**The Man as werewolf and the woman as donkey: comparative reading between “Bisclavret” and “The Rabbi who was turned in to a werewolf”**

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**Introduction**

The Jewish world has always objected to foreign influences of any kind, and Christianity in particular, primarily due to the fear of appearing to identify with Christian heresy. Nevertheless, Moritz Güdemann, a historian who served as chief rabbi of Vienna in the late nineteenth century, admits that the widespread belief in magic, witchcraft, and other superstitions also percolated into the Jewish community, becoming a source of Jewish fantasy in the Middle Ages.[[1]](#footnote-1) One example can be seen in the similarity between the narrative structure of the Yiddish story “The Rabbi Who Was Turned into a Werewolf” found in the compilation of Jewish folktales, *The Ma’aseh Book*, published in Basel in 1602,[[2]](#footnote-2) and “Bisclavret” by Marie de France, published in London c. 1160 in a collection of her Breton lais.[[3]](#footnote-3) In the current paper I examine the adaptation and integration of the distinctly Christian motif of the fantastical werewolf into a Jewish folktale. In addition, I note the similarities and differences between the two stories in an attempt to explain why they cannot simply be dismissed as foolish tales of magic and witchcraft. Instead, I will show how the werewolf motif, borrowed from the traditions and conventions of Christian literature and introduced into Jewish folklore, serves as a poetic device that mediates intercultural connections.

The methodology for this comparative analysis is anchored in the ethnological approach, or the sociology of culture, based on the principles of the Birmingham School movement and method (1964). [[4]](#footnote-4)According to the Birmingham approach, culture is defined as a convention, or coding through conventional signifiers of meaning, which is used to construct content worlds from reality and which contains the ideological essence of the features of a collective, universal identity. Thus, culture is seen as a complex network of memory, like a matrix, that facilitates the flow of knowledge and information across place and time. Accordingly, the current paper focuses on a central universal and timeless theme that cuts across communities and religions which finds expression in the metaphor of the werewolf: trust between a husband and wife. I conclude with a discussion relating to the title of the paper, linking folklore (culture) with misogyny (sociology of culture). More specifically, I will consider the cultural representations that shape the pattern of relations between a man and woman, a husband and wife, seeking to interpret the harsh denunciation of “evil” women. This analysis leads to the conclusion that the choice of animal (wolf, dog, donkey) is not random, nor does it stem from “foolish beliefs.” Rather, it is a poetic, metaphorical representation of a failing marital relationship associated with a hostile attitude to wives or women in general. In other words, the patriarchal androcentric reality of the High Middle Ages found its way into the book of Jewish folklore published during the Enlightenment, where women are represented as inherently inferior to men and regarded as a deviation from the norm. Thus, both of the stories compared here reflect the tension implied in the ancient Jewish principle “*matza or motze*,” finds or have found, whereby only fate or Divine Providence can determine which verse applies to a man’s marriage, “One who finds a wife has found good” or “I have found the woman to be more bitter than death” (Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Berakoth, 8a).

**The Place of Mythical Hybrids in the Twelfth to Seventeenth Centuries**

In twelfth and thirteenth century Europe, numerous folktales and lays described the magical transformation of a man into an animal: half-man half-wolf; half-man half-serpent; half-man half-bear; half-man half-bird, and more. These stories excited the imagination of listeners and were very popular in the royal courts in which they were told. Furthermore, the interest aroused by creatures of all sorts, including hybrids, went beyond literature, and they were perceived as real in Medieval Europe. Indeed, the human mind did not distinguish between the real and the imaginary until the modern era and the Age of Enlightenment. Until then, people believed that the world was filled with supernatural phenomena, and cast no doubt on the existence (or at least possible existence) of such creatures, considering them an integral part of the natural world. In order to prove their reality, scholars throughout Europe referred to the Bible and the Talmud and their commentaries, which were regarded as secret codes of laws and truths and were even cited in contemporary bestiaries. Periodically, there were reports of sightings of the footprints of magical creatures, including werewolves, or even actual encounters with them. In the early seventeenth century, show trials of individuals accused of mass murder or cannibalism were conducted in various parts of Europe. Identified as werewolves, they were charged with lycanthropy, and even executed for their crime.[[5]](#footnote-5) These cases captured considerable attention and were so common a subject of conversation that belief in the existence of wondrous creatures (whether malicious or beneficent) found its way into the writings of the Jewish community as early as the High Middle Ages. As a general rule, it appeared in the context of harsh criticism from leaders of the rationalist community of Enlightenment scholars, who viewed it as part of a foreign demonology deserving of derision, although there were also other opinions. According to David Shyovitz, not only did the leaders of the German Pietists (*Hasidei Ashkenaz*) not reject this belief out of hand, but they regarded werewolves as a subject that was “good to think with,” particularly in exploring the spiritual status of the human body. That is, they argued that the text should not be read literally as an actual metamorphosis (which is a delusion), but as an allegory of metaphoric or symbolic potential relating to the characteristics of human types. To demonstrate his point, Shyovitz analyzes an exegetical collection appended in the thirteenth century to the biblical commentary of R. Ephraim b. Samson on Jacob’s blessing to his son Benjamin, “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil” (Gen. 49:27), which may imply that Benjamin himself was a werewolf. Relying on the writings of Rabbenu Ephraim of Worms from the twelfth century, the author of the exegesis states:

Benjamin was a ravenous wolf, who would occasionally maul people—and when the time came for him to turn into a wolf…if he was with his father he would lean on the doctor, and in that merit would not turn into a wolf. Thus it says, “and if he leaves his father he will die” (Gen. 44:22)—that is to say, if he separates from his father he will turn into a wolf [and attack] people on the way, and anyone who encounters him will kill him…There is a certain wolf that is called a loup-garous that is a man who changes into a wolf. At the instant when he changes into a wolf, his legs emerge from between his shoulders—thus Benjamin “dwells between his shoulders”…It is customary for a man whose nature turns into wolf [to be born with teeth], since a wolf is born with teeth…A person who turns into a loups-garous wolf has a tail at all times, even when he is in human form.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The foreign influence was unavoidable. Throughout the centuries in which the Jewish community lived in the region of the Rhine, it interacted with the Christian population as a matter of course, if only in chance encounters. As Joseph Dan explains:

One level of connection between the Jewish and foreign societies is reflected in the daily life of commerce. Here, hostility toward the Church was not always apparent. We find Jews doing business and negotiating with non-Jews…This influence was primarily expressed in the realm of superstitions and demonology, which feature prominently in the literature of the German Pietists.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Thus, elements of the narrative patterns common in European-Christian culture, and particularly its folklore, gradually seeped into the stories of the German Pietists, where they were adapted, absorbed, and fully integrated into their narratives as well. From there they spread to the rest of the Jewish world. *Megilat Ahimaaz* (11th century) in Italy and the tales of Rabbi Judah the Pious and of his disciple Rabbi Eleazar of Worms (12th to 13th centuries) are filled with superstitions and tales featuring wizards, dragons, werewolves, women who devour babies, and all sorts of other demonic creatures borrowed from European folklore. Elie Yassif offers a similar explanation, adding that the majority of these stories never underwent Judaization.[[8]](#footnote-8) They were told in the Jewish communities in the same way as they were told in Christian society. Thus, it is logical to assume that the story of the rabbi who was turned into a werewolf was also a version of a Christian tale that found its way into the Jewish narrative tradition, where it was absorbed and accepted after a few minor changes to suit it to the values of the community.

**Metamorphosis in Bestiaries: Characteristics of the Werewolf**

The transformation of a man into a wolf is one of the most common ancient narrative motifs, appearing as far back as classic mythology. In “The Metamorphoses,” Ovid (b. 43 BC) tells of the sin and subsequent punishment of Lycaon, King of Arcadia, immortalizing his negative cultural image. Lycaon refused to recognize the godhood of Zeus, and served him human flesh to test his omniscience. Enraged, Zeus struck Lycaon’s house with lightning, and as he fled from the fire, the god changed his human form and turned him into a blood-thirsty wolf.

Terror struck he took to flight, and on the silent plains is howling in his vain attempts to speak; he raves and rages and his greedy jaws, desiring their accustomed slaughter, turn against the sheep—still eager for their blood. His vesture separates in shaggy hair, his arms are changed to legs; and as a wolf he has the same grey locks, the same hard face, the same bright eyes, the same ferocious look.[[9]](#footnote-9)

As Ovid describes it, Lycaon’s metamorphosis is not merely a whim or arbitrary punishment, but an act with evolutionary values. The change is allotropic, that is, a transformation of physical features without a change in the essence. Lycaon’s shell, his deceptive human form, is peeled off to reveal his negative, and dominant, personal qualities. The bloodthirstiness, the “ferocious look,” was always there. The physical change was the final stage in his transformation, with the external now reflecting the internal.

In the twelfth century, when Marie de France was writing in England under the patronage of the queen, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Ovid was widely known, and the poetess even quoted from him in her work.[[10]](#footnote-10) According to the historian Caroline Bynum, adopting the classical narrative was not a random choice, but rather exemplifies the period, the “Twelfth Century Renaissance” that saw considerable social, cultural, and conceptual changes. She contends that the intellectual efforts devoted to categorizing different types of change attest to the importance attributed to understanding the human body as a “psychosomatic unit.”[[11]](#footnote-11) As implied by the title of her book, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, the notion of change and transformation challenged the twelfth-century perception of the individual and their identity. Consequently, even if the possibility of metamorphosis from man to beast was dismissed, the fact that the laws of change were explored in the literature of the time leads Bynum to two main conclusions. First, that it was understood that a change in appearance does not necessarily indicate a change in essence. In many stories, it ultimately is revealed that the man was dressed in a costume sewn from animal hide (as in “a wolf in sheep’s clothing”). The fantastical motif therefore served as an aesthetic literary device. Secondly, consistent with the methodology adopted in the current paper, the popularity of anthropomorphic tales, particularly the terrifying ones of werewolves, is evidence of the importance of the need to perceive the human soul as a single unit.

The categorization and “zoological” chrematistics of animals (including wondrous creatures) extended beyond the bounds of literary fiction, gaining “factual” scientific definition that was encouraged by the Church. Between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, numerous bestiaries (similar to the second-century Greek volume *Physiologus*) were published.[[12]](#footnote-12) These compendiums of beasts brought together various quasi-scientific ideas that were common at the time, most of which had a distinct didactic-theological tone. The biological and zoological “facts” included interpretations based on minimal experience (e.g., observations of the behavior of wolves who had attacked human beings), the physiological elements known in that period, and far-fetched explanations of the nature of the beasts that linked between their behavior and their name. The bestiaries referred to Biblical verses to support their definitive descriptions of the character and qualities of the animal, as well as conventional anthropomorphic cultural symbols and a wealth of other prevalent stereotypes. To summarize the main ideas regarding wolves and werewolves, the subject of the current discussion, the wolf (lupus) was a very clever and vicious feral beast. The strongest animal in nature, it was a carnivore that thirsted for blood. To this was added a demonic element: the wolf represented Satan and was a symbol of hatred and evil stemming from envy of humankind. Its eyes, which shone in the dark like torches, were the work of the devil that could see through walls and mountains. In fact, its whole appearance was the work of the devil, designed to deceive and terrify the human soul. It therefore bore the Greek name, likos, meaning to bite, as wolves killed anything they chanced upon.

In Medieval times, it was commonly believed that the werewolf was even more vicious than the wolf. It hid in the forest and was seen as simultaneously human and beast. That is, it retained its human intellect, but its appearance, physical strength, and ferocity were those of the wolf (lupiform). Depraved and merciless, it lay in wait for human beings, caused havoc, and stole infants away from their mothers and devoured them.

**Wild Animal or Victim of Persecution?**

Bisclavret, the werewolf in Marie de France’s lai, and the rabbi whose wife turned him into a werewolf in *The Ma’aseh Book* are both described as worthy men. Unlike the case of Lycaon in the *Metamorphosis*, the evolutionary reduction imposed on these later werewolves is seen as an injustice, especially as their bestial form makes them a target of hunters in the forest. What did the authors mean by trapping their heroes in the body of a wolf, a loathed, despicable, and contemptible creature? “Bisclavret” is the earlier of the two, written c. 1160-1180 by a woman known primarily for *Les Fables*.[[13]](#footnote-13) It is reasonable to assume that Marie was highly familiar with the wolf’s characteristics as defined in the bestiaries and with the projection of the theriomorphic images onto the human qualities they represent. Indeed, evidence of this can be found in the first lines of her lai, where she offers a detailed description (which is rather unusual given the tight writing typical of the genre) of the savagery of the werewolf’s behavior (8: 9-11).[[14]](#footnote-14)

Garvalf, ceo est beste salvage;/ Tant cum il est en cele rage,/

Hummes devure, grant mal fait,/ Es grans forest converse e vait.

The Were-Wolf is a fearsome beast. He lurks within the thick forest, mad and horrible to see. All the evil that he may, he does.

She continues by describing additional characteristics similar to those customarily identified with the beast at that time. In animal form, Bisclavret hunts prey in the forest. He is later adopted by the king because of his intelligence and resourcefulness. Further on, Marie notes that he is so strong that it takes numerous knights armed with swords to keep him from tearing his treacherous wife to pieces. They are barely able to pull him off her and chase him away.

Similar, not to say identical, narrative elements appear in the Jewish folktale. There, the townspeople are terrorized by the ferocious werewolf, described typically as bloodthirsty and out for human prey, and ask the charcoal burners[[15]](#footnote-15) to go after it and destroy it. They refuse, fearing for their lives. As I see it, the fundamental difference between the two narratives lies in the answer to a disturbing question. Why does Marie provide no explanation, anywhere in the lai, for the reason for the evolutionary reduction that caused Bisclavret to be transformed into a detestable beast? The literary history of this motif indicates that the metamorphosis is generally the result of external intervention. A god, sorcerer, or witch concocts a drug or potion, curses the individual, or casts a spell on him. The transformation is either a form of punishment if the beast is considered depraved (as in the case of Lycaon) or a reward if it is considered subline (e.g., a falcon). The answer might be found in Jonah Frankel’s contention that two conditions must be met in narratives in this genre. First, the plot describes tension between a dyad in the family (e.g., father and son, husband and wife). Secondly, it revolves around a moral issue that exposes the contradiction between external form and internal values. Frankel explains that the tension is generally between moral or religious ideals and their opposites, reflected either in the two main characters or within the hero himself.[[16]](#footnote-16) This suggests that despite the detailed description of the werewolf’s physiology in both stories, the focus of the narrative is not the beast itself, but the tension between a husband and wife or a man and a woman. That is, the source of the tension in their relationship is the husband’s physical appearance and/or his wife’s aversion to it.

The Yiddish tale provides a direct explanation for the cause of the transformation. How was the rabbi turned into a werewolf? By a magic ring that fell into the wrong hands. It also explains how the spell was removed. By the intervention of the king, who retrieved the ring by trickery. In contrast, in “Bisclavret” there is no explication of how Bisclavret was transformed, nor the slightest indication that the curse or spell might someday be lifted and he could return to living as a man. Since Marie’s writing is so precise and every word is carefully chosen, while maintaining the fixed structure of a lai (which is dramatic in nature), it may be assumed that the lack of clarity is intentional and the answers are encrypted within the lines.

In order to reinforce this contention, I would like to add another layer to the discussion for purposes of comparison. “Mélion,” written by an anonymous author in the thirteenth century and most likely inspired by “Bisclavret,” contains the same narrative formula of a man turned into a wolf because of a treacherous woman. Here, however, the reason for the transformation is stated explicitly, as is the manner in which it is reversed.[[17]](#footnote-17) At the end of the story, Mélion the wolf becomes King Arthur’s pet, and joins him on a visit to the court of the King of Ireland. There he sees the king’s daughter, the wife who betrayed him, and he attacks her. After an investigation leads to a confession, she is forced to hand over the magic ring and restore Mélion to human form. The two kings offer him the option of punishing his wife by turning her into a wolf, but after some consideration, he decides to leave her in her father’s home and returns to Britain.

“Mélion” is distinct from the other two versions of the story in the way in which the dispute between the couple is resolved. The husband chooses not to punish his unfaithful wife, but rather leaves her behind without any retribution or shame. Why? Unlike Western narrative influenced by the classical Greek-Roman tradition, “Mélion” drew on the Celtic tradition. In Wales and Ireland, the “lupinity” of a human being was thought to be derived from an inherited trait that was not necessarily a sign of viciousness, but of a different human race. Those afflicted with genetic lupinity were viewed as talking wolves who walked on two feet and hunted their prey. In his travel journals, Bishop Gerald of Wales (b. 1146) describes a chance meeting with a werewolf from Ulster who asks hm courteously to accompany him to his home to pray with his wife who is on her death bed. Gerald agrees.[[18]](#footnote-18) At no point is he frightened or in fear of his life, nor is he even taken aback by his encounter with the creature. Following this tradition, Mélion has no need to explain the source of his metamorphic trait or apologize for it, as it is merely a feature of his nature and race. His anger stems from the offense he takes at his wife’s abandonment of him, but after giving it some thought, he decides not to compel her to live with him against her will and he acquiesces to her desire not to become a wolf like him as it is clear that she is not attracted to him. In contrast, in the Western tradition, the werewolf is depicted not only as cruel and ruthless, but also as a sick wild animal. We may therefore assume that Marie was familiar with these qualities, a fact evidenced by her identification of Bisclavret by name in the manner in which it appears in bestiaries.

In the Jewish folktale, as typical of the genre, the werewolf has no name and is referred to simply as “the rabbi.” In Marie’s lai, however, whereas the other characters are identified by their status or function (the king, the wife, the wise counsellor), the hero is given a name accompanied by an explanation (8: 3-4):

Bisclavret ad nun en bretan,/ Garwaf l'apelent li Norman

Bisclavret he is named in Brittany; whilst the Norman calls him Garwaf.

Scholars have proposed a variety of etymological explanations for the Breton name. Joseph Loth claims that it derives from two words: bisc-lavret (wolf in trousers; “le court culotté”).[[19]](#footnote-19) Heinrich Zimmer and W. H. Bailey contend that it is a compound of the two words bleiz-lavaret (talking wolf), with Bailey adding that the suffix “et” means shining moon, allying it with the popular belief that werewolves attack on the full moon. In a response to Bailey, William Sayers posits that the word “clev” comes from the Medieval Breton word “claff,” meaning illness or afflicted with illness, so that bis-clavret is a variation of bleiz claffet, a reference to a man suffering from lycanthropy (a word itself deriving from the name of King Lycaon).[[20]](#footnote-20) This suggests that the hidden meaning in the lai indeed lies in a mental or physical phenomenon. Marie begins by noting widely known “facts” (8: 5-8):

Jadis le poeit hum oir/ E sovent suleit avenir,/ Humes plusurs garval devindrent/ E es boscages meisun tindrent.

It is a certain thing, and within the knowledge of all, that many a christened man has suffered this change, and ran wild in woods.

Toward the end of the story, the wise counsellor raises the possibility that the docile wolf is actually a man who is under a spell and suggests that the king question the woman he attacked (8:240-260):

"Sire, fet il, entent a mei!/ ceste beste ad esté od vu;/ N'i ad ore celui de nus/ Ki ne l'eit veü lungement/ E pres de lui ale sovent:/… Meinte merveille avum veüe,/ Ki en Bretaigne est avenue".

"Sire, hearken now to me. This beast is always with you, and there is not one of us all who has not known him for long. He goes in and out amongst us, nor has molested any man, neither done wrong or felony to any…For many a strange deed has chanced, as well we know, in this marvellous land of Brittany."

In the Jewish version, it is similarly clear that such strange deeds are known, and therefore their feasibility should not be questioned. The tale relates that the king went out hunting on a snowy winter day and took his pet wolf with him. Suddenly, he saw the wolf using its paw to trace words in the snow in an unfamiliar language that later turned out to be Hebrew. The king looks on is astonishment and says (227 178b):[[21]](#footnote-21)

דאש מוש ניט גלייך זאך זיין דאש דער וואלף שריבין קיין פֿיל לייכֿט אישט ער פֿור פֿלוכֿט ווארדן אונט זייא איין מענש גיוועזן וויא וואל מער דינגש אלזו גישעהן איזט

There’s something wondrous here—a wolf that can write! Perhaps he’s really a human being under a curse! Such things have happened in the past.

In both stories, the king’s reaction to the discovery that the beast employs human means of expression leads to an obvious conclusion: the texts are metaphorical. In other words, neither Bisclavret nor the rabbi were actually transformed into animals, but at most, displayed bestial qualities. By way of comparison, consider the debate over the meaning of the cryptic Biblical verse, “All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar” (Daniel 4:25). The king was boasting about the grandeur of Babylon with its great palaces and buildings, and believed that this earned him a seat in Heaven. Daniel, called to interpret a bad dream he had had, declared that he would be punished by God for his pride: “That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven” (Daniel 4:22). Nebuchadnezzar’s punishment for his megalomaniacal aspirations was thus to be stripped of his human intellect, shackled in chains of iron and copper, treated like an animal, and live with the beasts of the field for seven years. The Jewish Sages tended to interpret this verse literally: God would transform him from a king into a beast in order to teach him a lesson about his place in the world. However, commentators such as Rabbi Saadia ben Yosef Gaon (9-10th centuries) and Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel (15th century) rejected this interpretation. According to the former, Nebuchadnezzar did not undergo a physical change, but rather became bestial in character, that is, his mind became muddled and he lost any semblance of humanity. After seven years, he would come back to his senses. Similarly, Rabbi Abarbanel firmly speaks out against any supernatural interpretation, stating that it is nonsense. Nebuchadnezzar was never turned into an ox and his soul never left his body to enter that of a bull because those are fantasies. Instead, stories of people being transformed into beasts are allegories. A woman will turn a man who pursues her into an ass without sense in his head and he will act like an animal, but his nature and species will not change.[[22]](#footnote-22)

**Lycanthropy and the Wolf Moon**

Up until the nineteenth century, lycanthropy was considered a mental illness known particularly for delusions of transformation.[[23]](#footnote-23) The symptoms included the belief that one bore the characteristics culturally identified with a feral wolf, including an uncontrollable lust for blood and human flesh, and the urge to kill solely to satisfy an appetite for cruelty and cannibalism. Hastings notes that the source of this extreme behavior lies in the degradation of the personality deriving from depression and a tendency toward melancholy.[[24]](#footnote-24) Sufferers from the disease were generally men who attacked other people in a sudden bout of rage, especially in winter. They tended to hide in cemeteries and in places remote from human habitation. After spending long periods of time in nature, their hair naturally grew wild and they came to resemble animals. Throughout Europe, there were reports of vicious attacks by creatures identified as werewolves. I would suggest that the two tales under discussion here similarly allude to a disorder that leads to bestial aggression expressed in violent outbursts. Thus, although the text centers around events with supernatural elements, the metatext describes a Lycanthropy breakdown in trust between a couple as a result of the wife’s aversion to the egregious qualities of her husband, who is deemed to be ill (either physically or mentally). In “Bisclavret,” it might be an unattractive skin disease, which is hinted at in three ways. First, it is said that Bisclavret is away from home for three days every week. Both folktales and bestiaries indicated that werewolves underwent their metamorphosis under the full moon (i.e., once a month), when they were unable to control their ferocious behavior. The second hint is contained in his wife’s reaction to her husband’s confession that he is a werewolf. Although she is dismayed and becomes “sanguine of visage,” (reference?) she does not flee in fear as might be expected, but “turned over in her mind, this way and that, how best she could get her from him” (8: 97-99). As I see it, both these instances suggest that the husband’s “lupinity” may have served Marie as a powerful poetic solution for the depiction of a physical defect or disease that affects the body (e.g., plague, leprosy, ergotism

or malaria) and causes severe discomfort, forcing Bisclavret to distance himself from human company and remove his clothes in an effort to seek relief.

It is also possible that Bisclavret came to resemble an animal. The clothes stolen by his wife (compelling him to remain in the forest for a year) are analogous to his human identity, which is restored the moment they are returned to him. During the time he spent in the forest (similar to the rabbi, who is in the wood for four years), he was forced to survive in the wild, and his neglected appearance made him so animal-like that he was virtually unrecognizable as a human being. This is in line with the “historical” reports of sightings of werewolves, as well as with the Biblical description of the King of Babylon:

The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws.

After seven years, his reason returned to him and he resumed the throne.[[25]](#footnote-25)

George Duby contends that in the Middle Ages, the outer body was indicative of the inner being.[[26]](#footnote-26) Form, including aesthetic beauty and physical proportions, were seen as a mirror of the soul reflecting the measure of internal perfection and harmony, and even as an external expression of the cosmic, that is, divine, order. In this sense, form has significant in*form*ative value, providing information about the person “clad” in the body. Umberto Eco makes a similar assertion, citing Thomas Aquinas, who stated that form is determined by measure or modus. God grants external form to the spirit, which is the fundamental essence of the human being (primary animate). Consequently, an individual’s form is not arbitrary. People are granted an appearance that reflects the inner qualities of the soul, thereby maintaining perfect harmony, in the divine sense, between the external and the internal.[[27]](#footnote-27)

The third hint at an illness in the metatext can be found in the final lines of the lai, or more accurately, in what they do not say. There is no indication that the hero of the story can now control the phenomenon, has been released from the spell or curse, or has recovered. This stands in contrast to Mélion and the rabbi, both of whom control the transformation by means of an object. As I see it, once Bisclavret’s secret is revealed to all, there is no longer a need to hide it. The man who wished solely not to be a burden on his family is now recognized for what he is: a man who, although afflicted with an illness, is a positive and honorable human being (in the Celtic tradition). The king embraces him fondly, freeing him of the fear of the same rejection, ostracism, and condemnation that he received from his wife.

**Finds or Have Found?**

The driving force behind the turning point in all three versions of the narrative is the creature’s resourcefulness which, after trials and tribulations, ultimately leads to the restoration of his human form. Mélion the wolf behaves like a pet dog, sticking so close to King Arthur that he is allowed to accompany him to the palace. In the Jewish version, in their third encounter, the king’s advisor (later to become king) pleads with God to save him from the beast, and in return swears not to go after him anymore. Hearing this, the wolf releases his hold and begins wagging his tail. The frightened man tries to keep him away, but the wolf trots after him like a loyal dog after his master. The same pattern of behavior appears in “Bisclavret” as well. After a year of living as an animal, Bisclavret sees the king in the forest and acts like a loyal dog (8: 145-160):

Des quë il ad le rei choisi,/ vers lui curut quere merci./ Il aveit pris par sun estrié,/ la jambe li baise e li pié./ Li rei le vit, grant poür ad;/ ses compainuns tuz apelad:/ “Seignurs, fet il, avant venez!/ Ceste merveillë esagrdez,/ cum ceste beste h’humilie!/ Ele ad sen de hume, merci crie./ Chaciez mei tuz ces chiens ariere,/ Si gardez que hum ne la fiere!/ Ceste beste ad entente e sen./ Espleitez vus! Alum nus en!/ A la beste durrai ma pes,/ kar jeo ne chcerai hui mes”.

When Bisclavaret looked upon his master, he ran to him for pity and for grace. He took the stirrup within his paws, and fawned upon the prince’s foot. The King was very fearful at this sight, but presently he called his courtiers to his aid.

“Lords,” cried he, “hasten hither, and see this marvellous thing. Here is a beast who has the sense of man. He abases himself before his foe, and cries for mercy, although he cannot speak. Beat off the hounds, and let no man do him harm. We will hunt no more today.”

In all three texts, the narrative continues following the same formula. As soon as the king takes the wolf as a pet, he behaves like a loyal dog and does not leave his side. When each of the kings realizes that the tame wolf is actually a human being under a spell, he compels the unfaithful wife (each in his own way) to remove the curse and restore her husband to human form. At this point, each of the versions deals in a different way with the dispensing of justice, so that the punishment is in line with the conventional beliefs and opinions in the society in which the story was told. In “Bisclavret,” the earliest version, the wife is first punished in the king’s court, where she is attacked viciously by the wolf and her nose is bitten off. She and her second lord are then exiled from the realm, and for generations to come, their daughters were born without a nose.

As we have seen, in “Mélion” the wife gets away with no punishment at all. In the Jewish tale, after the rabbi returns home triumphantly, he uses the magic ring to turn his wife into a donkey for the rest of her life. This grave act represents a significant change in the narrative that sheds light on the complex connection between popular folkloristic beliefs and human behavior.

Certain features of the narrative in “Bisclavret” attribute to the wife the characteristics of a faithful dog. She pleads with her husband to reveal his secret because of her loyalty to him (8: 79-88):

“Sir, la dame li respunt,/ jeo vus eim plus que tut le munde!/ Nel me devez nient celer,/ ne mei de nul rien duter:/ Ne semblereit pas amistre./ Qu’ai jeo forfeit? Pour queil peche/ me dutez vus de nule rien?/ Dites le mei, si ferez bien!/”

"Husband," replied the lady to him, "I love you better than all the world. The less cause have you for doubting my faith, or hiding any tittle from me. What savour is here of friendship? How have I made forfeit of your love; for what sin do you mistrust my honour? Open now your heart, and tell what is good to be known."

Her behavior, however, indicates that she is not what she proclaims to be. The narrative symmetry can be read as similar to a fable. Biologically speaking, the wolf and the dog are both members of the canine family. But in symbolic-archetypal terms, the wolf is ferocious, uncontrollable, and incapable of being tamed, whereas the dog is faithful and obedient. It goes without saying that in a fable, the conventional universal image of an animal is used symbolically, not necessarily relating directly to the creature itself, but to human types and personality traits, whether positive or negative. In number 26 in Marie’s *Fables*, she tells of a confrontation between a dog and a wolf in which she maintains the familiar symbolic-archetypal scheme.[[28]](#footnote-28) This is evidence that Marie not only understood what the animals represented, but also created an intriguing narrative symmetry dealing with the struggle between species. This symmetry supports my major contention here: while the supernatural elements in these stories may stretch the limits of reality as we know it, their focus is human nature, the circumstances, and ultimate justice (the principle of reward and punishment). The narrative formulae are comprised of the structured sequence that typically presents a mystery and its resolution, with the main reason for the lack of trust and/or tension in the couple being the man’s appearance. Thus, notwithstanding Marie’s detailed description of the biological/zoological characteristics of a werewolf, and the vivid narrations of the rabbi’s behavior as a blood-thirsty wolf in the forest, the axis around which the tales are constructed is an anthropomorphic symbolism, that is, not the natural world, but human nature. The reason for the metamorphosis is not the same in the different versions, but the moral is identical. It appears explicitly in the Jewish tale (227 180b):

דער הוט שלמה מלך גיזאגט מן זול קיינים ווייב קיין סוד פֿאר טרויאן העט ער אויך ניט זיינים ווייב דען סוד מיט דעם פֿינגרליין ניט פֿאר טרויאט זא ווער ער ניט אין דיא צרה קומן דאש ער העט מיזן [!] אים וואלד אום לפֿין.

That is why King Solomon said that one should never entrust a secret to one’s wife. For if the rabbi had not told his wife the secret of the wishing-ring, he would have been spared his ordeal and not have had to run about in the woods.

The story has a “happy end,” concluding with a moral based on the principle of justice in the folktale (ibid.):

אביר ער ביצאלט זיא ווידר דש היישט רעכֿט עש גידאכֿט מענכֿר איין גראב אונ' גרובט איינים אנדרין בֿור אונ' ער בֿלט זוילדרט דארין.

But in the end he paid her back what she deserved. For, as it is written in the book of Psalms, “he made a pit, and dug it, and he has fallen into the pit that he made.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

**Misogyny or Feminine Cunning**

The polar opposites of the virtuous husband and the immoral wife, a popular motif, appears in both texts. As Starck-Adler notes, the Judeo-Christian narrative tradition tends to blacken the name of women, framing them as witches or malicious figures with diabolical powers.[[30]](#footnote-30) The woman, in the service of Satan, is the instigator, the motivating force behind the demonic transformation. It is she who causes the man to become a beast, the beast to become a man, or both. In folktales, the wife’s transformation of a man into a wolf is not an arbitrary act, but is meant to humiliate him and is associated with sexuality and their intimate relations.[[31]](#footnote-31) This completes the equation between the husband hero-victim, the wicked wife, and the troubled marriage. While the twelfth century is known as a cultural golden age thanks to the generous patronage of Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughter Marie, Countess of Champagne, their influence did not go beyond the arts. Indeed, there is nothing in the popular courtly literature to indicate a change in the status of women or in the male attitude toward them. Shulamith Shahar claims that in the Middle Ages, the Church regarded marriage as a human weakness aimed primarily at “prevention of sin, procreation, and companionship.” Citing St. Paul, she states that “a parallel is drawn between the link between husband and wife and that between Christ and the Church: ‘Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body’ (Ephesians 5:22-3).”[[32]](#footnote-32) Unlike the husband, the wife, by definition, was inferior, since she chose not to be a nun, who takes an oath of chastity and is the bride of Christ and therefore “cannot become an adulteress, she is pure and cannot be contaminated.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Moreover, Shahar notes that some church fathers favored only a basic education for women that would enable them, at most, to promote their modesty and piety. Others firmly opposed the idea of giving women, including noble women, any education at all, because if they knew how to read they could read love letters, and if they knew how to write they could write them, and thereby bring shame upon their family and society as a whole.[[34]](#footnote-34) Thus, the default state of a married woman was moral inferiority to her husband, whose role was to dominate her for her own good. To further demonstrate this point, consider the words of Thomas Aquinas (a contemporary of Marie’s) in answer to Question 92, “The Production of the Woman”:[[35]](#footnote-35)

As regards the individual nature, woman is defective and misbegotten, for the active power in the male seed tends to the production of a perfect likeness in the masculine sex; while the production of woman comes from defect in the active power, or from some material indisposition, or even from some external influence…So…woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates.

In the bestiary written by Isidore of Seville, lupinity is identified etymologically with a negative female trait. The author states that foolish women (or prostitutes) are known as wolves (*louves*), which is the common term for women who destroy the virtue of the men who fall in love with them due to their tendency to spend all of their lovers’ fortune.[[36]](#footnote-36) This hostile attitude was also typical of the Jewish community. In a discussion of folktales adapted to Jewish society, Elie Yassif explains precisely who is directly to blame:[[37]](#footnote-37)

While the misogynistic tales in Jewish and Christian folk culture are indeed similar, their respective practical implications as construed by the religious leadership were at odds: In Judaism, marriage was an obligation, according to the ancient principle matza or motze?...A successful marriage, or its failure, was seen as the hand of destiny or of Divine Providence. Conversely, in medieval Christianity, the most extreme conclusion was sought from the image of woman as reflected in folk culture—separation of the sexes. Marriage was only sanctioned out of necessity.

The two stories under discussion here display the androcentric principle Yassif describes, exposing the true nature of the woman by relying on the symbolic images of animals drawn from fables. They begin with descriptions of the woman as treacherous, cruel, and ruthless, qualities associated in the culture with the wolf, even if she pretends to be as faithful as a dog, a wife protecting the integrity of her family. And both tales conclude with moralistic insights, much like a parable, whose value lies in the moral of the story. Outwardly, Bisclavret appears to his neighbors to prefer his freedom and independence to his marriage, not disclosing the reasons for his frequent absences. He later takes on the form of a vicious beast, only to be revealed at the end to be a feudal knight by nature, a man devoted to his family and king. His wife is the opposite, She clads herself for all to see in the guise of a loyal wife defending her home, but inside she is as faithless, cruel, and merciless as a wolf. In contrast, in the Jewish tale, the wife is not promiscuous (associated with witches in Jewish folklore), nor is she cunning and manipulative like a wolf (*louve*). Rather, in defiance of the spirit of the Jewish community, she “looked askance” at her husband’s good deeds, and in the end she is turned into a donkey. Furthermore, it is her husband, the learned and revered rabbi, who imposes on her the punishment “she deserved.” Battina Knapp sees an affinity between this transformation and Balaam’s ass (Num. 22: 24). The folktale, she contends, deals not with marriage, but with the honor and status of a man in the community. “Both Balaam and the rabbi,” she claims, “reveal a sense of shame and embarrassment at the thought of removing their persona. Neither is willing to speak the truth: the former is fearful of Balak’s scorn and anger and his own loss of prestige, the latter unwilling to cope with the jeers and recriminations his poverty might bring to him. Both men are not only fundamentally greedy and envious, but their haughtiness prevents them from seeing clearly into the truth of their own smudged psyches. Balaam and the rabbi are unable to face a world in which—as they see it—their reputations will be sullied.[[38]](#footnote-38) I believe this is only a partial interpretation, as Knapp views the function of the donkey (the woman) in the story merely as a means of conveying a moral lesson regarding the place or status of the rabbi (the man).[[39]](#footnote-39) As I interpret it, turning the woman into a donkey is a reflection of the patriarchal attitude that prevailed in the period of the Enlightenment and condemned the woman and her body. The rabbi is given divine confirmation of his place in society. After the king and his advisor realize that he is under a spell and find a way to restore him to human form, he is welcomed back into his community with joy and honor. The wife, however, is not pardoned, and there is no way for her to reverse her condition. The wife in Bisclavret similarly receives an extremely harsh punishment. Her nose is bitten off, she is exiled from the land with her lover, and her daughters and her daughters’ daughters are doomed to be born without noses. Cutting off a woman’s nose and expulsion from her husband’s household was, indeed, the accepted punishment for adultery. Shahar explains that in some regions men were given lighter punishments not because of the attitude or laws of the Church, but because of the superior status of men in society in general.[[40]](#footnote-40) Similarly, the wife in the Jewish version of the narrative is punished for her crime by the rabbi, thirsting for revenge. Seemingly, her crime was to cause him to be trapped in the form of wolf. In fact, however, it was to disclose his shame in public in a desire to condemn him for his uselessness and inability to fulfill his duties as rabbi of the community. His response is to put a curse on her, turning her into a donkey:

שטט קאם וואונשט ער וועט זוט ראש איין ווייב (יימח שמה) איין איגלין ווער אונ' שטענד אים שטל אונ' עש מיט דען אנדרן בהמות אויש דער קריפין אלש ער ראש ווארט קום אויז זישערכן הט דא ווארד

I wish to God that my wife, damn her soul, would turn into a donkey. Let her stand in the stable and eat from the trough with the other beasts.

Confining the wife in the stable with the other beasts is a reflection of her husband’s world view, which is supported by a community that considers women to be inherently inferior to men. The donkey is regarded as a slow, lazy, stubborn beast, befuddled, and lacking in sense, but physically strong. It can only be of benefit as a work animal. The rabbi thus chooses a punishment that will both humiliate his wife and serve his needs, using the donkey to haul bricks to construct a synagogue for the community (which will also enhance his reputation). The end of the tale is predictable. When the synagogue is completed, the rabbi holds a large banquet and invites his wife’s family. There he reveals why the woman has disappeared. They plead with him to forgive her and assure him that she will never do it again, but he refuses, claiming that he cannot trust her. And so his “wicked” wife is destined to live out her life as a donkey.

In a survey of ancient Jewish literature, David Rotman explains that tales of transformation were written from the “male gaze,” which by nature objectifies women. This led to their physical transformation into a passive object with no free will, history, or capacity to resist. According to Rotman, the irreversible erotic-violent act against women accentuates the condensed narrative typical of the poetics of the German pietists. He offers the example of the tale of a sorcerer who turned daughters of Israel into donkeys, probably written by Yehuda he-Hasid in 1217, which he claims is a religious response to the proximity of two Biblical taboos: intercourse with an animal and the existence of sorcerers or witches.[[41]](#footnote-41) In other words, an analogy of opposites is created between the controlling male and the controlled female. The husband imposes a passivity on his wife that strips her of her humanity, at the same time enslaving her innate desire for an active role by controlling the magic power that has fallen into his hands and that enables him to reveal how he actually sees her, which presumably was previously kept hidden.[[42]](#footnote-42) Yassif sums up this idea in the insights he draws from the novella “Solomon’s Three Counsels,” stating that the contradiction between the Jewish obligation to marry and perception of the woman’s evil nature is an expression of the deeply rooted tension in the Jewish versions of misogynist narratives in general society.[[43]](#footnote-43)

I would like to conclude with a point worth considering. It might be possible to give the wives a degree of credit for their actions if it could be shown that they were survival strategies rather than evidence of their moral inferiority. However, in the spirit of their time, the tales leave no room for such mercy. While the husbands are granted forgiveness and receive the blessing of the king and/or the community, the wives are sentenced to drastic punishment for the rest of their lives. There is no absolution for their sins.

1. Moritz Güdemann, *Ha-Torah Veha-hayim Bi-yeme Ha-Benayim Be-Tsarfat Ve-Ashkenaz* [The Torah and Life in the Middle Ages in France and Germany], A. S. Friedman, Trans. (Tel Aviv: Mada ve-Sifrut Le-Am, 1968), 157 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. R. Ya’kov, for R. Avraham of Mezeritch (Ed.), *Ma’asei Buch*, (Basel, 1602), Tale 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a biography of Marie de France and historical background of her work, see R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Richard Johnson, “What is Culture Studies Anyway?” (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1983), 10-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. J. A. MacCulloch, “Lycanthropy,” in: James Hastings (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, VIII* (New York: Charles Scriber and Sons, 1915), 206-220; Digital copy "Lycanthropy": <https://archive.org/stream/encyclopaediaofr08hastuoft#page/214/mode/2up/search/lycanthropy>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. David Shyovitz, “Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Werewolf Renaissance” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol 75, No 4 (October, 2014), 528-531. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Joseph Dan, *Hasidut Ashkenaz be-Toldot ha-Machshava he-Yehudit* (The German Piestists in the History of Jewish Thought), (Tel Aviv: Open University, 1990, Vol. 1, 84, 120; Vol. 2, 178-1192. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Elie Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), 352. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, A. D. Melville (Trans.), 1: 230-9, https://www.theoi.com/Text/OvidMetamorphoses1.html [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Guigemar*, in: Jean Rychner (Ed*.), Les Lais de Marie de France*, (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1978), v. 239-240; For the controversy over which of Ovid’s books Marie is referring too, see: Logan E. Whalen, *Marie de France and the Poetics of Memory*, (Washington D.C: The Catholic Univerity of America Press, 2008), 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2001), 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See among others: Pierre de Beauvais, “Bestiaire,” in: Gabriel Bianciotto (Ed. and Trans.), *Bestiaires du Moyen Age*, (Paris: Stock+Moyen Age, 1980); De Fournival, *Le Bestiaire d`Amour Suivi de la Réspone de la Dame*, in: *Gallica*: Bibliothéque Nationale de France: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1304386>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Marie de France, *Fables*, Charles Bruker (Trans.), (Paris: Peeters, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Jean Rychner, *Les Lais de Marie de France* **(**Paris, Honoré Champion, 1978); *French Mediaeval Romances: From the Lays of Marie de France*, Eugene Mason (Trans.), (1911); https://www.gutenberg.org/files/11417/11417-h/11417-h.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Artisans who made charcoal from the wood they gathered in the forest. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Jonah Frankel, *Sipor ha-Aggadah—Ahdut shel Tzura ve-Tokhen* (The Folktale—Unity of Form and Content), (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2004), 295 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. “Lai de Mélion,” in: Alexandre Micha (Trans.), *Lais Féeriques des XII et XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1992), 257-292. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. MacCulloch, 1915: pp. 84-85; “The Story about a Wolf that Talked to a Priest,” in: Bynum, , 2001, 15-18 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. In: Jean Rychner, *Les Lais de Marie de France* (Paris: Champion, 1981), 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. H. W. Bailey, “Bisclavret in Marie de France,” *Cambridge Medieval Studies*, 1 (1981), 95-97; William Sayers, “Bisclavret in Marie de France: A Reply,” *Cambridge Medieval Studies*, 4 (1982), 77-82. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. I would like to thank Noga Rubin for helping me to read and understand the ancient Yiddish text, English: http://www.brooklyn.net/classes/y371/texts\_371/werewolf.html [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Rabbi Isaac ben Judah Abarbanel, *Ma’ayanei he-Yeshu’ah: Peirush al Sefer Daniel* [The Wellsprings of Salvation: Commentary on the Book of Daniel]. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. In contrast to lupus, an autoimmune disease in which the body’s immune system attacks healthy tissue and which may cause a dark rash on the face. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Hastings, 1915, 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Daniel 4: 30, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. George Duby, *The History of Private Life Revelations of the Medieval World*(Arthur Goldhammer, Trans.), (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 522; Sharon Kinoshita and Peggy McCracken, *Marie de France: A Critical Companion*(Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer), 68-72, 170-171. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Umberto Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* (Hugh Bredin, Trans.), (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 34, 66-69, 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Marie de France, *Les Fables* (Charles Brucker trans.), (Paris: Peeters, 1998), 136-138. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Compare: “Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him”(Prov. 26:27). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Astrid Starck-Adler, “Mayse-Bukh and Metamophosis,” in *Bulletin du Centre de Recherche Francais a Jerusalem* (Jerusalem, 2001), 17-156 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Starck-Adler, 2001,156-158. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middfle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1983), 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid., 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., 139-140. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. *The Summa Theological of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Fathers of the English Domincan Province (Trans.), (Notre Dame IN: Christian Classics, 1981), 466-467. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Stephen A. Barney (Ed. and Trans.), *The "Etymologies" of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 225; Peggy McCracken, *In the Skin of the Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France*(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Yassif, 1999, 348. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Battina Knapp, "The Rabbi Who Was Turned into a Werewolf: The Medieval Shadow/ Anima/Animus at Work," in:*Manna and Mystery: A Jungian Approach to Hebrew Myth and Legend* (Asheville NC: Chiron Publications, 1995), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Ibid., 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Shahar, 1990, 100. I would like to voice a reservation here. It may be possible to find Medieval literature in which the woman is not humiliated or enslaved. However, Bisclavret represents a prevalent attitude toward women in general, and married women in particular. According to R. Howard Bloch, the gap between the genders represents the leitmotif of *mal mariée* (familiar from folk literature), which he identifies in all twelve of Marie’s lais: “The women of the Lais are unhappy, first of all, because they are imprisoned. Sometimes imprisonment takes the form merely of close suveillance…[Sometimes] the husband…has placed his wife in a maximum security prison de luxe…We see in Marie as good a representation of the feudal, aristocratic model of marriage as can be found in Old French literature.” R. Howard Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie de France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003),58, 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. David Rotman, *Drakonim, Shedim ve-Mehozot Kesumim: Al ha-Mufla be-Sipoor ha-Ivri ha-Kadoom* [Dragons, Demons and Magical Worlds: On the Marvelous in the Ancient Jewish Tale), (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 2016), 137-138 [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid., 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Yassif, 2016, 377. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)