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### Response to Marie de France

The story of the man who transforms into an animal or beast is a story type that has appeared throughout literary history and across cultural boundaries. Marie de France's *Lais* and a variety of folktales that come from different backgrounds have explored the story of the "man-animal." The man usually changes from his human form to that of an animal, and the more beast like or savage the animal the darker the story tends to be. When a man turns into a beast-like animal he becomes an indicator for something nefarious hiding in the story, which is often an evil found inside the man or the people around the man. The men's beastly side in Marie de France's "Bisclavret" and the folktale "The Snotty Goat" act as physical representations of the wickedness that hides in the man or in his society.

Marie de France's werewolf, Bisclavret, represents the evil that manifests inside of the people in the beast's society. As a human man he is "a good knight, handsome, known to be / all that makes for nobility" (17-18). In the introduction of the *lais*, Marie writes that "a werewolf is a savage beast; / in his blood-rage, he makes a feast / of men, devours them, does great harms, / and in vast forests lives and roams" (9-12). By starting the story with this description of the werewolf, Bisclavret would be expected to follow along this archetype, however, he proves to be the opposite. When he transforms into a werewolf the king's hunting dogs attack him, but Bisclavret approaches the king and begs for clemency. Recognizing the consciousness and

sapience of a man inside the beast, the king orders his men to stop the dogs, telling them that the werewolf has a “man’s mind; it begs the king / for mercy” (154-155). Bisclavret moves even further away from the expected as he is beloved by people who cherish his “noble bearing and [his] charm,” and during his time with the king he “never wanted to do harm” (179-180).

Bisclavret deviates from the savagery that Marie claims werewolves have as he begs for mercy in his beastly form, which points to the fact that his turning into a beast is a response to the hidden evil in those surrounding him rather than any evil that could be present in himself. The blood-lust and want to cause harm that Marie declares manifests in werewolves are absent in Bisclavret because he is not the evil or savage one in the story.

Throughout the story, the people around Bisclavret are the malicious ones who cause harm, and it is their dark nature that causes Bisclavret to become uncharacteristically violent. After finding out about his animal side, his wife betrays his trust and uses the information Bisclavret told her to trap him into becoming a werewolf permanently. Her reasons for betraying her husband stem from her own need to hide her secret, evil nature, and, since her husband secret is now exposed, the possibility of her own secrets being exposed becomes a risk. In order to keep her own darkness hidden she has to get rid of him. She takes up another lover to help her steal her husband’s humanity. Committing the sin of adultery further proves her heinous nature since historically, sin is a sign of evil. Additionally, the king appears capable of viciousness as well when he uses torture to force Bisclavret’s wife to tell him why the usually docile werewolf has suddenly started attacking her and her lover. Bisclavret is only violent when he attempts to dole out justice as retribution for an act of evil, an action that is typically aligned with God, the ultimate symbol of good. Bisclavret’s punishment of evil continues to prove that the evil in this

story comes from sources other than himself. In this story, the beastly form is a physical manifestation of the hidden and wicked nature of the people in his society.

Where the story of Bisclavret portrays the hidden darkness in the society of the beast, the Russian folktale “The Snotty Goat,” represents the evil that lurks inside the beast himself. In the folktale, a young woman is abducted by a goat who wishes to have the woman as his wife. Unlike Bisclavret, when we first meet the goat he is an animal, and he isn’t noble or charming like Bisclavret either. Instead, the snotty goat is an unpleasant beast, and the woman, the day after her capture, sees “that the yard [is] enclosed with a picket fence, and that there was a maiden’s head on every picket” (200). The woman had displeased the goat and he murdered them for it, and even though his new wife pleases him by tending to him and wiping his snotty, slobber-covered face, he neither acknowledges her nor rewards her. His disinclination to thank the woman indicates that he wants the woman to clean him because he gets a perverted satisfaction out of her suffering, proven further when he is in his human form. When the girl goes to her sisters’ weddings, the goat shows up in his human form and sings songs that make fun of her relationship with the snotty nosed goat. His ability to turn into a human whenever he pleases shows that he only turns into a goat because he knows it will be displeasurable for his significant other, and he wants them to suffer. He is a goat because he is more beast than man in his actions and personality which presents itself in his cruel savagery towards his wives. He has become on the outside what he truly is on the inside: animalistic.

In conclusion, the man-animals in Marie de France’s “Bisclavret” and the Russian folktale “The Snotty Goat” are representative of a hidden evil that is either in the beast or in the society the beast lives in. The werewolf and the goat are symbols of the dark side of human

nature. They are physical representations of what humans try to repress in themselves, so the appearance of the man-beast in a story is, in some way, a response to evil, which may be inside the man or it may be inside the people around him. The beast becomes a symbol for humans who try to hide their evil side, but these stories both show that their primitive, savage nature is always revealed.