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Doubts and Ambiguities in the Transmission of Ideas in a Medieval Latin Bestiary: Canterbury Cathedral Archives Lit. Ms D.10

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Abstract

This article connects medieval bestiary studies to doubts and the ambiguity of memory, so as not only to problematize the transmission of ideas from Late Antiquity and early medieval monasticism but also to consider how they imbricate contemporary visual theory on flaws. How did certain classical and early Christian ideas on nature and the visible and invisible worlds contest medieval cultural and literary norms in the medieval Latin bestiary? How does examining these tensions challenge our own perceptions?

By focusing on one chapter in a late thirteenth-century bestiary fragment in Canterbury Cathedral Archives, on the bear or *ursus*, this article examines how doubts expressed in the margins of the manuscript point to greater concerns about our perception of the value of late exemplars. It also shows how modern visual theory on flaws permits us to engage in a fruitful dialogue with those ideas about seeing developed in Late Antiquity and the early medieval period which are contained in the bestiary.

In conclusion, this article makes the *ursus* a site of doubt and the flaws in both medieval copying and contemporary image replication a means of looking afresh at the transmission of ideas.

Keywords: Bestiary, medieval, animals, bear, *ursus*, doubt, disbelief, flaw, memory, mnemonics, *ductus*, Canterbury, Benedictine, monasticism, Neo-Platonism, Theodor Adorno, Jacques Lacan, Walter Benjamin, CCA Lit Ms D.10, Cambridge Trinity College Ms O.4.7, British Library Ms Additional 11283

This article connects medieval bestiary studies to current thinking on doubts and the ambiguity of memory to examine how these issues problematise the transmission of ideas.[1] How did concepts and ideas from Late Antiquity imbricate and contest medieval cultural

[1] See, for example, Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), especially chapter 4, and more recently, *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, ed. M. Carruthers and J. Ziolkowski (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) pp. 1-32. For doubt in more general medieval and contemporary contexts, see James Q. Whitman, *The Origins of Reasonable Doubt: Theological Roots of the Criminal Trial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) and on unpacking

and literary norms in the bestiary.[2] How does examining these tensions challenge our own perceptions?

These questions are discussed via an examination of a Latin bestiary manuscript from *c*.1300. This is a thirty-folio fragment in Canterbury Cathedral Archives, Lit Ms D.10, and this article focuses on just one chapter, that describing the *ursus* or bear (figure 1: see page 15). The reason for choosing D.10 lies in its unusual discourse on accepted medieval and late antique thought modes.[3] To contextualise this analysis, two other ursine examples are used. One is a decorated initial in Jerome's *Commentary on the Old Testament* from *c*. 1120 (figure 2: see page 17).[4] The other comes from an illustrated chapter on the bear in an early bestiary manuscript of *c*. 1180, London, British Library Additional 11283 (figure 3: see page 22).[5] How should the doubts in D.10 (which are expressed in the marginal notations of *dubito*, meaning 'I doubt that', in the same hand as the text) be interpreted? How does this manuscript's scribal scepticism, as well as the ambiguity of those doubts, undermine the normative evidence for piety and authority contained in the bestiary?

texts through contextualisation, Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: the Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts*, (Princeton University Press, 2007).

[2] For bestiary studies, see among others, Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: the Second-Family Bestiary* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), Ron Baxter, *Bestiaries and their Users in the Middle Ages* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing 1998), *Animals and the Symbolic in Medieval Art and Literature*, ed. L. A. J. R. Houwen (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1997), particularly Jan Ziolkowski, 'Literary Genre and Animal Symbolism' pp. 1-24, and Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge University Press, 1995). Briefly, Clark sees the bestiary as being principally used as a schoolbook in a lay environment, Baxter as having been used primarily for sermons in a monastic environment, while Hassig uses illustrations in bestiaries to connect to medieval areas of concern, e.g. forest laws and Ziolkowski examines the symbolism in the bestiary.

[3] Mentioned by L. Sandler *Gothic Art*, no. 20, Hassig 1995, Baxter, and by Clark 2006 in most detail on p. 230, CCA Lit Ms D. 10 begins imperfectly at *cervus* or stag, ends at *baleine* or whale, not *aspidochelone* as per Clark 2006, whose page sizes are also slightly wrong and should read 230 x 155 mm page area and 184 x 124 mm text area.

[4] Cambridge, Trinity College Ms O.4.7, f.75 'I have little doubt that the book was written at Canterbury and bought for Rochester', M.R. James, *The Western Manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Cambridge University Press, 1900), «http://rabbit.trin.cam.ac.uk/James/O.4.7.html». See also Michael Camille, 'Seeing and Reading: Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy' in *Art History* Vol. 8, No. 1 (March, 1985), pp. 26-49.

[5] London, British Library Ms Additional 11283, *c*.1180, containing 123 chapters, is the earliest extant Second-family bestiary. See Clark 2006: the whole volume is a complete transcription, translation, description and comparison of this manuscript. See M. R. James, *The Ancient Libraries of Canterbury and Dover* (Cambridge University Press, 1903), which mentions three Christ Church bestiaries 151, 483 and 484. See also Baxter, p. 217. For works belonging to St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury; see *St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury Catalogue*, ed. Bruce C. Barker-Benfield (The British Library, 2008).

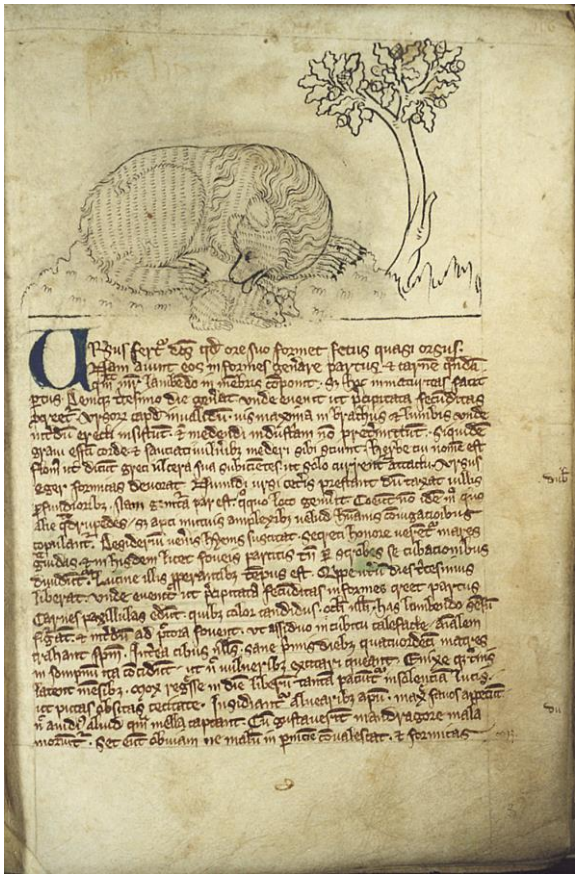

FIGURE 1: LATIN BESTIARY MANUSCRIPT, REPRODUCED WITH PERMISSION FROM CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL ARCHIVES LITERARY MANUSCRIPT D10 FOLIO 3 RECTO ©

However, for those readers not familiar with such works, this article begins with a definition of 'bestiary'. Willene Clark defines it simply as 'a medieval book of beasts', Charles Dodwell, rather more vigorously, as 'the more credulous ideas of antiquity embalmed in the winding sheets of medieval theology'.[6] Yet this latter commentator's disparagement of the natural history in the 'simple' bestiary is contested by evidence in D.10 which suggests that not all medieval people took such texts on animal lore literally.[7] More precisely, if less colourfully, the bestiary is a spiritual work which uses animals as *exempla* and employs rhetorical devices and mnemonic techniques as part of its exegesis. It is based on a *c.* fourth-century text, called the *Physiologus*, which probably originated in Alexandria. Over time, references were increasingly added, drawn from Isidore of Seville's seventh century *Etymologiae* as well as from other works, including those by Ambrose and Solinus, and later from the *Aviarium* of Hugh of Fouilloy. The text evolved through a number of sometimes concurrent recensions,

6 Clark 2006. See also C.R. Dodwell, *The Canterbury School of Illumination* (Cambridge University Press, 1954), p. 71.
7 'simple' quoted from M.R. James, *The Bestiary* (Oxford, Roxburghe Club, 1928) p. 1.

including the well-known, and most numerous, Second-family Latin bestiary.[8] Some fifty manuscripts from this family, including some deluxe versions, are extant. In its various recensions; in Latin, the vernacular or even pure illustration; and in the forms of prose, poetry, encyclopaedic extract, or courtly romance, the bestiary enjoyed great medieval popularity, particularly in England.

1. The ursine-inhabited initial in Jerome's *Commentary on the Old Testament*

To understand exactly how D.10 problematises and renders ambiguous the interpretation and the transmission of ideas from Late Antiquity, it is, of course, necessary to discuss, albeit briefly, those ideas and how they were interpreted in early medieval monasticism. I begin with the *exemplum* of the bear and, in particular, the bear drawn in a decorated capital initial letter from Jerome's *Commentary on the Old Testament*.[9] The bear is not mentioned in the *Physiologus* or First-family bestiaries, so this illustration is key in linking the *Etymologiae* to its first appearance in the Second-family bestiary, the earliest extant version being BL Additional 11283.[10] The text of D.10 is in essence (although we shall discuss the differences later) that of BL Additional 11283 and therefore D.10 is classed also as a Second-family Latin bestiary. These three ursine discussion points — the early twelfth-century decorated capital, and the bears from the two bestiaries; more memorably, the three bears — all proceed from Isidore's *Etymologiae*:[11]

> The bear (ursus) is said to be so-called because it shapes its offspring in its 'own mouth' (ore suo), as if the word were orsus, for people say that it produces unshaped offspring, and gives birth to some kind of flesh that the mother forms into limbs by licking it. Whence this is said, 'Thus with her tongue the bear shapes her offspring when she has borne it.' (Petronius, *Anthol. Latina*, 690.3) But prematurity is what causes this kind of offspring; the bear gives birth after at most thirty days, whence it happens that its hurried gestation creates unshaped offspring. Bears have weak heads; their greatest strength is in their forepaws and loins, whence they sometimes stand up erect.

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[8] For the fullest description of the Second-family Latin bestiary, see Clark 2006. This recension expanded the First-family bestiary of *c.* 37 chapters to around 123 chapters, rearranging their order from the original *Physiologus* to follow that of Book XII of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* and including many details from this work. These bestiary manuscripts are frequently handsomely illustrated and some, such as Aberdeen University Library MS 24 «http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/bestiary.hti» and Oxford, Bodley MS Ashmole 1511 are luxurious gilded versions with exquisite illustrations using expensive pigments. The majority of these deluxe manuscripts date from the early to mid-thirteenth century and are English.

[9] See James 1900 for Trinity College Ms O.4.7 details. See also Camille for an analysis of the decorated initial on f.75.

[10] c. 1180, according to Clark 2006, but C.M. Kauffmann, *Romanesque Manuscripts 1066-1190* (London, 1975) no.105, thinks c.1170. If this is a Canterbury production then c.1170 is less likely given the probable situation there following the murder of the Archbishop Thomas Becket in that year. See Michael J. Curley's translation, *Physiologus* (Austin: Texas University Press, 1979) which contains 51 chapters on animals but no bear.

[11] *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Book XII, chapter 2, paragraph 22, trans. Barney et al. (Cambridge University Press, 2006) pp. 252–53.

FIGURE 2: DECORATED INITIAL FROM JEROME'S *COMMENTARY ON THE OLD TESTAMENT*, MS O.4.7, F.75. © TRINITY COLLEGE. REPRODUCED BY KIND PERMISSION OF THE MASTER AND FELLOWS OF TRINITY COLLEGE CAMBRIDGE

The decorated initial 'A' from Jerome shows a man with a stick, holding onto a lead which connects to the muzzle of the bear. The man is saying 'ABC' and the bear replies 'A'.[12] This image is well known, having been used by Michael Camille to illustrate his article on medieval visual interpretation, in which he showed that the text used the 'etymological method of translating lists of Hebrew names as a basis for spiritual interpretation'. He took this initial as an example, calling it:

> a playful admonition to the monastic user of the text to learn through repeating these interminable lists [...], not with the bear's dumb animal mimicry but also with human understanding.[13]

However, I contend this initial is also much more, being not only a 'playful admonition' but also a pun on etymological translation itself, as well as a practical lesson in memory training by name association.[14] We learn this from the *Etymologiae* to which this initial doubtless refers, for here we are told that the bear, *ursus*, derives its name from the tradition that the mother bear licks her unformed cubs into shape: 'Ursus fertur dictus quod ore suo formet fetus quasi orsus [The bear *ursus* [also known as *orsus*] is so called because she formed her young by her own mouth, as if *orsus* were *ore suo*]'. So, in this decorated initial there is a pun on 'bear' and 'mouth', known from Isidore and later used in the bestiary, *ursus* and *orsus* being homophones. This use of puns brings ambivalence and duality of meaning to word and image, in a medieval typology where one sign stands for another, as in the prefiguring of the New Testament in the Old, so beloved in the exegetic works of St. Anselm.[15]

Using the standard medieval exegetic process of examining texts and images for their literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical meanings, this illustration develops the image of the unformed bear into the symbol of the unformed mind. The unformed nature of the bear cub then becomes a reference to a novice or student, someone yet to be licked into shape, a phrase we still use today. The decorated initial is telling us, as readers, that it is only by using our mouths, by *ruminatio*, by reading aloud, that we may learn and understand the meaning of these long lists of strange words. And it shows us how to do this, by linking the unknown word to a word we already know and connecting them with a strong visual image. Here, as we have seen,

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[12] John Lowden at the Leuven-Lille-London Colloquium held in Canterbury in 2008 mentioned that he felt this was more of an 'Aaargh' or growl. See also Laura Cleaver, 'Taming the Beast: Teaching Bears and Boys in the Art of the Twelfth Century' *Ikon*, Volume 1, Issue 2 (Spring 2009), pp. 243–52

[13] Camille, pp. 29-30.

[14] See Carruthers, p. 127 which has an example from a vernacular bestiary.

[15] T.A. Heslop, *St Anselm and the Visual Arts at Canterbury Cathedral, 1093-1109*, Lecture in Honour of St Anselm's 900th Anniversary held at the British Archaeological Association Annual Conference, 2009, forthcoming in Conference proceedings, but see also T. A. Heslop, 'Contemplating Chimera in Medieval Imagination: St. Anselm's Crypt at Canterbury', *Raising the Eyebrow: John Onians and World Art Studies: An Album Amicorum in his honour*, ed. Lauren Golden (Oxford: BAR International, 2001).

mouth, via Isidore's etymology of *ursus* as being derived through its variant form *orsus* from *ore suo* (by her mouth), connects to bear. Further, the novice student has his foot upon a bear cub in order to climb up the letter and eat part of its foliate structure. In so doing, he actively becomes a learned man and, therefore, more than a beast, since he is learning the Word of God and so accessing the divine, a parallel to transubstantiation in the Mass, where base bread becomes the body of Christ. The initial shows the importance of obedience to the teaching of the Word of God, so it is a reminder of the monastic vows of obedience while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of *signum* to *res*.[16] It demonstrates succinctly the *memoria spiritualis*, developed in monastic circles, drawing on the writings of St. Augustine, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and from Quintillian's ideas on *dispositio* and *memoria* and is perhaps best described as cognitive categorization, linking memory to sensory perception via a spiritual sense of direction and placement (or loci).[17]

This method of 'learning through seeing' is described by Paul Crossley as a Gregorian principle, similar to applying rhetoric to architecture, for example, through the flow of processing through a cathedral matched to the process or *ductus* of rhetorical arguments.[18] He has recently shown how similar lessons of *ductus* and rhetoric can be found in Chartres Cathedral;[19] similar ideas of procession and rhetoric may also inform the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral. There, some of the shaft capitals feature images from the *Physiologus*, later familiar from the bestiary (for example, the stag, the eagle and the snake). This use of figures and mnemonic techniques is evident in not only the *Physiologus* but also in the Second-family bestiary, which had its chapters substantially increased and reordered to follow Isidore's method of biblical exposition.[20] This problematises contemporary bestiary research as it demonstrates that the main reasons the bestiary in all its forms was so popular a text were not just because of its simple stories and appealing illustrations, but because it taught basic mnemonics and utilised rhetorical devices inherited by the monastic tradition from Late

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16 Jean-Claude Schmitt 'Images, imagination and the orders of time' in *The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain, Neale Lecture and Colloquium, University College London, 1st April, 2006* (forthcoming).

17 See, for example, St. Augustine's *Commentary on Confessiones 10.8.12*: *et venio in campos et lata praetoria memoriae, ubi sunt thesauri innumerabilium imaginum de cuiuscemodi rebus sensis invectarum. ibi reconditum est quidquid etiam cogitamus* [And I enter the fields and spacious halls of memory, where are stored as treasures the countless images that have been brought into them from all manner of things by the senses. There, in the memory, is likewise stored what we cogitate]. 'Cognitive categorization' is a reference to 'cognitive thinking, a categorising process', from Paul Crossley – see footnote 19.

18 'It is one thing to worship a picture, it is another by means of pictures to learn thoroughly the story that should be venerated […] Wherefore, and especially for the common people, picturing is the equivalent of reading' Pope Gregory I, quoted in Carruthers, p. 222.

19 Paul Crossley, *Ductus and Memoria: Chartres cathedral as rhetoric*, Inaugural Anselm Lecture, University of Kent, April 2009.

20 Clark 2006, pp. 34–36; Baxter, p. 84.

Antiquity to provide memorable lessons in exegesis and homiletics.[21] Mary Carruthers, who explicates this 'hooking process' so well, refers to bestiaries as:

> not 'natural history' or moralized instruction (all instruction in the Middle Ages was moralized) but mental imaging, the systematic forming of 'pictures' that would stick in the memory[22]

The ursine initial is thus an informed commentary on medieval exegesis, rendered easily accessible to novices and monks who knew their bestiary and had been taught how to read both texts and images for the literal, the allegorical, the moral and the anagogical and, crucially, then relate them to other works. They were indeed very well aware of what images they were using and why. Thus this initial is a good example of the pervasive influence of the bestiary in both Canterbury and wider monastic culture.[23] The bestiary bear was not only to be memorised as a link to the mouth and hence, via *ruminatio* and rote, to learning, but also via, as shall be seen, a mental image of ingesting poison and then receiving a cure a link to a standard Christological exegesis.

This analysis is now applied directly in a close reading of the *ursus* chapter of BL Additional 11283, our ur-text. It begins with Isidore's etymological description of the name, that strong visual image which links mouth to bear. Then the text mentions that sick bears are healed by mullein and by eating ants, a reference which comes from Ambrose. The bears appear almost human, copulating as humans, hugging and caring for their helpless offspring, having a liking for honey, sleeping heavily and then being blinded by light and lastly, having the cleverness to bite the most susceptible part of a bull. There is another reference to the curative properties of ants, this time as an antidote to mandrake poison.

What we have is a series of comments designed to show, just as chapters of the *Physiologus* do, the connections between the visible and invisible world, teaching how to understand 'the phenomenal world of nature and its heavenly archetype of which it is a likeness [*similitudo*]' through readily-memorised gobbets or *distinctiones*.[24] This may be based upon Origen's mystical and anagogical concept of correspondence between nature and heaven explored in Book 3 of his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*:

> [J]ust as God made man in his own image and likeness, so also did he make remaining creatures after certain other heavenly images as a likeness.[25]

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[21] Widely known, including in the form of rhyming couplets, 'Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria/ Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia' quoted in Ziolkowski, p. 6.
[22] Carruther, p. 127.
[23] See James 1900 on Cambridge, Trinity College Ms O.4.7 having been produced in Canterbury for Rochester Cathedral Priory.
[24] *Similitudo* from Curley, p. xiv; *distinctiones* from Carruthers and Ziolkowski, pp. 4, 5.
[25] Curley, p. xiii.

Thus, in the chapter on the bear, we see reflections of the human and the heavenly in the actions of the beast. It is the human characteristics of the bear that are stressed, to draw out that comparison between the beastly, unformed nature of the uneducated and the divine path of righteousness, just as in the initial examined earlier. Furthermore, the figure of the bear is used to represent transubstantiation. The curative properties of mullein and ants refer to sin and to the redemptive power of the Eucharist. So animals are not to be investigated for their own behaviour but for the light they shed on the relationship between the human and the divine.[26] That meaning is expressed not through the animal itself but through the word for the animal. A further example would be the memorable *exemplum* of the beaver for its Latin name, *castor,* is linked to *castrare*, turning the hunting of the beaver for its scent glands into the quest for monastic celibacy.[27]

2. Flaws, doubts and ambiguity in CCA Lit Ms D 10, f.3r *ursus*

Turning to the third bear, I shall examine those unusual features of D.10 which imply not only ambiguity towards but a contestation of the cultural norms to which the bestiary ur-text of BL Additional 11283 so studiously adheres. The illustration has been redrawn; the bear licks its cubs but these are formed, not 'unformed offspring'. The artist (probably also the scribe) has missed the anagogical importance of the unformed nature of the cubs. Not that this rendition of the bear is unique: British Library Harley 3244 also depicts a bear and formed cubs, while Cambridge, Gonville and Caius Ms 372.621, merely has a bear. There are also words missing from the text — for example, *nasci* 'to give birth to', while not essential provides clarification — and minor differences in wording.[28] Is the scribe just editing the text as he proceeds, is he following another exemplar, or is he careless? The handwriting is simplified, the 'm' has lost its serif feet, the bifurcation of ascenders is sometimes rushed and shows the connecting stroke, while the horizontal abbreviation marks are often pressed so hard that the nib has parted to

[26] 'in an important sense animals are human constructions', Mullan, B. and Marvin, G., *Zoo Culture* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987). See also Lacan, *Seminar Book 1* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 225 on the word for elephant being vastly more important than the animal itself. As many medieval books were parchment, not paper, this enables us to see them as material culture, flayed animal skins here tattooed with their own images to emphasise their human construction. See also Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows*: *Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) on tattooed, flayed human skins in her chapter on *Silence of the Lambs*.

[27] Ziolkowsk, p. 8, 'If nature is a book, then in a sense the animals with nature are words in the language of the text. This can be demonstrated readily by looking at the beaver (*fiber/castor*[sic]), whose purported behaviour in the *Physiologus* and the bestiary is meant to explain the verb *castro, -are* – the Origen-al [sic] sin.' See also Curley, pp. xxii-iii, n. 34 on the beaver mentioned in antiquity by Pliny, Juvenal, Herodotus, Aesop, Cicero and Apuleius.

[28] e.g. *ut dicunt greci ulcera qua subicie[n]tes* instead of *ut Graeci appellant ulcera subientes sua* and occasional word order changes, e.g. *alie quadrupedes* rather than the usual *quadrupedes aliae*; these are not in other recensions, but others are, e.g. *caede* is replaced by *corde* (line 7).

make two thin lines. Furthermore, a whole paragraph on the bull has been entirely missed; there is a tiny reference to the omission at the foot of the text.

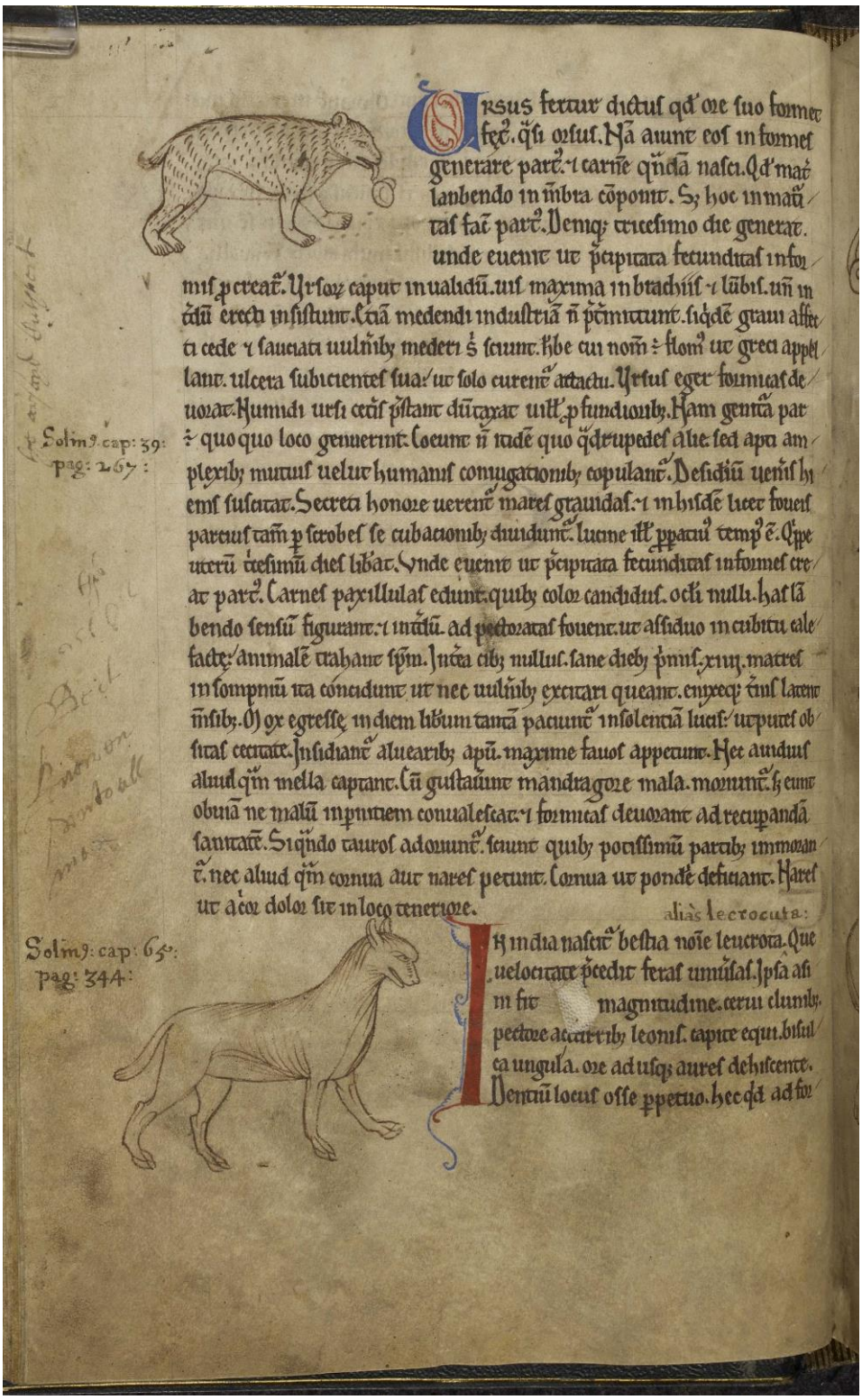

FIGURE 3: EARLY BESTIARY MANUSCRIPT OF *C.* 1180. BL ADDITIONAL 11283 — URSUS.F.7. © THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD (ADD. 11283 F7)

The page layout is poorly drawn up, the script itself is large, rounded and untidy and the chapter finishes in mid-sentence. The careful attention to the teaching of the novice the transcendent

importance of the written Word, and the anagogical references which the other examples exhibit are here ignored. D.10 has been written by someone who has little time for the spiritual mysteries with which the bestiary was originally imbued. This evidences a deliberate distancing from the inherited texts.

However, the crux of my argument lies liminally and literally in the margins, where things generally tend to get more interesting.[29] For in these important margins, there is evidence of individual opinion in an ambiguous disagreement with the text. Not classical *disputatio* but scepticism occurs throughout D.10 and twice in this chapter. Here, it is the eating of ants which moves the scribe to write *dubito* [I doubt that]. These doubts harbour an ambiguity by questioning the text without revealing why it is questioned, as James Whitman discusses in terms of the legal framework of examining reasonable doubt:

> the ambiguous term 'doubt' will always carry subjective connotations for […] doubt will remain, at least in part, a subjective state of mind […] a hesitation to act, an anxiety.[30]

Thus, our subjectification in this bestiary, our relationship with it, is affected by its 'constitutional interpretative ambiguity',[31] in an anxiety to probe these doubts and to rescue meaning from ambiguity. Also, a further ambiguity has been introduced as it has been argued that the abbreviation stands not for *dubito* [I doubt that] but *dubium*, meaning doubtful, though the abbreviation has been expanded in one example to *dubito*, allowing the doubting of the content rather than the doubting of the *exemplum*, to be foregrounded.[32] These marginal notations of *du*, which appear some sixteen times throughout the manuscript, are assigned to the scribe since they are in the same colour ink, have the same distinctive bifurcation of the 'b', the same almost horizontal angle of the ascender of the 'd' and the same simple formation of the 'u' that is often shorter on the right than the left. That *dubito*, that questioning of an authoritative text is most unusual and does not occur in any other bestiary I have studied. It is different from the joyful grotesques and marvels that illuminate the margins of many later medieval works; with their puns and crudities they do not question the text as much as gloss it or provide a separate running narrative. It differs too from the *nota bene* marks more commonly found in bestiaries or the scowling faces and pointing fingers used as *aides-memoires* by

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[29] M. Camille, *Image on the Edge: the Margins of Medieval Art* (Harvard University Press, 1992) suggests that the margins 'give birth to meaning at the centre' p. 48, for the 'centre is [...] dependent upon the margins for its continued existence. p. 10

[30] Whitman, p. 206.

[31] Ibid.

[32] I am most grateful for Professor Ian Short's kind discussion with me via e-mail as to whether the abbreviation refers to *dubium* or *dubito*. It should be observed that A. Capelli, *Dizionario di Abbreviature Latine ed Italiani* (Milano, 1912) «http://www.hist.msu.ru/Departments/Medieval/Cappelli/CPLLI112.HTM» p. 112 is not definitive. However, *dubito* is written out in full on f.9r of D.10. I have interpreted it as *dubito* because of the expansion example on f.9r and the juxtaposition of many of these marginalia to textual references to Ambrose's *Hexaemeron*, which implies contestation of this aspect of the text.

Clement Canterbury in St. Augustine's Abbey's books in the fifteenth century.[33] If it seems doubtful that bears eat ants, it certainly seems farfetched to expect eating ants to provide an antidote to deadly poison. This is a rational, prosaic doubting, a refusal to accept the ancient and authoritative written word as necessarily the literal truth while ignoring the anagogical sense. This rejection is very interesting; it strikes at the heart of that great block of historical belief, the medieval period as the age of faith and authority, although, of course, medieval scepticism has been discussed at length by eminent historians such as Susan Reynolds and John Arnold.[34] In the context of medieval heresy, John Arnold has argued the case for the 'materiality of unbelief'.[35] Using D.10, I put forward here a parallel case for the materiality of disbelief. By doubting, the scribe rejects the authority of the past even while preserving it, becoming a precursor of reasoning doubters. Here, in this little tatty manuscript, we have further evidence that the monolith of historical belief is indeed cracked. Clearly, this is not heresy but nor is it that passive acceptance of instruction, the faithful following of Isidore and the *Physiologus*, that the very *exemplum* of the bear itself should have engendered.

That is why these marginal doubts are so important, even in their ambiguity, because they undermine the whole weight of the normative evidence, all those works which tell us what medieval people were supposed to think and believe about their world. As John Arnold has put it, 'Looking to what people were supposed to think is only one part of the picture'.[36] It is not surprising that scepticism should exist during this period, but I contend it is surprising to find it here, in a well-known and standard text. D.10's doubts are unusual because the cultural impact of the bestiary was founded on its construction of a cultural and literary memory from the faith of the Desert Fathers and the rhetoric of antiquity. Together these had formed part of the bedrock of faith, carved into the very crypt shafts supporting Canterbury Cathedral, to be meditated upon as the monks processed for their offices.[37] This is a scepticism directed at a

[33] For example, marginalia in Oxford, Bodleian Rawlinson C 77, ff. 52–55.

[34] See Susan Reynolds, 'Social Mentalities and the Case of Medieval Scepticism', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th series, 1 (1991), p.25. The idea of the medieval period as an Age of Faith 'survives more or less unnoticed, rather like a shabby old chair in our mental sitting rooms'.

[35] John Arnold, 'The Materiality of Unbelief in Late Medieval England' in *The Unorthodox Imagination in Late Medieval Britain, Neale Lecture and Colloquium, University College London, 1st April, 2006* (forthcoming), discusses, as an example of this materiality, Margery Baxter who was reported in 1427 as saying that the sacrament 'is nothing but a cake of bread baked by a baker which [...] thus consecrated, the priests eat and emit through their rears into privies', which he quotes from N. Tanner, ed., *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31*, Camden Society, 4th ser., 20 (London: 1977) p. 50.

[36] John Arnold forthcoming.

[37] See T. Dale, 'Monsters, Corporeal Deformities, and Phantasms in the Cloister of St-Michel-de-Cuxa', in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 83, No. 3 (Sep. 2001) pp. 402–43 .

huge intellectual and spiritual legacy, a staccato marking that disrupts and challenges *ductus* that sight of the divine in the natural world.[38]

3. Flaws and ambiguity in modern visual theory and their resonating prefiguration in D.10

Yet it is in the bestiary's exploration of seeing that we have the most interesting resonances with current visual theory, helping us to see the bestiary, and D.10 in particular, differently, and more ambiguously, problematizing its simplicity.[39] In the *Physiologus* and subsequently the bestiary, orthodox exegesis depicted the visible world as a flawed *similitudo* of heaven.[40] Using modern visual theory we can enter into a dialogue with the orthodox exegesis and challenge this concept. Flaws in the visual conception of the world have resonances with the 'mote in thy brother's eye' (Matthew 7. 3-6), as the speck of falseness we detect in others while failing to understand our own grave faults. Interrupting the *ductus* of rhetoric is the 'splinter' of modern visual theory. Theodor Adorno saw the flaw or the mote as a splinter not of wood but of glass, and hence as a lens. He spectacularly transmuted it into an Aphorism in his *Minima Moralia* as 'the splinter in your eye is the best magnifying glass'. This broken shard of glass in the eye has been described recently by Esther Leslie, as:

> a conduit between vision, eye and world – it juts out from the eye into the world and back into the eye, a slash, a flaw in vision which enlarges the error in the world.[41]

That flaw, or 'magnifying glass', provides a link to the medieval images of manuscripts now gracing our computer screens. These digitised manuscripts can be explored in ever greater detail, the new Harley images at the British Library being a recent case in point. Engaging with the ideas of philosophers such as Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin permits us to see how the 'Other Nature' they saw in the duplications and close-ups of photography allow productive dialectical tensions. For while Adorno used the splinter as a critical theory to cut into the concept

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[38] In a further example in D.10, the *turtur* (turtle dove) uses special leaves to line its nest which causes the wolf, improbably, to flee (*lupi fuges*, f.21r). This unlikely scenario overwhelms the anagogical point that Christians are defended from the Devil by leaves of the Holy Church, i.e. the Bible. The scribe's marginal comment, 'defecitur + dubito' ('defective and I doubt it'), not only casts doubt on his *exemplum*'s accuracy but also its veracity; a double ambiguity. I am grateful to Prof. R.M. Thomson for his kind advice on this transcription.

[39] Its connections between word and image mediated in memory, speech and movement, its relating of the visible to the invisible; its use of mental imaging and imagining; and in its eye of wonder the bestiary contains ideas from Neo-Platonists.

[40] Curley, pp. xiii–xiv.

[41] Esther Leslie continues, 'So sight is insight when it is seeing in and seeing inside, revelatory insight is deeply flawed, the flaw in what is seen and all that is flawed – yet flaw in vision might be truthful', 'Critical Theory, Crystal Tearing', plenary address, In-Sight Conference, University of Sussex, April 2009 (Leslie, forthcoming). Prof. Leslie kindly confirmed, by email on 18 April 2009, that my thoughts on the connection between the biblical exegesis of the 'mote' and Theodor Adorno's splinter were sound: 'I certainly think Adorno was aware of the Biblical reference and placing it in that perspective adds a very particular light, amplifying the moral weight of the line.'

of vision, Benjamin produced an 'image–world which was not the illusioned partner of the actual world', examining micro-photographic images of snowflakes published by Gustav Hellman, who revealed that their beautiful structures are frequently, fragmented and deformed, although we often depict them as perfectly symmetrical.[42] As Hellman found warmth and humanity in these close-up images of imperfection, so too it is possible to find warmth and humanity in the flaws and imperfections of D.10, an imperfect replication of the Second-family bestiary text. This enables us to transform a standard appreciation of it as a poor, late fragment of a work which has many more complete, important and visually appealing manuscripts into something exciting *because* of its flaws, ambiguities and imperfections.

By magnifying those flaws and transposing them into digital images via that unconscious observation of the camera to the screen, one can make productive, challenging comparisons with other works. One can revisualise, in their digital closeness, the warmth and humanity of their original inception as cultural exchanges of knowledge evidenced as marks in books. It may not be possible to track down the scribe of D.10 — he may never have been a monk in Canterbury.[43] However, as this article demonstrates, through the use of digital images and Bruce Barker-Benfield's work on the St. Augustine's library volumes, D.10 may become a turning point for bestiary studies and not merely a footnote.[44] In conclusion, the nub of the issue is whether this bestiary's flaws and doubts problematise modern historiography's edifice of normative medieval hermeneutics and rhetorical ideas from Late Antiquity.[45] Does D.10 challenge current bestiary research by a doubting, an insertion of ambiguity which is an uncanny prefiguring of their ways of seeing?[46] Applying visual concepts to D.10 opens it up to reveal the mediation of the medieval image, which was initially replicated imperfectly, deformed and doubted and which is now splintered and duplicated through digital and printed reproduction, to be doubted and questioned again. The errors in copying, the marginal additions and the erasures become important because they point both to revelatory insight of the flaw,

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[42] The references to Benjamin and Hellman are in Leslie, forthcoming

[43] For a discussion on extant works from thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Canterbury monks' books, see W. Knorr, 'Two Medieval Monks and their astronomy books', *Bodleian Record*, Vol. 14, part 4 (April 1993). Examples of the handwriting of other brethren, such as Thomas Sprot, also have been identified recently (see Barker-Benfield, pp. 1839-83) but formal identification of D.10's scribe remains elusive.

[44] See Mika Elo, 'Walter Benjamin on Photography: Towards Elemental Politics' *Transformations*, no. 15 (November 2007). See also «http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/GreenGovernance/papers/Leslie EP-Snowglobalism.pdf» and Leslie, forthcoming.

[45] For ideas disseminated by Isidore, Augustine, Jerome, Cassian, the Desert Fathers, Origen and the Alexandrine Neo-Platonists such as Clement of Alexandria, see Curley, introduction.

[46] For a discussion of the uncanny and medieval literature, see Michael Uebel, 'Unthinking the Monster: Twelfth Century Responses to Saracen Alterity' in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) p. 268.

making D.10 the focus point for investigation by using the unconscious observer of the close-up camera to trace the signification of its marks, as well as perhaps tracing the path, flow or *ductus* of the human hand that once wrote it. Thus, its ambiguity does speak relevantly not only to current historiography but also to our contemporary perception of nature and modern visual theory. The bear as a memorable figure for the unformed mind has become here something more ambiguous, yet still powerful: a site of doubt.

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Web Resources

Virtual Tour of Canterbury Cathedral: «http://www.request.org.uk/main/churches/tours/canterbury/gabriel.htm»

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