Physical and Ontological Transformation:
Metamorphosis and Transfiguration in Old French and Occitan Texts
(11th – 15th Centuries)

Dissertation

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By

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study in physical and spiritual transformation in medieval French and Occitan literature from the eleventh through the fifteenth centuries. By considering the Ovidian and biblical tropes of metamorphosis and transfiguration that are present in medieval French and Occitan literature, particularly in works such as Robert le diable, Flamenca, La Vie de Sainte Marie l'Egyptienne, the various Tristan narratives, and the works of Chrétien de Troyes, one can have a clearer understanding of the influence that both Ovidian and biblical narratives had on medieval French and Occitan literature. By examining Ovidian metamorphic trope of metamorphic degradation and exploring the instances in which this trope appears in medieval French and Occitan literature, one can arrive at a greater appreciation for the influence that Ovid and his works exercised on medieval authors and readers. It is also possible to foster a greater appreciation for transformation by examining instances of disguise, costuming, and clothing presented in medieval French and Occitan literature it is possible to further explore the tropes of transformation as one gains a clearer appreciation for the role that clothing and disguise play in transformation narratives.
Dedication

To Mylène Watkins, for teaching me French.

To Rupert T. Pickens, for introducing me to the wonders of medieval French literature.

To Sarah-Grace Heller, for her patience and hard work in helping me see this through.

For Robert Hill, for putting up with my mishegass.
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Chapter One

Metamorphosis, Transfiguration, and Miracle: The Phenomenon of Physical and Ontological Transformation in Medieval French and Occitan Literature

Introduction

Physical change and spiritual change are tropes that one finds throughout the various genres of medieval French literature. In some medieval stories, the physical or spiritual change is so obvious that it tends to be accepted as the tool that advances the narrative. By recognizing the instances of physical and spiritual change as they arise in literature, and by paying special attention to them, it is possible to arrive at a clearer understanding of the narratives and the society in which they were written.

Metamorphosis and transfiguration, while they may be similar in some respects, are two phenomena. The terms, despite the similarity of their definitions in Greek and Latin respectively, are actually antonyms. This chapter will probe the definitions and etymologies of metamorphosis and transfiguration, examining examples from Biblical literature, Classical Greek, Classical Latin, and late-to-early modern medieval Latin literature, medieval French and Occitan literature, hagiographic sources, and late medieval French literature, as well as treatment of recent scholarly work. The examples that I shall provide deserve attention in that they provide intertextual models of transformation as a literary trope.
In studying physical and spiritual change as specific literary tropes in medieval French literature, I found it useful to classify them into three distinct categories: Metamorphosis and Transfiguration, the focus of this current chapter; Degradation and Salvation, the topic of the second chapter; and, Clothing and Disguise, the subject of the third chapter. In this first chapter, I shall explore the tropes of metamorphosis and transfiguration and define them, explaining, with examples, how each is used in literature. Degradation and Salvation will be the subject of the second chapter. In the second chapter, I shall explore Degradation and Salvation, how each corresponds to either metamorphosis or transfiguration, using examples from the various literary ages and genres listed above to illustrate how degradation leads to, or is a result of, metamorphosis, and how salvation is type of transfiguration. In the third chapter, I shall study how clothing is used in medieval French and Occitan literature, as well as the literature of Antiquity, as a means of temporary transformation through the use of disguise. I will consider how clothing is a human phenomenon, and that any rejection of clothing, or rejection of the clothing of one's social class, causes a change of identity and a spurious metamorphosis as one becomes “less” than what one was before.

Each of these categories that I have enumerated above treats a specific aspect of physical and spiritual change that is important to consider if one wishes to better understand what transformation as a trope communicates to the reader. The reason behind the importance of studying these particular tropes as I have categorized them will become clearer as each category is laid out, and specific examples in each
category provide further evidence of physical and spiritual change as valid literary
tropes worthy of further study.

**Transfiguration and Metamorphosis from Judeo-Christian Scriptural Sources**

In order to examine metamorphosis and transfiguration as literary tropes, it
is first necessary to define them. *The New Oxford American Dictionary* provides two
definitions for the term *metamorphosis*. The first definition is used in the field of
zoology, and is specific to insects and amphibians as they mature from a larval stage
to an adult form in a series of stages during which they have different bodily forms
that are entirely different from the final, adult bodily form. The second definition of
*metamorphosis* states that it is “a change of form or of nature of a thing or person
into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means.”¹ The first of
these definitions treats metamorphosis as a natural series of physical changes in the
maturing process, the second introduces the possibility of change through natural or
*transfiguration* as “a complete change of form or appearance into a more beautiful
or spiritual state.”

The word *metamorphosis* is of Greek origin, and denotes a complete physical
change. Whether that change is for the better or the worse, or whether the change is
from immature to mature, is not inherent in the word itself. The Latin equivalent of
*metamorphosis* is *transformatio*, which comes from the verb *transformare*, to change
form. It is interesting to note, however, that in his Vulgate Latin translation of the

Bible, Saint Jerome chose to use the word *transfiguratus*, and not *transformatio*, in the three gospel accounts of Jesus’ transfiguration. I believe that this was because, as I shall show, the term *transfiguratus* communicates a higher form of transformation and physical change than the term *transformatio*. Even though the terms *metamorphosis* and *transformatio* are direct synonyms for one another, I shall show that while *metamorphosis*, *transformatio*, and *transfiguratus* are all three terms that signify physical change, *transfiguratus* specifically indicates a physical change into something better, and more beautiful. However, this connotation of the word *transfiguration* is not inherent in the Latin term, itself. The idea of “transfiguration” as something beautiful and better is the result of contextual use over the centuries. The word *metamorphosis*, if we consider the scientific definition, indicates a transformation that one cannot undo. Furthermore, when looking at the trope of metamorphosis in literature—in particular the works of Ovid—one sees that it is more than a transformation, and the exact opposite of transfiguration.

The definition that I ascribe to metamorphosis in literature is somewhat different than the scientific definition provided in the dictionary. I define metamorphosis as the complete change of physical form or nature of someone (or something) into something less than human, or into a state that is less exalted than it began. In literature, metamorphosis demonstrates the degradation from a higher state of being into a lower state of existence. Likewise, I define transfiguration as the opposite of metamorphosis. As I define metamorphosis as a degradation and devolution, transfiguration is an elevation, or an exaltation in form or nature. Metamorphosis dulls and dims the mind, leading into darkness, ugliness, and
behavior based on instinct, whereas transfiguration leads to enlightenment, beauty, and light.

To the medieval person, the word *transfiguration* would have brought to mind the Feast of the Transfiguration (of Christ), which is celebrated on 6 August. The Feast of the Transfiguration is represented artistically in the Eastern Christian (Orthodox) Church in the icon of Transfiguration, the earliest extant example of which is located in the dome of the apse of the basilica cathedral of the Monastery of the Holy Transfiguration, also known as Saint Catherine’s Monastery (built ca. 565–600 CE), at the foot of Mount Sinai (Egypt).² This icon is emblazoned with the Greek words η Μεταμόρφωσις—the Metamorphosis. The event that this icon illustrates is that when Jesus took three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, to the summit of Mount Tabor where they witnessed his miraculous change of appearance and revealed to them his divinity.

The biblical account of this event that, in English and French, is called by the Latin term, *Transfiguration*, is found in the three synoptic gospels (those whose authors share many of the same, or very similar, views of the events of Jesus’ life) of Matthew (written ca. 70–100 CE), Mark (written ca. 68–73 CE), and Luke (written ca. 80–85 CE). The New Testament authors wrote in Koine Greek, the *lingua franca* of the Roman Empire, which allowed for an easier transmission of their writings, as well as a more widespread audience for the transmission of the gospels.

² Since the 9th century, the Monastery of the Holy Transfiguration is more commonly known as the Monastery of Saint Catherine at Sinai, becoming associated with the popular saint after the translation of her relics to the monastery around 850 CE.
The original Koine Greek text of Matthew 17:1–2, the verses that specifically concern the actual Transfiguration, reads:

Καὶ μεθ’ ἡμέρας ἔξ, παραλαμβάνει ὁ Ἰσους, τὸν Πέτρον καὶ Ἰακοβον καὶ Ἰωάννην, τὸν ἁδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀναφέρει αὐτούς εἰς ὄρος υψηλὸν κατ’ ἱδίαν. Καὶ μετεμορφώθη ἐμπροσθεν αὐτῶν, καὶ ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος, τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο λευκὰ ὡς τὸ φῶς (And after six days, Jesus took with him Peter, James and his brother, John, and brought them to a high mountain where they could be alone. And he was transformed/metamorphosed before them, and his face shone as bright as the sun, and his clothes became white as light).

The remarkable aspect in this passage concerns the relationship between transfiguration (ἡ μεταμορφώσις) and light (τὸ φῶς). Light dispels darkness and brings clarity. Likewise, light is pure and beautiful, and possesses the capacity to beautify, as well as to reveal what is not beautiful. The association between transfiguration and light and purity is strengthened in Mark’s gospel account when the author states that “καὶ μετεμορφώθη ἐμπροσθεν αὐτῶν· καὶ τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο στίλβον· λευκὰ λιαν” (and he was transformed/metamorphosed before them, and his garments shone exceedingly white, Mark 9:2–3). These two gospel authors focus on brightness and associate transfiguration with light and purity. Matthew’s gospel states that both Jesus’ face and clothing emitted light, whereas

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Mark’s account of the Transfiguration simply states that Jesus was transformed, but that his clothes emitted light and became “exceedingly white”. Mark 9:3 continues, commenting on the state of the whiteness and brightness of Jesus’ garments, saying “ὡς γναθεύς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐ δύναται οὕτως λευκάνει (such as no launderer on earth is able to whiten them).” Mark, then, is stating that the brightness with which Jesus’ clothes shines is from a supernatural source, and is nothing short of miraculous.

Once again transfiguration is associated with light and purity, and this association is made more emphatic with the description of Jesus’ clothing also being transfigured.

In Luke’s gospel, the account of the Transfiguration does not include any description of Jesus’ transfigured brilliance, rather only providing description of his clothing. Furthermore, Luke’s account simplifies the event as he states, “καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ προσεύχεσθαι αὐτόν, τὸ εἶδος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἔτερον, καὶ ὁ ἰματισμός λευκὸς ἐξαστράπτων” (And it happened that while he was praying, the appearance of his face was changed/became different, and his clothing became dazzling white, Luke 9:29). Matthew and Mark discuss the intensity of the event, comparing Jesus’ physical appearance, and the appearance of his clothes, to the brilliance of bright light: his face shone exceedingly bright; his clothes shone white as light and shone whiter than the whitest white ever seen. In each of these accounts the corporal change that Christ undergoes is what is emphasized, and then his clothing is described afterwards as being equally as bright, indicating that the event was affected not only the physical body of Jesus, but also the clothing that was in contact with his body. At this point, Luke’s account focuses more on the miraculous appearance of both Moses and Elijah on either side of Jesus, without going into any
more detail on the intensity of the transfiguration as found in the books of Matthew and Mark.

The Greek scriptures remained foundational in Christianity for both the Greek east and Latin west until Pope Damasus I, in 382 CE, commissioned Saint Jerome to revise the Latin translation of the Christian scriptures then in existence, both Old and New Testaments, which were Classical Latin translations of the Koine Greek. What Pope Damasus I wanted Jerome to do was to “update” the Classical Latin biblical translation into the more current Latin of his day, which would have the double effect of not only making the scriptures more accessible to the contemporary Latin-speaking Christian population, but also further distinguish the Christian scriptures from pagan writings, which were written in Classical Latin (e.g., the works of Ovid). While Jerome was commissioned to update the existing Latin translation of the scriptures, he ended up producing a new translation of some of the books of the Old Testament based the original Hebrew, as they were available, rather than the existing Koine Greek translation. His new Latin translation of the New Testament did end up being more of an “update” of the existing Classical Latin translation.

Saint Jerome’s Vulgate translation of Jesus’ Transfiguration is more descriptive than the Greek in Jerome’s choice of the word transfiguratus, as opposed to the more direct translation of metamorphosis, which is transformatus. Jerome’s translation reads, “et transfiguratus est ante eos. et resplenduit facies eius sicut sol:

4 See the article “St. Jerome” in the Catholic Encyclopedia, which details his commission from Pope Damasus I concerning the translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible. http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08341a.htm
vestimenta autem eius facta sunt alba sicut nix” (And he was transfigured before them. And his face did shine as the sun: and his garments became white as snow, Matthew 17:2). When paired with the terms resplenduit ... sicut sol (shone like the sun) and alba sicut nix (white as snow), Jerome’s choice of transfiguratus in his translation creates a relationship between transfiguration and pure, bright light, and pure, white snow, which can be as blinding as the sun when it reflects sunlight. It is both beautiful and awe-inspiring. Jerome also uses transfiguratus in his translation of the Transfiguration in Mark (9:1–2), and Luke (9:29). In his choice of the word transfiguratus over transformatus, it is clear that Jerome is associating the word transfiguratus with light, splendor, and clarity by pairing it with the words resplenduit and splendentia; likewise, he associated transfiguratus with purity by associating it with the albus, nix, and refulgens. Jerome’s association of the word transfiguratus with light, splendor, and clarity has further contributed to the modern definition of the word “transfiguration,” causing it to be associated with a more beautiful, elevated, and even holier physical appearance, and therefore a state beyond mere transformation.

In the Old Testament, also known as the Tanakh, or the Hebrew scriptures, one other instance in which such a relationship between transformation, light, and holiness is encountered. This is the episode in which Moses, after having spent forty days in conversation with God on the summit of Mount Sinai, returns to the camp that the children of Israel have established on their way to land that God has promised them. The primary source of the Old Testament writings for late antique readers, until Saint Jerome made his translation in the fourth century, was the
Septuagint translation.\(^5\) When Saint Jerome undertook his translation of the scriptures into Vulgar Latin, he relied on the Hebrew-language version of the Old Testament for his translation rather than the Septuagint version. As a result, Jerome made a translation error concerning Moses’ appearance following his descent from Mount Sinai. As recorded in Exodus 34:29–30

> ὡς δὲ κατέβαινεν Μωσῆς ἐκ τοῦ ὅρους καὶ αἱ δύο πλάκες ἐπὶ τῶν χειρῶν Μωσῆς καταβαίνοντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ ὅρους Μωσῆς οὐκ ἤδει ὅτι δεδόξασται ἡ ὄψις τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ τῷ λαλεῖν αὐτὸν αὐτῷ. Καὶ εἶδεν Ααρων καὶ πάντες οἱ πρεσβύτεροι Ἰσραήλ τὸν Μωσῆς καὶ ἡ δεδοξασμένη ἡ ὄψις τοῦ χρώματος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν ἐγγίσαι αὐτοῦ.

(And when Moses went down from the mountain, there were the two tablets in the hands of Moses—as then he went down from the mountain, Moses knew not that the appearance of his face was glorified, when God spoke to him. And Aaron and all the elders of Israel saw Moses, and the appearance of the skin of his face was made glorious, and they feared to approach him.)\(^6\)

In the Septuagint translation it is made clear that Moses had been transfigured while on the mountain receiving God’s commandments for the Hebrew people, and the people of Israel are able to still see the after-effects of this transfiguration. Further,\(^5\)

\(^5\) The Septuagint translation of the Old Testament (also known as the LXX translation) was translated into Koine Greek from Hebrew for the Hellenized Jews of Egypt. The translation was begun in Alexandria in the third century, BCE, and completed in the second century, BCE. It is called the Septuagint because, according to legend, it was translated by seventy-two Hellenized Jewish scholars for a Greek-speaking Jewish people living in Alexandria and the rest of Egypt. It quickly became known throughout the Greco-Roman world, to become (and still remain) the standard non-Hebrew version of the Hebrew scriptures.

in verse 35, the LXX text reads “So the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that it was glorified...” (καὶ εἶδον οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ τὸ πρόσωπον Μωυσῆ ὧτι δεδόξασται). Moses’ encounter with God caused him to take on a small portion of God’s glory, transfiguring him. According to the twelfth-century French rabbi and Torah commentator, Rashi, Moses was transfigured while in God’s presence for his own protection, that he might live while witnessing God’s glory. The result of this was that God’s glory remained with Moses for a time.7

In Jerome’s translation of the same passage, however, Moses appears to have undergone a very different transformation, having essentially grown horns while in the presence of God:

cumque descenderet Moses de monte Sinai tenebat duas tabulas testimonii et ignorabat quod cornuta esset facies sua ex consortio sermonis Dei. videntes autem Aaron et filii Israhel cornutam Mosi faciem timuerunt prope accedere.

(And when Moses came down from the mount Sinai, he held the two tables of the testimony, and he knew not that his face was horned from the conversation of the Lord. And Aaron and the children of Israel, seeing the face of Moses horned, were afraid to come near.)8

In Jerome’s translation, as well as the LXX translation of the Hebrew scriptures, Moses undergoes a change that is remarkable, and each translation represents the

8 For the English translation of Saint Jerome’s Vulgate Bible, I am relying on the Douay-Rheims translation, which is an English-language translation of the Vulgate. I believe that Jerome’s error in translation stems from the fact that the Hebrew language has no vowels, and the ancient Hebrew of the Torah contains no vowel markers. When Jerome saw the Hebrew word qrn, he was unable to distinguish between the verb q(ā)r(a)n (shone, or glorified) and the noun q(e)r(e)n (horn).
two sides of physical change: transfiguration, which is an elevation from the natural state to a state that is holier and more angelic; and, metamorphosis, which is a degradation from the natural state to one that is lesser, and even bestial. However, regardless of whether one speaks of Moses’ face as being glorified, radiant, shining, or horned after his encounter with God, it is certain from the textual evidence that a change took place.

The Church Fathers on Transfiguration and Metamorphosis

In considering the bestial attributes that Saint Jerome ascribes to Moses following his encounter with his god, one can also consider the Ovidian literature that also ascribes bestial attributes to mortals who also encountered their gods; however, one must also take into account the writings of the early Church theologians (hereafter referred to as the Church Fathers), who made a clear distinction between metamorphosis and transfiguration. The Church Fathers, who based their opinions on metamorphosis on the works of Ovid and Apuleius, considered metamorphosis to be a degradation and a devolution from the human state, whereas they considered transfiguration to be an elevation out of, and an exaltation from, the human condition. For the Church Fathers, metamorphosis degrades, but transfiguration exalts; transfiguration elevates and illuminates humanity, but metamorphosis bestializes humanity and darkens the human mind, forcing those affected to function by animal instinct rather than by human reason.

One of the early Church Fathers to write on the Transfiguration and its significance to the Christian is Origen. Born in Alexandria in 185 CE, by age thirty he
was already a celebrated Christian theologian throughout Egypt and Middle East, as far north as Antioch. Among his best-known writings are his commentaries on the gospels of Matthew and John, and his work *Contra Celsum*, written to counteract the teachings of Celsus the Platonist, a second-century anti-Christian apologist. It is in his *Commentary on Matthew* (of which only seven out of fourteen books remain, two of them in fragments) that Origen writes extensively about the Transfiguration of Christ and the great significance of this event in regards not only to the revelation of the deity of Jesus, but also in regards to the glorification of Christ after his resurrection. For Origen, the Transfiguration was a foretaste of the glory that Christ would receive after his resurrection, and the two events are linked together in their heavenly splendor.

In writing on the Transfiguration of Christ in his *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen argues that the glorified states of Transfiguration and Resurrection are related to one another, and this teaching became the basis of the viewpoints of several of the Church Fathers concerning the Transfiguration. Origen argues that during his Transfiguration, Jesus reveals himself to his chosen apostles, Peter, James, and John, as more than human, being also God. Just prior to the event of the Transfiguration, Peter had declared that Jesus was the “Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). Origen asserts that the Transfiguration is an additional affirmation of his divinity as the Messiah, but goes further in not only affirming Jesus’ divinity, but displaying it to the three apostles who were the most faithful. Origen argues that

9 See the article “Origen and Origenism” at [http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11306b.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11306b.htm)
... when He was transfigured before those who were led up by Him into the lofty mountain, He appeared to them in the form of God ... [he was] known no longer after the flesh, but known in His divinity ... and behelden in the form of God according to their knowledge; for before them Jesus is transfigured ...¹⁰

Origen is clear: transfiguration is the revelation of Jesus as both God and man who is capable of lifting humanity above its imperfect condition and toward exaltation, out of darkness and into light. For Origen, Transfiguration means to become something more than human. Origen’s views on the Transfiguration became the foundation of “Transfiguration Theology” of several of the Church Fathers, such as Tertullian, Irenaeus, and Augustine, to name but a few. “Transfiguration Theology” holds that Christ’s transfiguration prefigures the transfiguration of all humanity, meaning that humanity can be transformed through Christ and return to the Edenic state of the prelapsarian Adam and Eve.¹¹

The Carthaginian theologian Tertullian, who wrote during the early third century, used the Transfiguration of Christ as a key in his elucidation of orthodox Christianity and his fight against heresy. Tertullian particularly expounded on the Transfiguration of Christ in his work against the heretic Marcion, whose views rejecting the dual nature of Christ (i.e., that Christ was both entirely human and


¹¹ According to ancient and medieval Jewish theologians, Adam and Eve were clothed in light prior to their transgression. See The Legends of the Jews, Vol. 1. “Adam.” Eds, Ginsburg, Szold, and Radin. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003): 79–80. The teaching of the Church Fathers that the Transfiguration of Jesus prefigures the return of humanity to the prelapsarian state is part of the larger teaching on the doctrine of theosis that is, becoming like God through obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and growing in grace—in which heaven is a paradise of perfection, glory, and repose, comparable to the lost paradise of Eden.
entirely divine) threatened the foundational teachings of Christianity. In his writings, Marcion taught that the god of the Old Testament and the god of the New Testament are different gods. The Old Testament’s god, Marcion argued, was characterized by anger, jealousy, capriciousness, and vengeance. Marcion asserted that the Old Testament god was one who demanded adherence to the law of justice and meted out punishment for what might be considered minor offenses, such as performing a small amount of labor on the Sabbath. However, the god of the New Testament, he argued, is a god whose only attributes are love and mercy. This New Testament god, to whom Jesus referred as “father”, is the god who sent Jesus into the world to teach his message of love and mercy, in contrast to the Old Testament god who sent various prophets to preach a message of wrath incurred at breaking his commandments. Marcion taught that Jesus was the messenger of the god of the New Testament, and that as a prophet, he was in no way divine.\textsuperscript{12} Tertullian counters Marcion’s claims by arguing that the Transfiguration, as recorded in the synoptic gospels, provides proof of the divinity of his dual nature. Tertullian further argues that Jesus is not a mere prophet of Marcion’s New Testament god because both Moses and Elijah—both prophets who served the Old Testament god—appear at the Transfiguration and take their places on either side of Jesus, according him the central place of honor, as well as authority over them.\textsuperscript{13}

Jesus’ transfiguration is similar to Moses’ transfiguration on Mount Sinai when he received the law for the children of Israel. As Moses is the prophet who

\textsuperscript{12} Tertullian. \textit{Against Marcion: Book I.} Chapter 2. See \url{http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/03121.htm}

\textsuperscript{13} Tertullian. \textit{Against Marcion: Book IV.} Chapter 22. See \url{http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/03124.htm}
received the law, and propagated it, and Elijah is the prophet who, on Mount Carmel, 
defeated the priests of the Canaanite god Baal and called the people of Israel to 
return to the worship of the god of Israel, they each represent the two constants for 
the people of Israel: the Law, and the Prophets. Their presence at Christ's 
transfiguration and according him the place of honor, according to Tertullian, 
signifies that the Law and the Prophets were fulfilled in the person of Jesus, 
therefore completing the transformation from the Law of Justice to the Law of 
Mercy.

In his argument that the Transfiguration is proof of both the human and 
divine natures of Jesus, Tertullian provides a description of the event, re-presenting 
it with his own commentary interspersed throughout as the main points of his 
argument. In re-presenting the Transfiguration in this manner, Tertullian links 
Moses and Elijah as forerunners of Christ, but not equals with Christ, and most 
certainly not superior to Christ. Tertullian demonstrates that Moses and Elijah, as 
well as other Old Testament prophets (e.g., Isaiah), prophesied the coming of the 
Messiah, whom Christians recognize as Jesus, and explained that the promised 
Messiah would be identified by his filial relationship with God the Father. Tertullian 
maintains, in Book IV, chapter 22 of his work Against Marcion, that the scriptural 
evidence that the synoptic gospels provide in the Transfiguration narrative that only 
God, himself, could cause such a brilliant transformation.14

14 Arguing as he did against Marcion's teachings denying the divinity of Christ, Tertullian began the 
practice of publicly defending orthodox Christian teachings against what were eventually declared 
heretical teachings at the First Council of Nicaea (convened 325 CE), and further clarified and upheld
The Transfiguration as recounted in the three synoptic gospels presents an event that elevates Jesus above his human condition and reveals his divinity to his three favored apostles. Each of the synoptic gospel writers presents Jesus undergoing an immediate physical transformation into a state beyond human and into a divine state of purity and light. For Saint Augustine, bishop of Hippo (located in the modern-day Annaba region of Algeria) from 395–430 CE, the Transfiguration was not only proof of the divinity of Jesus and the Triune nature of God, but was also the symbol of what humanity could become. In his work *De civitate Dei*, book 22, chapter 35, Saint Augustine argues that the Transfiguration is not only Christ’s revelation of his divinity and a symbol of his resurrection, but is also representative of state the humanity following the return of Jesus and the resurrection of the faithful Christians at the end of time. For Augustine, the Transfiguration symbolizes the final shedding of sin and, sin thus overcome, accomplishing of the salvation and exaltation of humanity. As sin is vanquished, humanity becomes transfigured in a way that allows everyone to see with “spiritual eyes”, and become enlightened so as to understand the mysteries of salvation that Augustine, and the apostles before him, taught.

**Differentiating Transfiguration and Metamorphosis in Tension**

at the Council of Chalcedon (convened 451 CE). Both of these councils decreed the dual (human/divine) nature of Christ.


When one considers Augustine’s teachings on the Transfiguration, one must also look at his teachings on the subject of metamorphosis. Both transfiguration and metamorphosis are types of transformation. The question is, are they the same type of transformation? The Greek μετεμορφώθη is translated by Saint Jerome in his Latin Vulgate Bible as transfiguratus, and a cursory reading of the two languages in their gospel context could lead one to believe that the two terms are synonymous. However, when studying other authors who were contemporaries of the gospel writers, it is possible to see how they viewed the two terms differently. While the Greek term metemphōthi was a word used to communicate the supernatural transformation of Christ, and transfiguratus the Latin term for the same event, based on contemporary usage by other writers at the time, it is clear that the terms had two distinct meanings. The Latin transfiguratus connotes (now, as well in the time of the Church Fathers) a mystical experience that is not expressed with μετεμορφώθη. Transfiguration is, in each biblical instance cited above, associated with light, and an elevation of humanity and the human spirit. As we shall see, metamorphosis is not associated with any of these, but is rather considered the antithesis of transfiguration and its associated qualities, as seen in the literature of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Metamorphosis connotes a reduction of an individual’s human nature, devolution, and a movement away from light into darkness.

Metamorphosis Associated with the Demonic

Saint Augustine of Hippo, in his work De Civitate Dei, examined the poets of antiquity who “sang songs about those so-called gods who were merely men,
However great.” It was Augustine’s argument that these poets wrote a “flood of falsehood”, and claimed that even if these poets of antiquity “wrote anything … touching on the one true God, they merely adored Him along with their other gods,” and so all their works produced nothing that was good for the Christian reader. Augustine continues by closely examining metamorphosis in another chapter, asserting that metamorphosis in the Ovidian sense is nothing more than “demonic trickery”. Augustine bases his argument on various stories that had been told to him by people that he knew and whom he considered to be “quite above lying” to him about such things. It appears, however, that, based on what he says, Augustine and those who knew him believed the stories that Ovid had written in the *Metamorphoses* to also be true, and he argues that if these changes were wrought in human beings, they were merely the illusions of demonic powers cast onto those who followed them rather than giving their worship to the True God. In making his argument concerning the demonic sources of metamorphosis, Augustine declares that

… such phenomena are either too unfounded in fact or too far beyond general experience to deserve belief … demons cannot create substances. The most they can do—if they do any of the things we are discussing—is to make, in appearance only, one of the creatures of the true God to *look* like something different. Hence, on no account would I believe that demonic art or power

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can really change a man’s body—much less his mind—into the body and shape of any beast.\textsuperscript{22}

Not only does Augustine differentiate between transfiguration and metamorphosis, he aligns the reports that he has heard concerning metamorphosed humans with demonic activity and trickery. Several, though not all, instances of metamorphosis in medieval French literature, however, contradict Augustine’s argument of demonic trickery because the degrading physical transformation occurs as the result of penitential actions on the part of the transformed characters.

The idea that metamorphosis can be ascribed entirely to demonic activity was not unique to Augustine of Hippo. Saint Isidore of Seville, archbishop of Seville (604–636 CE), in his work \textit{Etymologiae} (\textit{The Etymologies}), taught that transformation is a natural part of the order that God created by which all creatures—from the lowest animals and plants to human beings—change as they grow and mature.\textsuperscript{23} However, even though Isidore acknowledges that transformation is a natural part of God's order in nature, he agrees with Augustine’s argument that \textit{metamorphosis} in human beings—that is from human to a lower creature—is brought about by demonic or other wicked activities. Isidore refers to the example of the sorceress Circe, from Homer’s \textit{Odyssey}, who used witchcraft to “transform the companions of Ulysses into beasts,” and “companions of Diomede ... into birds”.\textsuperscript{24} Isidore also asserts that some criminals, presumably to escape

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{24} Isidore of Seville, 246.
\end{flushright}
punishment, can be transformed into beasts through the use of witches’ magic when he states that “the appearance of miscreants is changed and they wholly metamorphose into wild animals, by means of either magic charms or poisonous herbs.”

Like Augustine, Isidore of Seville makes his assertions based on the belief that the mythological stories of pre-Christian Antiquity are factual retellings of historic events, insisting that, “the reporting of [these metamorphoses] is not a lie from story-telling, but people assert this with historical confirmation.”

Isidore’s mention of Circe as sorceress capable of causing humans to metamorphose into beasts and birds relates both sorcery and metamorphosis to demonic works of darkness. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid produces a shortened retelling of the legend of Circe, emphasizing that when she performs her transformative magic, light is subdued as darkness overtakes it. Ovid states that Circe

\[
\text{concipit illa preces et verba venefica dicit}\]
\[
\text{ignotosque deos ignoto carmine adorat}\]
\[
\text{quo solet et niveae vultum confundere Lunae}\]
\[
\text{et patrio capiti bibulas subtexere nubes.}\]
\[
\text{tum quoque cantato denseetur carmine caelum}\]
\[
(\text{fell to muttering incantations, worshipping her weird gods with a weird charm with which it was her wont to obscure the white moon’s features, and})\]

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25 Isidore of Seville, 246.
26 Isidore of Seville, 246.
hide her father’s face behind misty clouds. Now also by her magic song the 
heavens are darkened...)\textsuperscript{27} 

In specifically mentioning Circe and her magic, those who would have known Ovid, 
and possibly Homer, would have been able to make connection between her sorcery 
and the darkness with which she is associated. Her spells that caused human beings 
to metamorphose into beasts and birds are associated with the banishing of light 
and the welcoming of darkness, much as demons are associated with works of 
darkness as they engage in battle against “the children of the light.” (1 Thess. 5:5) 

Boethius and Metamorphosis 

In his \textit{De Consolatione Philosophiæ (The Consolation of Philosophy)}, the 
philosopher Boethius similarly speaks of metamorphosis and the sorceress Circe, as 
well as her role in the metamorphosis of some of the heroes of ancient mythology. 
For Boethius, metamorphosis is a metaphor for the beastly behavior of humans 
toward one another, and for the various types of behavior and characteristic 
qualities that human possess that can also be ascribed to the lesser animals. 

Boethius wrote \textit{The Consolation of Philosophy} while imprisoned in 523 CE, 
awaiting trial on charges of treason against the Ostrogoth king Theodoric the Great. 
The book itself is written in the style of a conversation between the author and 
“Lady Philosophy”, and addresses the question of theodicy, or how evil can exist in a 
world governed by a just and loving God. In \textit{The Consolation of Philosophy}, Boethius

\textsuperscript{27} Ovid. \textit{Metamorphoses: Book XIV}. Frank Justus Miller, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University 
reasons that, contrary to Augustine and Isidore, metamorphosis is the result of human wickedness and weakness of character. Boethius argues that certain human beings, because of their own wickedness and their own character faults, seem to take on the appearance of particular animals that demonstrate those same qualities. Following his reasoning, Boethius implies that the metamorphoses Circe accomplished were simply acts that revealed her victims' personalities, making them physically resemble the creatures they already morally resembled. The outer man is made to appear as he already is inwardly.28

Boethius contends that when human beings give themselves up to wickedness, although they may appear physically human, they have lost their human nature, which has been transformed into a beastly nature. Boethius proclaims that evil men, "by turning to wickedness, ... have by the same act lost their human nature."29 However, if a someone who turns to wickedness can lose his human nature and take on the nature of a beast, then reason follows that a wicked person who abandons evil for righteousness can likewise shed the beastly nature acquired through wicked behavior and regain the previously lost human nature. If wickedness causes one to degrade in their spiritual condition, then goodness can elevate one to a better spiritual condition.

In their harsh condemnation of the idea of human transmogrification, Augustine and Isidore only considered metamorphosis from one perspective: the

change of physical form from a higher species to that of a lower species, as recounted in so many of Ovid’s stories from the *Metamorphoses*, attributing such a phenomenon entirely to demonic activity. Boethius considered human metamorphosis to be an allegory for man’s own fallen nature, arguing that it is man who is responsible for his degrading transformation because of his own preference for wickedness over righteousness. In Ovid, as well as Apuleius in *The Golden Ass*, and the Hebrew scriptures, metamorphosis is always debasement from the higher, human state, to a lower, beastly state. The theologians and philosophers of the early Christian church noticed this, and for this reason they condemned the idea as demonic trickery, or perhaps the result of witchcraft, both of which only give the appearance of metamorphic change from the human form to a beastly form, or (in the case of Narcissus, for example) the form of a plant. One speaks of the appearance of change because, as God created the human in God’s image, to transform the human into a lower creature who survives only on base animal instinct would be to desecrate the living icon of God.

Contrary to metamorphosis, however, is the idea of transfiguration. Biblical examples of transfiguration connote such an event as being an elevation to a higher state of being, above and beyond the human condition, and an even further perfection of the apex of God’s creation. Metamorphosis and transfiguration are, in a sense, opposites; metamorphosis signals imperfection, reduction, and loss of reason, and transfiguration signals elevation, perfection, and ascension.

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30 Metamorphosis in the Hebrew scriptures will be covered more extensively in the second chapter of this dissertation.
whereas transfiguration signals perfection, elevation above the human condition, and enlightenment.

**Metamorphosis in Greco-Roman and Medieval Narrative Genres**

Ovid’s magnum opus, the *Metamorphoses*, is the main work that I shall examine treating the trope of metamorphosis in the ancient tradition, and provides the foundation for my theory concerning the difference between metamorphosis and transfiguration in the narrative literary tradition. Ovid was a poet of the Roman Empire, and he composed the *Metamorphoses* sometime around 8 CE, shortly before emperor Augustus exiled him to Tomis, (now Constanta Romania) on the Black Sea for what the poet referred to as “carmen et error” (a poem and a mistake). It is believed that his work *Ars Amatoria* (*The Art of Love*) was the reason for his exile to Tomis because the emperor, who was in the process of reforming the Roman moral code, found it offensive and a possible hindrance to the reforms he was propagating.

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid retells the myths of Ancient Greece and Rome as though they are historic fact. Ovid begins the *Metamorphoses* with the creation of the world and continues through to the deification of Julius Caesar. Throughout the tales, Ovid provides illustrations of the metamorphoses of human beings into beastly or plant life forms, with one instance of the opposite occurring, namely the

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tale of Pygmalion whose statue is transformed from a stone sculpture into a real woman. Examples of metamorphosis narratives include the story of Lycaeon, who was transformed into a wolf after slaughtering and roasting his own son in order to feed him to Jupiter as a means of testing the god’s omniscience. Actaeon, who was turned into a stag and torn apart by his own hunting dogs for the crime of accidentally seeing the nude goddess Diana as she was bathing in the woods, and Arachne, the talented weaver who wove a tapestry mocking the gods and, as a result, was turned into a spider by an angry Minerva. Each of these examples serves as an illustration of the idea that metamorphosis in literature is a transformation from a higher form to a lower form—from human reason and intellect to basic animal instinct. These examples also provide instances in which the metamorphosed subject is being punished for unrighteous, or at times careless, behavior.

Ovid also provides instances in which the gods use metamorphosis as a reward for those who have been faithful servant to them. However, it must be remarked that the gods of Greek and Roman antiquity were often portrayed as capricious, and sometimes what might be considered a great reward would become its own burden and punishment. One example of such a reward from the gods is that of the “Midas Touch”. It concerns the Phrygian king, Midas, who was a faithful servant of the god Bacchus. As his reward, Bacchus offered him whatever gift he

should request. Midas, in his greed, asked Bacchus to grant him the power to turn anything he touched into god. The request was granted, but Midas soon discovered that the god’s gift became his bane when he realized that he could no longer eat or drink because his food turned into gold as soon as he touched it. The same effect was produced if his servants tried to feed him because as soon as the food or drink came into contact with his tongue, it became gold. After inadvertently turning his beloved daughter into a golden statue, Midas begged Bacchus to take away his gift, repenting of his greed and his foolishness.\textsuperscript{36} However, not all divine gifts were curses in disguise. One example, in particular, is that of Argus, the faithful hundred-eyed servant of the goddess Juno. After Mercury murdered Argus, Juno rewarded Argus for his fidelity to her by placing his hundred eyes on the tail feathers of the peacock, her favorite bird, so that the world would forever be reminded of Argus and his great fidelity.\textsuperscript{37} One must remark, however, that Argus’ posthumous reward could hardly cause him any harm, and the reward that Juno bestows upon him insures that his legend will always be known. However, no matter how beautiful the peacock may be, Argus’ eyes remained dead and served only to decorate plumage. For Ovid, whether the gods use metamorphosis as a punishment that results in the abasement of those guilty of crimes against the gods or humanity, or whether they use metamorphosis as a reward, the end result is always the imperfection of the transformed. Those who are punished find themselves completely stripped of their


humanity, reduced to the bestial nature mirrors their crime. Those who are rewarded, such as Midas, quickly learn that divine rewards can be devastating.

However, there is one instance, in the *Metamorphoses* in which the gods use metamorphosis in a way that it does not appear to be a veiled punishment, and is the only instance in which a metamorphosis occurs from something inhuman to human. This unique occurrence in the *Metamorphoses* is when the goddess Venus grants a wish to the sculptor Pygmalion after he entreats her to give him a wife who is like an ivory statue he has made. This statue is his image of the most perfectly beautiful woman. In this unique instance, the goddess not only transforms Pygmalion’s perfect statue into a woman for him, she also causes the statue-become-woman to return Pygmalion’s love. One should note that Pygmalion, in making his request to Venus, asked that his wife be *like* his ivory statue rather than asking that she make the ivory statue his wife. Venus clearly understands what Pygmalion asks of her, and causes the statue to transform into a human woman. However, this singular occurrence does not necessarily mean that Pygmalion is not being punished. In Pygmalion’s situation, his punishment is to fall in love with his own creation because he is a misogynist, and causing him to fall in love with his lifeless statue is Venus’ way of punishing Pygmalion for his lack of love for, and even hatred of, women.

offensus uitiis quae plurima menti
femineae natura dedit, sine coniuge caelebs
uiuebat thalamique diu consorte carebat

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(offended by the very many faults nature has given to the female mind, he was living celibately without a wife, and for a long time lacked a partner in his bed, Ovid. X: 244–246.) Nevertheless, whether or not one considers that the gods are punishing Pygmalion for his misogyny, this particular story, much like the tale of Narcissus, came to be used as a love trope in medieval French literature.

Another metamorphosis that Ovid features is one that, based on narrative evidence, is accidental. The transformation of the fisherman Glaucus is accomplished through the eating of a magical herb that took away his ability to live on land and breathe air. However, he was received by the sea gods and through their efforts was rendered immortal.39

Ovid and the Metamorphic Trope in Medieval French Literature

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* was well known to medieval French scholars and medieval French authors. Frank Coulson, in his extensive work on the reception of Ovid in the Middle Ages, attributes Ovid’s popularity in medieval France to the fact that in the twelfth century scholars, such as Arnulf of Orléans, William of Orléans, and Fulco of Orléans wrote complete commentaries on individual poems, indicating that Ovid’s poetic works were being intensely studied in the cathedral school of Orléans, one of the greatest contemporary centers of learning.40 Given the extensive

degree of Ovidian scholarship in France from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries, it is not surprising that his works should exercise significant influence over the contemporary literature; nor is it unreasonable to believe that medieval scholars and readers would be well acquainted with Ovid’s tales and would, therefore, be able to recognize Ovid’s influence on their own literature. Ovidian tropes are plentiful in the romance, a genre in which the trope of courtly love, or fin’amors, is prominent.

Ovid’s Ars amatoria and the Heroïdes exercised a considerable influence on this particular type of literature, which was to serve as a model of “ideal love”. The Ars amatoria and the Heroïdes serve as treatises on the phenomenon of heterosexual love and elaborate on the proper structure of heterosexual desire. According to Marilynn Desmond, from the twelfth century onwards, both the Ars amatoria and the Heroïdes circulated widely and exercised considerable influence throughout medieval literature, but most particularly in the medieval romance.41 According to Desmond, the Ars amatoria, in particular, served as a fundamental influence on the works of Chrétien de Troyes, specifically Cligès and his later romances. Desmond demonstrates this influence with Chrétien’s own admission that when he translated the Ars amatoria into French, “he acknowledge[d] the significance of Ovid’s poem for the translatio studii of Latin erotic rhetoric and medieval romance,” and she further asserts that Chrétien “developed an elaborate heteroerotic ethic in Cligès

that is derived from the *Ars*, and the Ovidian discourse is apparent in all his later romances".  

Further evidence of Ovid’s influence among authors in medieval France is found in the contemporary literature. There are numerous reproductions of Ovidian stories in the popular literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in works such as Guillaume de Lorris’ and Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la rose*, as well as the translations and rewritings of several Ovidian scenes, such as the *Lai de Narcisse*, and *Philomena*. Each of these works, as well as being a treatise on love, directly considers the trope of human metamorphosis. The works of other medieval authors, such as the twelfth century writer Marie de France, and the fifteenth-century writer Christine de Pizan, contain several intertextual elements with the works of Ovid, but do not necessarily contain the same metamorphic tropes or qualities that one finds in the other medieval French works named above.

The *Roman de la rose* is a long allegorical love poem composed by two authors: Guillaume de Lorris, and Jean de Meun. In the *Roman de la rose*, Guillaume de Lorris makes use of the story of Narcissus. In his reworking of the Ovidian tale, Guillaume makes some subtle changes to the narrative in order to make it more relevant to his work as a treatise on love, as well as to make it relevant to the reader. In Ovid, Narcissus is a handsome young man who rejects love. After spurning the

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42 Desmond, *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, 110.
44 Recent scholarship attributes Guillaume de Lorris with beginning *Le Roman de la rose*, and having written the first 4000 lines between 1220 and 1230, possibly 1245, leaving it unfinished. Jean de Meun then wrote an additional 17,724 lines of continuation (1270–1280), to complete what Guillaume de Lorris had started.
love-struck wood nymph Echo, the gods punish Narcissus in his arrogance and pride
by making him fall madly in love with his own reflection in a stream. As this love can
never be requited, Narcissus wastes away, dies, and is transformed into a flower—a
narcissus—that grows along the banks of streams.\textsuperscript{45} In his reworking of the story,
Guillaume changes Echo from a wood nymph into a “haute dame” (line 1441),
effectively transforming her from a sylvan sprite into a human lady of noble birth,
and places Narcissus at a fountain rather than a stream. Guillaume relates how
Dame Echo is wounded by Narcissus’ painful rejection and how, just before she dies
of a broken heart, she implores God to punish the arrogant, capricious young man.
God hears Echo’s prayer and wills that Narcissus should fall in love with his own
reflection, later to die as a result of his own longing for himself.\textsuperscript{46} Guillaume omits
Narcissus’ transformation into a flower at the end of his reworking of the legend,
ending with Narcissus’ death and going no further with the story; however, he does
provide an explicit warning to those who reject love out of arrogance and pride,
stating that they deserve nothing less than death.\textsuperscript{47} The lesson the reader is to learn
is the same in both stories: one must not reject love out of arrogance. When one
rejects love out of arrogance, or uses love to mistreat another, Love will have her
revenge.

Even though Guillaume de Lorris omits the transformation of Narcissus into
a flower at the beginning of the \textit{Roman de la rose}, he does undergo a transformation
that is “the destructive passion that has its origin in self-love,” and Amant, the

\textsuperscript{45} Ovid. III: 402–510.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Le Roman de la rose}. Lines 1434–1500.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Le Roman de la rose}. Lines 1501–1503.
protagonist of the work, risks succumbing to this same destructive transformation.\textsuperscript{48} Jean de Meun uses the example of Pygmalion as a counter-example to that of Narcissus. Whereas Narcissus is closed off to love from an external source because of his own conceit, Pygmalion is open to love and allows himself to be transformed by it.

Jean de Meun, in his section of the \textit{Roman de la rose}, provides a retelling of the myth of Pygmalion. Like Guillaume, his retelling of the myth is considerably different than that of Ovid’s version, as he adds far more detail and focuses more closely on the actions of the eponymous character. Likewise, Jean’s Pygmalion is not a misogynist; rather, he is such a talented sculptor that he cannot help but fall in love with one of his own statues.\textsuperscript{49} Also, unlike Guillaume who omits Narcissus’ metamorphosis into a flower, Jean does not have the option of omitting the transformation of the statue into a human woman because the entire tale revolves around this particular transformation. In Ovid’s version of the tale, the author does not allow the reader access to the protagonist’s mind so as to know the emotions that he experiences while the ivory statue transforms into a woman of flesh and bone as he caresses it. Jean de Meun depicts Pygmalion as overwhelmed and the reader is able to share his thoughts and emotions.

\begin{quote}
Qu’est ce, dist il, sui je tantez?

Veille je pas? Nanil! ainz songe!

Mais ainc ne vi si apert songe.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Le Roman de la rose}. Lines 20919–21178.
Songe? Par foi, non faz, ainz veille!

Dont vient donques ceste merveille?

Est ce fantosme ou anemis

Qui s'est en mon ymage mis?

(What is this, said he, am I being tempted? Am I not awake? No, I am
dreaming! But I have never seen such a tangible dream. A dream? Of course
not, I am awake! From whence does this wonder come? Has a ghost or a devil
possessed my statue?)

Fear has overtaken Pygmalion, but to allay his fears, Jean de Meun gives voice to the
post-transformation statue, therefore adding greater humanity than Ovid to the
once inanimate object. When Jean provides a speaking voice to Pygmalion’s statue,
she is able to alleviate the sculptor’s doubts that he is perhaps being tricked by the
devil, and confirm that she is indeed the object of his love and affection, and that,
likewise, he is the object of her love and affection.

Ce n'est anemis ne fantome

Douz amis, ainz sui vostre amie

Preste de vostre compaignie

Recevoirm et m'amour vous offre

S'il vous plaist recevoir tel offre

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50 Le Roman de la rose. Lines 21148–21154. Translation is mine unless otherwise noted.
(It is neither a devil nor a ghost, dear Love. I am your lover, ready to become your companion, and I offer my love to you if it pleases you to accept such a gift.)

Jean completes his retelling of the Pygmalion myth by having the two lovers make love and then give thanks to Venus for her role in their union.

These two particular stories, particularly the way the authors of *Le Roman de la rose* set them forth, are lessons about moral transformation. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun present their characters as being self-interested; Narcissus is completely egocentric while Pygmalion seems so absorbed by his own artistry that he becomes impervious to the world around him. Narcissus’ tale stands as a warning to all who would knowingly and brazenly reject love, preferring to remain inwardly focused, whereas Pygmalion offers a glimpse of what love can bring when one opens oneself to others. While one may consider these narratives for the clear, evident transformations that they present, one should not ignore the moral lessons about interior transformations that they teach. If one does not wish to die alone, as does Narcissus, then one must open oneself to others, as does Pygmalion. Pygmalion, then, becomes the anti-Narcissus, and ought to provide the example for those who love or who, at least, open their lives to others.

Ovidian myths of transformation were popular among medieval scholars, and were a ready source for medieval authors who transformed Ovid’s works by making

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51 *Le Roman de la rose*. Lines 21158–21162.

them relatable to a contemporary audience, and who frequently made use of the metamorphic trope in their own original works. Even though some early theologians, such as St. Augustine and St. Isidore, condemned Ovid and metamorphosis literature, in general, as work of pagan subject matter and, therefore, unedifying for the Christian soul, later medieval authors successfully adapted and reinterpreted Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* for a Christian audience, making them an allegory for Christian living. The *Ovide moralisé* is one such example. This anonymous text, probably composed between 1317 and 1328, is more than six times longer than Ovid’s original.53 The work is in the Burgundian dialect and is an attempt at Christianizing Ovid’s “fables de l’ancien temps” (fables of antiquity).54 In translating Ovid’s masterpiece and reimagining the pre-Christian allegory for a Christian audience, the author/translator transformed Ovid’s work into a Christian reinterpretation.55 However, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, as we have seen, was already known in medieval France prior to the *Ovide moralisé*, particularly those Ovidian tales that treated the subject of love. The *Ovide moralisé*, in an attempt to Christianize the *Metamorphoses*, compares the Ovidian text with the biblical text, and using the biblical text as the standard for explaining Ovid’s work. The author of the *Ovide moralisé* seems to indicate that while Ovid produced a wonderful piece of work, he was in error, but only because he was a pagan. The *Ovide moralisé*’s

53 The *Ovide moralisé* is dedicated to Jeanne de Bourgogne, queen of France (1316–1322), wife of King Philippe V.
anonymous author also indicates that, using the Bible as a guide, one can see what Ovid was attempting to say. Therefore, the goal was not only to provide a new translation of the Metamorphoses, but to provide an entirely new “Ovidian” text with a Christian message, completely transforming the text itself.  

**Metamorphosis in the Merveilleux**

In the classical literary tradition that I have presented, metamorphosis is a degradation of the human condition as it results in the human being becoming a beast and losing all intelligence, and human reason. In Ovid, the human is reduced to beast or plant as punishment for crimes against other people or the gods. Ovid’s work, itself, was transformed by the poets who translated Ovid’s work for a medieval French audience, and in its transformation, not only was the language changed, but allegories as well, with the notion of fin’amors, or courtly love, becoming the primary theme of works like Le Roman de la rose. In the merveilleux, however, Ovidian tropes of metamorphosis are slightly skewed in some of the narratives as the idea of revenge on the part of the transformed replaces the idea of punishment of the metamorphosed.  

It must be remarked that punishment, or some type of *unwarranted* degradation of the transformed subject, is present in these narratives; however, their primary theme is that of revenge for that unwarranted punishment. The *lais* of Marie de France, and anonymous *lais*, such as

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57 The French adjective *merveilleux*, meaning wondrous, or marvelous, is a genre with many of its roots in fairy stories, and in which magic, as well as non-divine supernatural events, are common themes.
the *Lai de Mélion* and the *Lai de Doön* are a few among a large number of *merveilleux* narratives that were popular in France and Norman-England during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Marie de France was a late twelfth-century writer who probably lived and wrote in the court of Henry II of England. She is best known for her *lais*, short narratives in octosyllabic verse. In the prologue to her *lais*, Marie tells her readers that she could have rewritten the tales of the Latin masters of antiquity, but that so many before her have already done so, she has instead chosen to reproduce tales from Celtic sources, that is, the *lais* that she had heard, with the goal that they might be just as useful as the Latin masters of antiquity.58 She defends her choice of material by stating

Des lais pensai qu'oïz aveie.

Ne dutai pas, bien le saveie,

que pur remembrance les firent

des aventures qu'il oïrent

cil ki primes les commencierent

e ki avant les enveierent.

Plusurs en ai oïz conter,

nes vueil laissier ne obliër.

Rime en ai fait ditié

soventes feiz en ai veillié.

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(I thought, therefore, of the lais that I had heard. I knew without doubt that those who had begun writing them and publishing them had wanted to perpetuate the memory of the adventures that they had heard. I, myself, know many, and I do not want them to fade into oblivion. Therefore, I have written a few short stories in verse that have required of me many sleepless hours, Prologue, lines 33–42.)

For Marie de France, the purpose of writing the lais that she has heard is to preserve them for future generations to explore and study. There exist, however, many similarities between the Ovidian sources explored by other authors and the merveilleux sources presented by Marie de France in her lais. As concerns metamorphosis, there are instances in the merveilleux tradition in which human beings transform into beasts. One of the most striking, and obvious, examples from Marie de France is the hero of her lai called Bisclavret.

The story of Bisclavret features a type of metamorphosis that has not yet been covered in this chapter: metamorphosis accomplished at the will of the transformed subject through the use of magic. The story is one of an unnamed Breton knight, known only by the term Bisclavret, who is able to transform himself into a werewolf at will. After the transformation, he goes into the woods and does what wolves do; that is, he hunts prey, and steals. All this he admits to his wife who interrogates him as to why he spends three out of seven days away from home, and where he spends them, suspecting him of having a mistress.59 At first, the knight declines to answer her questions, telling her that to do would be at his own risk. She

59 Marie de France, Bisclavret, Lines 15–52.
continues her questioning, and he finally relents, saying, “Dame, jeo devienc bisclavret”—I become a werewolf (Line 63). After further questioning, he reveals how this feat is accomplished. At first glance, one might consider that this story is shares elements with Ovid’s lycanthropy story of Lycaeon. However, further inspection reveals that the only element that the two stories share is a main character that becomes a wolf. Lycaeon has been transformed by divine power and can never return to his human form. The Bisclavret, on the other hand, is able to effect his own transformation by means of magic. He does not reveal the exact magic behind his transformation, only that he leaves his clothes hidden under a stone at an abandoned chapel in the forest. The Bisclavret, in wolf form, retains his human reason and his ability to communicate with humans (although without the gift of speech), whereas Lycaeon loses all his human senses and abilities, and must live on pure instinct.

The werewolf in Bisclavret, unlike the metamorphosed creatures in Ovid, does not signify a debasement of humanity to the bestial, or devolution from human reason and intellect to animal instinct. The shape-shifting hero in this lai retains his faculties while in lupine form. The retention of his mental capacities is evident from the beginning (e.g., he remembers what he must do to return to his human form), but his humanness while in a wolf’s body is evidenced when the werewolf, since

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61 John Friedman. “Werewolf Transformation in the Manuscript Era.” Journal of the Early Book Society. 17 (2014): 65. Friedman asserts that although Marie indicates that her hero is able to transform by enchantment, she does not say what that enchantment is. In his article, Friedman expounds on the notion that werewolf transformation in medieval narrative was generally accomplished through enchantment.
betrayed by his wife and her lover who have stolen his clothes to keep him in lupine form, meets the king and pays him obeisance:

*Issi remest un an entire,*

tant que li reis ala chacier.

*A la forest ala tut dreit*

*la u li Bisclavret esteit*

... *Des que il a le rei choisi,*

*vers lui curut querre merci.*

*Il l'aveit pris par sun estrié,*

*la jambe li baise et le pié*

(An entire year had passed when the king went hunting, galloping straight to the forest where the Bisclavret lived ... as soon as he (the Bisclavret) saw the king, he ran to him to implore his mercy. He took him by his stirrup and kissed his leg and foot.)

This action provides proof that the man trapped in the form of an animal has retained his senses. The act of obeisance greatly impresses the king, who then decides to keep the wolf as a pet. Further evidence of the retention of his human senses leads to his freedom from his bestial form. The werewolf recognizes his wife and her lover at a court function, and in vengeance for his wife’s betrayal, Bisclavret

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attacks her and bites off her nose. This leads to his wife’s confession of her betrayal, the return of his clothes, and the restoration of the werewolf to his human form.64

In this example of metamorphosis in the *merveilleux*, Marie de France presents a transformation that is not really a metamorphosis in that the change is voluntary (the hero of the story is able to transform himself at will), impermanent (he is able to regain his human form), and the change in no wise alters or diminishes the hero's ability to think and reason like a human. Some scholars, such as Edith Joyce Benkov presents the theory that the knight in Bisclavret is “an unfortunate, who has no control over his nature,”65 without taking into consideration that Marie de France’s werewolf is in full control of his faculties at all times, and, therefore, can control whether and when he transforms. Phillip A. Bernhardt-House also points out that Bisclavret, and the almost identical werewolf narrative, Mélion, are both stories in which “the werewolf’s transformation is truly voluntary; though the choice to assume lupine form is his originally, he is trapped in that form by his wife’s exploitation of his limitations.”66 The werewolf, then, is fully aware of his choice and what he does in transforming himself, and is fully capable of returning to his human form. In Ovid, and those medieval authors that Ovid and his works inspired, metamorphosis is a degeneration from the human form to a lower form, and this includes the cognitive abilities of the transformed subjects: the person who is

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changed has no control whatsoever over the transformation, and likewise has no control over whether or not certain human faculties will be retained, as the metamorphosis is accomplished through the powers of a superior deity.

Metamorphosis in Hagiographic Literature

The Church Fathers regarded the topic of metamorphosis from only one perspective: that of interspecies transformation as set forth in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and in the *Metamorphoses* of Lucius Apuleius, the latter of which St. Augustine of Hippo called *The Golden Ass*\(^{67}\) in his critique of the work. In the view of the Church fathers, for any human being, the greatest of God’s creations, to be reduced to the physical and mental state of any of the lower creatures was achievable only through demonic trickery. In contrast, the Church fathers ascertain transfiguration to be the elevation of the human being to something higher, transcendent, and resplendent in relation to mere mortals, and they use the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor as their perfect model for this state of being. Metamorphosis degrades the human condition, is of low estate, and of demonic sources; whereas transfiguration elevates the human condition, is ethereal, and of divine provenance.

There are, however, examples in medieval French hagiographic literature in which the body is transformed, diminished, and weakened through extreme asceticism. This particular type of transformation does not in any way imply

interspecies transformation, so speaking in terms of metamorphosis in the Ovidian
sense will be inappropriate. However, I present here a discussion on a different type
of metamorphosis that is actually, I contend, a *transfiguration* specifically
accomplished by the saints through their penance, self-denial, and askesis. This type
of transformation I label as *ascetical transformation*, that is, transformation (both
physical and spiritual) that is accomplished through rigorous ascetic practice. In the
hagiographic narrative, as the body deteriorates because of askesis, or even torture,
the saint increases in holiness until she or he attains likeness to, or union with, God.
One hagiographic work, in particular, that features this kind of ascetical
transformation is the *Vie de Sainte Marie l’Egyptienne*, written by Rutebeuf, circa
1262.68

Rutebeuf's *Vie de Sainte Marie l’Egyptienne* (hereafter St. Mary, when
referring to the literary character) is a hagiographic narrative in which the extreme
askesis of the title character wreaks physical degradation to the point that she is no
longer visibly recognizable as a human being. In this hagiographic work, Rutebeuf
presents St. Mary as a well-known Alexandrian prostitute who decides to follow a
group of Christians on pilgrimage to Jerusalem. After a mystical experience at the
Church of the Holy Sepulcher, which an unseen force prevents her from entering
because of her many sexual sins, St. Mary repents, confesses her sins, and then
spends the next forty years as a hermit, living a life of extreme asceticism in the
desert beyond the eastern bank of the Jordan River. St. Mary’s physical appearance

68 Rutebeuf, “La Vie de Sainte Marie l’Egyptienne,” *Œuvres complètes* ed. and trans., Michel Zink,
after her conversion is in direct contrast with the physical description that Rutebeuf provides at the beginning of his work. At the beginning of the narrative, Rutebeuf describes St. Mary by saying

Quant ot .XII. anz, moult par fu bele,
Moult i ot gente damoisele,
Plaisant de cors, gente de vis.
Je ne sai que plus vos devis:
Moult par fut bien faite defors
De quanqu’il apartint au cors,
Mais li cuers fu et vains et voles...
(When she was twelve years old, her beauty was unsurpassable. Her body was beautiful, and her face most pleasant. This is all I can tell you: she was indeed perfect on the outside and her body was faultless, but her heart was vain and inconstant...)

She is a beautiful young woman, and uses her beauty to advance her career and life of prostitution. Rutebeuf does not devote much of his text to describing her pre-redemption physical appearance, preferring to place the emphasis on her turpitude by describing her life of debauchery and affinity for fleshly self-indulgence. Nevertheless, in the few lines that Rutebeuf does give to the physical description of St. Mary's youth, he uses language that leaves no doubt as to her beauty. She is exceedingly beautiful of face and body, her only faults being her vanity and

inconstancy. After her repentance, as she lives an ascetic life, she rejects all human company and punishes her body for the sins of her past, causing her to lose her beauty, and become beastly, even monstrous, in her appearance.

The physical transformation that St. Mary undergoes because of her extreme askesis is one that is physically degrading, and her place of self-imposed exile and continuous exposure to the elements contribute to the transformation that her body experiences. At the beginning of her story, Rutebeuf describes her beauty in six lines; but, following her pilgrimage into the desert that brings about her metamorphosis, he dedicates nineteen lines to describing what forty years in the Jordanian desert and extreme abnegation have done to her body. The words that Rutebeuf uses describe one who has become bestial and who is suffering from neglect. Beginning with line 430, Rutebeuf mirrors his statement in line 34 when he describes St. Mary's youthful beauty, then explaining the ascetic practice that will bring about the physical transformation he will describe directly. In the lines that follow, Rutebeuf relates how St. Mary loses her clothing to thorns, tree branches, and the elements before he goes into detail about the changes that have been wrought on her body. Rutebeuf begins this passage at line 430, asking

Tant chemina, que vos diroie?
A tout la soif, a tout le fain
Et a petit d'yaue et de pain,
Toute devint el bois sauvage.
(What can I tell you? She walked so much, pursued by hunger and thirst, and having only a little water and bread, that in the woods she became completely untamed.)

St. Mary the Egyptian, because of her time in the desert, completely isolated from humanity, she has become like a feral beast that, as further lines indicate, flees out of fear when humans approach.

Beginning at line 447, Rutebeuf goes into more detail concerning St. Mary’s transformation by listing each change. In creating his list, Rutebeuf uses terms that place her outside the realm of civilization, and that also indicate that she has become monstrous in her visible features. Furthermore, he explains St. Mary’s metamorphosis by pairing each specific physical degradation with an explanation as to why that particular degradation occurred, again relating the cause with her extreme ascetic practices. Rutebeuf depicts St. Mary thusly:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Sui chevoil sunt par ces espaules.} \\
\text{Lors n’ot talent de meneir baules.} \\
\text{A poinnes deist ce fust ele} \\
\text{Qui l’ot veëe damoisele,} \\
\text{Car ne paroit en lei nul signe.} \\
\text{Char ot noire com piè de cigne.} \\
\text{Sa poitrine devint mossue,} \\
\text{Tant fu de pluie debatue.} \\
\text{Les braz, les lons doiz et les mains}
\end{align*}
\]

Avoit plus noirs, et c’ert du mains,
Que n’estoit poiz ne arremens.
Ces ongles reoignoit au dens.
Ne cemble qu’ele ait point de ventre,
Por ce que viande n’i entre.
Les piez avoit creveiz desus,
Desouz navreiz que ne pot plus.

(Her hair falls over her shoulders. She no longer wishes to amuse herself at dances. Anyone who would have seen her, as a young woman, would have difficulty recognizing her: she resembled nothing of her former appearance. Her skin was as black as a swan’s foot; her bust became moss-covered from being beaten by the rain so many times. Her arms, her long fingers, and her hands, were blacker, at the very least, than pitch or ink. She chewed her nails to keep them short. One would say that had no belly because no food ever entered there. Her feet were cracked on the top, and on the bottom, they were as wounded as they could be.)

St. Mary the Egyptian is a far cry from the beautiful young woman she was before she began her penance. This is the last physical description that Rutebeuf gives of the saint prior to her death. At the moment when he depicts her death, he makes only one allusion to a physical description when he mentions her hair. As seen above, in line 447, the poet states that her hair “falls over her shoulders”. While it can be taken to mean that her hair is at least shoulder length, there is no indication

as to how long her hair actually is. However, just prior to the moment of her death, the poet reveals to the reader that St. Mary, knowing that she is about to die,

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\begin{align*}
\text{Lors c’est a la terre estendue} \\
\text{Si com ele estoit, presque nue.} \\
\text{Ces mains croisa seur sa poitrine,} \\
\text{Si s’envelope de sa crine.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(She then laid herself down on the ground just as she was, nearly naked. She crossed her hands over her chest, and wrapped herself in her hair.)\(^72\)

That the saint is able to wrap herself in her own hair brings to mind an Ovidian-type metamorphosis because, just as humans in the *Metamorphoses* who are transformed into animals, the saint—in order to hide her nudity—is covered in her own hair.

Daniela Mariani, in speaking of the length of St. Mary’s hair, asserts that her hair replaces the clothing that she has lost due to time and exposure to the various types of weather. She also states that it is a “fourrure formant nouveau vêtement, [qui] est l’attribut d’une ascète vivant à l’état sauvage” (fur coat forming new clothing, [that] is the attribute of an ascetic living in the wild).\(^73\) This “fur coat”, as Mariani has described it, coupled with the fact that she is living in the wild, places St. Mary on the same level as the wild beasts who have no need of clothing, using their furry pelts as their only covering. Furthermore, in spite of a youth spent in moral depravity, St. Mary’s metamorphosis has returned her to a state of moral purity,


evidenced in the fact that she is able to cover her nudity with the only thing that she available; that is, her hair.

Although one cannot say that St. Mary underwent an Ovidian metamorphosis (that is, she did not transform into a beast), she did, nevertheless, experience a drastic physical change. This change, I contend, in spite of the degrading physical effects that the narrative illustrates, is a transfiguration. It is a transfiguration because, even though it is physically debilitating, the extreme askesis that lies at the root of the transformation brings her into union with her god. St. Mary’s transformation is two-fold: an exterior metamorphosis caused by severe penitential practice, which brings about an interior transfiguration. After a long life of solitude, abnegation, and continual defeat of temptation, she arrives at sainthood. Her sainthood and transfiguration happen at the moment of her death, and are evidenced when the Virgin Mary appears to accompany her soul to heaven.

**Conclusion**

In medieval French literature, physical and spiritual transformations are tropes that one finds throughout a variety of genres. When one recognizes and studies instances of physical and spiritual change as they arise in medieval French literature, it is possible to arrive at a better understanding of both the characters who undergo transformation, the inspiration that led to their creation, and the society in which these characters were produced.

Metamorphosis and Transfiguration signify two types of physical change. In Ovidian literature, metamorphosis signifies a change that signifies deterioration
from the human condition to a bestial state devoid of reason and logic, wherein the metamorphosed individual acts solely on instinct. Examples of metamorphosis in Old French retellings and modifications of Ovidian tales range from translation of the Latin narrative into the contemporary French, to examples of intertextuality in Old French texts. These examples provide not only proof of the popularity of Ovidian narratives in medieval France, but also provide evidence of the influence that Ovidian tropes exercised in medieval French literature.

In contrast to metamorphosis, transfiguration signifies an elevation from the human condition to a higher, more beautiful, and exalted state. Transfiguration is a biblical literary trope that has few direct examples in medieval French literature; however, there are several examples in medieval French and Occitan literature of spiritual and ontological change rooted in the deterioration of metamorphosis that lead to a type of transfiguration. Although the transfiguration may not be physically evident, the ultimate lesson of the narrative is that transfiguration for the regular person, or even the most wicked and debauched, comes from a life of self-denial and penitence. This type of transfiguration is ultimately found in the Christian concept of sainthood and hagiographic literature. This kind of transfiguration is not always visible, but in hagiographic literary tropes, it is noticeable in other ways.

In the early Middle Ages, or late Antiquity, the Church Fathers, such as Augustine of Hippo, dismissed the idea of metamorphosis as an actual occurring phenomenon, except for that which was clearly evident in nature, such as found in the life cycles of insects, as ridiculous or condemned it as demonic trickery. The idea that human beings could *regress*, so to speak, from human to a lower species was
one that flew in the face of God and gave equality to demonic powers and witchcraft. However, for other writers and philosophers, metamorphosis was a metaphor for the various character types that one sees exhibited by humans of all classes and walks of life.

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* exercised considerable influence on the medieval romance, serving as the foundational model for what is known as theme of courtly love, or *fin’amors*, as it was known at the time. The writers of medieval romance used Ovid’s works as lessons on love and courtly behavior. The lessons that these authors took from the *Metamorphoses* are used as lessons on how love should be accepted and pursued. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, in their *Roman de la Rose*, provide two lessons on love that lead to the same conclusion, but not the same results. Love, they teach, must be outwardly projected. When it is turned inward, then the result is death. Only when it is turned outward can love claim its reward.

The tropes of metamorphosis and transfiguration abound in medieval French and Occitan literature, and by studying them one can better understand what transformation means in the context of a narrative, and can therefore lead to a better comprehension of the overall message of the story. By considering examples of physical and spiritual transformation in narrative as integral to the message that an author wishes to communicate through his or her narrative, rather than as merely a literary device to advance the narrative from stage to another, it is possible to arrive at a clearer understanding of the narrative as a whole and come to a better appreciation of the literary styles and tools of medieval French and Occitan literature.
Chapter Two

The Tropes of Degradation as Metamorphosis and
Salvific Absolution as Transfiguration

To understand medieval French transformation narratives, they must be considered as products of the tension between textual models taken from metamorphosis narratives on the one hand, and transformation rhetoric from theological models on the other. The terms metamorphosis and transfiguration represent more than mere physical change, as I assert in Chapter One of this dissertation. Ovidian-type tropes of metamorphosis denote a physical change into something that is less than human as regards both form and reason, whereas Judeo-Christian transfiguration indicates a transformation into something that is elevated beyond the human in both respects. Metamorphosis represents degradation (and at the same time, devolution) into bestial muteness, whereas transfiguration is exaltation from the human condition toward the beatific. There are, however, exceptions that prove the rule. In numerous instances in the second half of one anonymous thirteenth-century narrative, Robert le diable, it is metamorphic degradation that leads to salvation and, ultimately, to transfiguration, suggesting a hybridization of the two systems of narrative change.

As a counterexample to the titular character of Robert le diable, I present in this chapter the thirteenth-century Occitan romance Flamenca, which features the
character Archambaut who, because of intense and destructive jealousy, degenerates mentally to a bestial state in the belief that his wife could cuckold him. Archambaut is the “anti-Robert-le-diable” in that, contrary to Robert’s case, Archambaut’s insanity-induced degradation leads him to wickedness and abusive behavior against his wife, whereas Robert’s willing self-degradation leads him to humility and his eventual salvation.

In this chapter, I shall consider biblical and Ovidian tropes of metamorphosis in medieval French and Occitan literature as they relate to transfiguration in the Christian sense of the term, and I shall begin by considering specific examples of biblical and Ovidian metamorphic degradation, examining the examples of Adam and Eve, and King Nebuchadnezzar, among others. Afterwards, I shall examine the metamorphic tropes of the thirteenth-century work Robert le diable, among others, and demonstrate how the particular examples of metamorphosis in these works lead to the transfiguration of Robert le diable and the salvation of other literary characters I shall explore. Furthermore, I shall scrutinize Archambaut’s insanity in the thirteenth-century Occitan romance Flamenca as it relates to biblical and Ovidian examples of madness, such as the insanity of King Saul as recounted in the first book of Samuel in the Hebrew Scriptures. To conclude this chapter, I will illustrate how each of these examples and counterexamples proves my theory that, although Ovidian and biblical tropes of metamorphosis greatly influence medieval French literature, this particular literature itself serves as a catalyst which allows the two separate tropes of transformation to merge, in a sense, and creates cause for metamorphosis to lead to transfiguration.
In the *Metamorphoses*, in nearly every instance (the primary exception being the story of Pygmalion and his statue), Ovid portrays metamorphosis as a degrading form of divine punishment. Likewise, there are two biblical examples of metamorphosis (the change of humanity after the Fall of Adam and the madness of King Nebuchadnezzar) that present metamorphosis as a form of divine punishment. As a divine punishment, in both Ovid and the biblical text, deities use metamorphosis to cause the physical and mental degradation of the human creature from a higher state of being to one that is inferior. In the Ovidian text, the gods use metamorphosis to transform those people deserving punishment into lower animals or plants; likewise, in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Hebrew god generally uses a type of metamorphosis to transform those deserving punishment. As we shall see, degrading transformations are the chastisements that the Hebrew god uses to discipline Adam and Eve, as well as the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Although the biblical metamorphic narratives do not explicitly represent anyone physically transformed into an animal, as do the Ovidian narratives, metamorphosis as a state of degradation is evident in certain stories nonetheless. Unlike the Ovidian narrative, however, the biblical narrative presents the degradation and metamorphosis of its human subjects in a way that ultimately leads to their salvation. These transfiguring degradations present an important model for the saints—whose hagiographies represent a separate and distinctly different type of transformation—who sought salvation and sainthood through their own degrading metamorphosis. This salvific degradation is evident in vernacular works such as
Robert le diable and Flamenca through the degrading transformations that both Robert and Archambaut undergo.

Looking more closely at the biblical models on the one hand, and the lives of the Christian saints on the other, gives insight into how metamorphosis leads to their transfiguration and sainthood. The Christian tradition fundamentally teaches that one must humble oneself in order to be exalted. This is the pattern, as dictated by scripture, which Christian saints follow in order to imitate Christ, who, “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant,” and “humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death” (Philippians 2:7–8). It is this particular kind of self-degradation, which is a type of asceticism, handed down from earlier Jewish and Hellenic ascetics, was practiced in the early Christian community, particularly by those who came to be revered as saints as they took their inspiration from Jesus’ teachings to shed their riches and live in expectation of the kingdom of God. This ascetic practice, first introduced to the Christian community by desert hermits such as Saint Paul the Hermit (ca. 230–ca. 341 CE), and Saint Anthony of Egypt (ca. 251–356 CE), was further inspired by the teaching of Saint Paul who affirmed to the Church in Corinth that he chastised his body in order to subjugate it (1 Cor. 2:27). Following his teachings, the leaders of the early Church taught that it is through chastising the body and subjecting oneself to humility and degradation that one ultimately attains sainthood and becomes transfigured, rather than facing the disgrace of an

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74 For information on St. Paul the Hermit, also known as St. Paul of Thebes, see https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Paul-of-Thebes
75 For information on St. Anthony of the Desert, also known as St. Anthony of Egypt, see https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Anthony-of-Egypt
adókamos, or “castaway”. Saint Jerome translates the Greek term adókamos as “reprobus” in his Vulgate bible. Both terms meant “substandard” or “of poor quality,” and indicated something not fit for use. In order to present to God the most outstanding qualities one had to offer of oneself, Saint Paul exhorted the followers of Christ to subdue and master the body and conquer fleshly desires through acts of self-chastisement.

The theologians of the early Church, known commonly as the Church Fathers, also encouraged personal mortification and asceticism in order to “tame the flesh” and subdue the “passions,” that is, those emotions that so easily control the human person.76 According to E. F. Morrison, it was Saint Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea and the author of the first monastic rule (whose success is demonstrated by the fact that it is still in use today by monastics of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, as well as those of the Byzantine Catholic Church), who taught a strict asceticism that is “the desire for the purification of the soul by renunciation and self-denial.”77 This asceticism is presented as intended specifically for the taming of the body and the mastering of those emotions that appear to govern human beings. Saint Basil teaches that in order to attain to the level of holiness necessary to be worthy of Christ and eternal life, one should

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76 According to the English Oxford Living Dictionary (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/passion), the word “passion” comes from the Latin “passio”, derived from the past participle of the Latin pati “to suffer, endure”. It is a direct translation of the Greek pathos, which is suffering.

... cast off the burden of riches by distributing to the poor, and ... make haste to embrace the cross-bearing life of the monks by ridding ourselves through confession and good works of the load of sins contracted by our use of worldly goods ... undergo rigorous preliminary discipline with a view to proving his fitness to endure tribulations both of body and soul, lest, exposing himself to unforeseen stratagems, he be unable to resist the assaults against him and find himself in full retreat to his starting point, a victim of disgrace and ridicule.  

Saint Basil asserts in his letters and his teachings on the subject of asceticism that the subjugation and mastery of corporeal desires is necessary for anyone seeking salvation. This is accomplished through submission to a holy spiritual director and suffering tribulations both of body and soul in order to properly repent of one’s sins. This is precisely the type of askesis that the titular character of Robert le diable must undergo in order to obtain absolution for the sins of his youth.

In addition to Saint Basil, all of the Church Fathers emphasized, in many of their teachings, the importance of subduing the flesh and overcoming carnal desires. They each taught that salvation cannot be attained without self-mastery through penance and abnegation, presented as the signs of sincere repentance. Saint Augustine, bishop of Hippo (396–430), taught that through penance the sinner “learns by his punishment what is the difference between the good that he has abandoned and the evil that he has committed,” and that since the sinner’s “own

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powers have been dissipated and lost, he cannot return except by the grace of his
Creator, who calls him to penance and forgives his sins.”

Augustine further clarified in one of his Sunday homilies, *Sermon 351*, that
it's not enough to change one's behavior for the better, and to give up bad
activities, unless for things you have already done you also make it up to God
by the sorrow of repentance, by the groans of humility, by the sacrifice of a
contrite heart.

For Augustine, it does not suffice to change one’s way of life and cease to do
whatever is sinful. For this reason, Augustine places emphasis on the importance of
repentance and making amends for the sins that one has committed against God and
neighbor. Therefore, according to Augustine’s teaching, contrition should not only
lead to a change of behavior, but also to a desire to obtain forgiveness, which can
only be achieved after making restitution and performing an atoning penance.

Augustine’s theology concerning the necessity of an atoning penance in order
to attain forgiveness after repentance influenced the theology of Saint Thomas
Aquinas on the subject of the sacramental theology of penance and forgiveness. For
Aquinas, who developed his theology on penance while serving his term as regent
master at the University of Paris (La Sorbonne) from 1269–1272 while completing
the second portion of his magnum opus, *Summa Theologica*, the act of sin makes
man deserving of punishment, and as such sin cannot be absolved without a

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penance appropriate to the sin; that is, without a punishment incurred for the particular sin committed by the sinner. In his teachings on the sacramental theology of penance, Aquinas taught that it is the purpose of penance, in union with absolution, is to purify the sinner and restore everything to the “right order”, with God as one’s primary concern in life. Furthermore, Aquinas taught that penance should not be considered a “punishment” for sins committed, but rather a means of “redirecting” the penitent toward his or her primary objective, which is union with God.\textsuperscript{81} When one considers the penitential acts performed by the titular character in \textit{Robert le diable} in light of St. Thomas Aquinas’ teachings on the restorative qualities of a properly applied penance, they become a strong example of effects that a performed penance can have in reforming a penitent.

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw the rise of penitential religious orders, such as the Order of Friars Minor (the Franciscans) and the Order of the Friar Servants of Mary (the Servites), whose members’ sole aim was the life-long performance of self-sacrifice and penance for their own sins, as well as the sins of the wider world. The founders of these orders envisioned an asceticism that went beyond what had been usual for the time. Saint Francis of Assisi insisted on a life of poverty so extreme that, in the original rule he wrote for the religious order that came to bear his name, he prohibited not only personal, individual ownership of property (no matter how small), he also prohibited any conventual ownership of

\textsuperscript{81} Rik Van Nieuwenhove, “Theology of Church,” in \textit{The Theology of Thomas Aquinas}, eds., Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005): 289
property, preferring homelessness to the guarantee of shelter.\(^{82}\) Francis himself practiced an asceticism and personal mortification, that is a disciplining of his carnal body, that was so extreme that he was often ill. The Servite Order adapted the Augustinian Rule to their order, and placed more emphasis on penance and mortification. Mortification had been practiced since the early days of Christianity, as we see in the Latin and Greek hagiographies from the fifth and sixth centuries of the Christian era (e.g., the lives of Saint Alexis and Saint Benedict), but by the time of Francis and the rise of the mendicant penitential orders, mortification had ceased to be more than fasting during the fasting periods established by the Church, the denial of comforts (e.g., shoes, jewelry, or anything that one could consider extravagant), and self-flagellation and denial of sufficient food and shelter.

While the goal of the founders of these mendicant orders was to create religious communities whose members practiced a life of abnegation, penance, and poverty, it would appear that shortly after the death of their founders the enticements of the world, and corporal necessities became too great since the members and superiors of these orders seemed to care less about living in holy poverty and more about seeing that their needs were met. The poet and trouvère,\(^ {83}\) Rutebeuf (1245–1285), makes an acerbic critique of the religious orders with foundations in thirteenth-century Paris in his poem *Les Ordres de Paris* (*The Orders*

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\(^{83}\) A *trouvère* is the northern-French equivalent of the southern-French/Occitan *troubadour*. 
of Paris). In The Orders of Paris, Rutebeuf names each religious order with a foundation in Paris, and then makes a list of their faults, accusing them of hypocrisy, making a show of their piety, and preferring wealth and comfort to the exigencies of the religious life. In the second stanza of his poem, Rutebeuf describes them as taking up the habit because they do not how to work (Lines 13–14). Others he describes as going about shirtless in order to make a show of their mortifications (Lines 17–18). Finally, he states that “si ont ja la cité pourprise” (they own the entire city, line 21), directly accusing them, it would appear, of disregarding their vow of poverty. However, not all of these penitential orders are hypocrites, as Rutebeuf points out that the Trinitarians appear to do what they proclaim themselves to do, that is, collect money to ransom Crusaders taken prisoner in the Holy Land. He states that

De quanqu’il ont l’année pris
Envoient le tiers à mesure:
Outre mer raembre les pris.
Ce ce font que j’en ai apris,
Ci at charitei nete et pure...
C’il font de la teill fornesture,
Bien oeuvrent selonc l’Escriture,

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84 Rutebeuf. Œuvres complètes. Michel Zink, trans. and ed. (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 2001): 245–261). The English translation consulted for this work is by Sarah-Grace Heller. I express my great gratitude to Dr. Heller for allowing me to cite her unpublished translation of this work.

85 The Trinitarians were also known as the Order of the Holy Trinity for the Ransom of Captives. The order was founded in Cerfroid, near Paris, during the twelfth century by St. Jean de Matha and St. Félix de Valois. The initial vocation of the order was to raise money, and give one-third of their income as ransom for Crusaders taken captive by non-Christians in the Middle East.
Si n’en doivent ester repris.
(from what they collect during the year, they count out a third and send it overseas, to ransom captives. If they do as I am told they do, it is true, pure charity ... If they are supplying such funds over there, they are truly working according to Scripture, and they should not be reproached.)

For Rutebeuf, religious orders should be following the religion they represent, as well as the charism that they publicly proclaim. To do otherwise is pure hypocrisy and an insult and can cause scandal among the faithful.

For the saints and members of the newly established penitential orders of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, mortification of the body, particularly through fasting and flagellation, led to the degradation of the body, and penitential orders were established in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries for the precise purpose of making restitutions for one’s sins during one’s lifetime in the effort to avoid purgatory. According to Richard Kaeuper, self-castigation through physical pain and suffering was a popular penance through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries because of the belief that the more one suffered for one’s sins in this lifetime, the less God would punish them in the life to come, and if one failed to do any kind of expiation for one’s sins, then the suffering in Purgatory would be all the more worse. Just as Ovidian metamorphosis represents subjection of the human creature through punishment and degradation by making the human subject devolve and degrade by taking the form of a beast, the mortification—a literal


“putting to death”—of the body was meant to weaken the body, subdue its will, and transform it through self-denial and self-inflicted punishment. Mortification was meant to subdue and master what the Church Fathers called the passions, that is, those emotions and desires which, left unchecked, so easily govern the human person. In subduing these emotions and selfish desires, one submits oneself and one’s will to God and God’s laws, thus becoming holy and drawing nearer to the state of union with God, thereby becoming a saint.

There exist several Ovidian and biblical episodes in which physical degradation is not self-imposed. These episodes of degradation are punitive in nature, with the one who is meting out the punishment doing so for specific offenses. In the Metamorphoses, Ovid presents characters like King Lycaeon, who is transformed into a wolf as punishment for slaughtering and cooking his own son as a meal to test Jupiter’s omniscience; the hunter Actaeon, who is transformed into a stag and torn apart by his own hunting dogs for happening upon a nude Diana bathing in a forest stream; and, Arachne, who is transformed into a spider by an angry Minerva for the crime of insulting the gods in a tapestry. In these Ovidian examples, each of the metamorphosed characters submits to an involuntary physical transformation because of an offense they committed against the gods. The transformations are permanent, and result in the loss of the humanity of the transformed subject.

Biblical examples of metamorphosis, or degrading physical change, are similar to the Ovidian transformation in that they are punishments for transgressions committed against God; however, unlike Ovidian examples, they are
not transformations of human beings into beasts. The biblical transformations are penitential in nature, and the expectation of repentance on the part of the chastised sinner remains a significant part of the narrative, even if that expectation is not explicitly stated. The characters in these punishment narratives all suffer a form of degradation as a result of the punishment that they endure, whether that degradation be physical, mental, or both. However, with the expectation of repentance comes the expectation of a resolution that sees those who are punished restored to right relationship with God. The same can be said for those literary characters who undergo a humiliating and degrading transformation in medieval French and Occitan romance and pious literature: their metamorphosis is not a permanent interspecies transformation, but it is a temporary penitential degradation meant to cause a permanent spiritual change.

**Biblical and Ovidian Instances of Metamorphosis**

Biblical models of metamorphosis and its accompanying degradation are worth reviewing here because they illustrate the entire state of humanity, with the very first model of biblical metamorphosis and its accompanying degradation being the Fall of Adam. In the Genesis account, God creates man and woman in his image and places them in the Garden of Eden. God then specifically forbids them to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. They disobey God’s command, and he then punishes them for their transgression. This punishment involves transformation from a state of perfect impeccability to a state wherein they become aware of the difference between good and evil, guilt and innocence, and become capable of
experiencing pain, sickness, and death. Because of their transgression, they are transformed from immortal beings of pure innocence into mortal beings fully capable of experiencing what all mortals, as a result of Adam’s transgression, must experience. This transformations into mortality, which is the archetypal scriptural moment of degradation, begins immediately after they have both eaten the fruit from the forbidden tree. Paradoxically, it may appear that their newly degraded state is not a degradation at all, considering that Adam and Eve gain intelligence and are capable of recognizing their new state of being; however, the physical degradation they undergo also causes them to feel and suffer pain, sorrow, and death (Gen. 3:16–19), thus far outweighing the intelligence they gain as they degrade into mortality and disease.

According to the eleventh-century French Jewish scholar and Torah commentator, Rabbi Schlomo Yitzchaki of Troyes, popularly known by the acronym Rashi, prior to their transgression, Adam and Eve were immortal beings endowed with perfect innocence. As a result of their transgression, they were transformed into mortal beings that were no longer innocent, and therefore capable of sin and evil. Rashi asserts that in their innocence, Adam and Eve understood the difference between right and wrong, as evidenced in Eve’s discussion with the

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88 Rashi (1040–1105) was active as a Jewish leader in Troyes from circa 1065 until his death. His Talmud and Torah commentaries were, and still are, highly influential in Jewish academic circles. According to Harvey Sicherman and Gilad J. Gevaryahu, Rashi was also a businessman who likely engaged in commerce with his non-Jewish fellow citizens, and his writings remain a major source of the Old French (Champenois dialect) to this day. (See “Rashi and the First Crusade: Commentary, Liturgy, and Legend.” Judaism, Sp. 1999. Accessed via http://www.gevaryahu.com/Rashi%20and%20the%20First%20CrusadeWP.pdf.)

serpent concerning the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:1–4), but even though they were able to discern right from wrong, they had not yet acquired the knowledge to distinguish between good and evil. They did not acquire their ability to differentiate between good and evil until after they disobeyed a direct command from God, and allowed evil (in the form of both disobedience, which is wrong, and the fruit, which was forbidden) to literally enter them. Maimonides, the late thirteenth-century Sephardic Jewish Torah scholar and commentator from Córdoba, supports Rashi’s assertion, arguing that Adam and Eve already possessed intelligence, and were therefore capable of discerning between right and wrong. However, Maimonides argues, they were incapable of distinguishing between good and evil because sin—that is, willful disobedience to a commandment—had not yet entered the world.90 Based on Rashi’s and Maimonides’ commentary, sin and the introduction of evil in the world are what led to the degradation of Adam and Eve from their perfect, paradisiacal state.

Prior to their transformation, Adam and Eve are described as naked and unashamed (Gen. 2:25); however, after their transformation we read that “the eyes of both of them were opened: and ... they perceived themselves to be naked...” (Gen. 3:7). It is at this instant in which they knowingly disobey God’s commandment that they degrade and metamorphose into fully aware mortal beings who, along with all other creatures in the world, and all their descendants, must now pay the consequences of disobedience with illness and death. This particular type of

metamorphosis and degradation does not cause Adam and Eve to become beasts or plants, as in the Ovidian model of metamorphic degradation. It causes them to become lesser beings henceforth reliant on beasts and plants for their own survival.

In late Roman Gaul, Saint Irenaeus, the bishop of Lugdunum (Lyons), taught a view of the creation and the fall of man that emphasized the degrading qualities of the metamorphosis that Adam and Eve underwent. In his work Against Heresies (175–185 CE), Saint Irenaeus interpreted Adam and Eve’s transformation after the Fall by proposing that

Adam and Eve previously had light and clear, as it were, spiritual bodies, such as they were at their creation; but ... these changed into bodies more opaque, and gross, and sluggish. Their soul also was feeble and languid, inasmuch as they received from their creator a merely mundane inspiration.91

According to Irenaeus, although Adam and Eve gained knowledge, they metamorphosed from embodied innocence, degrading to flesh and bone and, as a further result of their disobedience, mortality. Taking Irenaeus’ point of view concerning Adam and Eve, the Genesis account portrays the god of the Hebrews punishing his creations by making them fully human, and therefore subject to entropy, decay, and death (Gen. 3:16–19). In contrast, Ovid portrays the Roman gods as punishing human beings by taking away their humanity. In this view, the physical transformation that accompanies the gaining of knowledge in the Genesis account

account fits exactly the definition that I ascribe to metamorphosis: degradation from a higher form to a lower one. Prior to their disobedience, Adam and Eve lived in a paradise outside the constraints of what has come to be the normal human existence, but because of their disobedience, they were punished with mortality and those states of life that accompany it: suffering, misery, and eventual death.

**Mental Degradation in Scriptural Models**

Just as there are examples of physical degradation and metamorphosis in biblical literature, there are likewise several examples of mental degradation. One particular example of mental degradation, which is to say true insanity, is that of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, which caused him to transform both mentally and physically for a period of seven years. The account of Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation is given in the book of the prophet Daniel (4:26–30). In this account, Nebuchadnezzar is described as being punished for his haughtiness by being made to resemble an eagle and behave like a wild ox. The Nebuchadnezzar narrative is an Old Testament account portraying both mental degradation, and a type of physical metamorphosis. According to the narrative, Nebuchadnezzar goes mad upon boasting that he is greater and more powerful than the god of Israel. As punishment, the god of Israel causes Nebuchadnezzar to transform both mentally and physically for a period of seven years. The biblical account reads

And they shall cast thee out from among men, and thy dwelling shall be with the cattle and wild beasts: thou shalt eat grass like an ox, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom
of men, and giveth it to whomever he will. The same hour the word was fulfilled upon Nebuchodonosor, and he was driven away from among men, and did eat grass, like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven: till his hairs grew like the feathers of eagles, and his nails like the birds’ claws (Daniel 4:29–30).

The most striking thing about Nebuchadnezzar’s mental degradation is the way he is likened to an animal after he goes mad. In the description, the insane king appears to have physically transformed into something that resembles a tripartite chimera: he has the body of a man, yet he eats grass and behaves like an ox, and appears to be covered with the feathers of an eagle and possesses talons. This image recalls the bas-relief Babylonian sculptures from the same era that represent a similar monster with a human head, a bull’s body, and an eagle’s wings. The beard and hair on the human section of the monster are carved in a manner similar to the feathers that make up the monster’s wings.92

Nebuchadnezzar’s descent into insanity, and his behavior while in the throes of his illness, find semblance in the insanity of the Arthurian knight Yvain in the Chevalier au lion, a parallel which has not yet been recognized. While the stories differ in the causes of each character’s insanity, they mirror each other concerning the severity of each character’s illness and behavior while in their unsound state of mind. Nebuchadnezzar becomes insane because he is the target of divine retribution

92 For a plastic representation of, and more information on, this particular monster, called “Human-headed Winged Bull”, see http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/winged-human-headed-bull. This particular sculpture features a winged bull with a human head. It was taken from the palace of Sargon II, at Dur Sharrukin (present-day Khorsabad).
for his exceeding arrogance and pride. Yvain becomes insane because of his foolishness and inattentiveness in keeping the promise he made to his wife, which causes her to discontinue her love for him and, consequently, forsake him. This rejection drives Yvain insane, and like Nebuchadnezzar, he withdraws from court to a deserted area where he lives like a beast. While Yvain is in his desert place, a forest, like a beast he stalks and kills prey as if by instinct. The narrator states that Yvain “les bestes par le bois aguete et lors ochist” (stalks beasts through the woods and kills them).  Chrétien also makes it a point to emphasize that Yvain “menjue la venoison trestoute crue” (eats the wild game completely raw). As Nebuchadnezzar eats the grass of the field like an ox, Yvain eats raw game that he stalks and preys upon like the lion that eventually becomes his companion after he regains his sanity. The two characters parallel each other in their madness by taking on the behavior of wild animals. Furthermore, the Daniel narrator emphasizes that Nebuchadnezzar comes to physically resemble a wild beast; the only information concerning Yvain’s physical appearance is that he is naked, with no other description. According to Sarah-Grace Heller “nudity was rarely represented in this period, and rarely favorably.” Heller goes on to state that representing a character as undressed with the exception of the chemise (a shift) was not uncommon in the romance tradition. Monica Wright ties clothing with identity and argues that the presentation of a nude

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94 Le Chevalier au lion, lines 2825–2826.
a character defines his lack of identity, his loss of identity, or his shame. This assertion has merit when one considers that once he regains his senses, Yvain’s first thought is that his shame would be too much if anyone who recognized would have seen him naked in the forest. However, I posit that Yvain’s nudity in the forest is remarkable in that it also signals the loss of his human reason and logic as he descends into instinctual beastliness, and the loss of his identity not only as a knight, but also as a human being. Yvain’s nudity during his insanity signals his ersatz metamorphosis into a wild beast of the forest that needs no clothing, and feels no shame. Yvain only feels shame for his nudity after he has been cured. The parallel between the Nebuchadnezzar’s madness and Yvain’s madness rests in the insanity itself. Each becomes bestial in his behavior as he sinks into madness to the point that each takes on the behavior of beasts driven by instinct rather than by reason.

Another example of mental degradation and physical transformation from medieval French literature is that of Partonopeu de Blois who, in a manner similar to that of Yvain, foolishly breaks the promise he made to his lady, the fairy Mélior. The story of Partonopeu and Mélior is similar to that of Cupid and Psyche, recounted in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius. In Apuleius’ story, the beautiful Psyche becomes Cupid’s lover after the god wounds himself with one of his arrows and falls deeply in love with her. He forbids her from seeing him, causing her to believe that he is a

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97 *Le Chevalier au lion*, lines 3028–3032.
98 Thomas Brown, “The Relationship between Partonopeus de Blois and the Cupid and Psyche Tradition,” in *Brigham Young University Studies* 5, no. 3 (1964): 193. The *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius is also known as *The Golden Ass.*
hideous monster. After her sisters come to visit, they cajole her into looking upon him at night, while he is asleep. She does so and falls in love with him, but is so taken with him that she accidentally spills hot oil from her lamp on him, causing him to leave her. The story is similar to Cupid and Psyche in that the mortal characters promise to not look upon, or even attempt to see, their other worldly lover until after they have been lovers for a specific period of time. In the case of Partonopeu and Mélior, the young, handsome Partonopeu must promise that he will not attempt to see his lover before they have been together for one year. However, because of the rumors surrounding them and the doubts that his mother and her friend, the bishop, have planted in his mind, Partonopeu manages to see Mélior by hiding his lantern under the covers and waiting until she gets into bed before throwing the covers back to look upon her.\textsuperscript{99} In both stories we see the mortal break a promise, and have to suffer the consequences of their disloyalty. Both Partonopeu and Psyche are required to endure a penitential-type suffering for their transgression against their lover, but each one is reconciled in the end.

Partonopeu, like Yvain, goes into the forest after being dismissed by his lady, where he lives out his “madness”, which today might be called his depression. However, the “madness” that Partonopeu must endure does not cause the same degree of mental and physical degradation as that of Yvain. However, Partonopeu’s “madness” causes him to undergo a physical transformation that renders him unrecognizable to those who know him, as is evidenced in his meeting with Mélior’s

\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Le Roman de Partonopeu de Blois}, eds., and trans., Olivier Collet and Pierre-Marie Jorris (Paris; Librairie Générale Française, 2005): lines 4505–4522.
sister Urраque in the forest where he had taken refuge. The description attributed to
his changed appearance is not bestial in the way of Nebuchadnezzar. The narrator
could very easily be describing a penitent who has deprived himself of food and
luxuries as mortification in reparation for a serious transgression. His
transformation is more similar to that of St. Mary of Egypt (see Chapter 1) whose
transformation after several years of exile in the desert could be considered
monstrous. Furthermore, like St. Mary of Egypt, he does not fall into insanity, but
rather spends his time reflecting on the transgression(s) that drove him into the
forest. He is described as

[Tant test] soilliés par les grans dels
Et si est covers de cevels.
N’est mervelle s’el ne l’enterce:
Le cief a lé con une herce;
Large a le front et les iols gros,
Le face basse et haus les os,
Les dens blancetes et menues,
Les levres secés et pelues.
Si a le vis trestot soilié,
De larmies mal taint et moillié.
Le col a lonc des qu’il endosse
Tresqu’a la teste, qu’il a grose,
Et magre et graille et lonc et noir.
Flebles ert, de petit pooir.
(He is made filthy by his great mourning, and is covered up by his hair. It is no wonder if she does not recognize him: he has a head as large as a plough, a wide forehead and large, round eyes, a darkened face and protruding bones; small, white teeth and dry, cracked lips. His face, poorly washed by his overabundant tears, is both pasty and filthy. He has a long, skinny, dirty neck that makes his head look too large. And he is weak and powerless.)

This post-transformation description of Partonopeu is in sharp contrast with the physical portrait that the narrator provides near the beginning of the romance. When the reader is first introduced to Partonopeu de Blois, the narrator provides a physical portrait of the hero, emphasizing that he was also the most handsome man from his head to his feet. The pre-transformation descriptions of particular body parts are distinct in that they are in direct contrast with the post-transformation description, and the author consecrates forty-eight lines to the description of Partonopeu’s beauty. In short, as far as his pre-transformation looks were concerned, he was “De toutes beautes ... parfiz” (perfectly beautiful in every way).

This description of perfect beauty renders his transformation even more remarkable. Since Partonopeu, like St. Mary of Egypt, has ostracized himself in the forest, his beauty has deteriorated due to the penitential nature of his exile.

100 Partonopeu de Blois, lines 5937–5950. Translation mine.
101 Partonopeu de Blois, line 578.
102 In his hagiographic work La Vie de Sainte Marie l’Egyptienne, the French poet and trouvère, Rutebeuf, describes the notorious Alexandrian prostitute as being beautiful, charming, and well-formed, and “perfectly beautiful” as far as everything concerning the physical (lines 34–35). However, after she repents of her life of debauchery, she lives in desert exile for 40 years, during which time she is transformed and described in monstrous terms (lines 449–62). See Chapter 1 for more on St. Mary’s transformation as described by Rutebeuf.
However, unlike the transformation of St. Mary of Egypt, the physical transformation that Partonopeu undergoes is not permanent. Like Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain, he has become ill and needs a cure; however, he cannot cure himself. Like Yvain, who has the help of an anonymous lady who happens to recognize him in his dementia and uses the magical ointment she has to cure him and help him regain his sanity, Partonopeu has the help of Mélior's sister, Urraque. Partonopeu and Urraque recognize one another, and she takes Partonopeu out of the forest to a place where he can recover. Partonopeu recovers and he is retransformed to his handsome self after learning from Urraque that Mélior is willing to love him again because of his great demonstration of repentance for breaking his promise. As Partonopeu recovers from his time in the forest, his good looks return, and he again worthy to have Mélior as his lady.

When examining Partonopeu's madness, it is necessary to consider whether it is authentic insanity. Contrary to Yvain's madness in the Chevalier au lion, there are no actions or words on Partonopeu's part to indicate that he has gone insane. In the Chevalier au lion, Chrétien de Troyes creates a portrait of a man fallen from greatness to a mentally devolved state. The actions following that devolution affirm

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103 Le Chevalier au lion, lines 2992–3011.
104 Partonopeu de Blois, lines 6055–6062.
105 Partonopeu de Blois, lines 6037–6054.
106 In the continuations of texts A and B of Partonopeu de Blois, Partonopeu must joust against a sultan, who is his rival for Mélior. They are both equally matched, so a beauty contest decides the winner. Partonopeu, because of the restoration of his great beauty, easily wins and returns to Mélior. Partonopeu de Blois, pages 634–639.
and make real the madness and degradation that Yvain endures. Any allusion to madness is on the part of Urraque who makes her assessment based entirely on Partonopeu’s drastically changed appearance. Furthermore, unlike Yvain, Partonopeu “does not regress to a bestial existence that renders him almost unrecognizable as a human being,” such as is the case with Yvain, in both mental condition and behavior. Partonopeu has certainly experienced a physical transformation that destroys his beauty, but this is because of what I argue is his penitential exile into the woods in expiation of his transgression against his Lady.

Another type of madness that I shall broach here is feigned madness. There are instances in the Hebrew Scriptures wherein feigned insanity is necessary for self-preservation, for instance, when David saves himself from murder by pretending to be insane (1 Sam. 21:12–15). It could also be a teaching tool, as in the case of several prophets. Examples of feigned madness by the Hebrew prophets include Isaiah, who wandered around naked for three years (Isa. 20:2–4); Ezekiel, who ate a parchment scroll (Ezekiel 3:1–4) so as to deliver the literal word of his god to the people, and who then later baked a loaf of barley using human excrement as fuel (Ezekiel 4:12–13) to symbolize the uncleanness of the nation of Israel who repeatedly sinned against their god through their disobedience to his commandments; and Jeremiah, who fastened a yoke to himself to symbolize the yoke of bondage and exile that was to come after Nebuchadnezzar’s victory over the

kingdom of Israel (Jeremiah 27:1–8). These prophets (and David) allow themselves to be taken for insane when the reality of their situation indicates that they are conscious of their behavior and make of it to impart their messages. I categorize this “feigned madness” as a voluntary mental degradation because the behavior of the prophets is meant to be a sign to the people legitimizing their actions and words as representing the will of God.

**Physical and Mental Degradation Because of Age and Illness**

When speaking of mental degradation one must also consider the effects of age and illness. In general terms, physical and mental degradation are the usual outcomes of longevity. These degradations are the direct result of the experience of life. As people live their bodies and minds degrade: eyesight fails, hearing becomes muffled, skin loosens, and strength lessens as weakness increases. For some people, mental acuity begins to fail as dementia slowly seizes the mind, and infection and illness, as well as unforeseen mishaps, reduce a once robust person into a corpse. People have, for millennia, sought advice on how to avoid aging, illness, and death because of the general fear of what again, illness, and death hold for them.

In one example of the high medieval focus on natural degeneration, Cardinal Lothario dei Segni, who later became Pope Innocent III, insinuates in his *De Miseria humane conditionis, or On the Misery of Human Condition*, that old age is the bane of humanity as he lists the various ailments from which the aged complain, and philosophically reckons that “the old cannot glory over the young any more than the young can scorn the old. For we are what they once were; and some day we will be
what they are now.” Aging, therefore, according to Cardinal dei Segni is a long series of physical and mental degradations continuing in succession until death. This, then, is the misery of the human condition.

Religion has, to an extent, served as a principle resource for answering the question of why mental and physical degradation are central to life, and makes an attempt at answering the question concerning what happens after death. Nevertheless, people still fear physical and mental degradation, and religion does little to help the majority of people overcome this fear. The titular characters of Robert le diable and La Vie de Sainte Marie l’Egyptienne—as well as all subjects of hagiographic literature, in general—stand out in sharp contrast to the rest of society because they actively seek out the degradation that others wish to avoid. Such behavior is typical in the hagiographic narrative: the saints in question, in their efforts to imitate Christ, allow themselves to “die to the things of the world” in order to “live in the kingdom of God,” death to the things of the world being a metaphor for their conscious rejection of all things that distract them from their mission of imitatio Christi.

Saintly characters in hagiographic narratives, in their pursuit of “death to the things of the world” and acceptance of the degradation they actively seek, subvert

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the typical human experience, which is to try to avoid the degradation and suffering that come with illness, and delay the deterioration that accompanies aging. The main characters of hagiographic narratives not only welcome their sufferings—whether self-induced or caused by others—they likewise welcome death, as death from the world of suffering is birth into an eternity of felicitous bliss wherein no suffering exists.\textsuperscript{110}

In the counter-point, the saints’ acceptance of suffering and degradation in their imitation of Christ may also be subversive to the Christian experience. Christian theology and belief proclaim Christ to be the healer above all other healers because of the many miracles attributed to him, or his intercession, in the Christian scriptures. Christ, as healer, transforms the degraded to make it new and better. In his exposition of Psalm 102, Saint Augustine of Hippo teaches that through Christ the healer, “all your sluggishness and weakness will be healed. There is no need to fear. ... For this all-powerful Doctor, no disease is incurable.”\textsuperscript{111} Augustine states that Christ is the ultimate healer for both body and soul, and the Christian soul should come to the healer when in need. According to Lothario dei Segni, human beings are meant to suffer, but do not wish it. In hagiographic literature, those who follow Christ accept their sufferings and even actively seek opportunities to suffer for Christ, even if that suffering means their own death. The reason that the saints

\textsuperscript{110} In Book Three, chapter 1 and 2 of On the Misery of the Human Condition, Lothario dei Segni lists the various sins of humanity and the suffering that these sins cause upon the body when one is at the point of death. Logically, one can assume that when one has repented and atoned for the sins committed during the natural course of the human existence, these death-pains do not occur, (pp. 67–69).

actively seek suffering for the sake of Christ is because suffering is healing; that is, it
is corporal suffering that brings about the cure for the soul. For Augustine, Christ is
the healer, not only spiritually, but also physically and mentally.

In re-creating what Christ created and re-forming what he formed in the
cases of Robert from Robert le diable, and St. Mary of Egypt, one must consider
Christ’s healing abilities beyond the physical. In the case of these two literary
characters, I would propose that there is no healing, but rather a re-creation and a
re-formation that makes them different from what they were at the beginning of
their narratives. The re-creation and re-formation of each character is accomplished
through the degradation of each character, both physically and spiritually. The
degradation that each character undergoes leads them through a metamorphosis
that is, ultimately, a transfiguration as they achieve their salvation.

Robert, from Robert le diable, is a character who must endure a degrading
penance in order to be “healed” of the sins of his youth. While in the throes of
murderous activity, Robert is unaware that he needs healing. However, after a
moment of introspection wherein he questions the source of his wickedness, his
mother reveals to him the secret behind his conception, causing him to make the
conscious and willful decision to spend the rest of his life in penance in order to save
himself from hell. Robert, in fulfillment of his penance, degrades himself in order to
be re-created and re-formed, as Augustine would have it. Likewise, Mary the
Egyptian does not see the debased condition of her spiritual state when she
surrenders to “bestial” urges and seeks only her own carnal gratification. However,
when she is faced with the truth of the gravity of the condition of her soul, she is
able to see clearly and submits herself to a degrading penance of her own making in order that she, too, might be re-created and re-formed in Christ. The narrator’s prescribed cure for both Robert and Mary the Egyptian is an ascetic practice that places them in a subservient position to one that they have placed in authority over them. Their pride is broken, and as a result they are both able to achieve salvation and sainthood: transfiguration through degrading metamorphosis.

Degradations in Medieval French Literature: Seeking Explanations for Madness and Physical Degradation

In recent years, scholars such as Huguette Legros have written on the subject of insanity in medieval French literature, and particularly on the titular character of Robert le diable, as well as madness, crime, and punishment in the Middle Ages. These three themes: madness, crime, and punishment, in addition to the fourth and fifth themes of penitential degradation and redemption, respectively, comprise the three major sections of Robert le diable. I shall examine how each of these components, but particularly those of penitential degradation and redemption, leads to metamorphosis and eventual transfiguration in the narrative.

In Robert le diable, the titular character is a heinous criminal whose infamy has spread as far as Rome, causing the pope to threaten Robert’s parents, the duke and duchess of Normandy, with excommunication if they do not rein in their son and put an end to his wicked behavior. His crimes, which target the Church and

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112 Huguette Legros, La Folie dans la littérature médiévale: Etude des representations de la folie dans la littérature des XIIe, XIIIe, et XIVe siècles (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes), 2013.
Christian people, will place him (and his parents) beyond the reach of salvation unless he abandons his crimes and makes amends to God for them through repentance and penance. When Robert finally does repent of the evil that he has done and seeks forgiveness and absolution for his sins, the penance assigned to him is threefold: he must behave as though he were mad, he must sleep and eat with dogs, and he must not utter a single word until his spiritual director releases him from his penance (lines 1109–1182). Should Robert fail to perform his penance exactly as it is prescribed, he will be a slave to the devil forever. The idea of Robert feigning insanity as a part of his penance is a theme that is uncommon, though not unknown, in the Middle Ages.

In her book *La Folie dans la littérature médiévale*, Huguette Legros examines biblical instances of madness and compares and contrasts them with examples from *Robert le diable*, *Tristan*, *Raoul de Cambrai*, and *Le Chevalier au lion*, just to name a few. She argues that madness is often reserved as either a punishment for sin, or as a sign of God's favor, as in the case of the Hebrew prophets. The term that Legros uses to distinguish this particular kind of madness from mental illness is *folie pénitentielle*. Legros also differentiates between *la folie pénitentielle* and *la folie pour Dieu*. Legros argues that *la folie pénitentielle* is that madness which is imposed as a penance, such as the madness of the biblical characters of King Nebuchadnezzar and King Saul, as well as the literary heroes Yvain, Partonopeu, and Tristan, and is intended, as the name implies, to be a penance for a particular transgression. *La folie pour Dieu*, on the other hand, is a feigned madness and is associated with the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures and certain medieval Christian saints, such as
Francis of Assisi and Basil of Moscow. The purpose of la folie pour Dieu is to bring sinners to God through the seemingly insane behavior of the “fool”. Legros defines la folie pénitentielle and differentiates it from la folie pour Dieu by asserting that

La folie pénitentielle ne relève pas, comme la folie pour Dieu, d’une forme de spiritualité: il s’agit d’une pénitence imposée à un pécheur en réparation de ses fautes. Elle est donc indissociable de la notion de péché et de la pratique sacramentelle de la pénitence; or, le péché et folie sont associés.

(Penitential madness is not rooted, as is Foolishness for God, in a form of spirituality: it is, rather, a penance imposed upon a sinner in reparation for his sins. Therefore, it is inseparable from the notion of sin and the sacramental practice of penance: as such, sin and madness are related.)

In examining the character of Robert le diable, who, in order to atone for his sins, must feign madness, Legros’ argument is useful in assessing the penitential nature of this false madness, as she repeatedly insists that Robert’s madness is feigned; however, when one studies Legros’ argument, as well as the “madness” that Robert exhibits, one must recognize that this false insanity does not truly fit the definition of penitential madness (folie pénitentielle) as do the cases of Nebuchadnezzar and Yvain, which, based on the textual indicators, are cases of true insanity. Robert’s madness does not quite fit the definition of folie pour Dieu, either, as his madness is not a madness rooted in didactic spirituality, such as that of the Hebrew prophets. Robert le diable pretends to be insane because his spiritual director ordered him to do so, and since he is not really insane, one cannot rightfully speak of penitential

113 Legros, 36.
madness in the same terms of other characters in medieval French or biblical literature.

If Robert le diable’s madness does not quite fit the definition of folie pénitentielle because it is feigned, and does not quite fit the definition of folie pour Dieu because it is not rooted in didactic spirituality, then it is necessary to consider the effects that this unique feigned insanity has on both Robert, and those with whom he comes into contact, or enters into relationship. When Robert comes into contact with the Roman citizens as he begins his penance, the reaction of the Roman populace to his perceived insanity is one of revulsion and violence. Robert is beaten, chased, and pelted with stones and all manner of waste. After his first adventure in Rome in performance of his penance, the narrator indicates that, not only did the people of Rome mistreat Robert, but they tried to kill him, and Robert barely escaped with his life. In spite of nearly losing his life, the narrator indicates that Robert, in his zeal to perform his penance correctly, repeats this same scene every day.\textsuperscript{114} As for the people’s reaction, the reader sees just how repulsive the Romans find Robert’s insanity as the narrator describes how they receive him when he first appears to them:

\begin{verbatim}
Tout chil de Rome a fol le tiennent;
A grans tourbes contre luy viennent.
Si com il va, li hue engraigne:
De tay, de boe et de longaigne,
De palestiaux et de chavates
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{114} Robert le diable, lines 1186–1200, 1210–1213.
Et de pommons de viés nates
Le ruent et batent et fierent,
Car or ont il chou qu’il desirent.
...
Mais li felon sierf deputaire
Li font grant mal et grant laidure,
Car ne troevent roke si dure
Ne l’en doingnent contre le cuer

(All the Romans took him for a madman and ran en masse to attack him. The closer they got to him, the louder their shouts became: they threw muck, mud, and excrement at him, along with rags, old shoes, cows’ lungs and old straw mats, and they beat him all they wanted because he was the victim they desired ... The hateful and vile people did great harm and wickedness to him by their violence: there was no rock too hard that they didn’t use it to throw against his heart.)\(^{115}\)

Robert is feigning madness, being completely sane while allowing the people of Rome to attack and beat him mercilessly, and it is apparent that they attempt to kill him when they strike him with rocks against his heart. However, the ample variety of other projectiles in the Romans’ arsenal against Robert draws the most attention. The citizens of Rome revile Robert with their house rubbish and viscera, drawing

\(^{115}\) Robert le diable, lines 1193–1200, 1210–1213.
the reader back to his destructive youth when he murdered and pillaged for his own enjoyment.116

Pretending to be insane and, as a result, accepting the abuse of the people of Rome is a type of physical degradation that leads to spiritual transformation. For Robert, this is the mortification that he needs to pay for the sins of his past life as the treatment that he receives from the people of Rome mirrors his own behavior prior to his conversion. Before his repentance, Robert le diable spent his time harming (and murdering) others; the reaction of the Roman populace to his perceived insanity mirrors his behavior prior to his conversion, and this brings balance to his life. In order to make amends for the physical suffering that he caused, he must now suffer physically. The mistreatment that he suffers at the hands of the Romans balances his sinful past with his penitent present.

According to Elisabeth Gaucher (in her work Robert le diable: histoire d'une légende) the earliest extant version of the story of Robert le diable is a short, Latin-language exemplum provided by the Dominican friar Etienne de Bourbon, who included it in his Tractatus de diversis materiis predicabilibus, sometime around 1250.117 The story of Robert le diable is one in which the theme of reparation for a sinful past is recurrent. The notion of Robert accepting abuse and mistreatment mirrors and provides a balance for the abuse and mistreatment that he doled out onto others during his infancy. At the beginning of Robert le diable, the titular character exhibits characteristics that, in light of Boethius’ interpretations of Ovid’s

116 Robert le diable, lines 281–310.
Metamorphoses, are more bestial than human. In several passages prior to his introspection and desire to know the truth behind his wickedness, Robert le diable is described in bestial, even demonic terms. At his birth, his mother struggled in labor for a week as though the pains that she endured were a foreshadowing of the wickedness and havoc that her son would wreak on the world. It is at his birth that it becomes apparent to his mother that she has given birth to a monster. Robert is terrifying from the moment of his birth, and even more so, it seems, after his baptism, as his violence knows no limits. In addition to violent behavior from his infancy, Robert exhibits a literal taste for blood, which he seems to prefer to the taste of milk:

Quant il fu teulz que dent li vinrent,

L’uns des catiaus de la mamielle

De sa norrice la plus bielle

Li trencha hors as dens tout outré.

(When he began to have teeth, he used them to bite off the nipples of his prettiest wet nurse.)\(^\text{118}\)

He is, therefore, in a very literal sense, bloodthirsty. As an infant Robert is already exhibiting signs of vicious monstrosity that separates him from other children and other human beings. Robert resembles a vampire in that he does not crave milk, but rather blood. Furthermore, he grows in strength as his wet nurses weaken and wither.\(^\text{119}\) Compare this scene, at the very beginning of his bloodlust, to the scene of

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\(^\text{118}\) Robert le diable, lines 160–163.

\(^\text{119}\) Robert le diable, lines 156–158.
the carnage at the Abbey of Arques, when it reaches it zenith.\textsuperscript{120} He grows in strength and power while others waste and wither, and he covers himself in their blood and carnage. This, again, calls to mind his assigned penance and the scene wherein the citizenry of Rome pelt him with offal, a different kind of carnage meant to bring balance to his life.

Robert is also, from his conception and birth, the exact opposite of Jesus Christ. According to the Christian Scriptures, the Christ was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary through the workings of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:13, Luke 1:35, 38). In the case of Robert le diable, he was conceived as the result of a prayer that his mother, in anger and exasperation at not being able to conceive, made to Satan. In response to her prayer, Satan caused her husband, the Duke of Normandy, to become aroused with lust (as opposed to Christian chaste conjugality),\textsuperscript{121} and Robert was conceived that very night. Furthermore, according to apocryphal Christian legend, the Virgin Mary did not suffer in any way the pains of labor or childbirth;\textsuperscript{122} however, Robert’s mother suffered labor pains for an entire week, and her labor was so painful that she believed she was going to die. As a youth, Jesus is meek and obedient to his parents,\textsuperscript{123} but Robert willfully disobeys his parents. Jesus is a child of peace, but Robert is an unholy terror who delights in the havoc that he wreaks.

\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Robert le diable}, lines 585–594.
\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Robert le diable}, lines 83–100.
\textsuperscript{122} According to the teachings of Saint Augustine of Hippo in his \textit{Sermon on the Nativity}, Saint Thomas Aquinas in \textit{Summa Theologica} \textit{III}, q. 35, a. 6, Saint Bonaventure in his \textit{Psalter of the Blessed Virgin Mary}, and the Roman Catechism of the Council of Trent of 1566, the Virgin Mary delivered Jesus without any pain, whatsoever, at his birth.
\textsuperscript{123} Luke 2:51–52.
Even though Robert le diable is the opposite of Jesus Christ, who is the son of God and a virgin, he is quite unlike the hybrid characters Merlin, who is the son of a demon who had sexual intercourse with a virgin;\textsuperscript{124} and Geoffroy la Grand‘Dent, who is the hybrid son of the fairy, Mélusine, and her human husband.\textsuperscript{125} Robert le diable is the child of two human parents, and as such Christ is able to redeem him, regardless of who answered the duchess‘ prayer to conceive. As good Christians, Robert’s parents have him christened, and this is what ultimately saves him, despite the fact that he spends his entire childhood and youth torturing and killing anyone associated with the Church. Because of his desires, his beastly nature, and his innate hatred of anything associated with the Christian faith throughout his childhood until his repentance, Robert can be said to have been suffering from insanity since his birth.

Robert’s moment of clarity comes after he is at his most murderous and demonic. Over some sixteen lines (from line 565 and ending at line 581) the narrator recounts how Robert attacks a convent and slaughters some forty nuns, not counting the priest who provides them with the sacraments, and the unnumbered laymen who work for the nuns on the convent grounds.\textsuperscript{126} Robert slaughters everyone at the monastery, and to add further villainy to his crime, he sets all the

\textsuperscript{126} The expression used in the text is \textit{convers}, which Elisabeth Gaucher translates as \textit{frères convers}. This term was used to designate a lay member of a medieval male monastic community—that is, someone who was not ordained—charged with performing the secular work, as well as the manual labor, that the monastery required. In this particular case, since the monastery in question is a women’s monastery, the term \textit{convers} would apply to the local men who were employed by the convent to do the heavy manual labor required for its upkeep.
building on the convent grounds ablaze. At the end of this episode of carnage, the narrator described Robert, and his horse, as being completely covered in the blood of his victims:

Les maines en a sanglentes toutes
Et ses chaucès de grosses goutes
Del sanc qui esproba deseure
... Et ses chargés trestous de sang
Que poy y pert partout de blanc.

(His hands were all bloody, and his chausses were covered in great drops of blood that had splashed on them. ...Even his horse was so soaked in blood that one could not distinguish whether it was white. Lines 585–587, 593–594.)

This act, as stated above, signals the apex of Robert’s bloodthirstiness. It also symbolizes him at his most powerful. He is able to destroy a monastery, and murder everyone present, single-handedly. It is this act, which is Robert’s last act of carnage before his conversion that is mirrored in the episodes that feature Robert fighting the Saracens who invade Rome. These episodes of Robert fighting the Church and her representatives are balanced with the episodes at the end of the narrative wherein Robert fights the enemies of the Church and the Christian empire.

After completing his act of carnage, Robert returns to Arques and discovers that the citizens flee from before him out of terror, and even at the castle the

127 Robert fights the Saracen invaders on three separate occasions. These occasions are in lines 1887–1980, 2534–2696, and 2971–3064. The last time that Robert fights the Saracens is the bloodiest of three.
servants run in fear and hide to avoid being in his presence. He is described as being one “en qui il a dou mal assés” (“in whom a demon resides,” line 608), and “Che samble que li soit esprise / La chiere et que toute li arde.” (“Whose face appeared to be entirely aflame,” lines 614–615). It is at this moment that Robert’s introspection begins and he questions how he came to be so evil, even from a very young age. He decides to ask his mother why he seems to be so wicked, and threatens her with death if she does not reveal everything concerning his birth. She reveals to him that “d’infier vient, u li mal sont ; / Li mal qu’en viennent la revont” (he comes from hell, where the wicked are, and the wicked who come from there, will there return, lines 705–706). Robert, while not being a demon-human hybrid, nevertheless has infernal origins. His mother confesses to him that he is a gift of hell and that his nature attests to it, and that hell will be his final destination.

The above scenes from Le Roman de Robert le diable are those scenes that detail the wickedness of our hero’s youth and young adulthood prior to his conversion. We see that, in spite of his baptism (lines 136–144), Robert still belongs to the Devil, who assisted in his conception. Robert’s connection to the Devil is evidenced in his actions towards all those who serve the Church in some way, whether as bishops or priests, or as vowed religious (monks and nuns). The telling of Robert’s vicious and bloodthirsty behavior towards servants of the Church, in spite of his baptism, indicates to the audience that baptism is not enough to guarantee one’s salvation. If baptism were enough, Robert would have been a much better behaved child, submitting himself not only to his parents’ authority, but also to the authority of the Church and her representatives. As St. Thomas Aquinas
concluded, baptism is insufficient to assure salvation because the theology of the Church indicates that the purpose for infant baptism, as was the case in Robert’s baptism, is for the remission of Original Sin, which is contracted through carnal generation. It is for this reason that Robert must confess his sins and subject himself to the authority of the Church, which represents his only means of salvation, since outside the Church there is no salvation. As Robert received the sacrament of baptism as an infant, only the Original Sin, which he contracted from his parents upon his conception, could be erased. All other sins that he would commit thereafter would be his own responsibility, and to receive absolution for them it is required that he confess his sins sacramentally, that is, with compunction and the firm intention to avoid committing the same sins again, and submit himself to the authority of the Church whose ministers alone possessed the power to absolve.

Robert’s moment of awareness in which he recognizes his wickedness and is moved to question the source of his innate hatred for all things holy is his first movement toward change. As Robert ponders, the narrator allows the reader access to Robert’s thoughts as he questions the sources of his wickedness.

Merveille soi moult durement

Pour quoy est et dont ce li vient

Que on le doute tant et crient.

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128 St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica (Complete & Unabridged): Part III, Question 69, Article 6.* Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. [https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa/TP/TP069.html#TPQ69A6THEP1](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa/TP/TP069.html#TPQ69A6THEP1)

129 *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church, which was interpreted by Thomas Aquinas as meaning subjection to the Pope and the Roman Catholic curia. See *Summa Theologica (Complete & Unabridged): Part III, Question 73, Article 3.* [https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa/TP/TP073.html#TPQ73A3THEP1](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa/TP/TP073.html#TPQ73A3THEP1)
De luy meïsme a grant merveille
C'a bien faire ne s'apareille.
Car quant le bien a faire pense
Sans contredit et sans desfence,
Une autre pensee li saut,
Qui par estrif et par assaut
De bien faire si le desvoie,
Que lues l'a mis en aultre voie
(He deeply pondered to himself, why he was the cause of such dread and fear, and what could be the reason for it. He also wondered, concerning himself, why he could never undertake any good act? Because whenever a good intention crossed his mind, for no reason whatsoever, his thoughts for good intentions were assailed and replaced with thoughts that demanded that he abandon any good intentions for the opposite.)

This moment of introspection is also the first stirring of interior transformation that will eventually lead Robert to sainthood. This self-questioning is what brings Robert to seek the circumstances surrounding his conception and birth. Although Robert questions the origins of his wickedness, he is not yet willing to abandon his wicked ways.

Robert reasons that he has been wicked since his infancy, so he deduces that his penchant for evil must be related to his birth, or events surrounding it. In order to learn the origins of his wickedness he decides to interrogate his mother, and

130 Robert le diable, lines 630–640.
orders her to either reveal the secret behind his predisposition for evil, which clearly goes beyond whatever evil normal humans may commit. To force her to reveal her secret, he threatens her with death ("Tost vous estuet dire, / U vous hastievement morrés", lines 674–675). She begs him not to force her to reveal her secret, stating that her great shame and his great ire once he hears the truth, will bring about her death (lines 682–685). However, learning the truth about himself brings Robert to make the decision that brings about his full transformation, and rather than killing his mother he decides to reject and abandon the life he had heretofore known and become a penitent and go to Rome in order to confess his sins to the Pope. It is at this point that Robert’s degradation begins as he seeks salvation.

The narrator of the *roman* dedicates fifteen lines to describe the beginning of Robert’s degradation. The narrator describes how Robert throws away his weapons and uses a knife to shave his head in the manner of a penitent (lines 729–732). While his introspection marks the beginning of his spiritual transformation, his rejection of his weapons further confirms that a spiritual change is occurring. He is not only rejecting his weaponry, but also rejecting the violence that is associated with them and his past. The next eleven lines are dedicated to Robert’s rejection of his family’s wealth, which represents his own past, and his taking on of the penitent’s habit (lines 733–742). As will be discussed in Chapter Three, clothing marks a person as following a specific path in society; but in the case of a penitent, clothing marks the beginning of a transformation that begins with the exterior.
The beginning of Robert le diable’s transformative degradation could be compared, in some ways, to that of Saint Francis of Assisi. As the son of a wealthy merchant, Francesco Bernardone (1181–1226) enjoyed worldly pursuits as a young man. His greatest wish was to become a knight, but after being a prisoner of war and contracting an unknown illness he came to question the meaning of life, his very existence, and his role in God’s world. This introspection led him to abandon his worldly pursuits in favor of caring for the poor. However, after his father discovered that Francesco had stolen from the family business in order to pursue his social ministry, his father took him to court. Francesco claimed religious sanctuary because he had committed his act of theft in the name of Christian charity. The mayor of Assisi, wishing to avoid the scandal, agreed with Francesco and recused himself, transferring the case to the local bishop to decide. When his father accused Francesco of theft before the bishop, Francesco removed all of the clothes that his father had given him and, standing naked in the presence of all, he renounced his past and his former secular interests. He exchanged the clothes that were symbols of his wealth and foolish youth for the rough robe of a penitent, which he wore for the rest of his life.\textsuperscript{131} Saint Francis’ act of rejecting his family’s wealth and his youthful waywardness are strikingly similar to those of Robert le diable, with both of them living lives of penance and degradation until death.

Robert le diable journeys to Rome because he wishes to confess his sins to the Pope and be absolved of the many murders and blasphemies he had committed.

In so doing, Robert recognizes that he must submit himself to the authority of the Pope and the Church. This submission is another form of degradation indicating that Robert is no longer the master of his own life. As master of his own life, Robert has committed murder and left in his wake nothing but destruction and chaos. In placing himself under the authority of the Church and her temporal leader, Robert is shown as degrading himself by recognizing that someone else has the power to exercise control over him.

The scene in which Robert meets the Pope illustrates even further the character’s degradation by demonstrating how far Robert will abase himself in order to receive absolution. In order for Robert le diable to meet the Pope, he must hide near the altar in the Pope’s private chapel. As it happens, Robert spends the night hiding near the altar in the papal chapel. As soon as the Pope finishes mass the next morning, jumps from his hiding place and throws himself at the Pope’s feet. He then grabs the Pope’s legs and embraces them so hard that the Pope is unable to move, all the while crying and begging the Pope for absolution (lines 813–821). The Pope hears Robert’s confession at his insistence (lines 870–893), but is unable to decide what kind of penance he should assign for such heinous crimes (lines 894–897). Submitting Robert to even further degradation, the Pope sends him to the hermit who serves as his own confessor, explaining that the hermit is such a holy man he will surely be able to discern the penance that Robert must complete in order to receive the absolution he seeks.

The degradation that Robert le diable experiences in his encounter with the Pope underlines his need to learn obedience to someone in authority, and hearken
back to his childhood and youth during which he refused to acknowledge the authority, or superiority, of anyone over him, specifically his parents and the Church. His entire childhood and youth were spent in disobedience to his parents to such a point that his father was prepared to execute him in order to maintain peace and stability in his realm (lines 336–339), and the duke (along with the entire population of Normandy) was threatened with excommunication if he did not act to put an end to his son's murderous rampages (lines 268–273). Until this very moment, Robert had spent his entire life in defiant disobedience to anyone who held any kind of authority over him, and, likewise, he spent his time torturing and murdering those to whom he was superior and would one day be lord. Now that he has subjected himself to authority, he must submit himself to his degrading penance in order to balance the wickedness he committed while he rejected the Church's authority.

Robert's pre-penitential savagery is evident in his predilection for violence and his refusal to adhere to neither the social standard nor the laws of the Church. The violence that he exhibits causes the reader to question whether he is entirely sane, all the while understanding that Robert's murderous behavior is the result of his diabolic origins. However, Robert is self-aware, and has become conscious of how his behavior is affecting other people. Robert possesses the ability to understand exactly what it means to be a gift of the Devil, and is therefore willing to do what is necessary in order to reconcile himself with God and the Church, therefore breaking any control or claim that the devil may have over him. This is the beginning of what will become Robert's spiritual and physical transformation,
leading him through a metamorphic degradation that will eventually see him through to his salvific transfiguration.

In his transformation from his wicked past, the young, insane, unruly Robert le diable must, after his confession, give way and allow himself to be transformed into the Robert that is the older, sane, and self-controlled Robert le pénitent. Robert is assigned a penance directly from God, through the person of the hermit to whom the Pope sent him to seek penance and spiritual direction. By way of introduction, Robert presented himself with a letter the Pope had written on his behalf, detailing who he was and the crimes he had committed, and also how he (the Pope) felt insufficient to provide Robert with a penance fitting the gravity of his crimes, thus the reason for sending him to the hermit. The hermit, while saying Mass the next day, received directly from the hand of God a letter detailing what Robert’s penance should be:

A tant vit devant luy estendre
Une main, si li prist a tendre
.I. petit brief; et cil l’a pris,
(He saw a hand reach out toward him, handing him a letter, which he took.)

The letter contained instructions as to how Robert was to perform his penance.

The penance that Robert must perform is three-fold: first, he must dress and behave as one who is insane, and accept all the abuse that is heaped upon him from the

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132 Robert le diable, lines 1079–1081.
133 Robert le diable, lines 1125–1153.
populace, and he must actively seek out this abuse every day; second, he must
remain mute, regardless of the circumstances or desire to speak, otherwise he will
once again be a slave of the Devil; and, third, no matter how hungry he becomes he
must only eat the food that he can succeed in stealing from mouths of dogs, and to
do otherwise will imperil the state of his soul and cause him to lose all the spiritual
progress he had up to that moment. To fail, or to refuse, to perform any of the
penance exactly as prescribed would cause Robert to become worse than he was
before.134

Robert’s penance is far more degrading than the self-deprecating actions he
has taken thus far. The three-fold penance requires not only that Robert subject
himself to the authority of the Church and her representatives, but that he become,
in effect, the complete opposite of what he was prior to his moment of insight and
conversion. It is at this point that Robert becomes the “anti-Wild Man.” He is
completely endowed with reason, he is completely sane, and he is a very handsome
man who has altered his appearance with his clothes and his lack of grooming in
order to appear to be something that he is not. Robert’s penance creates the illusion
that he is un fou muet (a mute fool), but this is a disguise that will be removed by the
end of the narrative, and his true identity and reason for his behavior will be
revealed (see Chapter Three: “Disguise and Unveiling: The Use of Clothing as a
Medium for Metamorphosis and Transfiguration in Medieval Narratives”).

Robert’s physical degradation from his first moment of introspection up to the
point of the prescription of his penance marks the slow interior transformation

134 Robert le diable, lines 1109–1153.
that ends at what can be labeled a metaphoric “transfiguration”. However, in order to attain this transfiguration, Robert must first be degraded, that is, *metamorphosed*, into that which can be transfigured. At this point, everything is dependent upon Robert and his reaction to the severe penance that he has received. If he accepts his penance, and performs it exactly as prescribed, then his forgiveness and absolution for the crimes of his youth are assured. However, if he rejects his penance, or fails to perform it exactly as it was prescribed, then his entire endeavor will have been a waste of time and he will find himself once again enslaved to the Devil.

One thing that is important to recognize is that Robert le diable has already been degraded and transformed prior to receiving his penance from the hermit. Robert was already humbled when he returned home on the day that no one would come to help him off of his horse or out of his armor after slaughtering an entire convent. The narrator’s observation that people ran from his presence did not fill him with any pride in himself or cause him to relish the fact that his very character made people run in fear. The servants fleeing in fear had quite the opposite effect on him: it made him question why he was so wicked that even the people who knew him feared him (and this included his parents). Likewise, when his mother reveals (upon pain of death!) Robert’s satanic origins, rather than taking pride in his origins or rejoicing at his differentness, Robert is horrified and humiliated, and seemingly mourns the fact that his origins are demonic:

\[
\text{De ce que sa mere il conte} \\
\text{A moult grant doel, a moult grant honte.} \\
\text{La em pleure moult tenrement;}
\]
L’eve li file espressemet
Des ielz tout contreval la face,
Qu’avoit plus clere que glace;
A grant fuison en issent larmes.
(What his mother told him filled him with very great suffering and very great shame. He cried bitterly, the tears flowed from his eyes in great streams down his face, which had become as clear as glass).135

This scene is the first time that Robert offers any emotion other than anger and hatred. The degradation that leads to Robert’s conversion has already happened. The penance is the test to make sure that his compunction and repentance are real.

As a test, the degradation brought about by the penance provides the evidence of the sincerity of Robert’s repentance, and when one looks at the penance itself, it is interesting to see how each particular element contrasts with the actions of Robert’s youth, and each element recalls Ovidian tropes of metamorphosis. As Robert behaved as a senseless animal in his youth, acting as if by instinct to murder and wreak havoc, and now he is required to live and eat with dogs who are but one degree higher on the social scale than the wolf, who lives by instinct to kill and destroy. But even so, Robert must abase himself to a degree lower than the dog because he must steal his food from the mouths of the dogs, and he is required to sleep with dogs, further degrading the heir to the duchy of Normandy. Robert le diable performs his penance to the letter (quite literally) for a period of ten years, never erring from it in the least. During this decade Robert finds shelter and

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135 Robert le diable, lines 709–715.
protection at the emperor’s palace where he is kept as a *fou*, almost as a pet, for the emperor’s enjoyment. Likewise, several times the emperor refers to Robert as “mon fou” and, as though he were a precious pet, forbids anyone from harming him. The fact that Robert is capable of withstanding such abuse—even from those who mean no real harm—stands as proof that his repentance is sincere, and that the spiritual change that has been wrought in him is real.

Robert’s complete obedience and willingness to degrade himself to the level of an animal of lower estate than a dog, in complete submission to the exigencies of his penance, assures his forgiveness and absolution for the sins of his life in Normandy. Furthermore, Robert’s faithful fulfillment of his penance without question or lapse not only provides proof of his seriousness, but also assures his salvation after his death when he is celebrated as a saint.

As a narrative, *Robert le diable* offers several contrasts, all of which signal a stage of transformation for the protagonist. The first contrast signifies his transformation from an ungovernable child and young adult, who frequently abused and murdered the people of his father’s realm, particularly representatives of the Church; to a penitent who not only placed himself under the authority of the Church and her ministers, but willingly submitted himself to a degrading penance that saw him being abused and threatened with death on a daily basis by the people of Rome. The second contrast in the narrative marks Robert’s transformation from a wicked knight who actively fought against his own people and the Church, and whose bloodlust reached its apex when he massacred the nuns at the Abbey of Arques, to a
knight who came to fight for the Church and only wished to serve his emperor and justice.

For ten years Robert lived in complete anonymity at the emperor’s court, assuming his new identity as the *fou* (fool), never straying from his penance and never revealing his identity to anyone. When the Saracens attack, Robert is given permission from God, by the message of an angel, to don white armor and mount a white horse in order to fight to protect not only Rome, but also the entire Christian empire, from foreign invasion.¹³⁶ During each battle Robert fights with such skill and ability that he is able to repel the enemy invasion that same day, and is so skillful that he is able to return to the emperor’s palace to return the armor and horse to the angel and not be discovered by the emperor or his soldiers. They only know that a knight in white armor, riding a white horse, was able to deliver Rome from the Saracen invasion. The emperor and his soldiers refer to him as the *chevalier blanc*. The same scene is reproduced twice more, each time with the same result. The last time, however, Robert sustains a wound in his thigh that serves to later identify him as the *chevalier blanc* who saves Rome.¹³⁷ Upon discovery of the identity of the *chevalier blanc*, Robert is released from his penance by the hermit and given permission to speak, and he tells the emperor and everyone present his story and how he came to be the *chevalier blanc* who is a savior beloved of his people.¹³⁸ The emperor offers Robert the hand of his daughter, who secretly loves him, but Robert refuses, preferring a life of solitude and prayer to a life of

¹³⁶ *Robert le diable*, lines 1833–2023; 2531–2630; 2921–3076.
¹³⁷ *Robert le diable*, lines 3144–3145.
¹³⁸ *Robert le diable*, lines 4470–4504.
conjugality. He joins the hermit and returns with him to the forest where he lives as a wonder-worker until his death, after which the local people revere him as a saint.\(^{139}\)

By the time that Robert has spent a decade in penance, a complete ontological change is wrought in his life. This is evidenced by not only his complete submission to the angel's directives concerning the battle, but even more by his refusal of the emperor's offer of his daughter's hand in marriage. Robert, who was once the possession of the Devil has now completely changed and forever become the possession of God, his taking of monastic vows being the final symbol of that ontological transformation.

The scenes in which Robert is allowed to participate in the battles against the Saracens mark a particular kind of change in Robert because they are each the exact opposite of the types of “battles” in which he would engage himself prior to his conversion. The battles against the Saracens are *legitimate* battles in which Robert is called to perform his duty as a knight who is required to defend both his sovereign and his sovereign’s domain, as well as fight to defend the faith that he, as a Christian, is duty-bound to defend.\(^{140}\) The blood with which his white armor and horse become splattered is the blood of the guilty pagans who dare to invade Christian lands. Prior to his conversion, the “battles” that Robert fought were not true battles, but rather raids upon innocent people in small towns, as well as convents and monasteries. These people were innocent, pious Christians, and were the direct

\(^{139}\) *Robert le diable*, lines 4571–4717.

\(^{140}\) St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians (6:11–18), admonishes them to “put on the whole armor of Christ” to defend the Church against her spiritual enemies.
opposite of the Saracens who dared to invade Rome. In effect, by going to battle against the Saracens three times, Robert is bringing balance to his life by “cancelling out” the three times prior to his conversion where he is recounted “fighting” unarmed Christians. The last of these battles against the Saracens is the worst of the three, and the worst of Robert’s atrocities is the devastation and destruction of the convent on the day of his introspection.

For ten years Robert lived in silence and acted the role of the fool who allowed himself to be abused by everyone, effectively effacing the physical and mental harm he had done to others while a small child. The battles against the Saracens, the “enemies of God” as Pope Urban II denounced them in 1095 at the preaching of the First Crusade, brought balance back to Robert’s life by erasing the “battles” he had fought against the Church and God’s servants prior to his conversion. As Robert restored the balance that he owed to society for the upheaval that he had caused throughout his youth, he also brought balance to his own humanity, which had been unbalanced since his conception as it was achieved without the help of God and the saints, but instead through the action of the devil. Through his conversion and his actions to protect the Christian empire, Robert the “devil” not only restored balance to the society that he had tormented during his youth; he restored himself to nature because he ceased to be the “unnatural” creature that he was born to be. In order to overcome his unnatural state, Robert must metamorphose—that is, degrade himself—in order to achieve his ultimate transfiguration.
The metamorphosis of Robert le diable, although not an interspecies metamorphosis as one finds in the Ovid and Apuleius, signals a series of physical transformations that eventually lead him to his transfiguration and sainthood. This series of transformations resembles biblical tropes of degradation, such as the degradation experienced Nebuchadnezzar, wherein physical degradation is required as a penance to atone for past transgressions. Although the mental degradation that Robert exhibits is feigned, there is nevertheless a profound mental transformation generated by his penance that causes him to forsake carnal wickedness in favor of heavenly ideals.

**Physical and Mental Degradation in Flamenca**

Mental degradation, or madness, as a cause for metamorphic physical debasement is not represented in Ovid's works, although there are examples of madness that lead those affected to commit murder, such as Philomela and Procne, and Medea. There is no physical degradation associated with their madness, although as punishment for committing the crime of filicide, the gods transform Philomela and Procne into a swallow and a nightingale, respectively. Medea, for her part, flees to Athens and marries Aegeus, suffering no punishment whatsoever for the murder of her family. Biblical tropes of madness as a cause for physical debasement occur in the Hebrew Scriptures in the story of King

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Nebuchadnezzar, as recounted in the book of the prophet Daniel, and in the story of King Saul, the first king of Israel, as recounted in the first book of Samuel.

King Saul’s mental degradation was rooted in the intense jealousy he felt toward David, whom he perceived as a threat to his rule. The prophet Samuel had already warned Saul that his disobedience to the God of Israel had incurred his disfavor, and that he would be replaced as king of Israel. However, Saul did not know that David would be chosen to replace him. It was only after they had gone to battle against the enemies of Israel, and Saul heard the women of Israel singing the praises of David, saying “Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands,” that jealousy began to overtake him and further darken his mind. When he heard the women of Israel singing the praises of David, “Saul was exceeding angry ... and Saul did not look on David with a good eye from that day and forward.” Saul’s jealousy was so intense that he tried on several occasions to kill David (1 Samuel 18:10–11, 13, and 1 Samuel 19:1, 10, 11, 18). Jealousy as the medium for degrading transformation causes a similar metamorphosis in Archambaut, the cuckolded husband in the Occitan romance Flamenca.

The anonymous thirteenth-century Occitan romance Flamenca has received much scholarly attention in recent years, and one of the reasons that Flamenca has received so much renewed interest as of late is that new discoveries are being made in its narrative. As an example, Caroline Jewers, in her work, Chivalric Fiction and the History of the Novel, argues that Flamenca is a parody of the courtly love topos and

\[143\] 1 Samuel 15:22–26.
\[144\] 1 Samuel 18:7
\[145\] 1 Samuel 18:8–9.
serves as a subtle subversion of the French *romance* genre. Juliet O’Brien, on the other hand, does a comparative reading of *Flamenca* against Chrétien de Troyes’ *Le Chevalier à la charrette* on the subject of courtly love as opposed to *l’amor coral*, or love of the heart. One of the discoveries that I have made in my studies of *Flamenca* is that of the physical and ontological transformation of Archambaut.

"Flamenca’s" narrator provides Archambaut’s physical transformation entirely in the form of descriptive portraits. In distinct stages, the narrator describes Archambaut as he undergoes a remarkable set of personality and behavioral transformations because of the insane jealousy that festers in his mind owing to his fear of being cuckolded. Also remarkable is the physical transformation, almost a metamorphosis, which accompanies the change in Archambaut’s personality and behavior. His physical appearance becomes beastly, even demonic, as his jealousy further consumes him. Archambaut’s physical transformation contrasts with other narratives in which such transformation is also evident, but whose origins are *merveilleux*, such as *Partonopeu de Blois* and the works of Marie de France. Likewise, Archambaut’s physical transformation recalls instances of biblical transformation—most notably that of Nebuchadnezzar whose descent into madness caused him to not only behave as a monstrous beast, but also caused him to believe he was a monstrous beast. There is also a metaphorical contrast with Moses who,

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according to Jerome’s translation of Exodus 34:29, sprouted horns after his encounter with God, as Archambaut sprouts the “horns” of the cuckold. In the case of Moses, his horns are symbolic of intelligence, enlightenment and strength as he is the prophet and leader of Israel. In the case of Archambaut, his horns mark him as beastly, abusive, and particularly weak in the face of rumor and fearful of possibility.

The portraiture in Flamenca provides not only a physical description of the characters, but also allows the reader insight into the personality of each character. The only extant manuscript of Flamenca is a large remnant, with a number of the beginning and ending folia missing, as well as a few missing folia scattered throughout the remaining manuscript.149 Several scholars call attention to the fact that, due to the state of the manuscript, some portrait descriptions for our characters are lost, and the first lacuna (which is found in the first quire) probably contained a brief description of Flamenca. Although Flamenca is missing the initial portrait of its heroine, sufficient references are made to her beauty that allow the reader to know that she is, indeed, quite beautiful.150 The initial portrait of Archambaut is also missing, but in spite of this the reader is able to surmise that he is very courtly because of his generosity, loyalty, and friendship. Concerning his character, his friends describe him as “de totz mals aips ” (pure from every evil inclination).151 With this, if one knows nothing else about Archambaut, one knows that he is a good man. Later descriptions of his generosity at his wedding confirm

150 Flamenca, 96.
151 Flamenca, line 32. All translations of the Occitan text are my own, unless otherwise noted.
Archambaut’s innate goodness; and his suffering after the queen plants the seed of jealousy in his soul, further illustrates the integrity of Archambaut’s character.

The idea that Archambaut undergoes a physical metamorphosis resonates with Ovidian and biblical comparisons. While scholars, such as Zufferey, Nelli, Luce-Dudemain, and Graves, among others, have observed Flamenca’s intertextuality with Ovid’s *Ars amatoria*, I propose that Flamenca may also be read in light of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, considering the profound transformation that Archambaut endures because of his jealousy. In Ovid, metamorphosis is distinguished from other forms of transformation in that it almost always results in degradation from a human state as a form of divine punishment. Archambaut’s metamorphosis is not represented as merveilleux or imposed by any supernatural influences. On the contrary, his transformation illustrates that it is jealousy that is degenerative, and besets its own punishment. *Cornutz* (horned) for Archambaut is the opposite of Moses’ transfiguration. *Cornutz* for Archambaut is a descent into insanity, darkness, and unholy mortification, whereas for Moses it is an ascent into clarity, radiance, and divine favor.

According to Alice Colby, portraits form part of the standard rhetoric of romances, and normally begin with the face, after which the description continues from the head down to the feet, and finishes with a description of the moral

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152 *Flamenca*, lines 37–38.
153 *Flamenca*, line 1170. Archambaut uses the term “cornutz” in relationship to the word “cogos” (cuckold).
character of the personage in question. Rather than a standard portrait, such as Colby has described, the reader is given particular insight into Archambaut’s mental state and sees that his jealousy is causing him to undergo a change of persona as it festers within him and consumes him from the inside out. The reader sees by his actions that Archambaut is suffering greatly from the jealousy that completely mentally overtakes him in a short time. The narrator describes Archambaut’s descent into madness by describing the embattled emotions that he keeps to himself as his jealousy grows:

Ben es intratz e mala brega,
Ren non acaba ni eissegga;
Soen vai dins, soen defora;
Deforas art, dedins acora;
Ben es gelos qui aci bela.

Quant cuja cantar, et el bela,
Quant cuja sospirar, bondis;
Neguna ren non eissernis.

(He has entered into a bitter battle. He accomplishes nothing, nor completes anything he begins. He leaves as soon as he arrives. Outwardly he burns, but inwardly his heart fails him. He is well and truly jealous, he who behaves in

this manner. When he thinks he is singing, he brays; and when he thinks he is sighing, he moans. He no longer understands anything.)\textsuperscript{155}

This description of Archambaut’s behavior as jealousy overtakes him enumerates the mental problems that he suffers, while at the same time providing a description of effects of jealousy on his personality. This description illustrates that jealousy causes people to behave irrationally and prevents them from recognizing it. This description of jealousy and the erratic behavior it causes resembles the qualities that Jean de Meun ascribes to love in the \textit{Roman de la rose}. While the narrator of \textit{Flamenca} portrays the effects of jealousy on behavior, Jean de Meun enumerates the qualities of love (e.g., love is loyal disloyalty, and disloyal loyalty),\textsuperscript{156} and the effects of love on the psyche of the lover (e.g., love is foolish wisdom and wise foolishness).\textsuperscript{157} Each example that Jean gives of the qualities and effects of love on someone further illustrates that the mental confusion and degradation caused by jealousy has similar roots in love itself.\textsuperscript{158}

As jealousy further overtakes Archambaut he begins to see enemies surrounding him where before he saw friends and allies. Even those he does not know he sees as potential enemies who would steal his wife away and make him a cuckold. As Archambaut’s jealousy completely overtakes him, and drives mad he who was once generous, kind, and “free from all evil inclinations”,\textsuperscript{159} the narrator

\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Flamenca}, lines 1035–1043. Translation mine.
\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Le Roman de la rose}, lines 4292–4293.
\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Le Roman de la rose}, line 4320.
\textsuperscript{158} The list enumerating the qualities and effects of love is rather long (forty-seven lines). The full list comprises lines 4290–4337.
\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Flamenca}, line 32.
relates how Archambaut allows his mental torment to lead him to beastly, even insane, behavior. His all-consuming jealousy-turned-madness causes him to undergo a physical change that both the reader and Flamenca notice. While the reader, through the narrator, is aware of the mental torment consuming Archambaut, Flamenca remains ignorant of his situation and innocently asks, “Sener, ques avez?” (My lord, what is wrong?, line 1145). This simple question pushes Archambaut from jealousy toward insanity, and what follows shows the reader the depths of his madness. Archambaut harangues Flamenca as he responds

E con! ... vos respondez!
Per Crist! per Crist! mala-us salli!
Eu mur, e vos esquarnes mi!
Aiso·m fan ist donnejador,
Mai, fe que dei Nostre Senor,
Non sai trobarau huis ubert.

(What!? ... You dare to speak? By Christ! By Christ! It is to your own misfortune that you allowed that word to escape your lips! I am dying, and you, you mock me! That is the real work of seducers, but I swear by the faith that I owe to Our Lord, here they will no longer find an open door).\textsuperscript{160}

Archambaut’s insanity explodes here as he yells the double entendre “E con!” and essentially tells Flamenca that he does not trust her when he tells her that her “seducers” will no longer find a “huis ubert” at his house. In speaking of the double entendre (and \textit{Flamenca} contains several), “con” has two meanings: the first being...

\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Flamenca}, lines 1146–1151.
“what?”— as in “what did you say?”.

The other is the equivalent of the French vulgarity “con”. The “huis ubert” is another double entendre that serves to illustrate Archambaut’s greatest fear as it is in direct reference to “con”. Archambaut’s use of the exclamation “con”, as well as being a double-entendre, serves a double purpose.

Not only does Archambaut shout in apparent disbelief at his new bride when she asks him whether anything is wrong, but he also insults her by reducing her to the body part he fears she will use to cuckold him.

Archambaut seemingly realizes that his jealousy is consuming him as he returns to his interior dialog and concludes

... mais voil morir
Qu’eser aunitz per trop sufrir;
Mais voil esser gelos proatz
Qu’eser suffrens escogossatz;
Mail voil esser gelos sauputz
Qu’eser suffrens cogos cornutz.
(I would rather die than be dishonored through my own kindness. I would rather have the reputation for being jealous than being a cuckold. I would rather be renowned for my jealousy than my horns.)

It is with the mention of the horns, the famous symbol of the cuckold, that allusions to metamorphosis are made. Horns are an important image, but this image can have a conflicting significance: horns on Moses as he descended Mount Sinai emphasized
his transfigured state after having spoken face to face with God. Horns on Archambaut satirically emphasize his beastliness and brand him as a stupid animal who is willing to believe whatever is told to him.

Archambaut’s interior transformation catalyzes the physical change that deserves characterization as a metamorphosis as he becomes bestial in his appearance. As we see in lines 1161–1163, Archambaut speaks to himself saying “tiei pel son fer et irissatz, que flameir espirat e coa d’esquirol salvage (Your hair looks horrible and is going every-which-way, it looks like fanned fire and is as bristly as a the tail of a wild squirrel). Beastliness is represented in the words *irissatz*, reminiscent of the hedgehog, and *esquirol salvage*, the wild squirrel. These may appear to be harmless animals, but in reality can be quite ferocious, that is *fers*, when they perceive a threat to their safety. The narrator, interestingly, is comparing Archambaut at this stage in his jealousy and transformation to small animals that are easy to fight off or escape, even when they are “ferocious” in the face of a perceived threat. Archambaut perceives a threat to his manhood. This perceived threat to Archambaut’s manhood allows us to return to the word *coa*, which *coa* also serves as a double entendre in much the same way as *con*, and, attached to the squirrel, provides an image of non-threatening manhood. However, Archambaut feels threatened by Flamenca whom he believes to be aflame for another man.

By the time Guilhem, the secret lover who woos Flamenca and eventually wins her trust, first sees Archambaut, his change in appearance has become quite

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163 Exodus 34:29–30, 35.
noticeable. In lines 2440–2446, we see how the narrator describes Archambaut as he enters the church for mass and Guilhem sees him for the first time.

Adoncs venc le fers aversiers
Per digastendonz totz derriers.
Egaiatz fon e mal aceutz;
Anc non fon mens mas sol l’espeutz
Que non semble tal espaventa
Con vila fan ab vestimenta
Contra senglar en la montaina

(Then came the fierce devil, intentionally last. He was shaggy and repulsive: all he needed was a club and he would have looked like one of those scarecrows that mountain farmers make to frighten away the wild boars.)

While the narrator’s portrait of Archambaut in this passage is not particularly beastly, the description of him as a ferocious, disheveled and repulsive adversary, or devil, would normally create another image in the reader’s mind: that of a demon who means to instill fear in those who see him. However, just a few short lines following his appellation of fers aversiers, the description of him as espaventa, a scarecrow, further diminishes Archambaut as he has only the semblance of a human, and his ferocity is truly non-existent. Archambaut’s appearance has actually gone beyond beastly and become completely artificial, associating him with something far less dangerous than a frightened hedgehog or squirrel. However, one more reference to his diabolical appearance is made when the narrator affirms that

164 Flamenca, lines 2440, 2442–2446.
Archambaut “diabol semblet de la teste de cels ques homs irissatz pein (his head resembles the head of one of those unkempt devils that men paint.)”\textsuperscript{165} However, this represents another false appearance. Archambaut simply “resembles” a shaggy devil, and this is a symptom of his jealousy-induced madness. The long process of his metamorphic degradation is complete as Archambaut is said to have taken on the appearance of a demon, of a small, impish variety. However, his mental and physical transformations are completely reversed at Flamenca’s honest assurance that he never had any reason to doubt her fidelity, coupled with her further mendacious insistence that she had been completely faithful throughout their marriage, in spite of his cruel treatment of her. It is unknown how this second transformation came about as the folia following Flamenca’s pledge of fidelity are lost, and the next scenes we see as readers are those of Flamenca liberated from her prison and Archambaut returned to his courtly behavior and appearance. Important here is that Archambaut believes Flamenca, not because she is worthy of belief, but because he is a stupid “horned” beast, and it is possible to manipulate him, like an ox suited to pulling a plough.

Archambaut’s transformation serves as a subversive caricature for Ovidian and biblical metamorphosis, just as Flamenca itself subverts the conventions of romance.\textsuperscript{166} As Ovidian transformation into beasts is rooted in divine punishment, Archambaut’s transformation is rooted within self-destructive emotion; as Moses’ horns indicate his transfiguration, Archambaut’s metaphoric horns indicate a shame

\textsuperscript{165} Flamenca, lines 3894–3895.
\textsuperscript{166} Jewers, 128.
that he brought to himself. This transformation subverts Ovidian and biblical tropes, and it presents Archambaut as his own victim. Flamenca, as his intended victim, is able to overcome her victimhood through her astuteness, whereas Archambaut wallows in his self-imposed victimhood. Furthermore, unlike the Ovidian and biblical transformations, there is no divine intervention that can save him: he is only saved from himself by means of a lie about the infidelity that he caused.

**Conclusion**

Metamorphosis and degradation in medieval French literature serve as catalysts to exaltation and transfiguration. As metamorphosis degrades the human being into something less than human, whether that degradation be physical or mental, transfiguration elevates the human person from mere humanity into a something that is better. As we have seen in examples from the anonymous thirteenth-century work *Robert le diable*, as well as *Le Chevalier au lion*, and *Partonopeu de Blois*, intertextual influences from both biblical and Ovidian sources, penitential degradation is a trope that illustrates the necessity of degradation in order to attain salvation. In *Flamenca*, we see a counter-example in which the mental and physical degradation of Archambaut has no penitential character whatsoever, and, therefore, have no redemptive qualities in the final analysis.

The *romance* protagonists Yvain, from Chrétien de Troyes’ *Chevalier au lion*, and Partonopeu, from *Partonopeu de Blois*, experience a mental deterioration and physical abasement that is penitential in nature, and ultimately redeems the two heroes in the eyes of their ladies. After each hero transgresses against a rule imposed by his lady, and she withdraws her love, he must then enter a period of
penance and self-abasement in order to atone for his violation of her lone commandment. The penance that each hero experiences is harsh, even excessive, as he requires the intervention of a third party to restore him to both mental and physical health, and ultimately to his lady.

The penances that Yvain and Partonopeu unwittingly perform in order to regain the favor of their ladies is reminiscent of the similar penance that the God of Israel required of Nebuchadnezzar after the Babylonian king refused to humble himself. Similar to Nebuchadnezzar, Yvain and Partonopeu disregarded the requirements imposed upon them by thinking only of themselves, and had a pay a price that saw them debased to a status so low that they were no longer recognizable as human beings. Each of these characters performing their degrading penances has the final effect of teaching them their place, and making them better men than they were before their penitential acts.

Yvain and Partonopeu each unwittingly performs his penance in order to be restored to his lady; that is, neither hero actively sought to perform a penitential act in order to atone for his misdeed. The eponymous protagonist of Robert le diable, in contrast, seeks the most degrading penance he can perform after his moment of spiritual awakening that makes him conscious of his own wickedness, and the roots of his evil nature. As Robert willingly performs his penance, he effaces his previous identity, which he will forever associate with his wicked and sinful past, and creates a new identity for himself: that of saint. In performing his humiliating and self-effacing penance, Robert creates a balance that effectively cancels out the wickedness he had committed prior to repentance: the evil that he meted out to the
his father’s subjects in Normandy is repaid to him by the cruelty of the people of Rome; the tongue he used to blaspheme God and the Church during his youth is now silenced until he is permitted to speak; his former rejection of authority is now replaced by subjection to both Church and emperor; and, finally, the weapons he used as a knight to wage war against the Church and murder his own people are now used to protect both Church and country in defense against Saracen invaders. Robert, in willingly effacing and debasing himself, undergoes a transformation that leads him to his own salvation and transfiguration as he is proclaimed a saint after his death. Where Yvain and Partonopeu are restored to their former glory and to their ladies’ affections (although better men for having learned a lesson they will never forget), Robert le diable, in renouncing worldly glory and conjugality, surpasses them both as he is revered as a saint.

If Yvain, Partonopeu, and Robert le diable are all better men for having each gone through the suffering associated with their respective penances, Archambaut subverts their examples by learning nothing. Archambaut was the cause of his own suffering because he allowed jealousy to overtake him. Rather than proving himself worthy of his beautiful wife, he becomes distrustful and abusive, which ultimately (unbeknownst to him) causes his wife, Flamenca, to perform the very deed he fears most; that is, turning him into a cuckold. Yvain and Partonopeu recognize their error and pay a harsh price for being unworthy of their ladies, and, through penance, must be transformed into knights who are worthy of their ladies. However, Archambaut only recognizes what could possibly happen and through his behavior, repeatedly proves himself unworthy of his wife’s hand. It is only after his wife’s spurious
reassurance that he had no reason to worry that he is restored to himself. Unlike Yvain and Partonopeu, Archambaut never performs a penance for his mistreatment of his wife, and he never, as far as we can know from the extant manuscript, learns a lesson that makes him a better, more enlightened man than he was prior to his descent into mental illness. He is restored and is the same as he was prior to marrying Flamenca.

Physical and mental degradation in medieval French literature exhibits the notion that penance is necessary after committing transgression to not only restore balance and happiness, but to surpass the state that was lost prior to the transgression. Studying the actions of characters like Yvain and Partonopeu and examining what they do in order to be reconciled with the one they offended constitutes a study in penitence. Examining the willful penitential actions of Robert le diable is not only a study in penitence, but also an exploration of sanctity and perseverance that leads to salvation and transfiguration.
Chapter Three

Disguise and Unveiling: The Use of Costume and Clothing as a Medium for Metamorphosis and Transfiguration in Medieval Narratives

There are examples of clothing as a medium for metamorphosis and transfiguration in the esteemed ancient sources that forged the hybrid that is medieval French literature. In narrative, clothing is capable of transforming a person in a manner that is both immediate and temporary, and can serve as the tool necessary for initiating a change that becomes a permanent ontological transformation. There are characters throughout medieval French and Occitan literature that use clothing to change their appearance and realize an ersatz transformation into something, or someone, else. Examples of these characters who use clothing as disguise in order to transform themselves include Tristan from the extant Tristan and Yseut romances, Chrétien de Troyes’ Yvain, and the eponymous character of Robert le diable. Each of these characters, and many others, works to transform himself, and one of the media that they each use is that of their clothing. By donning the clothing of a penitent or a knight, they successfully transform themselves from what they were, into something new. This something new can signify a new identity, a new social status, or a completely new life, in the case of penitents. As a counter example, I shall once again present a character from the Occitan romance Flamenca. This character, Guilhem, uses clothing not as a means
for transformation, but as a means to accomplish his designs to seduce Archambaut’s wife, Flamenca. Guilhem is a subversive character who, through his use of clothing and his actions, subverts and parodies both the clerical class and the knightly class.

As now, to some degree, in the Middle Ages clothing provided not only a covering for the body, it also provided an indication of the social status, region of origin, career, and in some cases, a means of identity, for the wearer. In medieval literature, clothing characterizes the wearer in that one is able to determine the personality of a character based on the clothing that the character is described as wearing. Clothing, then, is as important as a character’s action in a narrative for determining class, behavior, and social status. In her work *Weaving Narrative: Clothing in Twelfth Century French Romance*, Monica L. Wright posits that the “quality of a person’s dress ... was in direct correlation to that person’s status, geographic location, and political situation. In this way, clothing ... was functionally a symbol because it had a motivated relationship with its meaning: the wearer’s identity.” 167 In other words, the clothes that a person wore served to identify the wearer vis-à-vis his or her social status, region of origin, and even the political system of the wearer’s region: serfs did not dress as princes, nor did knights dress as monks.

As clothing identifies the wearers and distinguishes them by social class, region, and political situation, any change of clothing—that is, to subvert the use of

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the identifying and classifying power of clothing by wearing clothing outside one’s own social situation—was to create a new identity, and in several examples in medieval French literature, this gives clothing the power to transform the wearer. As a vehicle for transformation, clothing provides the wearer with the easiest manner to transform his or her appearance, and also the easiest manner to change his or her identity. Simply costuming oneself in the clothing of a different social class, a different region, or a different occupation, provided the wearer with the easiest method of transforming himself or herself.

Influencing the role that clothing plays in medieval French and Occitan literature, clothing plays a substantial role in several biblical narratives, and is linked with identity and social status, as well as with transformation. Expounding upon the importance of apparel in the Genesis 3 narrative (the Fall of Adam), it becomes evident that clothing plays a part in the metamorphic transformation of Adam and Eve, considering how they need garments and covering when they become fully human so as to distinguish them not only from their prior state of innocence, but also from the lower creatures who have no need to cover their nudity, and how, as such, clothing in ancient and medieval narrative is what truly distinguishes humans from animals. In this exploration of clothing in biblical metamorphosis, the early Church fathers’ interpretation of the importance of clothing as Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden is instructive for understanding the reception and importance of this narrative for later European Christians. This warrants the exploration of how clothing served as a medium of physical and ontological transformation in medieval narrative, particularly in the romance genre,
as well as what might be best defined as pious fiction, followed by the exploration of clothing in medieval French and Occitan narrative employed as disguise as a tool for deception, and subversion of cultural archetypes.

**The Relationship Between Clothing and Transformation in the Biblical Narrative**

The third chapter of Genesis contains the first biblical narrative of metamorphosis. As a metamorphosis narrative, it specifically deals with the definition of metamorphosis that I provided in the first chapter of this dissertation; that is, a transformation from a higher level of existence to a lower level of existence. I provide the opposite definition for transfiguration, which concerns transformation from a lower level of existence to a higher level of existence. The account of transformation that we see in the third chapter of Genesis concerns what is commonly known as the “Fall of Adam”, and recounts the story of how, according to the biblical narrative, human beings came to their imperfect, mortal state. In their metamorphosed state, Adam and Eve required covering for their nudity because, as the biblical account relates, “the eyes of both of them were opened: and when they perceived themselves to naked, they sewed fig leaves, and made themselves aprons” (Gen. 3:7). These first clothes were intended to cover the nudity that had been exposed by their metamorphosis, and did not serve any other purpose.

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168 I am using the Douay-Rheims translation of the Bible for this dissertation, as it is a direct translation into English from St. Jerome’s Latin-Vulgate Bible translation that was (and remains, today) the “official” Bible of the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages.
According to the eleventh century French rabbi and Torah commentator, Rashi (acronym for Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki), the first clothes made by Adam and Eve were made to cover the “damage” (Rashi’s euphemism for Adam and Eve’s loss of innocence) that had been exposed by their disobedience. Rashi states that in their pre-transgression state of pure innocence, Adam and Eve had not yet notice their genitals and, therefore, they were unaware of their nakedness, much like small children who, in their innocence, are unashamed of nudity because they do not associate any part of the body with shame. According to Rashi, Adam and Eve sewed aprons for themselves because, in their disobedience to a commandment from their creator, they literally internalized evil and lost their innocence; and, in so doing, their nudity became apparent.  

The act of creating clothing for themselves not only confirms the metamorphosis of Adam and Eve into fully mortal human beings who are now in need of clothing, it likewise signifies their first act as fully mortal human beings who are no longer entirely connected to their creator. Elaine Scarry, in her remarkable interpretation of the fall of humanity as recounted in Genesis 3, propses that Adam and Eve’s creation of clothing to cover their nudity was their “first cultural act wholly independent of God.” Adam and Eve not only metamorphosed into fully mortal human beings as a result of their transgression, but they also created new identities for themselves (they are no longer “good” creations who are entirely

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dependent upon their creator), and created the first clothing—sewn-together fig leaves. It is worth noting that this “first clothing” became the symbol of their identification in works of art throughout the centuries since the Middle Ages.

Adam and Eve’s act of sewing together fig leaves into aprons to cover their nudity is not the only instance in this narrative in which clothing has an essential role. They also receive clothes from God. The narrative states, “the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skins, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21). The clothes that they receive from their creator are made of skins. The use of skins to fashion clothing for Adam and Eve in their postlapsarian state is particularly significant in the symbolism that such clothing would have held for medieval Christians, as well as the Jewish people of Antiquity. Skins as clothing would have been symbolic of the penitential lives that Adam and Eve would live hereafter in order to atone for their transgression of their creator’s commandment not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, lest they die (Gen. 2:17). Andrea Denny-Brown explores the question of the significance of the clothing made of animal skins when she posits that, for the medieval Christian, “the dramatic turning point in human fortune signaled by the garments of skin in Genesis 3:21 would forever tie clothing and dress to the concept of the fallen world.”

This “fallen world” is one in which human beings are prone to sin and must, therefore, do penance—as presented in the examples of Robert le diable and Marie l’Egyptienne—in order to atone for their fallen, sinful nature, and garments made of skins provided the appropriate clothing

for their penitential state. Denny-Brown continues by asserting that "the idea that Adam and Eve’s garments were meant simultaneously to convey and effect repentance has a strong draw for later moralists" such as St. Ambrose of Milan.\textsuperscript{172}

Not only were Adam and Eve’s garments meant to convey and effect repentance, but they were also meant to be the source of suffering, according to St. Ambrose.

St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan (374–397 CE), in a letter to Sabinus, a fellow bishop, proposes that the clothing of skin that Adam and Eve received from God just before they were cast out of the garden of paradise was their very own skin, which then their descendants inherited. Ambrose reasons,

In shame I desire to cover up my sinful deeds like the limbs of my body, but because God sees everything and because I am shaded by leaves or hidden under cover, I think I am in hiding, just because I am covered with a body. It is just the same garment of skin which Adam had when he was cast out of paradise, not protected from the cold, or saved from reproach, but exposed to harm and blame.\textsuperscript{173}

Saint Augustine, bishop of Hippo (396–430 CE), who was greatly influenced by St. Ambrose’s teachings, taught that in eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve had “abandoned the face of truth” and “made for themselves aprons from the leaves of the fig tree”.\textsuperscript{174} However, Augustine affirms that, “God made for them garments of skin … God changed their bodies into this

\textsuperscript{172} Andrea Denny-Brown, “Belief,” in Heller, 72.
\textsuperscript{174} St. Augustine of Hippo, \textit{Saint Augustine on Genesis}, 127.
mortal flesh in which deceitful hearts are hidden.” For the early theologians of the Church, the “garments of skin” with which God clothed Adam and Eve before their expulsion from the Garden of Eden is the source of their suffering and pain. As Adam and Eve transgressed the commandment concerning the eating of the forbidden fruit they metamorphosed from creations who were perfect and innocent, into beings who were then imperfect, shameful, and aware of guilt, thus becoming fully human with all the imperfections, shame, guilt, sorrow, and suffering that defines being human.

When clothing is first introduced in the Genesis account, that is, the aprons made of fig leaves, it is practical in its functionality: it serves to cover the body and hide nakedness. The same use that Adam and Eve had for the clothing that they made in their postlapsarian state, Noah and his sons have for it in the aftermath of the flood narrative as Shem and Japheth, two of Noah’s sons, must cover (and, therefore, hide the shame of) their father who had become drunk and unconscious (Gen. 9:21–25). In each of these narratives clothing serves no other purpose than to cover human nudity and the shame associated with it.

The first episode in the biblical narrative in which clothing constitutes a means of transformation (in this case, disguise), is found in Genesis 27, which is the

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175 St. Augustine of Hippo, *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, 127.
176 Saint Jerome, in his *Biblia Vulgata*, uses the word *pallium* to name the garment that Shem and Japheth use to cover Noah’s nudity: *at vero Sem et Iafeth pallium inposuerunt umeris suis ... et patris virilia non viderunt* (and Shem and Japheth placed a *pallium* over their shoulders ... and they did not see their father’s nakedness, Genesis 9:23). At the time of Jerome’s translation, a *pallium* was a wide, rectangular cloak that was draped over, or wrapped around, the shoulders. While the *pallium* and the fig leaves serve the same purpose in these biblical narratives, one must note the contrast between the materials used: fig leaves are fragile and eventually wither, whereas a *pallium* is made of woolen cloth, is far more durable, and as a result, far more effective in its purpose.
episode in which Isaac, the son of Abraham, blesses his younger son, Jacob, who takes his elder brother’s birthright. In this story, Isaac has become old and blind and is preparing to die. He calls his elder son, Esau, and instructs him to hunt and prepare venison for him so that Isaac may give him his blessing. Rebekah, Isaac’s wife, overhears and instructs their younger son, Jacob, to slaughter two goats and bring them to her so that she may prepare the meal instead. She then tells Jacob that he will take the food to his father and receive the blessing he intends for Esau (Gen. 27:5–10). Jacob, while not objecting to the plan, finds flaw with it, arguing, “Thou knowest my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am smooth. If my father shall feel me, and perceive it, I fear lest he will think I would have mocked him, and shall bring upon me a curse, instead of a blessing” (Gen. 27:11–12). It is at this point that Rebekah devises the plan to physically transform her son using the skins of the goats that he will slaughter to fashion crude gloves and a collar for him to deceive Isaac (Gen. 27:16). Furthermore, she instructs Jacob to dress in Esau’s clothes so that he might smell like Esau, and therefore complete his spurious transformation into Esau (Gen. 27:15). The disguise is successful and Jacob receives the blessing and birthright meant for Esau. Jacob’s successful use of disguise as a way to deceive his father is mirrored in the extant Tristan romances, as Tristan uses several disguises to fool his uncle, King Marc, who fostered and reared him from a young age.

Jacob successfully transforms himself into Esau for the few moments that it takes to convince Isaac and receive the blessing that was intended for the elder brother by using the same clothing material with which Yahweh had clothed Adam.
and Eve. For Adam and Eve, as demonstrated above, this clothing of animal skins constitutes a clothing of penance and suffering, which are the consequences of transgression. In the Jacob and Esau narrative, however, animal skins are connected to deception and self-advancement through disguise and temporary transformation. Clothing in this particular scene is also connected to identity; as Jacob not only attempts to fool his blind father by using goatskins to make himself appear hairier, but also wears his brother’s clothing in order to more completely “transform” himself into Esau by arrogating his scent. Here, clothing is not only linked to transformation, but also to identity as it is only through the appropriation of Esau’s clothing and scent that Jacob is capable of succeeding in his deception.

Clothing used as disguise for deceptive purposes is also one of the topics of interest in Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5–7). Jesus warns his disciples to be on guard against false prophets who come to them “in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly … are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15). This reference to disguise is one in which Jesus urges his disciples to see through disguises of piety and humility that many false prophets will use in order to fool others into a false sense of safety, and they will not realize that they are in danger until it is too late. Sheep are typically seen as being meek, harmless animals and the exact opposite of the wolf that, according to the teaching that Jesus presents in this parable, will successfully lead their disciples to their damnation because they are dressed in the clothes of the meek.

Saint Augustine, in his *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, identifies these “wolves in sheep’s clothing” as heretics who would lead away the faithful with
false teachings, and that they may be recognized as heretics by their actions, and the fruits that their false teachings and actions produce. Augustine affirms for the Christian community that heretics, that is, these “wolves in the clothing of sheep” ultimately cannot produce the good works and virtues that both Jesus and Saint Paul propose as the fruits of the Spirit. Augustine states that while it is possible for heretics to give alms, they only do so “for the sake of display” and likewise when they pray, “without directing their attention toward God, but seeking to please men.” Therefore, according to Augustine, those wolves disguised as sheep are easy to recognize when the faithful pay attention to the fruits that the teachings and actions such people produce.

While Augustine interprets this teaching as a warning for Christians to beware of heretics, there were thirteenth-century authors and poets, such as the French author Rutebeuf, and the Occitan troubadour Pèire Cardenal, who attributed the qualities of wolves in the clothing of sheep to the members of the clergy and religious orders of their day. In his “Les Ordres de Paris,” Rutebeuf critiques the religious orders with houses in thirteenth-century Paris, criticizing their behavior in regards to the poverty of Christ and the early founders of these orders.

The Occitan troubadour Pèire Cardenal was very direct in his criticism of the clergy and religious orders of his day. Several of his poems and songs specifically name the hypocrisy of the contemporary clergy and religious, commenting that they

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only do good works to be seen of others, in direct opposition of the teachings of
Christ, as well as commit the same sins for which they condemn others. In his poem
“Un Estribot farai” (I Will Make an ‘Estribot’), \(^{180}\) Cardenal begins by presenting a
type of Creed, that is, a list of the beliefs that he holds dear, all of which are
confirmed by the teaching of the Church. \(^{181}\) In his description of the local clergy and
monks, who should believe the same things that he has listed since they are taught
and affirmed by the Church that they represent, he states:

\begin{quote}
Mas so non crezon clergue que fan las falcetatz,
Que son larc d’aver penre et escas de bontatz,
E son bel per la cara et ore de peccatz,
E devedon als autres d’aco que fan lurs atz,
\end{quote}

(But the clerics, who do all manner of wickedness, do not believe this. They
receive goods with largesse, and are stingy with their good works. They are
handsome of face and horrible with sin, and they forbid others from doing
that in which they take delight) \(^{182}\)

These clerics profess something that they, themselves, apparently do not believe (if
one examines their actions and compares them to their preaching). Although their
outward appearance does not betray them, they are the worst of sinners and
hypocrites.

\(^{180}\) Pèire Cardenal, “XXXIV: Un estribot farai,” Œuvres complètes bilingues de Pèire Cardenal,
\(^{182}\) Pèire Cardenal, “Un estribot farai,” lines 15–18.
In addition to being hypocrites, Cardenal further accuses them of forsaking their vows of chastity and their monastic rules, and making a mockery of the holy orders that they took upon themselves. As men who have taken vows to live lives of prayer, Cardenal represents them as having abandoned prayer and the recitation of Psalms for more carnal activities.

E en loc de matinas an us ordes trobatz
Que jazon ab putanas tro-l solelhs es levatz
(And instead of Matins, they have invented an Office that allows them to lie with whores until the sun has risen)\textsuperscript{183}

These two lines, along with the following description of activities that Cardenal attributes to the Benedictines, create an image of clergy resembling the clerical images that one finds in the Old French \textit{fabliaux}, which feature salacious monks and priests who spend more time creating cuckolds than saints.

Cardenal completes his portrait of the clerics of his day by specifically detailing the nature of their fraud:

Monge solon estar dins los mostiers serratz
On azoravan Dieu denan las magestatz,
E can son en las vilas on an lurs poestatz,
Si avetz bela femna o es homs molheratz,
El seran cobertor, si·eus peza o si·eus platz;
...
D’aqui eyson l’iretge e li essabatz

Que juron e renegon e jogon a tres datz:
Aiso fan monge negre en loc de caritatz.
(Monks used to stay cloistered in the monasteries, where they worshipped
God in front of holy images; but now they reside in the towns where they
have their superiors, and if you have a beautiful woman who is married to a
man, they will be her blankets, whether you like it or not ... that’s where the
heretics and sandal-wearers come from, those who swear and renounce and
play [the game of] three dice: that’s what the black monks do instead of
charitable work.)

The monks, who should be locked away in monasteries saying their prayers and
reciting their psalms, have abandoned the solitude of the monastery for life in the
city. Furthermore, they have, by all appearances, renounced their religious calling,
their life of penitence, and their charitable works in order to imbed themselves
deeper into immorality. The only thing religious about them is their raiment, which
Cardenal specifies is black, thus the name *monge negre*, the Black Monks, the
sobriquet of the Benedictines, whose monastic robes are black.

**Clothing and Disguise in Ovid's *Metamorphoses***

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid makes few allusions to the use of clothing, and
there are no references to clothing as a medium of transformation. In the story of
Pygmalion clothing is mentioned as the sculptor clothes and adorns the statue with
which he has fallen in love; however, the clothing is in no way related to the statue’s

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transformation from an ivory work of art into a woman of flesh and bone. Ovid pays more attention to clothing in his *Ars Amatoria (The Art of Love)*, dedicating Book 3 to clothing, grooming, and hygiene, but he only discusses clothing for the sake of appearance. For example, Ovid counsels women to not “strut weighed down by clothing heavy with in-sewn gold” because in so doing they drive men away with the wealth they use to lure them.\(^{185}\) For Ovid, metamorphosis is purely corporeal and is permanent, thus eliminating the possibility of using clothing as a tool for transformation because clothing is neither corporeal, as it is not a part of the body, nor permanent, as it can be donned or removed at the will of the wearer.

However, there is one instance in the *Metamorphoses* in which the clothing of the metamorphosed subject is likewise transformed. This instance is found in Book I of the *Metamorphoses*, in which Ovid recounts the tale of Lycaeon, who had slaughtered his own son to serve a meal for Jupiter to test whether the god was truly omniscient. As punishment, Jupiter transformed Lycaeon into a wolf, and we read that “in villos abeunt vestes, in crura lacerti” (his garments change to shaggy hair, his arms to legs),\(^{186}\) indicating that his clothes, rather than being an instrument of, or a necessity because of, his transformation, were subjected to the same transformation as their wearer. In the case of the Ovidian character Lycaeon, and indeed in all of Ovid’s metamorphosed characters, clothing ceases to be a necessity.

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when human wearers are degraded to the lower animals who act on instinct rather than reason, and who are unashamed because they know no nudity.

The Use of Clothing and Disguise in the *merveilleux* Tradition

Clothing does not really begin to play a larger narrative role until the Middle Ages, when writers begin to link apparel to identity, including social status, region of origin, and religion. When linking clothing to religion, not only is it used to distinguish Christians from non-Christians, but also to distinguish those people who are “religious”, that is, those men and women who have taken on the celibate, vowed life of a religious community. For men, there were even further sartorial distinctions to make between those men who were ordained diocesan clergy (i.e., priests and deacons under the authority of the local bishop), and those who were monastic clergy. Likewise, writers begin to see the importance of clothing when describing the physical appearance of their characters, even though the description of clothing was not always a part of a character’s physical description. In medieval French and Occitan literature, clothing is linked to transformation when it is exchanged for other clothing, or when it is removed altogether. One example in medieval French literature of clothing being used as a tool for transformation comes from the twelfth century lai, *Bisclavret*, by Marie de France.

*Bisclavret* is a lai, that is, a short story in octosyllabic verse, in which the protagonist, a knight, is able to transform himself into a werewolf. In order to transform, he must first remove his clothes and hide them; in order to regain his human form, he must return to his clothes and put them back on. This is explained
by the knight, himself, in response to his wife’s questioning concerning why he
regularly leaves home for four days at a time. He confesses to her that he becomes a
werewolf and, as such, does what wolves will do.\footnote{187} Upon further questioning from
his wife, the knight reveals how he is able to achieve such a transformation. His wife
specifically wants to know about his clothes and whether he removes them or
remains clothed during and after his transformation. As Bisclavret’s wife continues
her questioning, he becomes reticent to reveal information concerning his clothes,
indicating that his clothing more important in his transformation, whether from
man to beast or beast to man, than one might think. The narrator presents their
conversation as almost an interrogation:

Quant il li aevit tut cunté,

Enquis li a e demandé
S’il se despueille u vet vestuz.

'Dame', fet il, 'jeo vois tuz nuz.'

'Dites pur Deu, u sunt vos dras?'

'Dame, ceo ne dirai jeo pas;

Kar se jes eüsse perduz

E de ceo fusse aperceüz,

Bisclavret sereie a tuz jurs.

Je nen avrie mes sucurs,

De si qu’il me fussent rendu.

Pur ceo ne vuei qu’il seït seü.’

(When he had told her everything, she asked him whether he stripped out of his clothes or kept them on. “My Lady, said he, I go completely nude.” “In God’s name, tell me where are your clothes?” “My Lady, that, I will not tell you, for if someone were to find me out and I should lose them, I would remain a werewolf forever. I would not be able to do anything about it until they were returned to me. That is why I do not allow anyone to know.”)  

It is clear from this passage that our hero’s identity as a human being, as well as his identity as a werewolf, is directly linked to his clothes. Monica L. Wright specifies that not only do his clothes mark his identity as a human and a wolf, they also “actually perform the transformation,” since without them he is unable to reverse his transformation to regain his human body. It is only by removing his clothes and hiding them that he can complete his transformation into a werewolf, and it is only by returning to his clothes and dressing himself again that he is able to reverse his transformation and regain his human form. Therefore, clothing is linked to humanity in a way that it cannot be linked to the lesser animals. The titular character of Bisclavret abandons his human form along with his clothing, and therefore also abandons his humanity in favor of becoming a wolf; however, he never completely renounces his humanity because he always returns, after a few days, to reclaim his clothing and, likewise, his humanity along with his human form.

189 Monica L. Wright, Weaving Narrative,” 128.
In Ovid’s story of Lycaeon and his lycanthropic metamorphosis, Jupiter also causes Lycaeon’s clothing to transform, converting it into the shaggy, bristly fur coat that serves to identify wolves on sight. As Lycaeon loses his humanity, his garments, likewise, lose their association with humanity and as they fuse with his body and assume their own beastliness as they transform into a pelt. This is in direct contrast with Bisclavret who must use his attire as a tool for his transformation. Rather than his attire fusing with him as he undergoes his metamorphosis, he must shed it in symbolism of the shedding of his human countenance. In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid depicts the degradation and dissolution of the human who undergoes metamorphosis into an animal or a plant, but in *Bisclavret*, as well as in *Méliom*, the hero is ultimately the master of his own transformation as he is capable, in opposition to Ovidian characters, of restoring his humanity, himself.\(^{190}\)

The protagonist of *Bisclavret* is not the only knight in medieval French literature whose identity and humanity are directly linked to his attire. The protagonist in the late anonymous twelfth-to-early-thirteenth century *Lai de Mélion* is, like the hero of *Bisclavret*, a knight (hereafter referred to as Mélion) who is also a werewolf, and must likewise remove his clothing in order to accomplish his metamorphosis into a wolf.\(^{191}\) However, unlike Bisclavret, Mélion also possesses a magic ring with which he touches his forehead in order to generate his bestial transformation. As in *Bisclavret*, Mélion confides in his wife to his own peril as she

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betrays him for another, leaving him in his lupine form after she and her lover steal his clothes and magic ring, both of which he must have in order to reclaim his human form and his human identity.

In both *Bisclavret* and the *Lai de Mélion*, clothing is associated with being human. The relationship between clothing and humanity is demonstrated by the removal of clothes when the two knights wish to assume their lupine form and take on their bestial identity; additionally, they must return to their clothing in order to reverse the transformation, further underlining that clothing is the significant difference that separates human beings from animals, particularly wild animals of the forest.

In order to transform into wolves, both Bisclavret and Mélion must remove their clothing, which distinguishes them as human beings—and their clothing likewise distinguishes them from other human beings. Similarly, they each make the same mistake in revealing the secret concerning the importance of their clothing in their metamorphosis. While Bisclavret directly tells his wife of the necessity of his clothing for his transformation process after she pleads with him to share his secret, Mélion makes the same mistake by not only telling his new bride of his ability to transform into a wolf and explaining to her how he does it, but by also performing his transformation in front of his wife and squire, and allowing them to help him transform. He has his squire help him undress and then cover up his nudity with a coat. According to Susan Small,

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192 “*Le Lai de Mélion*,” lines 153–172.
Mélion, too, takes off his clothes in order to become a werewolf, but ... his is no story of exposed skin; it is a lesson in sartorial etiquette. Not only does Mélion ask his squire to help him undress by taking off his shoes for him; he also covers himself up with a coat once he is completely undressed.\textsuperscript{193} After he has completed the act of undressing, with the help of his squire, he instructs his wife to touch his forehead in order to bring about the complete transformation. It is at this point that Mélion becomes a wolf and goes about procuring the venison that his wife mentioned craving prior to his transformation. It is also at this point that his wife and squire steal his clothes and his ring and flee to Ireland.\textsuperscript{194} By stealing both his clothes and his ring, Mélion’s wife and squire leave him with no means by which to return to his human form, thereby robbing him of his humanity and keeping him imprisoned in his lupine disguise.

Mélion and Bisclavret, while they are endowed with the magical capacity to transform themselves into wolves, cannot be truly considered as wolves. Unlike the Ovidian metamorphic trope, which is permanent, this particular metamorphosis is reversible. Furthermore, they cannot be truly considered as wolves because they retain their human sense and reason, thereby revealing that they are more than mere beasts. In this way, their lycanthropy must be considered a disguise that they use for their own benefit. In the case of Bisclavret, he transforms and then enters the forest, where he “vit de preie e de ravine” (lives off of prey and what he can steal).\textsuperscript{195}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{194} “Lai de Mélion,” lines 189–202.
\textsuperscript{195} Marie de France, “Bisclavret,” line 66.
\end{flushleft}
Mélion uses his lycanthropy to benefit him as a hunter. It appears that, as a wolf, Mélion becomes a more agile and capable hunter, and as the narrative advances, because of his human reason, he becomes a capable leader of other wolves. As both Bisclavret and Mélion retain their human abilities to think and reason, their lupine bodies are mere disguises that they may assume whenever they wish.

The evidence that the lupine bodies of Bisclavret and Mélion are disguises, that is, a temporary appearance that masks their true identities, lies in their behavior toward their sovereigns. Each werewolf recognizes his king and remains conscious of his place in society. They have each taken on the appearance of a wolf, even so far as physically becoming a wolf, but they have not gone so far in their transformation that they have completely forsaken their humanity. Both Bisclavret and Mélion have retained their human reason and intelligence, and they each use both reason and intelligence to exact revenge and seek justice against those who have betrayed them. They are still capable of identifying as human and, while trapped in their lupine form, they use their human capacities to reveal their true identities. By using their human reason while trapped in the form of a wolf, they manage to extract the truth from those who betrayed them: Bisclavret from his unfaithful wife, and Mélion from his unfaithful squire.196 Once the truth is revealed, their clothes are restored to them, Mélion’s ring is restored to him, as well, and they are able to regain their human form and human identity.

Monica L. Wright, in Weaving Narrative: Clothing in Twelfth-Century French Romance, posits that clothing in twelfth-century texts serves a purpose that goes

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beyond class and economic situation, but also serves to provide the wearer with an identity. In other words, the wearer of particular is identifiable by that same clothing. She argues that,

While the quality of one’s clothing in the twelfth century made it possible to identify a person’s social class, it is also instrumental in the expression of individual identity … characters are often recognized on the basis of their clothing. Conversely, characters who wear unfamiliar clothing often go unrecognized. Moreover, characters who are nude or not dressed in their normal attire defy recognition altogether.\(^{197}\)

When characters change their style of dress, that is, dress that does not fit their social class or economic status, they are disguising themselves in order to gain the anonymity that comes with being unrecognizable, or they are going further by attempting to create an entirely new identity for themselves. The creation of a new identity for oneself is a theme that is explored further in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Le Conte du Graal*, in which the young man Perceval wishes to become a knight. This theme is further explored in the *Moniage Guillaume*, and in several episodes of the *Tristan* cycle of narratives.

**The Use of Clothing and Disguise in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes**

Clothing as a tool for transformation is also a theme in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Le Chevalier au lion*. In this romance, the hero, Yvain, is identifiable by his garments, and loses his identity when the noble apparel he wears is destroyed after his mind

\(^{197}\) Wright, 64–65.
descends into the darkness of insanity. His clothing, like that of Bisclavret and Mélión, is directly related to his pseudo-metamorphosis as his mental state causes him to behave like a beast of the forest.

The link between clothing and identity in the case of Yvain is made clear during his period of insanity as he wanders through the forest in his diminished mental state, after his lady, Laudine, withdraws her love from him for having broken a promise that he made to her. In his madness, Yvain is degraded to a less-than-human state that causes him to destroy his clothing as he descends into madness and retreats into the forest, where the wild animals dwell. As he sheds and rejects his garments, Yvain undergoes psychic metamorphosis as his mind degrades and he loses all human reason, thereafter being forced to rely on animal instinct for his survival until his sanity is restored. The narrator describes Yvain’s transformation into animalistic behavior using the terms forsenne and sauvage to describe his mental state, as well as describing the behavior that he unwittingly adopts as he begins to live by instinct rather than reason:

Lors li monta i. troublellons
El chief, si grant quë il forsenne;
Lors se desschire et se despenne
Et fuit par cans et par valees,
Si laisse ses gens esgarees,
Qu’il se merveillent ou puet estre.

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Les bestes par le bois aguete
Et lors ochist, et si menjue
La venoison trestoute crue.
Et tant conversa el boscage
Comme hom foresenés et sauvage ...
(In his head there arises such a powerful turbulence that he *goes mad*;
so he then tears apart his clothes and strips himself completely and flees into
the fields and the valleys, leaving his people in complete confusion, asking
themselves in their surprise where he could possibly be ... He keeps his eyes
open for wild beasts I the woods, he kills them, and then he eats of the raw
venison. He stayed a long time in the forest, living as a *wild madman*... Lines
2804–2809, 2824–2828. Emphasis mine.)
The first thing that Yvain does when he descends into bestial madness and begins
behaving like a wild beast of the forest, is to tear off his clothes and effectively strip
himself of his identity, both as a knight and as a human. While Yvain does not
metamorphose into a wild animal as one would find in Ovidian metamorphic tropes,
or in the works of Marie de France, he does, nevertheless, undergo a transformation
that causes him to lose his identity as a human being and identify more with the
wild beasts of the forest. His rejection of his clothing further identifies him as
bestial, as opposed to human, in that the beasts of the forest do not wear clothing.
Yvain no longer needs clothes because his reason has left him and he has mentally
transformed into a beast that lacks the modesty that human reason requires. Yvain's
madness and sojourn in the forest is similar to the punishment of the biblical king Nebuchadnezzar, even though the narrator of the Book of Daniel does not specifically mention Nebuchadnezzar’s clothing, or whether he was even clothed, during his seven years of madness (Daniel 4:25–34). Nebuchadnezzar, like Yvain, loses his human senses and begins to live entirely by animal instinct, thus banishing him from human society. Yvain’s banishment from human society is further concretized during his period of mental degradation by the loss of his clothing which, according to Monica L. Wright, emphasizes the loss of his social status and social identity.\(^{199}\)

Yvain’s loss of his human identity is confirmed when he is discovered in the forest by the “Dame” and the two “Demoiselles” who provide the magical ointment he needs in order to be cured and return to his senses (lines 2888–2896). When they first encounter him asleep in the forest, they do not recognize him. It is one of the Demoiselles who recognizes a scar on his cheek that is the first to recognize Yvain for who he is, and understands that he has become insane. The narrator explains that the young woman

... mout le regarda anchois

Que nule riens sor li veïst

Qui reconnoistre li feïst.

Ja l’avoit ele tant veü

Que tost l’eïst reconneï

Së il fust de si riche atour

\(^{199}\) Monica L. Wright, *Weaving Narrative*, 119.
Com ele l’ot veü maint jour.

(... looked upon him a long time before noticing something about him that gave her a hint so that she could recognize him. She had already seen him so many times before that she would have recognized him sooner had his clothing been as magnificent as what she had seen him wear so many times, lines 2894–2900.)

Here, the narrator makes it clear that not is Yvain’s humanity directly linked to his clothing, but his social identity, as well, as he explains that the young woman who recognized Yvain would have more easily recognized him had he been wearing the fine clothing that she was accustomed to seeing him wear. Yvain was not a stranger to her, yet she was not able to immediately recognize him. She had to look upon him *longuement*, a long time, in order to finally see something about him that gave her a *hint* as to his identity. The young woman had to carefully examine Yvain for this hint, and it was only because of a scar that he had on his face (lines 2905–2909).

The young woman recognizes that Yvain is suffering through mental illness and, with the permission of her Lady, provides a medicinal cure in the form of an ointment that her Lady instructs her to rub on Yvain’s temples, stating that the medicine is so efficient that just a few drops massaged into the temples are sufficient to restore him to his senses (lines 2946–2955; 2964–2973). However, the most striking thing about Yvain’s treatment and cure is the fact that the young woman, in addition to massaging him with the ointment that is so effective that “nule rage n’est en le teste qu’il n’en ost” (there is no madness in the head that it will not cure, lines 2954–2955), brings him garments to cover his nudity.
Robe vaire, cote et mantel,
Li fait porter, de soie en graine.
Chele le prent, et si li maine
En destre un paleffroi mout boin.
Et avec ché y met du soin:
Chemises, braies delëes,
Et chausses neuves bien taillies.

([The Lady] sent to him a robe lined in vair, along with a tunic and silk mantel. The young woman took the clothes and, with her right hand, also led to him a good riding-horse. In addition to these, she carefully added shirts, sturdy breeches, and new, good cut pantaloons, lines 2974–2980.)

In providing him with clothing to cover his nudity, she also provides a way for Yvain to be restored to a more human state. As he wandered through the forest in a state of dementia, behaving like a wild animal and acting entirely on instinct, he had no more need of clothing than a beast of the forest. Upon returning to his human senses, however, his humanity is fully restored and, as a human, he requires clothing to cover up the shame that animals do not experience.

When Yvain is cured and returns to his human mental state (... rot son sens et son memoire), the first thing he notices about himself is that he is naked. Just as Adam discovered his nakedness immediately upon being able to distinguish between good and evil, Yvain, likewise, sees that he is naked and must cover himself.

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200 Vair is a fur, typically bluish-grey, obtained from a variety of squirrel, used from the 12th through the 14th centuries as a trimming or lining for garments.
201 Chrétien de Troyes, Le Chevalier au lion, line 3019–3020.
Furthermore, he is so profoundly ashamed of being naked and exposed that finding the clothing laid out for him is almost as much an embarrassment as his unclothed state. The narrator reveals Yvain’s thoughts as he ponders the how and why of not only how he came to be in his unclothed state, but also how new clothing came to be beside him, worrying that he may have been discovered wandering mad and naked through the forest (lines 3023–3032). His human senses, and therefore his humanity, have returned to him and he is no longer free to go unclothed as the animals that are not bound by such restrictions as clothing. His re-transformation to humanity is completed with the act of dressing himself in the clothing left for him and covering his nudity. That Yvain feels embarrassment at being nude in the forest, and even greater embarrassment at possibly having been observed while unclothed is not unusual. Sarah-Grace Heller, in her research on clothing in medieval literature, has found that nudity “was rarely represented ... and rarely favorably,” having also found that characters represented in a state of undress in medieval literature are generally still clad in undergarments. Complete human nudity in medieval French literature was rarely depicted because nudity suggested assimilation to inhumanity. Only animals, the monstrous, and the mentally ill, who were considered as somewhat less-than-human as they were deprived of reason, were depicted without clothing as a means of displaying their lack of humanity or their insanity. In the case of Yvain, as well as other characters from Old French literature, his nudity

further illustrates the mental transformation that he has undergone in degrading to a bestial state.

**Tristan and Efficient Metamorphosis Through Disguise**

As seen in the case of Yvain, when he was discovered in the forest, clothing not only distinguishes the human from the animal, it also serves to identify an individual person. Clothing, therefore, proves useful as a medium for temporary transformation, particularly when self-preservation is at stake. Such is the case for Tristan, who disguises himself in order to save the life of his lover, Yseut. In addition to providing a level of protection against those who might recognize him and cause him harm, Tristan’s disguises also allow him to continue to his relationship with Yseut, and even further this relationship by proving to Yseut that Tristan is willing to place himself in danger to be at her service, or even just be in her presence.

The knight Tristan and Queen Yseut have fallen in love with one another after having drunk a love potion intended to be shared by the queen and the king on their wedding night. The lovers became careless and were discovered by Tristan’s enemies. In order to exact vengeance against Tristan, his enemies convince King Marc to exile Tristan and put the queen to the ordalie, also known as “judgment by ordeal”, and the “judgment of God”. It was decided that the judgment by ordeal that the queen would undergo was the ordeal by fire. Ordeal by fire involved heating an iron bar until it was red, and the accused would then pick up the bar in his or her

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204 There are several spellings for the French name of Tristan’s lover: Yseult, Yseut, Iseut, Iseult. In English, however, her name is generally given as Isolde, although Isolt and Isold are other possibilities. I have decided to use the spelling given in my edition of Béroul’s *Tristan et Yseut*. 152
bare hand. If the accused was able to pick up the iron rod unscathed, then innocence was assured.

In order to help his lover in her ordeal, Tristan devised a plan wherein he would disguise himself, much like Jacob (Gen. 27), in order to fool those who would become aware of his presence otherwise. Tristan’s plan was to assist Yseut so that she could be truthful when she made her testimony, and thereby escape the punishment that would be due an adulteress. On the day of Yseut’s ordeal, Tristan disguised himself as a leper and arranged to give her assistance. In Béroul’s Tristan, the narrator describes Tristan’s disguise as bizarre but effective:

Tristran, li suens amis, ne fine,
Vestu se fu de mainte guise;
Il fu en legne, sanz chemise;
De let burel furent les cotes
Et a quarreaus furent ses botes.
Une chape de burel lee
Out fait tailler, tote enfumee.
Affublez se fu forment bien,
Malade semble plus que rien;
Et nequeden si ot s’espee
Entor ses flans estroit noee.

(Tristan, her beloved, was not idle, but created a curious disguise. He was in wool, without an undershirt; his tunic was made of course, homespun woolen fabric, and his boots were covered in patches. He wore a cloak of
tattered burel (the same fabric as his tunic) that he had made, and had
blackened with smoke. He was very well disguised, and looked sicklier
than anything; nevertheless, he had his sword tied tightly around his
waist.)

In creating this disguise, Tristan effectively transforms himself into a leper, and is so
unrecognizable, and plays his part so convincingly, that he is able to beg alms from
people without being discovered. The narrator confirms this, saying

Ne tant ne quant pas nu mescroient
Qu’il ne soit ladres, cil quil voient.
(No one among them doubted that he was a true leper.)

The words mescroient and voient underline the efficaciousness of Tristan's disguise
and transformation. No one doubts that Tristan was a leper because they have the
proof of their eyes: cil quil voient, that is what they see. They see a leper and,
knowing that Tristan is not a leper, they can assume that the one they see is not
Tristan.

Through his clever use of disguise, Tristan is able to transform himself into a
stranger that everyone believes is a leper. His choice of clothing is that of the
beggars. As Tristan is a knight, it would seem unrealistic for him to choose the attire
of a beggar, let alone a leper. Yet, as Monica Wright asserts, because of Tristan’s
noble status (even as an exile from court) “no one even seems to suspect ... that the
leper could possibly be Tristan in disguise. Rather, they accept his identity as it is

205 Béroul, Le Roman de Tristan, ed. Ernest Muret (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot et Cie., 1903),
lines 3570–3580.
206 Béroul, Le Roman de Tristan, lines 3665–3666.
presented sartorially.” Therefore, through the use of clothing Tristan is able to transform himself sufficiently enough that not only is he safe in a place surrounded by people who would otherwise arrest and imprison him; it never occurs to any of them that this beggar could actually be anyone other than who he professes himself to be. Tristan’s choice of costume models that of the eremitic saints who renounce worldly goods, pleasures, and status for that of (self-imposed) outcast and anonymity, as does the titular character of the anonymous eleventh-century work *La Vie de Saint Aléxis.*

Tristan’s use of disguise is not limited to that of a beggar or someone else outside of his social class. In the scene just prior to Yseut’s ordeal, Tristan changes his costume to one more suited for his social standing: that of a knight. However, in order to participate in the joust incognito, he covers his horse, his shield, his lance, and his entire head in black serge.

*Cote, sele, destrier et targe
Out covert d’une noire sarge;
Son vis out covert d’un noir voil,
Tot out covert et chief et poil.
A sa lance ot l’enseigne mise

208 *La Vie de Saint Alexis: Poème du XIème siècle*, eds. Gaston Paris et Léopold Pannier (Paris: Librairie A. Franck), 1872. Saint Alexis, according to the hagiographic legend, was the son of a wealthy Roman senator sometime after Christianity attained legal status in the Roman Empire. Alexis wished from a young age to become a monk, but his father forced him to marry the daughter of another wealthy senator. Alexis ran away from his family home on the night of his wedding, and after exchanging clothes with a beggar, became a beggar himself. As a result of this sartorial transformation, Alexis is no longer recognizable by the people who would have known him otherwise.
209 Serge is a twill fabric, with diagonal ridges on both sides.
Que la bele li out tramise.

(His coat, saddle, warhorse and shield he covered with black serge; his face he covered with a black veil. He completely covered his head and his hair. On his lance he place the insignia that his lady had sent to him.)

Further in the description, it is revealed that Tristan does not speak while at the joust, adding to the mystery. The only person who knows of his presence is Yseut, because on his lance he has attached an insignia that she had secretly sent him. This disguise is as equally elaborate as the disguise he wore when he was begging alms as a leper. He is so convincing in his attire that no one will joust against him because they take him for the Black Knight of the Mountain, who is faé, that is, enchanted. Once again Tristan has managed, through disguise, to transform himself into someone else, thereby assuring his own self-preservation while also remaining near his Lady. Moreover, Tristan not only succeeds in transforming his appearance so that everyone assumes that he is someone else, he convinces others that he is a magical creature.

Throughout the corpus of literature in which he figures as the primary hero, Tristan seems to be a master of disguise. One text in particular is a continuation of the Tristan cycle called la Folie Tristan d’Oxford. In this poem, the exiled Tristan has decided to return to Cornwall in the hopes of seeing Yseut. However, upon learning

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210 Béroul, Le Roman de Tristan, lines 4001–4006.
211 Béroul, Le Roman de Tristan, lines 4016–4021. The word that I have translated as “enchanted” is the word “faé”. Faé is also the Old French word for fairy, so one could easily understand the text to mean that the Black Knight of the Mountain is a fairy, thus instilling fear into the other knights who were afraid to joust against him lest he put a spell on them.
that King Marc is present, he decides that he must disguise himself in order to both see the queen, and to preserve his own life.

Or voil espruer autre ren,
Saver si ja me vendrait ben:
Feindre mei fol, faire folie;
Dunc n’est ço sen e grant veisdie?
Cuintise est; ...
Tels me tendra pur asoté
Ke plus de lu serrai sené,
E tels me tendra pur bricun
K’avra plus fol en sa maisun.

(Now I want to try something else, to find out if she will still come to me: I shall pretend to be mad, and act the fool; is this not, then, a wise and magnificent ruse? It is shrewd ... I will be wiser than anyone who takes me for a fool, and anyone who take me for an idiot will have an even greater one in his own house.)\textsuperscript{212}

Tristan devises the plan by which he will fool everyone. He will feign insanity in order to gain entrance into the castle and continue to feign insanity while there. Furthermore, he will create a disguise to ensure that he gains entrance without any

threat to himself or the queen. In order to create his disguise, he decides to exchange clothes with a fisherman.\textsuperscript{213}

Tristan makes his manufactured temporary metamorphosis realistic through his choice of clothing. The transformation lasts for as long as necessary for him to achieve his goal, which is to see Yseut, and basically communicate the message to her that he still loves her and wants only to be in her presence, if even for a brief moment, even if that means that she must be unaware of him until he reveals his identity to her in a way that only she will understand. In the case of protagonists like Robert le diable and Marie l’Egyptienne, clothing is used as a means to initiate ontological change; that is, the clothing that they adopt initiates the complete transformation of their nature. However, in the case of Tristan, his disguise serves no such purpose. His intention is to transform himself temporarily in order to pass anonymously among those who would harm him while visiting Yseut. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner argues that Tristan is not only successful in his disguise, but that he is \textit{too} successful because, in addition to the clothing that he dons to change his appearance, his increasingly erratic behavior and his change of voice as he “performs” before Yseut and the king, add an additional layer of transformation on top of the visual change that he had effected. In spite of the small revelations he makes to Yseut, giving her clues as to his true identity, the physical change that he has wrought through his disguise is so thorough she is unable to correctly interpret the clues. Bruckner notes that Tristan’s use of disguise is so perfect that it “disintegrates his totality”, meaning that “the fragments of Tristan and the fool

\textsuperscript{213} Joseph Bédier, \textit{ed.,} \textit{Les Deux Poèmes de la folie Tristan}, lines 190–204.
cannot make a credible whole for Iseut” who continues to reason that the fool is not Tristan.214

Tristan, a nobleman and a knight, expects to be recognized by his clothing. Therefore, exchanging clothes with a fisherman will mark him as such, and he will therefore be transformed into a lower social class by simply changing the clothes he wears. Furthermore, he knows that his disguise will work because no one will be expecting it. In addition to changing his clothes, he cuts his hair, changes his voice and dyes his face to add to the illusion of madness:

Tristran unes forces aveit
K’il meïmes porter soleit;
De grant manere les amat;
Ysolt les forces lu donat.
Od les forces haut se tundi;
Ben senlle (sic) fol u esturdi;
En après se tundi in croiz;

(Tristan had a pair of shears that he always kept with him. He loved them so much because Yseut gave them to him. He sheared his hair into the shape of a cross so that he would seem mad or senseless.)215

The most striking image in this passage is that of Tristan cutting his hair in the form of a cross. Tristan’s cutting of his hair evokes images of the monastic tonsure, which

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was done when one entered the monastery as an outward symbol of the dedication of their life to the service of God.\textsuperscript{216} However, the particular tonsure that Tristan gives himself is one that would confirm to those who would see him that he was insane. According to Philippe Ménard, in his study on representations of insanity in twelfth and thirteenth century French literature,

Pour tondre \textit{en croix}, il faut remarquer que l’expression s’applique seulement aux fous. On tond allègrement la chevelure des insensés en laissant seulement une petite masse de cheveux disposés en croix.

(As far as cutting the hair in the form of a cross, one must remark that it applies only to the insane. The hair of the insane is happily cut leaving only a small mass of hair in the shape of a cross.)\textsuperscript{217}

The tonsure of the mentally ill in the Middle Ages was, according to Ménard, a practice that kept them from tearing out their hair in their delirium.\textsuperscript{218} However, specifically cutting hair in the form of a cross distinguished the insane in their ragged clothing from those men who wore the monastic tonsure, which was cut short all around the head, and shaved from the crown to the forehead, as well as the nape, the back, and sides of the head so that only a thin circle of hair was left. This circle of hair is the “corona,” or the “crown”.\textsuperscript{219} Ménard also indicates that cutting

\textsuperscript{218} Philippe Ménard, “Les fous dans la société médiévale,” 437.
\textsuperscript{219} Philippe Ménard, “Les fous dans la société médiévale,” 437. According to Ménard’s footnote on this same page, in medieval France, one did not speak of being “tondu” (shorn) or “tonsuré” in relation to the monastic tonsure. The term found in liturgical literature is “coroné”, or “crowned”.

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the hair in the form of a cross was also “manifestement une flétrissure, un signe d’infamie” (clearly a dishonor, a sign of infamy.)\textsuperscript{220} This particular tonsure further degrades the mentally ill as a type of punishment, indicating that the insane should perform penance for their insanity.

In addition to exchanging his clothes with a fisherman and cutting his hair in a way that specifically identify him as mentally ill, Tristan further adds to his disguise and spurious transformation by changing his voice. By changing his voice, Tristan also adds another layer of protection between himself and those who would arrest him and cause him harm had they been able to discover his identity.

Tristran sout bien muer sa voiz;
Od une herbete teinst sun vis
K’il aporta de sun païs:
Il oinst sun vis de la licur,
Puis ennerci, muad culur;
N’aveit hume ki al mund fust
Ki pur Tristran le cuneïst,
Ne ki pur Tristran l’enterçast,
Tant nel veïst u escutast.
Il ad d’une haie un pel pris
E en sun col l’en ad il mis.
Vers le chastel en vait tut dreit;
Chaskun ad poùr ki le veït.

(Tristan knew how to change his voice, and with a small herb that he brought from his country he dyed his face: he anointed his face with the juice, then his face changed color and darkened. There was no man in the world who would have recognized him, no who would have taken him for Tristan, no matter how much they examined him or listened to him. He then took a stick from a hedgerow and stuck it into his collar and went straightway to the castle. Everyone who saw him was frightened of him.)

Tristan completely changes his identity with his disguise. In changing his clothes, which no one who knew him would have expected, he transforms himself vis-à-vis his social class. The further coloring of his face and changing of his voice give him a completely new identity as he transforms into a fol (madman). With the additional act of disguising his voice, Tristan renders himself completely unrecognizable to everyone at court, including Yseut. Even though Tristan produces the signs that should have revealed his identity to her, because he continues to speak while disguising his voice, Yseut continues to believe that the person addressing her is a madman. This is because, “once Tristan actually puts on his disguise, the narrator assures him complete control over his identity, since no one in the world looking at him or listening to him speak can recognize the fool as Tristan.” Tristan’s disguise, then, is too effective, as he has essentially transformed himself from a knight into a fool, thus preventing anyone, including his beloved, from recognizing his true identity.

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222 Brucker, Shaping Romance, 13.
The narrator of the *Folie Tristan d’Oxford* is presenting Tristan as holding back nothing as far as his costume and willingness to transform himself in such a way to be believable. Not only does his work to make sure his disguise is believable guarantee his own personal safety, it also shows that he is willing to do what is necessary for his Lady, as knights in other romances. He is willing to degrade himself as much as necessary in order to prove his love to her. This degradation is a transformation into a “suffering servant”, so to speak, for the cause of love. In the case Tristan, he is willing to disguise himself, even to the point of making physical changes and playing an ignominious role, in order to prove his love for Yseut.

According to Wright’s interpretation of the *vestimentary code*, wherein one dresses according to one’s social class, Tristan’s use of dress when he disguises himself as a leper and a fisherman disrupts this code because he sheds the clothing of his class in order not to be recognized. I propose that his sartorial choices for disguise are not merely disruptive, but entirely subversive to the idea that one dressed according to social class and rank. As can be seen from the *Roman de Tristan*, lines 4001–4006, the narrator presents Tristan disguised as knight, which fits both Tristan’s class and social standing. It is Tristan’s donning of the rough and ragged clothing, associated with peasants and paupers, that subverts the vestimentary code and causes Tristan to socially metamorphose into someone, or something, that people of the noble classes would not expect.

The descriptions of Tristan’s disguise in both Béroul and the *Folie d’Oxford* indicate that Tristan, while he might be representing himself as in the throes of

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madness, is not representing himself as completely insane, as Yvain was represented in the *Chevalier au lion*. In his study on representations of insanity in medieval literature, Ménard argues that “les vêtements de dessus et de dessous résistent difficilement à la rage des déments. Au bout de quelque temps le fou se retrouve nu comme un ver. (Over-clothes and under-clothes hold up poorly against the madness of the mentally ill. After a little while, the madman is as naked as a worm.)”\(^{224}\) For Ménard, while ragged, torn clothes are indicative of mental illness, total nudity is, as is seen in the narrative of Yvain’s madness in *le Chevalier au lion*, the domain of the completely insane, as nudity belongs to the realm of the beast who does not know he is naked.

**Clothing and Disguise in Robert le diable**

The story of *Robert le diable* is one about the son of one of the dukes of Normandy. For the purposes of clarity, I have divided the story into four parts: the first part deals with Robert’s conception, birth, childhood and youth up until the point of his conversion; the second part is that part in which Robert becomes a penitent pilgrim in search of absolution for his crimes; part three sees Robert living out his assigned penance in the imperial palace as the emperor’s property; and, part four sees Robert not only completely rehabilitated, but redeemed as he fights for his emperor and God. In the first part of the narrative Robert, spends his youth committing atrocious crimes against humanity and the Church. After committing his most heinous crime he asks his mother the circumstances surrounding his birth,

believing that they could be the cause for all the wickedness he prefers to commit to the good he wishes he could do. When his mother reveals to him that after seventeen years of childlessness and unanswered prayers to God had greatly angered her; therefore, in her rage against God she asked the devil to give her a child. As a result, Robert belonged to the devil, and that his wickedness was natural to him. At the point, Robert vows to change his ways and completely transform himself so that the devil would no longer have any power over him, and would not have his soul after his death. As the section that I have labeled the second part of Robert le diable begins, the first thing that Robert does in order to transform himself from a child of the devil into a holy man is change his clothes. Through the voluntary act of changing his clothes, Robert initiates his ontological metamorphosis and eventual transfiguration. He begins his transformation with those visible, physical aspects and he adopts the behavior that is associated with those who would normally wear the clothing that he has adopted; that is, after he dons the clothing of a penitent, he begins to behave as a penitent.

The importance of Robert’s clothes in his transformation cannot be emphasized enough. They represent his first steps toward the metamorphosis that he undergoes as a penitent, and they represent the level of change he has undergone as he becomes completely transformed at the end of the narrative to a level of honor and holiness that will see him proclaimed a saint after his death. Robert’s physical transformation begins with his clothing, which then affects his ontological transformation as he begins to behave in a manner consistent with the penitential vestments that he wears as he creates a new identity for himself.
The first action that Robert undertakes when he learns the truth about his propensity for wickedness, and the claim that Satan has over his soul, is to completely strip himself of everything that attaches him to his life as a nobleman. As the scene unfolds, Robert throws away his weapons and cuts off his hair, the narrator emphasizing how Robert exchanges not only his knightly raiment for the vestment of a penitent, but also how he trades his sword, the tool he used for committing murder, for a razor, the tool he uses to initiate his transformation and create his new identity as he literally travels the road of repentance.

Lors eskeut son brac et son poing,

S’espee si jete moult loing,

Puis trenche ses caviaus et taille

D’un coutelet que on li baille.

(Shaking his arm and his fist, he threw his sword far away, and then, with a razor he ordered brought to him, he cut off all his hair.)

Similar to the situation with clerics, monastics, and the mentally ill, penitents also cut their hair off as a symbol that set them apart from the rest of society and readily identified them as sinful penitents who were seeking absolution. In cutting off his hair, Robert is beginning his transformation by marking himself as a penitent and, much like those entering the mendicant orders, relying on those who would meet him to provide alms and protection while on his pilgrimage of penance. In cutting off his hair, he is giving himself a type of monastic tonsure as he renounces those things

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associated with sin—and in Robert’s case, all those things are associated with his
noble life—and places himself under the direct protection of the Church. Philippe
Ménard, when speaking of the rite of tonsure, argues that
dans beaucoup de civilisations la tonsure est un rite d’humiliation : on
renonce à certains pouvoirs, à certains privilèges ; on perd une partie de sa
force et de sa personnalité profonde. La perte des cheveux est vraiment une
diminutio capitis.
(in several civilizations the tonsure is a rite of humiliation: one renounces
certain powers, certain privileges; one loses a part of one’s force and
profound personality. The loss of the hair is truly a diminutio capitis.)

Robert is willingly giving up his power and his privilege when he cuts off his hair
and commits himself to penance, and then placing himself entirely under the
protection and the authority of the Church that he has spent persecuting up until the
moment he decides to abandon the life iniquity he had hitherto lived.

The image of Robert le diable losing his strength and privilege when he cuts
off all his hair recalls a similar scene in the biblical narrative concerning the judge
and strong man, Samson. Samson was a Nazirite, consecrated to serve the god of

227 A Nazirite (root: Hebrew nazir, which means “vowed” or “consecrated”) is literally a person who
is consecrated to God, or vowed to the service of God, for a period of time. In ancient Israel there
were two types of Nazirites: a Nazirite for a set period of time, and a permanent Nazirite. Samson was
a permanent Nazirite, but unlike permanent Nazirites who made the vow of their own volition,
Samson (like Samuel), was consecrated to God from the womb. As a gift from God and a permanent
Nazirite, Samson was forbidden to cut his hair, to come into contact with a corpse (even of a close
family member), and to imbibe in wine or any strong drink. Furthermore, he was required to eschew
grapes and raisins in addition to observing all the other Jewish dietary restrictions (Numbers 6:1–
21). Samson generally broke all the rules that were incumbent upon all Nazirites, with the exception
of the rule governing his hair.
Israel from his childhood throughout his life. One of the outward signs of the
Nazirite was that he was forbidden to cut his hair, or shave. In the case of Samson
his miraculous strength is represented in scripture as coming from his hair. Should
his hair ever be cut, he would not only lose his privilege as a Nazirite, but also lose
his superhuman strength.\textsuperscript{228} Samson, after revealing the secret of his strength to his
lover, who was a spy for his enemies, the Philistines, lost his strength when she
shaved his head while he was sleeping.\textsuperscript{229} In cutting off his hair, Robert le diable is
voluntarily weakening himself because, as a penitent, he will no longer have access
to weaponry or the protection that arms and armor will give him. In addition, the act
of cutting off his hair as a penitent places him outside of society. While he may need
to rely on alms and the good deeds of others for his protection, he has no guarantee
that he will receive either. Following this moment, Robert le diable is truly at his
weakest.

Following his tonsure, Robert le diable orchestrates further sartorial
transformation by stripping himself of the raiment that identifies him as a nobleman
and a knight, and dons the robe of the mendicant penitent.

Quant il ot ses caviaux ostés,

Lés i. piler s’est acostés,

Si se descauce isniel le pas,

Puis s’en va biellement le pas

En une chambrete petite

\textsuperscript{228} Judges 16:17.
\textsuperscript{229} Judges 16:19–20.
U il prist une viés carpite:
Se reube y laist, que plus n’en porte.
De l’esclavine, qui fu forte,
S’est affulés a capulaire.

(When he had removed all his hair, he leaned himself against a pillar and quickly removed his shoes, then he went quickly into a small bedroom, where he took up an old mantel, removed every last stitch of his clothing, and donned the coarse vestment in the manner of a sleeveless habit.)

After Robert cuts off his hair he removes the clothes of his youth, which mark his nobility and his sinful past, and rejects them in favor of the “coarse vestment” of the penitent. Such garments were a symbol not only of the wearer’s willingness to submit himself or herself to a penitential rule of asceticism in order to overcome sin and the desires of the body, but also a symbol of the wearer’s willingness to make changes to his or her life in such a way as to be fully submissive to the authority of the Church in all matters. Such people lived further submitted themselves to strict obedience to a spiritual father or mother who had already endured and grown spiritually by living the kind of life that penitents were proposing for themselves.

Robert le diable, in rejecting the fine clothing that he would have worn as a young nobleman and taking on the coarse habit of a penitent notably emulates stories circulation of Saint Francis of Assisi, as well as a number of other founders of mendicant religious orders in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Saint Francis of Assisi’s biographer, Thomas of Celano, relates how Francis, when he had decided to

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230 Elisabeth Gaucher, Robert le diable, lines 733–741.
fully commit to the life of penance and asceticism that he had begun, stripped himself completely, and publicly, of the clothes that his father had provided for him and returned them. When Francis returned his clothes to his father, and then accepted the coarse of the beggar, he placed himself outside of the society that had, up until that time, provided for his needs. The same can be said of Robert le diable.

In removing and rejecting the clothes that he would have worn as a nobleman and a knight in favor of the clothing of the poor, Robert is creating a disguise not to hide his identity as “le diable” (the devil), but rather to create a new identity for himself as a penitent who relies entirely on God rather than the wealth and luxury to which he would have been accustomed as the son of a duke. This becomes evident at the end of the narrative when officers from Normandy reveal that they had been seeking him since his father died, and that they want him to return to take his rightful place as duke of Normandy. Robert refuses because his identity has completely changed after the years of ascetic practice and penance to which he had submitted himself. The new identity he sought when he first put on his penitent’s habit had become his true identity. Robert’s transformation is therefore permanent in nature, unlike those of Tristan and Yvain who are able to reassume their identities as knights when they once again dress in their courtly attire.

Robert le diable changes identities when he changes his clothes to penitential garb and exchanges his life as a nobleman for the life of an ascetic working out his salvation. This change is the first in a series of identity changes that Robert makes

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throughout the narrative as he transforms. It is notable that with each change of identity, a vestimentary change takes place. The second new identity that Robert assumes, in the third part of the narrative, is that of the fool in the imperial court. As a penitent, Robert’s confessor assigns him a three-fold penance: first, he must pretend to be insane and accept whatever abuse people will mete out to him; second, he must remain mute at all times, not uttering even a syllable; and, third, he may only eat what he can take from the mouths of dogs. After hearing his penance and vowing to his confessor to obey him and follow his penance to the letter, he goes to Rome where he begins to carry out his penance exactly as instructed. The people of Rome, believing him to be insane, began to beat him and abuse him, much as he abused the people of his father’s domain. The people nearly kill him, but he is able to recover sufficiently to allow him to repeat his penitential actions. He manages to climb the wall to the imperial palace and there takes refuge with the emperor. The emperor, impressed with how even a madman can recognize his emperor and come for aid, declares that Robert is “his fool” and that no one is harm him. Nevertheless, Robert still manages to leave every day at daybreak in order to go into the city and behave as a madman, and willingly accept the beatings the Romans give him. Robert’s identity as a madman, and as the emperor’s fool, does not require any real vestimentary change. This identity is purely expressed by his behavior as he feigns madness in order to fulfill the penance that he has been assigned by his confessor. However, while Robert’s identity as the emperor’s fool does not require any real vestimentary change, the emperor, by extending to him his

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imperial protection, does provide for Robert’s needs, and one can assume that clothing is one of the needs that the emperor provides. In so doing, however, rather than recognizing Robert as a knight or feudal vassal, the emperor regards him as property and treats him as a pet throughout the narrative. He consistently refers to Robert as “my fool” each time he sees him beaten and abused, and reiterates his wish that no one abuse him. Therefore, along with his identity of imperial fool, one can say that Robert also assumes the identity of imperial pet that enjoys no greater status than the dogs with which he eats and sleeps.

The next vestimentary change, and the next identity, begins in the fourth part of the story. Robert lives in the imperial court for ten years and is able to live out his penance exactly as his confessor prescribed. However, at the end of these ten years in the emperor’s care the Saracens invade Rome. The emperor mobilizes his army, and Robert wishes he could participate; however, since the emperor believes that he is senseless, he is left at the palace to await the emperor’s return. When the emperor and his army depart, Robert withdraws to the garden fountain and enters a period of silent prayer as he cries and mentally expresses his desire to join his beloved emperor in his fight against the invading armies. While Robert is crying at a fountain in the courtyard he receives a heavenly visitor. This visitor is a knight who explains to Robert that God will allow him to fight, but in so doing he must always keep in mind his penance and never stray from it. The heavenly knight is described in terms of dress and armor that communicate to the audience, a knight who is perfect in appearance as well as one who is spiritually pure, based on the whiteness of his armor and horse.
La u Robert son deul demaine,
I. chevalier moult bel et gent
D’un hauberc plus blanc que argent
Estoit armés, et ses anarmes
Erent plus blanc que flor de lis
...
Glaive tient grosse sor sa hanche,
Dont l’alemele est ausi blanche
Com li noif qui des nues chiet,
Et li chevals sor coi il siet
Ert plus blans que flors espanie,
[Et] une blanche suscanie
Ot [il] vestu por plus biaus estre.
(There where Robert abandoned himself to despair appeared a magnificent knight, of noble allure. He was equipped with a hauberk that was *whiter* than silver; his shield, with its straps, and all the rest of his armor, was *whiter* than the fleur de lys. ... He held against his hip a large battle sword whose blade was *whiter than the snow* that falls from the clouds, and the horse upon which he was seated was *whiter* than a freshly bloomed flower; he was wearing a *white* blouse that added even more to his beauty.)

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The emphasis on the whiteness of the heavenly knight’s apparel is in direct contrast to the bloodiness of Robert’s armor when he was still a young knight in Normandy, and used his social status to slaughter innocent people.234

The celestial messenger came to tell Robert that God wanted him to take the armor and the horse and go fight to save Rome from the threat of the foreign invaders.235 The armor that Robert receives is an exact duplicate of the armor that the angel is wearing, and brings him full circle as he assumes the identity of a knight. Although Robert is already a knight, having been made a knight when he was a young man, he did not embody the qualities of a good knight when he was a young. His father had made him a knight in the hopes that he would change and would embody the ideals of chivalry. However, Robert only became worse and used his added prestige and power to cause further destruction and mayhem. This is another scene of contrasts wherein Robert is willing to do his chivalric duty with God as his overlord who provides him with the necessary armor, weapons, and horse.

Robert, by taking up the white armor, quietly and anonymously assumes his new identity as he uses his new armor to transform into the *chevalier blanc* who fights against the enemies of Rome and the Church. He fights valiantly, as God has ordered him, and is successfully able to fend off Rome’s enemies.236 The Saracens return twice more, and Robert is ordered to don the white armor each time in order to fight for Rome and the Church, each time successfully routing the invaders, preventing them from destroying the city and establishing themselves as her

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234 Robert le diable, lines 582–594.
235 Elisabeth Gaucher, Robert le diable, lines 1833–1835.
236 Elisabeth Gaucher, Robert le diable, lines 1889–2023.
masters.  Robert’s identity as the chevalier blanc creates a balance in his life that
cancels out the wickedness he committed as a young man. He has, through his
humiliating penance and willingness to degrade himself, been able to create new
identities for himself that have each been associated with the clothes that he has
worn with the creation of each new identity.

After the completion of his penance, and his complete ontological
transformation from criminal to holy man of God, Robert’s original identity as the
son of the duke of Normandy is finally revealed.  This happens as Robert recounts
his life story to the emperor and the court after his confessor releases him from his
penance and orders him to speak. As he reveals his life story to the emperor and
everyone present, it becomes evident that his true identity is that of penitent. As he
was presenting his story to the emperor and assembled crowd there were four
barons from Normandy who happened to be present, and they hoped that Robert
would return and be their duke.  Robert, however, refuses them because he
cannot reconcile his identity as a penitent with the exigencies that being the duke of
Normandy would require of him. In addition, the emperor asks Robert to marry his
daughter and succeed him as emperor when the time comes, and again Robert
refuses, preferring a life of penance and solitude to the exigencies that the empire
would require of him, because all of these things would put him at risk for returning
to his old ways and, therefore, losing his soul.

237 Elisabeth Gaucher, Robert le diable, lines 2531–2602; 2939–3018.
238 Elisabeth Gaucher, Robert le diable, lines 4483–4504.
239 Elisabeth Gaucher, Robert le diable, lines 4505–4543.
240 Elisabeth Gaucher, Robert le diable, lines 4592–4630.
Robert le diable is but one example of how clothing helps to define a character. Throughout the Robert le diable narrative, the hero adopts three successive identities, those of penitent, fool, and holy warrior, each one associated with a specific type of disguise. Each successive disguise, however, is not meant to hide his true identity, although it may appear so, but rather each successive disguise is meant to help Robert as he metamorphoses and eventually transfigures into his true identity, which is that of penitent.

Robert le diable presents metamorphic transformation and transfiguration in a way that deviates from ancient models of transformation in that the protagonist initiates all of the physical changes through his own will and through his choice of clothing and disguise. The real and lasting transformation that Robert experiences is the transformation of his nature while retaining his human form and senses, unlike Ovidian models of metamorphosis, which almost always feature a complete physical transformation from human to something else, whether to animal or plant, with exceptions to this being rare.

Disguise in the Romance of Flamenca

The example of disguise in the thirteenth century Occitan romance Flamenca is quite different from the examples of disguise that we have seen thus far. In previous examples we have seen how disguise is used to define identity as one transforms, as in Robert le diable. We have seen how clothing is linked to identity, and how wearing the clothes of a different social class or profession can, at a cosmetic level, create a dissociation between the identity of the wearer and the
clothes, therefore hiding the identity of the wearer and ensuring self-preservation, as in the case of Tristan. Likewise, we have seen how the complete removal of clothes erases identity in the case of Yvain. Furthermore, we have seen biblical examples of how clothing can be used to forge an identity as a human being, as well as how it can be used as a tool for creating a disguise to deceive for personal gain. It is this last use of clothing, that is, as a tool for deception for personal gain, that is the concern of the character Guilhem in Flamenca.\textsuperscript{241}

In Chapter Two of this dissertation we examined the character Archambaut and the extreme jealousy that led him to madness, and a degradation that saw him become a caricature of both a man and an animal. The character Guilhem, who is in many ways the ersatz antagonist to Archambaut’s anti-hero, uses disguise to create for himself an identity that he has no intention of keeping, neither does he intend to live up to the qualities that his disguise would inspire. Like Jacob’s disguise in Genesis, Guilhem’s disguise is for his own personal gain.

Guilhem de Nevers is a young landed noble who falls in love with Flamenca after having heard of her great beauty. He has also heard of the jealous husband who keeps her under close surveillance. Guilhem decides to disguise himself as a cleric in order to meet, speak with, and ultimately seduce Flamenca. After bribing the local priest to allow him to serve at the altar, Guilhem is able have a conversation with Flamenca—once per mass, two whispered syllables per mass—as she receives communion from him. It is in this way that they agree to meet one another at the

local baths, and Guilhem undertakes to make the arrangements to have a secret tunnel excavated so that he might be able to meet with her in the ladies’ bath without Archambaut’s knowledge.

Guilhem disguises himself as a cleric in order to fool Archimbaut and get closer to Flamenca, whom he intends to seduce. The clothes that he chooses as his disguise are, however, not clothes that one would see on a penitent or a monastic. The garments that Guilhem chooses for his disguise identify him as a cleric, but they also identify him as a wealthy and fashionable young man. His sartorial choices allow him to remain above public suspicion, and at the same time make him appealing to Flamenca, who is the object of his affections. The description of the garments that Guilhem chooses as his disguise reveals him to be a savvy consumer, and someone with a head and eye for the current fashion trends. The description of the clothing that composes Guilhem’s disguise begins with the undergarments, succeeded by each additional layer that he puts on top of them.

Em braias fon et en camisa;
Un mantel vert ap pena grisa
A mes sot si a la fenestra
...
Tot bellamen si vest e-s caussa
E non ac sabbata ni causa
Mais us bels estivals biais
Que foron fag ins a Doais;
Caussas de saia non caussera
Si ben hom, tant non la tirera.

(He was in his pants and shirt; a green *mantel trimmed with grey* fur he spread out upon the window casement. ... He dressed and put on his shoes elegantly; he did not put on *clogs or thick slippers*, either, but very lovely, *elegant pointed boots, fashioned for him* in Douai. Woolen shoes would not have fit him so perfectly, even if they had been pulled tight.)

The clothing that Guilhem puts on as he gazes at the tower where Flamenca is being kept, sighing for her and lamenting her lot, is not the clothing of the poor, and the narrator gives particular attention to the boots that Guilhem puts on, indicating that they were made for him, and that he chooses to wear them over less elegant shoes that would have been bulky and far less form fitting.

The description of Guilhem’s vestimentary choices put him at odds with characters like Robert le diable, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Alexis, and St. Mary the Egyptian who renounce finery in clothing in order to live lives of austere penance. However, Guilhem is not pretending to be a cleric in the hopes of one day attaining the diaconate or the priesthood; rather, he is pretending to be a cleric in order to get closer to Flamenca because the jealous Archambaut allows his wife to leave the house for two reasons: to attend Mass, and to go to the baths. Archambaut does not have a problem with his wife attending Mass, as long as he is with her, and he does not have a problem with her going to the baths because the baths are segregated and she would not be able to meet with any man. In addition, her ladies in waiting accompany her to the baths, as well, which, in Archambaut’s mind, adds another

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level of security to keep his wife faithful. Added to Guilhem’s clerical disguise is his level of education and knowledge concerning the Church’s liturgical practices. Archambaut never suspects anything between Flamenca and Guilhem because he never suspects them of being able to see one another outside of Mass, during which time Archambaut is not present.

In comparison with Tristan and his leper disguise, one can see that he and Guilhem are dialectic opposites. Tristan disguises himself as a leper and behaves as such in order to save the life of the woman he loves. Guilhem, on the other hand, continues to dress in a very elegant manner in order to seduce the married woman with whom he has fallen in love, without ever having met her. Tristan’s disguise conceals his identity from those who would have known him, therefore also adding a level of protection for himself, as well as Yseut. Guilhem set up residence in a place where no one knew him and pretended to be a cleric, and a very well dressed one, at that. Furthermore, in his pretense as a cleric, Guilhem subverts the clerical state by actively pursuing a sexual relationship with a married woman.

In speaking of disguise, Flamenca can be said to be a romance in disguise. It certainly contains the elements of romance with the almost Tristan and Yseut type of fin’amors between the lovers, and Guilhem’s willingness to put himself at risk for his lady’s love. However, Flamenca also subverts the romance genre as it, from one perspective, makes a mockery of the romance genre and the very idea of fin’amors, and is comic in the way that the two lovers meet one another, and arrange to begin and carry on their illicit love affair for a period of about four months. The story itself reads like a fabliau, in which the intelligent priest seduces the ignorant bumpkin’s
wife, and in which the clever wife and her lover cuckold the jealous and stupid husband. However, Guilhem is not a real cleric so there is also the subversion of the Church whose laws require a man to be ordained before he can provide the sacraments to the faithful. The characters in the work, as well as the work, itself, parody the romance culture and the social structure upon which said culture is built. *Flamenca* is the story of a false cleric who provides the sacraments to the woman with whom he contrives to have a sexual relationship, and who is the wife of a nobleman who is most ignoble in behavior, intellect, and appearance. Furthermore, this false cleric, even though he looks and plays the part rather well because of his disguise, serves neither the Christian god nor *Amors*, but rather seeks to satisfy his own lusts. Even though the text presents Guilhem as having fallen in love with Flamenca after having hear of her great beauty, much like the troubadour Jaufré Rudel and his “Amor de lonh”, Guilhem spends the entire time that he gets to know Flamenca plotting his seduction of her. The fact that she is an unhappily married woman because of the inexplicable jealousy of her husband makes the seduction very easy.

**Conclusion**

Clothing and disguise have been an important part of literature since the beginning of literature, and its use as a tool for creating identity, as well as transforming oneself and creating a new identity, is clear from various ancient texts.

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In the biblical narrative, for example, it is possible to see how clothing is closely tied to the Adam and Eve story and their metamorphosis from perfect beings to becoming fully human. In becoming fully human, Adam and Eve required clothing that they did not require before their transgression and subsequent metamorphosis.

Clothing and disguise as a tool for transformation is a theme visible throughout medieval French and Occitan literature, beyond ancient models that also feature clothing as a means for temporary transformation, such as can be found in biblical literature. It is possible to see how clothing, or the lack of clothing, is important in metamorphic transformation in Marie de France’s *Bisclavret* and the anonymous *Lai de Mélion*, as well as how the lack of clothing brings out the beastly side of insanity in Chrétien de Troyes’ *le Chevalier au lion* as the hero sinks into depression and insanity at the loss of his love. Even though Yvain does not actually transform into a beast as do his fellow knights, Bisclavret and Mélion, his madness, nevertheless, reduces him to a mental bestial state, and his destruction of his clothing serves to illustrate just how bestial he becomes. Without his clothing, Yvain, again, similar to Bisclavret and Mélion, is not recognized as a human being. When clothing is provided for him, however, his humanity is restored and he is re-transformed into the knight he once was.

Likewise, in medieval French and Occitan literature, it is possible to see how clothing not only serves as a disguise, but also serves to create partitions between the classes in society. Through the use of clothing in medieval narrative, authors and narrators also created the same class distinctions that existed in society, and linked identity with the clothing associated with its class. To create a disguise or to dress in
clothing that would be outside of one’s social class was to create a new identity. This is seen in the Roman de Tristan and the continuation known as the Folie Tristan d’Oxford in which the hero defies social convention and class distinction in order to disguise himself in such a way as to become completely unrecognizable. The idea that one would not dress outside of his or her social class adds another level of security to the disguise in question as Tristan takes on the appearance and identity of a leper and, in the Folie, the appearance and identity of a madman. The disguises are so good that no one suspects that it could be Tristan underneath the ragged clothes.

One can also see the possibilities of clothing serving as disguise to help one change one’s ways. In Robert le diable, the eponymous hero rejects the clothing that identified him by class and social status in favor of the cloak of a penitent. It is only after he has successfully completed his penance and completely reformed himself, that he is once again able to assume the identity of the noble knight that he should have been during his misspent youth. However, his clothing and his penance have caused him to transform both physically and spiritually, and he has no interest in returning to court or in serving as a knight. He has spiritually transformed and decides to continue in his identity of penitent in hopes of attaining heaven after his death. Therefore clothing, while useful for disguise and temporary physical transformation, can also initiate permanent change in Old French literature. Further examples beyond Robert le diable are the hagiographic tales of the Vie de Saint Alexis and the Vie de Sainte Marie l’Egyptienne, both of whom, like Robert le diable,
exchange the clothing of their youth for the clothing of penance and the anonymity that penitence brings.

Finally, we can see how clothing and disguise can be used to deceive. In the case of Guilhem in the thirteenth century Occitan romance *Flamenca*, he uses cleverness, education, and clerical costuming to seduce the wife of a jealous husband. In so doing, he subverts the society of the day and the Church as he successfully fools the men around him, particularly the priest and Archambaut, as he seduces and carries on an illicit love affair with Flamenca without her husband ever suspecting them. Therefore, one could say of Guilhem that the habit does not a priest make.
Conclusion

Metamorphosis and Transfiguration are Ovidian and biblical themes that are prevalent in medieval French and Occitan literature, and the study of them will lead to a better understanding of how both Ovidian and biblical texts influenced the writers of medieval French and Occitan texts.

At first glance, one might consider metamorphosis and transfiguration to be two words to express the same phenomenon. However, a closer examination of the Ovidian and biblical texts disabuses one of that belief when one considers that throughout Ovid’s corpus, but particularly his *Metamorphoses*, metamorphosis always results in a degradation and decline of the metamorphosed subject. In Ovid, metamorphosis is specifically a punishment that causes devolution, and the ending result is not only a loss of human form, but of humanity, including human thought and reasoning capacity. The result of metamorphosis is a lesser creature that must act on instinct alone in order to survive. Furthermore, the metamorphosis affects not only the subject being punished, but the subject’s descendants, as well.

Metamorphosis also exists in the biblical text; the example of which being the third chapter of Genesis in which the first humans transgressed the commandment of their creator and, as a result, lost their innocence and the perfection in which they lived. According to Saint Irenaeus, in his work *Against Heresies*, Adam and Eve degraded from creatures of light into creatures who became mundane and mortal,
subject to sickness and death that they had never before experienced. The imperfections and sufferings resulting from the metamorphosis of Adam and Eve, just as in Ovidian metamorphosis, are passed down through their descendants.

Transfiguration is a biblical phenomenon that is not found in other ancient literary sources. Transfiguration, as I have defined it for the purposes of this dissertation, is the opposite of metamorphosis. Metamorphosis is animalistic and earthy, representing a loss of reason and intelligence that causes the metamorphosed subject to behave and act on instinct alone for survival. Transfiguration, in contrast, is an elevation beyond humanity, human reason, and intelligence. It is celestial, and elevates the human person to a more beautiful, enlightened, and exalted state. By examining biblical episodes of transfiguration with Ovidian scenes of metamorphosis, the difference is quite clear.

In episodes of Ovidian metamorphosis, one sees human beings transformed into animals as divine punishment because of offenses against humanity and the gods. In biblical episodes of metamorphosis, humans are punished but, with the exception of Adam and Eve and the metamorphosis they undergo when they become fully human, there is no interspecies transformation. Furthermore, punishment by physical change is temporary, allowing for the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. The early Church theologians, in their teachings on metamorphosis, either dismissed it as a “demonic trickery” and “foolishness”, as did

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Saint Augustine,²⁴⁵ or as a natural part of nature, as did Isidore of Seville.²⁴⁶ Whatever the opinion, however, the Church Fathers agreed that interspecies metamorphosis such as is represented in the Ovidian texts or in Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass*, is not possible, and that such transformations are only tricked played by demons and witches. Other philosophers considered the idea of interspecies metamorphosis as metaphor for a person’s character, insisting that no actual physical transformation occurs.

Regardless of the opinions of the Church Fathers on the topic of metamorphosis, the theme was prevalent in medieval French literature, and Ovidian works exercised considerable influence on the literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in particular. The *Roman de la rose* remains the example *par excellence* of the influence that Ovid’s works had on the contemporary literature. In addition to works like the *Roman de la rose*, which features heavily in Ovidian tales, such as Narcissus and Pygmalion, as allegories on how to love and how not to love, there were several Ovidian works translated into contemporary language, and adapted to allow for cultural themes. Furthermore, Ovid’s works influenced the twelfth- and thirteenth-century literary phenomenon called *fin’amors*, or “Courtly Love”. The writers of the medieval *romance* genre relied on Ovid’s works as their model for ideal love and the ideal lover.

In addition to the trope of love present in medieval French and Occitan literature, there is also the trope of degradation that leads to a spiritual transformation, and eventually to transfiguration. While the physical transformation may not be the result of any supernatural cause, it is a physical transformation that raises the question of whether the transformed subject is human or not. There is also spiritual transformation that is brought about because of physical degradation as people perform penances and extreme asceticism to overcome the flesh and carnality. In medieval literature, particularly in the cases of Saint Mary the Egyptian by Rutebeuf, and the eponymous hero of Robert le diable, these spiritual and physical changes are permanent, therefore qualifying them as metamorphoses, and since the end result of their metamorphoses is sainthood, one can say that they have also been transfigured.

The final type of physical change is purely cosmetic, and purely temporary. It stands as a counter-example to the permanent types of metamorphosis that exist in medieval literature. This final type of transformation is sartorial transformation. As clothing is linked to both class and identity in the Middle Ages, to change clothing or to reject the clothing of one’s class is to effect a change. This changing of clothes has the power to change one’s identity, to efface oneself and sink into anonymity. When clothing is no longer an option, such as when Chrétien de Troyes’ Yvain descended into insanity and destroyed his clothing, human identity is called into question, especially when insanity has caused the bestial side of man to be revealed.

Metamorphosis and transfiguration as literary tropes in medieval French and Occitan literature has its roots in both Ovidian and biblical themes. Through

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studying them and the examining the intertextual clues that are present in the Old French and Occitan romances, it is possible to arrive at a deeper understanding of the text itself and its influences.
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Appendix A: Chronology

31 BCE  Augustus Caesar establishes the Roman Empire.
8 CE    Ovid, the author of The Metamorphoses and the Ars Amatoria is exiled to the Black Sea coast in what is modern-day Romania.
50–95  The books of the New Testament are written.
130–202 Life of Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (Lugdunum, Gaul).
ca. 177 Irenaeus is appointed bishop of Lugdunum upon the death of Saint Pothinus.
312    Conversion of the emperor Constantine.
325    First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea I) convened by Constantine.
344–421 The life of Saint Mary of Egypt.
354–430 Life of Augustine of Hippo
386    Augustine converts from Manicheism to orthodox Christianity.
395    Augustine is appointed bishop of Hippo (modern-day Annaba, Algeria).

Early 5th Century  The death of Saint Alexis, and early Greek version of his legend propagated.
410    The sack of Rome by the Visigoths.
426    Augustine's De civitate Dei is completed and published.
King Odoacer deposes Emperor Romulus Augustulus, effectively bringing an end to the Roman Empire in Western Europe.

Life of Boethius

Boethius writes *The Consolation of Philosophy*.

Charles Martel becomes King of the Franks.

Charles Martel defeats Saracen invaders at Poitiers.

Charlemagne becomes kings of the Franks.

Charlemagne is crowned emperor of the Holy Roman Empire on December 25, 800.

The Oaths of Strasburg are pledges on February 12. They are written in three languages: Medieval Latin, Old Gallo-Romance, and Old High German. The Old Gallo-Romance is the earliest extant written example of what would eventually become known as Old French.

Hugues Capet establishes the Capetian dynasty.

*La Chanson de Roland.*

*La Vie de Saint Alexis.* This particular hagiographic work enjoyed significant popularity through the sixteenth century, undergoing updates, revisions, and expansions through each century.

The “Great Schism” begins between the Eastern and Western Churches.

William, Duke of Normandy, invades England and becomes king after defeating King Harold at the Battle of Hastings.
1095  Pope Urban II preaches the first Crusade. There were several Crusades until the end of the thirteenth century, with four of them being to the Muslim territories. The First Crusade results in the founding of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, with Godefroy de Bouillon installed as king.

Late 12th century  Béroul writes his version of Tristan.

c. 1155–1160  Thomas of Britain writes his version of Tristan.

c. 1170–c. 1190  Chrétien de Troyes writes his Arthurian romances.

1181/82–1226  Life of Saint Francis of Assisi.

1189–92  The Third Crusade. The Crusaders fail to recover the Holy Land to reestablish the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

1202  Fourth Crusade launched. Crusaders sack Constantinople.

1209  Pope Innocent III launches the Albigensian Crusade in southern France.

c. 1230  Guillaume de Lorris writes his part of Le Roman de la rose.

1245–1285  Life of the French writer Rutebeuf.

c. 1250  Robert le diable in Old French and Picard; the Occitan romance Flamenca.

c. 1275  Jean de Meun writes his part of Le Roman de la rose.

1305–1378  Avignon papacy.

1337–1443  The Hundred Years’ Wars.

1364–1430  Life of Christine de Pisan.

May 30, 1431  Joan of Arc is burnt at the stake.