxiety that combined the fear of the devil with that of darkness as a possible site of evil.[5]

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[4] Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews*: *Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 62.

[5] It has to be noted that darkness enveloped most of the households during long periods, hence that anxiety was a permanent element of the psychology of humans at the time; see Jean Delumeau, *La peur en occident* (*XIVe- XVIIIe siècles*). *Une cité assiégée* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1978); for a discussion of the demonic in the late medieval visual arts and its relation to the question of evil see Claude Peltraut, "Le monstrueux dans l'iconographie du démoniaque, du XIV au XVIe siècle" in: *Le monstrueux dans la litterature et la pensée anglaises*, ed. Nadia Rigaud (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1985), pp. 1—12.

Not only the devil, but also demons were believed in so commonly that already the Church Fathers had to account for their existence, to take only the theories of St Augustine or St Thomas Aquinas. St Augustine was definitely more hesitant about whether demons were real or not than was Aquinas:

> ... it is widely reported that Silvani and Pans, commonly called *incubi*, have often behaved improperly towards women, lusting after them and achieving intercourse with them. These reports are confirmed by many people, either from their own experience or from the accounts from the experience of others, whose reliability there is no occasion to doubt. Then there is the story that certain demons, whom the Gauls call Dusii, constantly and successfully attempt this indecency. This is asserted by so many witnesses of such a character that it would seem an impertinence to deny it. Hence I would not venture a conclusive statement on the question whether some spirits with bodies of air (an element which even when set in motion by a fan is felt by the bodily sense of touch) can also experience this lust and so can mate, in whatever way they can, with women, who feel their embraces.[6]

Even though Augustine had some doubts about the authenticity of those accounts, it was already widely believed then that there existed two sorts of demons: *incubi*, male demons impregnating women by adopting the shape of humans and using their semen, and *succubae*, who would seduce men by temporarily acquiring the form of highly attractive women. Aquinas provided his contemporaries with a logical explanation of demons' stratagems when he wrote that they were motivated by the envy of humans and he delineated the complex relationship between incubi and succubae. Incubi did not generate their own semen: they took it from living men who were deprived of it during the sexual intercourses with succubae. The human material would thus be transferred through the non-human intermediaries.[7] Consequently, the children of incubi and women

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[6] St Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 638.

[7] Thomas Aquinas, *Questiones de Potentia Dei*, quoted in: Andrea Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights*: *A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 166.

were not simply half-human, since their origin was far more complex. Even though the material constituting their body was all-human, the principle that engendered them was an otherworldly one, hence they had to be extraordinary at least in some aspects of their physicality, and also, at least in some cases, personality. The fear of incubi found their reflection in literature, to mention only the mysterious reference in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*.[8]

In the criticism of the subject it is widely maintained that the passage from *De Civitate Dei* devoted to incubi intends not only to account for the existence of demons, but also to dismiss the belief in giants as the progeny of women and angels. The influential tradition explicated the existence of those monsters as a result of the intermingling of *filii Dei* and *filiae hominum*.[9] In general terms the birth of a monstrous child would thus be a punishment for the woman if she succumbed to the temptation of satisfying her libido. One has to bear in mind that anti-feminist literature of the time (denoting here texts directed against the female sex) frequently referred to women being sexually insatiable and accordingly causing the downfall of men, who were more virtuous in their nature and hence more involved in the matters of the spirit than in those of the body.[10] Women were therefore seen as more susceptible to the lure of demons and, as a result, suspected of mothering demonic children instead of offspring by their lawfully wedded husbands. The theory of demonic influence on the reproduction of humans was structured around the religious discourse of the time. Demons were in that sense more related to Christian spirituality than to the world of magic *per se*.[11] Furthermore, there existed accounts

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[8] For an interpretation of that reference see Przemysław Mroczkowski, "Incubi and Friars" in: Przemysław Mroczkowski, *Chaucer to Chesterton*: *English Classics from Polish Perspective* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1996), pp. 167—169.

[9] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Gowther Among the Dogs: Becoming Human c. 1400" in: *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, eds. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1997), pp. 219—244.

[10] For excepts from the anti-feminist medieval literature see *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*: *An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. Alcuin Blamires (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), especially pp. 43—222.

[11] Peter Dinzelbacher discusses the devil and demons side by side, without distinguishing between religious and supernatural figures; see Peter Dinzelbacher, *Angst im*

of saints visited by demons intent on affecting humans' otherwise im-
peccable psyche through disturbing images, frequently those of seductive
women.

St Guthlac's *vitae* functioned in Old English literature in a number of
different versions. Felix's *Vita S. Guthlaci* existed in England through its
translation in London, BL, Cotton Vespasian D. xxi, whereas the Exeter
Book included two poems based on Felix's work, which are now known
as *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*.[12] St Guthlac was a saint who, particularly in
Guthlac A, resembled an Anglo-Saxon warrior more than the hermit he
aspired to be. He chose the life in a hermitage, where he still had to fight
against the demons trying to oust him from his post and therefore to make
him abandon the *vita contemplativa* in favour of *vita activa*. Hence he was
forced to follow the paradigm of *miles Cristi* so characteristic of the re-
ligious discourse of the time. Nevertheless, the mixture of contemplative
and active life Guthlac practised on Crowland, an uninhabited island situ-
ated close to Mercia and East Anglia, could be compared to the advice of
Do-Best in Passus XI of the C-Version of *Piers Plowman*, where Do-Well
and Do-Bet, allegorizing respectively *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*,
are rejected as less perfect ways of Christian life in comparison with the
combination of the two.[13]

Felix's *Vita S. Guthlaci* contains a highly puzzling description of the
demons' physicality, which resembles that of the monstrous races due
to the imagery signaling ethnic alterity: "For they were ferocious in
appearance, terrible in shape with great heads, long necks, thin faces,
yellow complexions, filthy beards, shaggy ears, wild foreheads, fierce

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Mittelalter. Teufels-, Todes- und Gotteserfahrung: *Mentalitätsgeschichte und Ikonogra-
phie* (Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1996).

[12] For a discussion of belligerent masculinity contrasted with holiness in *Guthlac A*
see Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis and London: Uni-
versity of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 116—153; Peter Dinzelbacher in turn discuss-
es the role of the demonic in the plot; see Peter Dinzelbacher, *Angst im Mittelalter…*,
pp. 46—49; the question of the manuscripts and the differences in the respective plots is
thoroughly examined in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*; see *The
Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, eds. Michael Lapidge, John Blair, Si-
mon Keynes, and Donald Scragg (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 222.

[13] See *The Vision of William Concerning Piers the Plowman by William Langland,
Text C*, ed. W.W. Skeat (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

eyes, foul mouths, horses' teeth, throats vomiting flames, twisted jaws, thick lips, strident voices, singed hair, fat cheeks, pigeon breasts, scabby thighs, knotty knees, crooked legs, swollen ankles, splay feet, spreading mouths, raucous cries. For they grew so terrible to hear with their mighty shriekings that they filled almost the whole intervening space between heaven and earth with their discordant bellowings."[14] The demons appear here as if their description originated from the record by an anthropologist accounting for the appearance and the mores of a tribe inhabiting remote regions of the world. The tribe's ways tend to be incomprehensible to the civilized onlookers, who fear their unpredictable comportment as much as admire their exotic quality. The demons produce uncultured noise easily contrastable with reverent silence, which terrifies Guthlac secluded in his place, where he emulates the Church Fathers and their contemplative life. The confrontation terminates with his victory confirming the superiority of Christianity, here also in quasimilitary terms.

As for the complex relationship between the belief in demons and Christianity, it might also be exemplified by the fact that medieval penitentiaries included *bestialitas* in their catalogues of the sins committed by humans. The term did not apply merely to sexual intercourse with animals, as the name itself might suggest, but it embraced all types of sexual intercourse with non-humans, including supernatural characters. Only as late as the sixteenth century did a separate term emerge: from then onwards the word *demonialitas* began to refer exclusively to the sin committed with otherwordly creatures.[15] Whatever the name applied to the act, there existed a belief that liaisons with incubi would result in monstrous births and the progeny of such couples would even look abnormal. In Slavic countries the most frequent description of a monstrous child would include such features as a big head and unnaturally large eyes, as Adam Krawiec notes. Moreover, he insists that the firm belief in a possibility of sexual intercourses with demons appeared as late as the twelfth century

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[14] *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p. 103.

[15] Joyce E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within*: *Animals in the Middle Ages*, quoted in: Adam Krawiec, *Seksualność w średniowiecznej Polsce* [*Sexuality in Medieval Poland*] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2000), p. 241.

due to the development of scholastics and the rise of the belief in purgatory.[16] Krawiec concludes that while the existence of purgatory implied that souls were material enough to physically suffer in the afterlife, demons began to be perceived as corporeal enough to have physical relations with humans.[17] Nevertheless, it has to be underlined at this point that the monsters resulting from such relationships were not altogether considered to be inferior: they were not to be blamed for their parents' sins and their monstrous origin did not necessarily result in moral depravity. As a result a monster, even though in most of the cases it was physically different, did not have to be morally defective.

The motif of demonic offspring was very quickly incorporated into literature and found its literary representation in romance. Lee C. Ramsey analyses this plot in some literary works and she pinpoints its existence in folktales, where a supernatural birth is often synonymous with a devil-birth. In *Chivalric Romances* due attention is devoted by Ramsey to *Richard le Coer de Lyon*, an early fourteenth-century romance where historical facts merge with folktale elements.[18] In the romance Richard, another Devil Child, combats the Saracen enemies by dint of directing against them the very method that was deemed to be typical of pagans and savages: cannibalism.[19] The telling gesture of unknowingly consuming young Muslim's flesh instead of pork and then deliberate feasting on Saracens' heads reveals that for medievals motivation was more significant than the action itself: according to the anonymous author a gruesome act does not require any criticism if it is intended to psychologically ravage religious Others, otherwise too threatening through their authority to be ignored. Richard's monstrosity is accordingly put to "good use", as his

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[16] Krawiec, *Seksualność w średniowiecznej Polsce…*, p. 241; on the emergence of the belief in purgatory see Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

[17] Krawiec, *Seksualność w średniowiecznej Polsce…*, pp. 241—242.

[18] For an edition of *Richard le Coer de Lyon* see: *Der mittelenglische versroman über Richard Löwenherz*, ed. Karl Brunner (Wien und Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumiller, 1913).

[19] The question of Richard's cannibalism has been scrutinized by Nicola McDonald; see Nicola McDonald, "Eating People and the Alimentary Logic of *Richard Coeur de Lion*" in: *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England*: *Essays in Popular Romance*, ed. Nicola McDonald (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 124—150.

barbarous acts edify Christian England and contribute to the formation of English national identity.[20]

Gowther, the title character from the thirteenth-century romance (known also in a fourteenth-century version) may be justifiably seen as yet another monstrous child, this time "misbore" [misborn] (971), to use the phrase from the accusation directed against Maurice in Gower's version of the Constance narrative, due to the demonic influence.[21] Uniqueness of the former literary character is stressed by Margaret Robson, who comments on it in the following mode: "I know of no other romance where the hero begins life as a vampire, is, at best, brutish in his youth, a perfect Christian knight in manhood, and a miracle worker after death."[22] Gowther commences his life by stepping onto the path of monstrosity unconsciously and dies enveloped in the aura of holiness. He summarizes the progress of the idea of the deformed that I have attempted to present here: instead of monstrosity holy through reflecting God's inscrutability, in the end he demonstrates the idea of the divine achieved through his sainthood.

As for the genre represented by *Sir Gowther*, the work has been pigeonholed as a tale of trial and faith, penitential romance, hagiographical romance, secular hagiography, Breton lay, and "a process of romance."[23] Medieval genres well reflect the numerous perspectives frequently coexisting in one and the same genre. As Andrea Hopkins comments on the phenomenon:

> Few medieval histories offer a record of the sober, literal truth; the
> truth they represent is to be sought at other textual levels. We should

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[20] For criticism of the romance focusing on the question of ethnicity see Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic*: *Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 62—113.

[21] John Gower, *Confessio Amantis,* Book II, ed. G.C. Macauley, at: <http://sunsite. berkeley.edu/OMACL/Confess/1secun.html>; the numbers of the lines refer to that edition.

[22] Margaret Robson, "Animal Magic: Moral Regeneration in *Sir Gowther*", *Yearbook of English Studies*, No. 22 (1991), pp. 140—153.

[23] The debate is related by Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury in their introduction to *Sir Gowther*; see Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, "*Sir Gowther*: Introduction" in: *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1995), at: <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/gowint.htm>.

not be surprised, then, that medieval literary genres, when they exist, would not be hard and distinctive, but a little blurred round the edges.[24]

The subject matter well matches the generic diversity dormant in the narrative's texture: apart from the inborn monstrosity, metamorphosing into transparent moral defectiveness, we have to do here with transmogrification into a canine creature, becoming one of the legendary Wild Folk, and the juxtaposition of the political authority and the spiritual.

The Wild Folk were creatures always on the verge of uncontrollable ferociousness who simultaneously practised the ideal of holiness laboured on in seclusion, through the gesture of emulating the Desert Fathers. The legendary woodland inhabitants definitely provided patronage for the child in *The King of Tars*, baptized John perhaps not only to commemorate the day of his miraculous beautification, as it was stated here earlier, but also after St John as the patron of the Wild Folk. Obviously, the name alluded to the significance of baptismal waters that cleansed the soul of the formless lump and as a result molded its body. Nevertheless, it could also portend the child's character, reflecting his multicultural and multi-religious origin. The Wild Folk were hybrid, half-human creatures who provoked fear due to their aggressiveness and unbridled energy. Nevertheless, they simultaneously carried a large potential for sainthood since their borderline personality hypothetically allowed them to approach the divinity more easily than it would have been the case with ordinary humans. The deformed child from *The King of Tars* did not necessarily abandon all his inborn qualities at baptism. Perhaps he was also more predestined to sainthood than others. This possibility is no longer perplexing if the hagiographic legends of several medieval saints are considered. Clarissa Atkinson insists that in medieval literature physical deformity did not necessarily connote moral evil, since "great saints such as St Bernard were praised for triumphing over physical weakness".[25] Therefore the path from monstrosity to holiness was perhaps shorter than one might expect. A similar route is noticeable in *Sir Gowther*.

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[24] Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights…*, p. 5.

[25] Clarissa Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*: *Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 92.

Laskaya and Salisbury insist that the figure of Sir Gowther, initially "literally and figuratively a devil-child", quoting Jane Gilbert, follows the paradigm of the Wild Folk characters.[26] Apart from St John the Baptist, the two critics write about the figure of Mary Magdalene as a representative of the type. In accordance with that interpretation, the two saints function as the emblems of holy insanity: a phenomenon conducive to establishing a closer relationship with God.[27] The assumption would thus be that any saint remains on the brink of insanity and that the condition verging on madness is a necessary ingredient of the apophatic philosophy occupying a prominent position in medieval theology. Gowther in his primary immorality is then paradoxically more capable of gaining access to God than an average human. The conclusion could be that we do not know how divine grace works and who has the privilege of becoming a saint. Interestingly for us here, the oriental perspective emerges again if one remembers that the Wild Folk were often visually represented as Saracens.[28] Moreover, there exists a discursive link between the canine life that Gowther will undertake as a penance and being a Saracen or a Jew, which will be discussed here later.

As for the analogues to *Sir Gowther*, Laskaya and Salisbury trace as many as four of them: an eleventh-century Irish tale, a twelfth-century Breton lay *Tydorel*, the *Life of St Alexis*, and Hartmann von Aue's *Gregorius*.[29] The thirteenth-century French romance *Robert le Diable* is arguably the most obvious one and the criticism of the Middle English romance often refers to *Sir Gowther* as a variant of the narrative about Robert and differing from it in terms of such significant elements as, for instance, the treatment of sexuality.[30] Robert exemplifies the Wild Folk

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[26] Jane Gilbert, "Unnatural Mothers and Monstrous Children in *The King of Tars* and *Sir Gowther*" in: *Medieval Women*: *Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain. Essays for Felicity Riddy*, eds. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Rosalynn Voaden, Arlyn Diamond, Ann Hutchinson, Carol M. Meale, and Lesley Johnson (Turhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 329—344.

[27] Anne Laskaya and Sarah Salisbury, "Sir Gowther: Introduction", at: <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/gowint.htm>.

[28] Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons and Jews*…, pp. 182, 183 *et passim*.

[29] Laskaya and Salisbury, "Sir Gowther: Introduction", at: <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/gowint.htm>.

[30] For the analysis of sexual intercourse as sinful itself in *Robert le Diable* as opposed to the sinfulness of specific intercourses with demons in *Sir Gowther* see Dorothy S. Mc-

type even better than *Sir Gowther,* where the subject of hermitage is not emphasized to such an extent. As for the hero of the French romance, the anonymous author describes him as a Wish Child: a folktale figure whose birth resulted from the wish made by a childless couple. In that motif the consequences of successful conception are oftentimes dreadful: the supernatural creature who helped the couple now usurps the right to the child's soul. Laskaya and Salisbury claim that the Wish Child endeavors to liberate himself from the domination, which is a goal usually accomplished at the end of the narratives.[31] Consequently, the Wish Child motif in medieval literature is frequently present in penitential romances, where the hero's behaviour may be traced to his fiendish origin and where his "nature" has to be overcome and transformed into the state of holiness.

The plot of *Robert le Diable* starts with the wish expressed by the duchess of Normandy, described as despairing due to her inability to conceive: "La duchoisse a le ceur dolant/Qu'ele ne pot avoir enfant" [the duchess has an aching heart since she cannot have a child] (35—36).[32] Nevertheless, she does not encounter the fiend and it suffices that she prays to him in order for her to conceive in the course of the prayer:

> «Diable,» fait el, «je te proi
> Que tu entenges ja vers moi:
> Se tu me dones un enfant,
> Che te proi dès ore en avant.»
> <div align="center">(45—48)</div>

[Devil, she says, I pray you/to turn your eyes on me:/If you give me a child,/From now on I will say my prayers to you.]

Coy, "From Celibacy to Sexuality: An Examination of Some Medieval and Early Renaissance Versions of the Story of Robert the Devil" in: *Human Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Douglas Radcliff-Umstead (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1978), pp. 29—39.

[31] Laskaya and Salisbury, "Sir Gowther: Introduction", at: <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/gowint.htm>.

[32] *Robert le Diable. Roman d'Aventures*, ed. Eilert Lőseth (Paris: Societé des Anciens Textes Français, 1901); all the quotations have been taken from that edition and the translation is mine.

No fleshly relations take place between the supplicant and the fiend. However, the two versions of the French romance, the thirteenth- and the fourteenth-century one, slightly differ from each other since the later version includes additional argumentation on the part of the duchess. She haughtily argues that the rich and the beautiful are more entitled to have children, especially when they donate huge offerings in churches. Dorothy S. McCoy insists that such words may be the pathway for the devil and that is how he can enter the duchess' soul.[33] As a result of the contract between the woman and the devil an outstandingly beautiful child is begotten.

Nevertheless, external beauty is here only a misleading disguise for the monstrous nature of the infant, which manifests itself in constant crying, kicking the wet nurses, and even biting them while suckling. A similar issue emerges in *Sir Gowther*, but it is solved in a different way. In *Robert le Diable* the act of biting symbolizes resistance to civilizing attempts and draws due attention to the ambiguity inherent in the French term "norreture", which denotes both alimentation and nurture, as opposed to nature.[34] The usage of the same words for those two ideas is justifiable if one considers medieval beliefs about the importance of maternal milk. As we have already stated above, it was widely believed that the woman suckling an infant transferred her personality features onto the child because the milk had been produced out of her own blood. The future life of children was therefore determined by the mother's (or, more often, the wet nurse's) conduct and the choice of a wet nurse was not considered to be a thing of minor importance. Hence alimentation became synonymous with culture in that respect. In the French romance no wet nurse is able to transfer any positive qualities to Robert since breastfeeding him is a torture. As a result, the wet nurses invent a *cornet*, that is a corn-like object, which allows them to feed the infant with milk. Nevertheless, Doris Desclais Berkvam notices that no details are given as to what milk is given to Robert, which suggests the possibility of feeding him with some animal's milk.[35] Thus even if the infant does not die of hunger, no woman directly influences his develop-

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[33] McCoy, "From Celibacy to Sexuality", pp. 29—39.

[34] Doris Desclais Berkvam, *Enfance et maternité dans la littérature française des XIIe et XIIIe siècles* (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1981), p. 73.

[35] Ibidem, p. 52.

ment. If the milk comes from an animal, the result may be the child's bestiality, which indeed becomes visible in the unnatural size of his body.

This gigantic stature is of use to him when he transgresses against the society in his youth: he tortures men and rapes women. His father reacts vehemently and, being unable to improve Robert's character through knighting him, he banishes his own son. The monstrous child flees to the woods where he gathers some bandits around him. After a particularly heinous crime which he commits against the whole convent, since he murders all the nuns and sets the buildings ablaze, he reflects on his own nature and becomes curious of his origin. Naturally, the crime is depicted by the author as the one directed against the Church in general. In one of the two extant manuscripts that part of the plot has been even omitted, possibly due to its blatant anticlericalism.

Despite having been christened as an infant, Robert is spiritually converted to Christianity only when he learns the truth about his birth. He violently forces the confession out of his mother and then goes to Rome to confess his sins to the pope. Yet, true penance is undergone by him not in Rome, but in the wilderness, where he encounters a hermit, later his spiritual guide. Insanity characteristic of the Wild Folk becomes a part of his penance, as does extreme asceticism: pretending muteness and eating only the food that dogs bring him in their mouths. Robert becomes a fool in order to expiate his sins and he is severely beaten any time he finds himself in the crowd. Despite having received absolution for his past crimes from the hermit, he chooses to spend the rest of his life in the wilderness. When the hermit dies, he adopts the man's function as the local holy person, while after his own death miracles take place. Consequently, his body is buried in Rome at St John the Lateran, and then a rich man of Puy builds an abbey for his relics. The place is from then onwards called St Robert.

Sir Gowther has to be treated as yet another version of *Robert le Diable*, but it is a version differing from its source. Gowther's father is "a warlocke greytt" [powerful demon] (22), and he literally sires the child during a garden scene, with the setting being a stock element of the Breton lays. Firstly the duke of "Estryke" [Austria] (31) marries a "meydyn schene" [fair maiden] (37), but the couple does not have any offspring. The husband accuses the wife of being "baryn" (53), while she desperately yearns for a child. Her determination is perhaps best expressed by

the words: "On what maner scho ne rogth" [She did not care how] (63), which introduces a degree of ambiguity about her subsequent explanation that she did not know she met a demon and not her husband. In an orchard, "underneathe a chestayn tree" [underneath a chestnut tree] (68), as it is specified in one of the manuscripts, the fiend begets a child on the lady since he is "as lyke hur lorde as he myght be" [as similar to her lord as possible] (67). Gowther is born out of an adulterous intercourse: in accordance with Aristotelian theory he takes his fiendish character directly after his begetter.

As Lee C. Ramsey maintains, in medieval romance trees are frequent markers of the fairyland boundaries, since they indicate the existence of a passage from the land of humans to that of supernatural creatures.[36] Trees appear in that role in Thomas of Chester's *Launfal* and the anonymous *Sir Orfeo,* where indeed the two worlds intersect in their vicinity. Furthermore, not only Breton lays, but also dream visions include the garden setting as an important part of the plot. The text of the Gawain-Poet's *Pearl* does not contain any direct reference to a tree in the garden where the Dreamer falls asleep, but the famous illumination in the Cotton Nero manuscript depicts him lying under one. Moreover, when the Dreamer enters the otherworldly domain, a forest is the first thing he discerns.[37] The words: "Towarde a foreste I bere the face" [Toward a forest I turned my face] (67) introduce us to the world of the marvelous he enters. Not surprisingly, his conversation with Pearl has been compared to the scenes of encounter between humans and their supernatural lovers.[38] To counterbalance our focus on the "serious" genres, the Breton lay and the dream vision, it should be noted that a pear tree also plays a role in Chaucer's fabliaux, *The Merchant's Tale*, where Damian and May make love in its branches during their secret encounters in the garden, "among the fressche leves grene" (IV: 2327).

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[36] Lee C. Ramsey, *Chivalric Romances*: *Popular Literature in Medieval England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), p. 140.

[37] *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*, eds. J.J. Anderson and A.C. Cawley (London and Rutland, Vermont: J.M. Dent & Sons and Charles. E. Tuttle, 1976); the numbers of the lines come from that edition.

[38] See Andrzej Wicher, *Archeology of the Sublime*: *Studies in Late-Medieval English Writings* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1995), pp. 154—166.

Remembering the tree symbolism in Marie de France's *La Fraisne* and its Middle-English version, *Lay le Fresne*, the type of tree mattered while interpreting a specific scene or the entire plot.[39] Trees either represented certain values, or they suggested a possibility of certain events taking place. Chestnuts usually connoted disturbing occurrences, hence it was not propitious to meet in their vicinity, particularly when the meeting was with a stranger.[40] The consequences of the meeting for Gowther's mother are partly joyful and partly terrifying, and they are exposed when the fiend reveals his identity in the scene which constitutes the Annunciation *à rebours*:

> He seyd, "Y have geyton a chylde on the
> That in is yothe full wylde schall bee
> And weppons wyghtly weld."[41]
>
>   (73—75)

[He said: "I have begotten a child on you/That will be very wild in his youth/And will powerfully manage weapons"]

Interestingly, cunning intervention of a supernatural agent does not occur only in *Sir Gowther* and its sources. An analogous scene of conception along with the subsequent monstrosity of the child, ambiguous as the deformity is, appears in diverse romances about Alexander the Great. Among them there is *Kyng Alisaunder*, a work attributed to the anonymous author of *Richard le Coer de Lyon* and *Of Arthour and of Merlin*. The latter work also involves the phenomenon of Annunciation *à rebours*, as Andrea Hopkins notices.[42] Merlin appears there as a child sired by the Devil, treacherously impregnating a pious virgin, which produced a mixture of the holy and the demonic in the character of the adult protagonist.

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[39] In the Anglo-Norman and the Middle English lays the ash-tree symbolizes barrenness, whereas the name of the heroine's twin-sister, le Codre, stands for fruitfulness; see John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*: *The Abondonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. 369.

[40] McCoy, "From Celibacy to Sexuality…," pp. 29—39.

[41] "Sir Gowther" in: *Six Middle English Romances*, ed. Maldwyn Mills (London and Rutland, Vermont: J.M. Dent & Sons and Charles E. Tuttle, 1992), pp. 148—168; the translation into modern English is mine.

[42] Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights…*, p. 169.

The reference to Merlin is not incongruous also in the context of the introductory passages to *Sir Gowther,* where the fiendish agency is portended through indicating the history of supernatural conceptions:

> Sumtyme the fende hadde postee
> Forto dele with ladies free
> In liknesse of here fere;
> So that he begat Merlyng and mo
> And wrought ladies so mikil wo,
> That ferly it is to here.
>
> (7—12)

[Once the fiend had the power/To have intercourse with noble ladies/In the shape of their husbands;/So he begot Merlin and other children/And caused the ladies so much woe/That it is astonishing to hear.]

The story of Merlin's origin points out the ambiguity with which such offspring may be received by his mother. Moreover, it signals the duplicity of the child's character and the role of nurture in coining virtue out of the vice dormant in it. Fortunately, as the romances about Alexander the Great prove, monstrosity bequeathed from one parent does not have to materialize, as long as the child exercises virtue early in life.

The relationship between *Sir Gowther* and the Alexander romances becomes even more apparent if one considers the significant alteration in the mode of portraying the historical ruler, which occurred in the thirteenth century. Quoting Donald B. Sands, the figure was then turned into "more of a legendary than a strictly historical figure".[43] The ancient accounts of Alexander's life (whose authors were: Ptolemy, one of his generals, Nearchus, his admiral, Onescritus, a future ruler of Egypt, Aristobulus, an engineer, Pseudo-Calistenes with his famous compilatory *The Life of Alexander*, Flavius Arrianus Xenophon with *Alexandri Anabasis*, and an anonymous translator of Pseudo-Calisthenes' work into Latin) metamorphosed into romance plots.[44] In French or Anglo-Norman the most popu-

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[43] Donald B. Sands, "Introduction" in: *Middle English Verse Romances*, ed. Donald B. Sands (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1986), pp. 1—11.

[44] For a commentary on the ancient versions of Alexander's story see, for example: W.R.J. Barron, "*The Wars of Alexander*: From Reality to Romance" in: *Romance Reading*

lar versions were Alexandre de Paris' *Roman d'Alexandre* and Thomas of Kent's *Roman de toute chevalerie*, whereas *Kyng Alisaunder* (based on Thomas of Kent's work) and *The Wars of Alexander* and the *Prose Life* from the Thornton manuscript very likely attracted wide reading audiences in England. *The Wars of Alexander* present a panorama of diverse events from the ruler's imaginary life, including his conception, enveloped in mystery since his real parentage was unknown.

Alexander's legendary father was Anactenabos, an Egyptian magician (identifiable with the historical figure of Nectanebo II, an Egyptian pharaoh perceived as the human shape of the Libyan god Ammon). In *Kyng Alisaunder* the father was "Neptenabus/Wiis in þis ars and maliciouse" [wise in his art and malicious] (73—74), an astrologer.[45] He initially announced the visit of god Ammon to queen Olympias in her sleep only to pose as the god himself and thus sire the royal child, Alexander. In *The Wars of Alexander* the description of Anactenabos in the guise of Ammon implies his bestiality and simultaneously a degree of holiness: he is described as having "twa tufe hornes" [two horns] (319) and "a mouthe as a mastiff hunde" [a mouth like a mastiff] (321), which very likely alludes to his identity as a pagan deity, since horns emblematized holiness and adorned the heads of numerous gods in the world mythologies.[46] In the romance the Egyptian magician straightforwardly states that the goal of the visit will be begetting a male child, whose colonialist impulses will lead to imperial rule and conquest.[47]

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on the Book: *Essays on Medieval Narrative Presented to Maldwyn Mills*, eds. Jennifer Fellow, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers, and Judith Weiss (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), pp. 22—35.

[45] "Kyng Alisaunder" in: *Old and Middle English*: *An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), pp. 537—550; the numbers of the lines refer to that edition.

[46] *The Wars of Alexander*, ed. W.W. Skeat (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2002); the numbers of the lines come from that edition.

[47] Michelle R. Warren states that Alexander's imperialist drives are recorded particularly in the French *Roman d'Alexandre* in prose; other texts from that corpus, however, are not free from the colonialist project, either; Michelle R. Warren, "Take the World by Prose: Modes of Possession in the *Roman d'Alexandre*" in: *The Medieval French Alexander*, eds. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), pp. 143—160.

Anactenabos enchants himself "into a wild dragon" (378), begets a child and flies away, which is a gesture fairly typical of supernatural characters in the narratives of that kind, such as Mélusine from the Middle English version of the romance, Couldrette's *Romans of Partenay or of Lusignen*.[48] The prodigious nature of the child to be born out of that union is manifested by extraordinary events. Firstly king Philip calls for a "phylysofyre" [seer] (434), who prophesizes the birth of a child likened by him to a lion: in his vision the child "to ρe lyon hede" [looks like a lion] (438). The bestial elements presaging Alexander's birth do not end at that point, since afterwards Anactenabos appears at the royal feast in the shape of a dragon so as to prove the truthfulness of Olimpias' words. In order to convince Philip that his wife's child was begotten by the god, another magic trick takes place: a bird comes and lays an egg in Philip's lap. Consequently "a litill worm" [a small serpent] (511) comes out of it and soon dies. The event appears to be a reversal of the birth of a phoenix: among the marvels of the East that are described by Mandeville there is the Phoenix which undergoes the stage of being a worm before it turns into a bird again.[49]

No similarity can be discerned in Alexander's physicality: he "like was to nane/...to fadire ne to modyre" [similar to nobody/... neither to the father nor to the mother] (599—600). His hair amounts to "large lyons lockis" [large lion's locks] (602) and he has "grete glesenand eȝen" [big bright eyes] (604). Moreover, his teeth are "as any bare tuskis" [like bare tusks] (610), an element which no longer belongs to the usual pattern of describing human children. Moreover, the lion-child from the seer's vision is endowed with yet another quality, this time related to magic: he is "wald-eȝed" [wall-eyed] (608), a remark which requires some commentary.[50] Willem P. Gerritsen and Anthony G. van Melle refer to *het-*

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[48] See *Romance of Partenay, or of Lusignen*, ed. W.W. Skeat (London: The Early English Text Society, 2002).

[49] C.W.R.D. Moseley (trans. and ed.) *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 65.

[50] That feature of Alexander was also extant in other versions of the romance, for example in Albéric de Pisançon's fragment about Alexander written in the early twelfth century. There the hero's eyes are described in detail: "L'un uyl ab glauc cum de dracon/ Et l'altre neyr cum de falcon" [One of his eyes was sea-green as if it was the dragon's/And

erophthalmia as a feature characterizing Alexander's physical appearance, whereas David Williams interprets the description as that of the "evil eye": an eye spurting out an invisible poison liquid, hence the Italian name of the phenomenon, *jettature* or *gettature*.[51] It was believed that those who had the evil eye were in some way deformed: "All those among the ancients who in any way surpassed conspicuously the common standard, as, for instance, in athletic or physical strength or size, were dreaded as possessors; on the other hand, anyone specially defective, particularly a dwarf; the latter, if hunchbacked, was dreaded still more. Squinting or differently coloured eyes were always certain marks of what is now a *jettature*".[52] Unnatural shortness is indeed a feature characterizing Alexander: when fighting as an adult against the king Poros of India (who indeed was his adversary after he conquered king Darius of Persia) he is described thus: "...thre cubettis fra ρe croune down his cors had a lenghte" [his body was only three cubits long from the crown downwards] (3987). His meager height is juxtaposed against Poros, since "þe person of ser Porrus past him þat hiȝt twyce" [the person of sir Poros was twice as tall as him] (3988). The giant is conquered by the hero who is paradoxically "litill & laghe" [small and short of stature] (3985).

The idiosyncratic qualities above do not blur the impression of disconcerting similarity between Alexander from *The Wars* and Sir Gowther. Even though Alexander is unusually short while Gowther's gigantic stature terrifies his enemies and astonishes his own parents, physicality only demonstrates the otherness within: Alexander's precocious intelligence contributes to his military triumphs, whereas Gowther turns his intellectual energy to a bad purpose. Gowther's mother realizes the fiendish

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the other black like the falcon's]; Albéric of Pisançon quoted in: Laurence Harf-Lancner, "Introduction" in: Alexandre de Paris, *Le Roman d'Alexandre*, trans. and ed. Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1994), pp. 5—58; the translation into English is mine.

[51] *A Dictionary of Medieval Heroes*: *Characters in Medieval Narrative Traditions and their Afterlife in Literature, Theatre and the Visual Arts*, eds. Willem P. Gerritsen and Anthony G. van Melle, trans. Tanis Guest (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), p. 17.

[52] *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, vol. 5, ed. James Hastings, quoted in: David Williams, *Deformed Discourse*: *The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), p. 232.

nature of the child even before he is born: "…ei yode scho bownden with tho fende" [all the time she was carrying the devil's child] (92). The parallelism with Merlin's life emerges again: the lady lives with the awareness that "This child within hur was non odur/Bot eyvon Marlyon halfe brodur,/For won fynd gatte hom bothe" [This child inside her was no other/ But evil Merlin's half- brother/For one fiend begot them both] (94—96).

The words about "eyvon Marlyon" have to be interpreted critically due to the intertexual result that is produced by the juxtaposition of the two plots: Merlin finally turns into a civilized character due to the influence of his surroundings. A possibility appears that the evil *nature* can be overcome through *nurture*, even though the transformation is not achieved through the christening in church since in *Sir Gowther* "tho duke hym gard to kyrke beyre,/Crystond hym and calyd hym Gwother" [the duke had him taken to church,/christened him and called him Gowther] (103—104). The monstrous child soon after his birth begins to epitomize wildness, since he "sythyn wax breme [and brathe]" [later became fierce and unruly] (105). The latter words introduce a degree of discord: at first Gowther's mother *knows* that he is monstrous and then he *turns into* a monster, which has an air of being a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Gowther is unnatural already at the stage when he slays his aristocratic "melche wemen" [wet nurses] (107); it is an act which, like in *Robert le Diable,* creates a link between the two issues, alimentation and culture. As a child deprived of human milk he becomes unable to be transformed into a fully human character. Then his mother, who "fell a fowle unhappe" [suffered dreadful misfortune] (124), decides to feed her unnaturally gigantic child herself. He maims her so severely that her willingness to provide him with alimentation suitable for human infants proves to be abortive. He metaphorically feeds on violence, as Cohen notes: "His exceptional growth is the product of the flow of violence that nourishes him as much as the breast milk with which it mingles: his father arranges for him to have the best wives of the country as his wetnurses..."[53] His excessively large body feeds on the women, incorpo-

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[53] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Gowther Among the Dogs: Becoming Human c. 1400" in: *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, eds. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1997), pp. 219—244.

rating their bodies in order to produce the strength that will be directed against more females in Gowther's adult life.

The monstrous child, very early in life fed with "rych fode" [rich food] (133), resembles a carnivorous beast more than human offspring. A priest is called to the lady who has been severely hurt by her fiendish child, and not to Gowther himself whose nature cannot be altered, as it is believed then. In accordance with the prophesy of his biological father, like Alexander he already has his own weapon in his youth: at the age of fifteen he has a "fachon" (139), a curved sword of oriental type. Maldwyn Mills stresses the fact that the sword functions as an ambiguous symbol within the plot: it stands for Gowther's unbridled violence in his earlier years, but later it becomes an emblem of his belligerence in fighting against the infidels.[54] The oriental weapon, initially signaling its owner's alterity, is paradoxically used in the battles against religious and ethnic others.

At first he directs his unjustifiable rage against Christians and their religious beliefs seem to be the only reason why they become subjects to violence:

> All that ever on Cryst con lefe,
> Yong and old, he con hom greve
> In all that he myght doo.
>   (190—192)

[All that ever believed in Christ/Young and old, he wanted to grieve them/In everything he did.]

Gowther's sexual insatiability is typical of giants from medieval romance, but he directs his energy against inaccessible women, particularly maidens and those who are married, who naturally oppose his intent and are raped as a consequence. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen insists that in the Middle Ages giants, along with incubi to whom they were related, functioned as symbols of utmost corporeality and insatiable libido.[55] The emphasis that is placed on the issue of sexuality accounts for the murder

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[54] Maldwyn Mills, "Commentary" in: *Six Middle English Romances*…, p. 215.

[55] Cohen, "Gowther Among the Dogs: Becoming Human c. 1400"…, pp. 219—244.

which Gowther commits in one of the two extant versions of the poem: as in *Robert le Diable* he slays the nuns before burning their convent, yet here the gruesome act acquires an additional ominous dimension. Gowther seems to be particularly oriented towards sexual violence and the murder of the nuns may equally be sexually motivated, since it is possible that he slays them in order to prevent them from devoting their souls to Jesus. Here the hagiographical legends about virgin martyrs come to one's mind, since it is there that Christian women are killed in a particularly cruel way when they refuse to have a close relationship with anybody but Christ. Numerous scholars have already emphasized the sexual dimension of such deaths.[56] Therefore it may be postulated that also the martyr deaths of the nuns who are murdered because of their Christianity in *Sir Gowther* follow the pattern designated by the virgins from hagiography.

The truth about Gowther's unnatural conception is discovered by "an olde erle of that cuntre" (202), who reveals his suspicion to Gowther: "We howþe thou come never of Cryston stryn,/Bot art sum fendys son, we weyn" [We do not think you were begotten by a Christian/but imagine you are some fiend's son] (205—206). The earl correctly diagnoses the "natural" evil that results from such an origin: Gowther is compelled to do evil instead of good in any circumstances. The hypothesis of contamination was not unusual in the epoch: as Alcuin Blamires claims in his sociologically-grounded analysis, "where the offspring fails to conform to elite social expectation, medieval society is prepared to allege contamination in the succession".[57] The earl does not realize how closely related to the fiend Gowther is, since he only hypothesizes: "We hope thou be full syb tho deyll" [We believe that you are close kin to the devil] (209). Gowther's choices are very likely instinctive and therefore "naturally" grounded in his physicality. Andrea Hopkins even diagnoses a pathological personality in that character when she writes that he is "psychopathically oblivious to the notion of right and wrong".[58]

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[56] See, for instance, Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*: *The Myth And Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador, 1990).

[57] Alcuin Blamires, "The Twin Demons of Aristocratic Society in *Sir Gowther*" in: *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England…*, pp. 45—62.

[58] Hopkins, *The Sinful Knights…*, p. 20.

His deviant morality is to be cured through penance and he seeks absolution from the pope, to whom he promises to "never Cryston deyre" [never harm Christians] (285). As a part of his penance he will have to play dumb and, like the hero of *Robert le Diable*, eat only the food from dogs' mouths. Here alimentation again acquires the function of the material sphere able to change one's spirituality: rich food, very likely meat, determined the bestiality of Gowther's youthful character, whereas eating from dogs' mouths symbolizes utmost mortification. It is an ascetic act whose role is to help in the development of Christian spirituality in the young duke of Austria. Asceticism is an attitude that has to purify him of his iniquity, which the holy water during his baptism did not achieve. Gowther is surrounded by greyhounds in his contrition and again their breed symbolizes a specific set of values, as Laskaya and Salisbury notice.[59] They indicate that greyhounds were perceived as particularly noble dogs and their symbolism was exploited in Dante's *Inferno*, where the legend of the Holy Hound is cited:

> Molti son li animali a cui a'ammoglia,
> e piū saranno ancora, infin che 'l Veltro
> verrà, che la farà morir con doglia.
> Questi non ciberà terra nè peltro,
> ma sapïenza, amore e virtute,
> e sua nazion sarà tra Feltro e Feltro.
> Di quella umile Italia fia salute
> per cui morì la vergine Cammilla,
> Eurialo e Turno e Niso di ferute.
> Questi la caccerà per ogni villa,
> fin che l'avrà rimessa nello 'nferno,
> là onde invidia prima dipartilla.
>   (I: 100—111)

[Many are the creatures with which she [the wolf — A.C.] mates and there will yet be more, until the hound comes that shall bring her to miserable death. He shall not feed on land or pelf but on wisdom and love and valour, and his country shall be between Feltro and Feltro; he shall be salvation to the low-lying Italy

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[59] Laskaya and Salisbury, "Sir Gowther: Introduction", at: <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/gowint.htm>.

for which the virgin Camilla and Euryalus and Turnus and Nisus died of their wounds; he shall hunt her through every city till he has sent her back to Hell whence envy first let her loose.][60]

In contrast with the monstrous *cynocephali*, uncivilized and threatening, the Holy Hound here should be perceived as the sign of political and spiritual regeneration, if not the religious rebirth of all the Italian states and subsequently of the entire world. He provides a counterpoint for the symbolic figures of the leopard, the lion, and the wolf, standing respectively for lechery, pride, and covetousness, be it the carnal lust, that for possession, or that for knowledge. The Hound emblematizes the (historical) figure who would be capable of reestablishing the moral and the political order desirable in the well-governed state. The Hound, identified from the classical early commentaries onwards with Pope Benedict XI, emperor Henry VII, Ugocionne Della Fagolla, and finally Cangrande Della Scalla, symbolizes the power to reform the Church by returning to Christianity's earliest principles.[61] Especially Cangrande Della Scalla emerges from that prophetic vision as a possible real-life equivalent of Gran Cane, the Great Dog: while in exile, Dante found refuge with him. It was widely expected of Cangrande that he would rejuvenate the world through deeply spiritual fervour, bringing fresh air to the world of politics and ending the internal conflicts.

The above considerations might alter our initial perspective on Gowther's penance. The Holy Hound was believed to be able to reform the whole Church, whereas in the romance individual greyhounds helped the monstrous young duke to reform his soul. That breed of dogs was believed to be the most noble not only because of the legends narrating their role in reforming the world, but also due to the conviction that they were generally mute, in the sense of being the least noisy of all the breed. What

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[60] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy. Inferno*, trans. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961); the numbers of the lines and the translation come from that edition.

[61] A modern bibliography for Canto I along with references to the classical commentaries can be found in: Letterio Cassata, "Canto I" in: *Lectura Dantis. Inferno. A Canto-by-Canto Commentary*, eds. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 9—24.

is more, we have to remember the holiness that dogs in general betokened, particularly in hagiography where they functioned as a part and parcel of dream visions prophesying future events. In *Sir Gowther* muteness is the feature that the hero shares with the dogs he lives among during his penance. The muteness, as much as his insanity, is a behaviour adopted in order to expiate his sins. Living among the greyhounds Gowther voluntarily becomes bestial, which stands in direct opposition to his previous biologically-determined bestiality. During his mortification the bestiality becomes self-imposed and does not connote cruelty any longer. It has already been stated that the monstrosity was natural for Gowther, even though it manifested itself in unnatural, that is uncivilized, acts. His life in the company of dogs might be deciphered as accepting one's own nature and an attempt to construct holiness out of moral depravity.

Medieval teratological texts again prove indispensable at this point in our reading. *Cynocephali,* so far discussed as an indispensable part of the (oriental) world according to *The Wonders of the East*, appear also in the Latin *Liber Monstrorum de Diversis Generibus*.[62] Here the dog-heads are described in a way that relates them to monstrous *Sir Gowther*: "Cynocephali are ... said to be born in India, who have the heads of dogs, and spoil every word they say with mingled barks, and do not imitate humans but the beasts themselves in eating raw flesh" (269). The dog-heads do not resemble noble greyhounds who are the mutest of all breeds, which makes them particularly suitable companions for Gowther in his self-imposed muteness. Moreover, like the very young Gowther *cynocephali* devour meat, which again makes them more bestial than human. Such a description created a disconcerting similarity between that monstrous race and the hero of the Middle English romance. As for *The Letter from Alexander to Aristotle,* it does not add a lot to that representation, since there *cynocephali* become merely savage creatures who have to be frightened away by Alexander and his warriors during his conquest of India, ended by the aforementioned victory over king Poros: "After that we saw amongst the wooden groves and trees a great multitude of cynocephali who came because they wished to wound us, and we shot them with arrows, and

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[62] Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*: *Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer), pp. 255—317; the numbers of the pages are given in brackets.

they soon fled away and went back into the woods" (245). In the narrative the monsters embody the pagan dimension of canine imagery which has already been discussed here.

The holiness of dog-heads in turn finds its model in hagiographic legends of St Christopher. One of the few extant versions of the mythical saint's *vita* is included in the *Old English Martyrology* and it arguably deserves more attention than *The Passion of Saint Christopher* from the *Beowulf*-Manuscript, whose text is incomplete due to its missing beginning. The delineation of the future saint's origin repeats the description from *Liber Monstrorum* and it also resembles Alexander's legend in some respects:

> Christopher came in the days of the Emperor Decius into the city which is called Sanos, from the race where people have dogs' heads and from the land where folk eat each other. He had the head of a dog, and his locks were exceedingly long, and his eyes shone as bright as the morning-star, and his teeth were as sharp as boar's tusks. He believed in God in his heart, but he could not speak like a man.[63]

The extraordinarily long hair resembles the lion's mane of Alexander, or alternatively the descriptions of *cynocephali*, which included more marks of hybridity than merely dogs' heads. As for Christopher's bright eyes, they may again be a feature that the saint has in common with the Macedonian ruler: as a savage he may possess the "evil eye". The cannibalism of his folk complements the picture. Due to their nature they are savage beasts, hence Christopher has to transcend his inborn qualities in order to become a civilized Christian. At the beginning he is mute, or more possibly he barks like a dog, which still means the inability to speak. As for *The Passion of Saint Christopher* in the *Beowulf*-Manuscript, the preserved fragment about his monstrosity refers to him as a savage giant, close to the Wild Folk in his brutality and the potential for spiritual transcendence.

Living a canine life may therefore constitute a path to holiness, the knowledge of which Gowther puts to good use. He undergoes transfor-

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[63] *The Old English Martyrology*, ed. George Herzfeld, quoted in: Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies…*, p. 13.

mation through adopting a canine-like body. Quoting Cohen, he "gains his adult identity as knight, hero, and saint through a ... process of transformation, mapping the potentialities of his unsocialized self across the grid of canine bodies with whom he shares food and place".[64] The human body metamorphoses only when it is temporarily abandoned in favour of incorporating canine elements into one's self. Like monstrosity, the canine identity becomes imprinted onto Gowther's humanity and erases the moral deformity, replacing it with sainthood. The company of dogs is especially propitious for change, as Cohen notes: "Dogs are easily incorporated within human meaning systems because their bodies have been bred to be easy to imprint. We like dogs as household pets to the extent to which they act as if human, like a simultaneously exaggerated and diminutive version of ourselves."[65] As it occurred in the case of Alexander the Great, an infant's monstrosity metamorphoses into an attitude in adult life that is praised by the narrator: Gowther marries the princess, matching his pretended muteness with her actual speechlessness. Political power is transmitted to the earl who marries Gowther's mother, while the central character adopts the life of *miles Christi*. He chooses the place for his own burial ("And here lye Y schall") (687), combats Saracens, and dies slain by one of them. His once-canine body becomes holy, since the relics are treated with veneration due to the miracles they cause. Throughout his lifetime a morally monstrous human acquires the status of a saint. The path of spiritual deformity is abandoned in favour of the position secondary only to that of God, namely the identity of a saint.

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[64] Cohen, "Gowther Among the Dogs: Becoming Human c. 1400…", pp. 219—244.
[65] Ibidem.

Conclusion

> "Now give me some ideas about populating the kingdom,"
> Baudolino said. "I have to have elephants, dromedaries,
> camels, hipopotamuses, panthers, onagers, white and red
> lions, mute cicadas, gryphons, tigers, llamas, hyenas, all
> the things we never see in our countries, and whose re-
> mains are precious for those who decide to go and hunt
> down there. And also men never seen, but spoken of in
> books on the nature of things and the universe…"
> "Centaurs, horned men, fauns, satyrs, pygmies, cyno-
> cephali, giants forty cubits tall, one-eyed men," Kyot
> suggested.
>
> Umberto Eco *Baudolino*[1]

The epigraph above describes a meaningful symbolic gesture of
peopling the imaginary land of Prester John with monsters by the titu-
lar character of Eco's novel. It might also be a metaphor of peopling
the medieval world as such with deformed creatures, since, as we have
noted above, according to medieval imagination the world was inhab-
ited by monstrous races. Even more significantly for us here, Middle
English literature was also peopled with representations of monstrous
children, as I attempted to demonstrate above. It is not unusual if we
consider Lisa Verner's thesis that monsters were a preoccupation of the
medieval mind; as a result, reflection on their meaning and function
constituted an important part of medieval philosophizing.[2] More fre-
quently viewed in a positive light rather than as a more ominous part
of creation, monstrous children demonstrated the diversity of beings
coexisting, at least hypothetically, in the world. Nevertheless, the af-

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[1] Umberto Eco, *Baudolino*, trans. William Weaver (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 140.

[2] Lisa Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages* (New York and
London: Routledge, 2005), p. 1.

firmative attitude clashed with externalizing gestures directed against the deformed.

Claude Kappler summarized the two approaches to monstrosity by writing about "the eternal ambiguity of [the idea of — A.C.] the monster, which was particularly emphasized in the Middle Ages. Should the monster be counted as one of the manifestations of pathology, or should it, as it was done in the Middle Ages, be assigned a place within the Norm of nature and spirit?"[3] The literary texts we have interpreted here provide their readers with no easy answers. Also in such divagations the monstrous eludes us. Still, a diversity of attitudes becomes visible: from reading monsters as ominous signs to recording their spiritual transformation into sainthood.

What Huizinga termed "the waning of the Middle Ages" witnessed another transformation, this time in terms of aesthetics. Quoting Kappler's analysis again:

> It seems that as the Middle Ages are getting to an end, there emerges a tendency to assign a separate realm to the monstrous, to relish its existence and find a new aesthetics in it: that form of taste had already been included in the formula of St Bernard: *deformis formositas ac formosa difformitas*, the deformity of beauty and the beauty of deformity.[4]

Affirmation of the deformed finds its full confirmation in the world of the emerging carnivalization. If the monster used to be a sign in medieval culture, so were monstrous children. Representations of the monstrous symbolized complex ideas. The children were either reminders of human sinfulness, or emblems of the divine omnipotence and simultaneously of

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[3] [… l'éternelle ambiguïté du monstre, l'ambiguïté que le Moyen Age a particulièrement mise en relief: le monster doit-il figurer au rang des manifestations pathologiques, ou faut-il, comme l'a fait le Moyen Age, lui reconnaître sa place dans la Norme de la nature de l'esprit?]; Claude Kappler, *Monstres, démons et merveilles à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Payot, 1980), p. 259.

[4] [Il semble que plus le Moyen Age s'approche de sa fin, plus s'affirme cette tendance à faire du monstrueux un règne à part, à s'y complaire à trouver en lui une nouvelle esthétique: cette forme du goût est déjà tout entière dans la formule saint Bernard: *«deformis formositas ac formosa difformitas»*, difformé de la beauté et beauté de la difformité]; Kappler, *Monstres, démons et merveilles à la fin du Moyen Age…*, p. 43.

God's impenetrable nature. According to Pseudo-Dionysius' Neoplatonism they could acquire the status of a "dissimilar" symbol, paradoxically standing simultaneously for the impossibility and feasibility of cognizing God. Due to the transcendence of the ordinary that the monstrous symbolized, it could also be the vantage point against which "normative" bodies might be defined. Monstrous children were also frequently visible evidence of their ethnically mixed origin, or of the supernatural influence on their generation. An infant monster signaled the necessity of conversion into Christianity, while fictitious monsters could be distinguished by the Church as saints or near-saints. The birth of deformed offspring could give rise to reconciliation between Christianity and Islam, provided the Muslim parent underwent conversion. Ideologically speaking, according to the authors whose work we discussed, it was almost impossible for a union of two Christians to result in the offspring's permanent monstrosity. Baptism was an act central for miraculous transformation, while monstrous *nature* could be overcome by *nurture,* self-recognition, and finally one's readiness for metamorphosis. The appearance of monstrous children in the narratives we discussed was complemented by the purely fictitious figures of ethnic others, mainly Saracens, another group of "monsters" extant in medieval culture.

Physically and morally deformed progeny and monstrous races did not exhaust the list of medieval uses of the monstrous. In addition to his analysis of monstrous races and individual monsters from literary texts, David Williams discusses allegory and rhetoric as deformed language.[5] Furthermore, he claims that there exists a direct link between the phenomenon of language and the idea of a monster: "Like language, the monster is a sign of a unity now lost, the unity of Being dispersed in the multiplicity of forms and the plenitude of creation, and like language, the monster is the possibility of the reconstruction of the very thing that it, itself, has deconstructed."[6] Thus the monster gives one more access to the comprehension of the world than a "normative" being, similarly to allegory and rhetoric being more perfect modes of describing the world precisely be-

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[5] For the philosophical theory relating monsters to language see David Williams, *Deformed Discourse*: *The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1996), pp. 61—103.

[6] Ibidem, p. 63.

cause they refer to it in an indirect way. For medieval people monstrous children, like other representatives of the deformed, simultaneously belonged to the realm of fiction and were "real" in the sense of referring not merely to the natural world, but to a more elevated one, that of the spirit. Thus they were able to direct the observers' attention to another reality, more universal and directly related to the divinity. The children's bodies were seen as inscribed with diverse messages from the divine, which testified to their superiority in relation to all the entities with no "writing" inscribed on them.

To conclude, in the Middle Ages the monstrous could demonstrate the unintelligibility of the divine plan. As for the monstrous children, their apparently negative characterization might have reflected medieval ambivalence over childhood, while most of the blame was put on the mothers. *The Man of Law's Tale* involves the fiction of monstrosity that unjustly indicates the mother as the source of deformity. Nevertheless, the real monstrosity becomes materialized in the religious and ethnic others, while the child grows up to be a saintly figure. Consequently, deformity and difference ultimately become signs of holiness. Chaucer's Constance's postulated "otherness" becomes repeated in an analogous narrative, *Emaré*, whose heroine chooses to wear an oriental robe in a gesture somehow explaining her marginalization. In the two romances baptism becomes central in the combat against the chaos of paganism. *The King of Tars* revolves around the same act, particularly if we consider it as a remedy against miscegenation and an act of erasing shapelessness from the body of a half-Christian and half-Muslim infant. The change of the sultan's skin colour becomes as significant for the narrative's didacticism as the infant's "magic beautification". Sir Gowther's iniquity in turn also originates from his father's identity; still, it metamorphoses into the holiness of a Christian saint.

Consequently, the texts in question teach us that a deformed being could become a divine message to the world. Still, the monster had to undergo a true baptism, or else abandon its ethnically different identity. This modest attempt to map monstrous children onto the itinerary designated by the imagery of Middle English literature was intended to indicate that pattern.

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Index of Personal Names

NAPIS NA CIELE
Monstrualne dzieci w literaturze średnioangielskiej

Streszczenie

Niniejsza praca stanowi omówienie idei deformacji fizycznej i psychicznej skonkretyzowanej w postaciach dzieci-potworów występujących w literaturze napisanej w języku średnioangielskim, jak również w analogicznych utworach napisanych po średniofrancusku i średnioniemiecku (*Mittelhochdeutsch*). W rozprawie umieszczono tego typu przedstawienia w kontekście średniowiecznej fascynacji tym, co odmienne, jako znakiem unaoczniającym złożoność Bożego planu dotyczącego stworzenia, jak również podkreślono niejednoznaczny obraz samego dzieciństwa w kulturze średniowiecznej. Uwzględniono w niej też teorie reprodukcyjne i teratologiczne wywodzące się ze starożytności, a także kontynuację średniowiecznego zainteresowania monstrualnością w postaci renesansowej wizji potwora jako boskiej kary skierowanej przeciwko grzesznym rodzicom.

Rozważania zawarte w studium zapoczątkowane są omówieniem motywu „oskarżonych królowych", pierwotnie umieszczanego przez Margaret Schlauch w kontekście baśni ludowej, a występującym w *Opowieści Prawnika* w Chaucerowskich *Opowieściach kanterberyjskich* oraz anonimowym średnioangielskim romansie *Emaré*. Odmienność religijna i etniczna pozwala w nich oskarżyć matkę o rzekomy negatywny wpływ na cielesność potomstwa, ale fabuły te kończą się potwierdzeniem świętości dziecka.

XIII-wieczny romans *The King of Tars* przedstawia już nie fikcyjną, ale prawdziwą deformację, unaoczniającą czytelnikom, że islam to religia tak martwa, jak nieruchome jest ciało dziecka sułtana Syrii i chrześcijańskiej księżniczki. Dopiero nawrócenie ojca na chrześcijaństwo nadaje dziecku kształt, a samego sułtana upiększa, zmieniając kolor jego skóry. Podobny jest wydźwięk *Parzivala* Wolframa von Eschenbacha. Dydaktyzm obu narracji jest jasny: jedynie chrześcijaństwo chroni przed brzydotą zewnętrzną i wewnętrzną. Taką brzydotę wewnętrzną przedstawia sobą brutalny i bezwzględny dla przedstawicieli Kościoła tytułowy bohater romansu *Sir Gowther*, podobnie jak bohater analogicznego romansu *Robert le Diable* dziecko poczęte przez diabła. Dopiero świadomość źródła swojej chorej psychiki pozwala Gowtherowi odbyć pokutę i zostać świętym.

Analizowane teksty ukazują spektrum zagadnień związanych z monstrualnością: deformacją fikcyjną, będącą bronią przeciwko matce oskarżanej o „inność", monstrualnością realną, wynikającą z tożsamości religijnej i etnicznej ojca, oraz skazą psychiczną, będącą skutkiem wpływu diabła na sam akt poczęcia. We wszystkich tych utworach efektem końcowym jest potwierdzenie nie tylko normatywności cielesnej dziecka, ale nawet jego świętości.

INSCRIPTION SUR LE CORPS
Enfants-monstres dans la littérature du moyen anglais

Résumé

Le but de la présente étude est d'analyser l'idée de la déformation physique et psychique concrétisée dans des personnages d'enfants-monstres de la littérature écrite en moyen anglais, ainsi que dans des oeuvres analogues en moyen français et en moyen allemand (*Mittelhochdeutsch*). L'auteur de la dissertation place les représentations de ce type dans le contexte de la fascination médiévale pour l'étrangeté considérée comme signe de la complexité du plan divin de la création ; elle souligne également une image équivoque de l'enfance dans la culture médiévale. Le travail tient compte des théories reproductives et tératologiques issues de l'antiquité, ainsi que de la continuation de l'intérêt médiéval pour la monstruosité qui se manifeste, à l'époque de la Renaissance, dans la vision du monstre en tant qu'une punition divine infligée aux parents pécheurs.

Le travail commence avec la description du motif des «reines accusées», placé originellement par Margaret Schlauch dans le contexte du conte folklorique, et présent dans *Le Conte du Juriste* des *Contes de Canterbury* de Chaucer, et aussi dans *Émaré*, une romance anonyme composée en moyen anglais. Dans ces oeuvres la seule différence religieuse et ethnique permet d'accuser la mère d'une prétendue influence néfaste sur la corporalité de la descendance, mais les textes finissent par une confirmation de la sainteté de l'enfant.

La romance du XIIIe siècle *The King of Tars* présente déjà une déformation réelle et non fictive, prouvant aux lecteurs que l'islam est une religion aussi morte que le corps de l'enfant du sultan de Syrie et d'une princesse chrétienne est sans vie. C'est la conversion du père au christianisme qui permet de former l'enfant et d'embellir le père en changeant la couleur de sa peau. *Parzival* de Wolfram von Eschenbach transmet un message pareil. La morale des deux histoires est claire: seul le christianisme protège l'homme contre la laideur externe et interne.

Cette dernière est personifiée entre autres par les héros éponymes des deux oeuvres analogues: Robert, un enfant conçu par le diable (*Robert le Diable*) et Gowther, un homme brutal et intransigeant envers les représentants de l'Eglise (*Sir Gowther*). Ce n'est que la conscience de la source de sa psyché malade qui permet à Gowther de faire pénitence et de devenir saint.

Les textes analysés étalent tout un éventail de questions concernant la monstruosité, à partir d'une déformation fictive, étant une arme contre une mère accusée d'étrangeté, par une monstruosité réelle, résultant de l'identité religieuse et ethnique du père, jusqu'à une tare psychique causée par l'influence du diable sur l'acte de conception. Dans toutes ces oeuvres l'effet final consiste à confirmer non seulement la normativité corporelle de l'enfant, mais aussi sa pure sainteté.