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HENEVELD (Amy), « Eating your lover's otherness. The narrative theme of the Eaten Heart in the *Lai d'Ignaure* »

RÉSUMÉ – Le cœur mangé est un thème narratif cannibale qui apparaît régulièrement dans une variété de textes médiévaux. Comme histoire d'amour, le conte est un rappel macabre des plaisirs et des peines de l'amour. Dans le *Lai d'Ignaure*, l'auteur infuse le tragique avec le comique, créant une tension interprétative pour le lecteur. Par la représentation du désir féminin, le cannibalisme devient une métaphore pour l'amour et la lecture, enseignant comment effacer la distance entre soi et l'autre.

ABSTRACT – The Eaten Heart is a cannibalistic narrative theme that appears regularly in a range of medieval writings. As a love story, it's a gruesome reminder of both the pleasures and the pains of love. In the *Lai d'Ignaure*, the author infuses the tragic with the comedic, creating a tension for the reader around how to interpret the tale. Through the representation of female desire, cannibalism becomes a metaphor for love and reading, teaching how to erase the distance between self and other.

EATING YOUR LOVER'S OTHERNESS

The narrative theme of the Eaten Heart in the *Lai d'Ignaure*

The Eaten Heart is a narrative motif that appears repeatedly in the written record of medieval French literature: first sung by Yseut in Thomas' *Tristan*, it appears in the *vida* of troubadour named Guillem de Cabestaing, in a short *lai*, and in several longer romances[1]. It was persistently rewritten in a range of genres up until at least the nineteenth century[2]. As its name suggests, it describes a love story with a morbid end. A jealous husband takes revenge on his adulterous wife by killing her lover, having his heart and occasionally other body parts cooked and feeding it to her. In its medieval context, female desire thus explicitly frames the story and its proscriptive lesson initially appears to be straightforward, especially as female readers or listeners may have understood it: be true to your matrimonial vows and accept constraints on your desire or suffer the consequences. Yet the tale also glorifies erotic love, through the sacrifice of the lovers, and thus the message of the tale seems ambiguous. In this article I would like to suggest that medieval readers and writers might have repeatedly returned to this motif not because of how it expresses taboo desires in order to proscribe them but because it articulates, through love, the possibility of an egalitarian relationship between self and other. From sexual communion to alimentary ingestion, might cannibalism in the context of erotic love teach us something about how to relate to the other as no different from the self?

1 For two in depth repertories, along with excellent readings of the myth in its different incarnations, see L. Rossi, "Suggestion métaphorique et réalité historique dans la légende du Cœur mangé", *Micrologus*, 11, 2003, p. 469-500 and M. Di Febo, "Ignauré: La parodie 'dialectique' ou le détournement du symbolisme courtois", *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 5, 1998, p. 167-201.

2 J. Bohnengel, *Das gegessene Herz: eine europäische Kulturgeschichte vom Mittelalter bis zum 19. Jahrhunderg: Herzmäre – Le cœur mangé – il cuore mangiato – The eaten heart*, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2016.

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In the past twenty years, two critics have proposed to read the motif as it allows for the expression of repressed desire, broadly defined[3]. In an article that considers the motif from an anthropological perspective, published in 1991, Jean-Jacques Vincensini summarizes how its elements speak to broader human concerns, since similar tales have been traced outside of the Indo-European tradition, in an Eskimo story, for example, and in two tales from the Pacific Islands. The author turns to the *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, where S. Thompson categorized it in the following way: "Q478.1. The Eaten Heart. Adulteress is caused unwittingly to eat her lover's heart (Sometimes other parts of the body[4])". He identifies three taboos around which the tale turns: the breaking of matrimonial vows, the killing of another human, and the involuntary ingestion of a cooked part of an eroticized human object, the lover. This last transgression mirrors the first, since it stands in as a trope for the sexual act itself, the adultery that begins the story and that leads to a jealous and violent act of revenge. The cannibalistic act thus mirrors the sexual union of the lovers, with a disjunction in between, the murder of the lover.

Simon Gaunt's psychoanalytic reading of the tale, especially the troubadour versions, underlines the latter thematic, stressing how the lover "wants to be devoured since incorporation is the ultimate sign of love, while she proves that she loves him enough to eat him[5]". In this reading the lovers are diametrically opposed and fixed, passive and active: it is the man's ultimate desire to be eaten and the woman's ultimate desire to consume her lover. He sees this as one of the structural elements of courtly love, the shadow side to the *amor de loin* trope. Poetic discourse is the void around which this exchange is built, and the text is the

3 J.-J. Vincensini, "Figure de l'imaginaire et figure du discours. Le motif du 'Cœur Mangé' dans la narration médiévale", *Le "cuer" au Moyen Âge: Réalité et Senefiance*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses universitaires de Provence, 1991, p. 439-459; S. Gaunt, "'Le cœur a ses raisons…': Guillem de Cabestanh et l'évolution du thème du cœur mangé", *Scène, évolution, sort de la langue et de la littérature d'oc: Actes du Septième Congrès International de l'Association Internationale d'Études Occitanes, Regio Calabria-Messina, 7-3 juillet 2002*, ed. R. Castano, S. Guida and F. Latella, Rome, Viella, t. 1, p. 363-373. A version of this article was also published in English, and for ease of citation this is the one I will be referring to: S. Gaunt, "Exposing the Secrets of the Heart in Medieval Narrative", *Exposure*, ed. K. Banks and J. Harris, Bern, Peter Lang, 2004, p. 109-123.

4 S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1956, p. 238.

5 Gaunt, "Exposing the Secrets of the Heart", p. 110.

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realization of the desire of the courtly lover, the troubadour writer whose work becomes a monument to his life and love. Indeed, at the end of the *vida* a monument is built to the lovers so that all true lovers can remember them. Like Vincensini's narratological and anthropological understanding of the story, this reading also monumentalizes its meaning: both literary lovers get what they have longed for, to be eaten and to eat, while the text celebrates their mutual sacrifice for love. Desire thus finds an ethical solution and resolution in the tale, one that is only possible, however, in the world of the fictionalized life of the male poet.

Yet once the story told and this literary monument constructed, why does the tale continue to fascinate both writers and readers? The earliest mention of the narrative in Old French comes from Thomas's version of the Tristan and Yseut myth. It is Yseut who, alone in her room and longing for Tristan while he is off fighting a giant, sings a *lai*, the *Lai de Guirun*[6]. Tristan, who has married the other Yseut, "aux blanches mains", is unable to satisfy Yseut's desire and cannot come to her. Her longing is explicit, she desires only him:

Ysolt en sa chambre suspire
Pur Tristran qu'ele tant desire;
Ne puet en sun cue[r] el penser
Fors ço sulment: Tristran amer.
Ele nen ad altre voleir
Në altre amur në altre espier.
En lui est trestuit sun desir
E ne puet rien de lui oïr[7]. (v. 703-709)

Yseut, in her chamber, sighed
for Tristran, the object of her deep longing;
all her heart could think of was
loving Tristran.
She had no other desire,
no other love or fancy.
All her longing was for him alone,
and yet she could learn no news of him[8].

6 For a fascinating reading of this example of the theme in this context, which seeks to identify the classical metaphor at the heart of it, see Rossi, "Suggestion métaphorique", p. 477-483.

7 *Thomas'* Tristan, ed. S. Gregory, *Early French Tristan Poems*, ed. N. J. Lacy, vol. 2, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 1998, p. 3-174, at p. 42.

8 If not stated otherwise, all translations into English are mine.

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After this passage, the reader learns of Tristan's adventures, which involve fighting a giant who wants King Arthur's beard[9]. Over a hundred lines later, we return to Yseut, who is singing a "lai pitus d'amour[10]". Here the reader finds an eight-line resume of the Eaten Heart narrative, which Yseut sings with an instrument, her voice low and her hands beautiful[11]. It is interesting that, in order to express her longing and unfulfilled desire, Yseut sings the tale of a male protagonist, Guirun, who is betrayed and whose heart is fed to his lover. As we shall see, in the *Lai d'Ignaure*, a male narrator sings of female desire to reflect his own.

The *Lai d'Ignaure*, the second Old French incarnation of the tale, has been read as an expression of medieval misogyny and a mockery of renewed female religious piety[12]. Both these readings, however, refuse to consider the cannibalistic act as anything other than an obscene gesture towards the people who are tricked into it: the twelve ladies who love Ignaure adulterously. In order to do so, they minimize the importance of the female agency that runs throughout the work, from the vocal, active female lovers at the beginning of the text to the twelve verses these twelve female bodies compose at the end of the tale to commemorate their despair. When taken into consideration, these meaningful representations of female desire allow for a positive reading of the cannibalistic act that ends the story. The tale becomes an important lesson on an important principle of love: unity.

One hint that the cannibalism in medieval versions of the Eaten Heart theme must be read as more than an atrocious punishment or ironic mockery comes from earlier uses of the theme in classical literature[13]. In the classical narratives that include acts of anthropophagy, most notably the story of Thyestes who is punished for his adultery, or

9 Rossi interprets the passage as symbolic of castration ("Suggestion métaphorique", p. 478). This interpretation is meaningful in relation to Tristan, who cannot and will not make love to his new wife, the new Yseut, and of course to Yseut's choice of *lai*.

10 *Thomas'* Tristan, v. 834-843.

11 "Ysolt chante molt dulcement, / La voiz acorde a l'estrument. / Les mains sunt bel[e]s, li lais buens, / Dulce la voiz [e] bas li tons." *Thomas'* Tristan, v. 844-847.

12 R. H. Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 126-128; B. Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular against the Sacred*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2013, p. 174-181.

13 See Rossi for a discussion of the relationship between the theme and the classical tradition ("Suggestion métaphorique", p. 469). He sees the story as the expression of the metaphysical difficulty of describing the highest forms of love: "la tentative vaine de

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Tereus, who is punished for the rape of his sister-in-law Philomela, both characters pay for their crime by unwittingly eating something that belongs to them or is the same as them, their progeny. In these examples, a man is punished for his sexual misconduct by being fed his children; in essence, he eats himself, ending the patrilineal line. With the Eaten Heart theme, the female lover is punished for acting on her adultery but she is forced to eat her beloved other, something that is different from her but which she wants to bring closer. The reader begins to think, just as with the death of Tristan and Yseut, that this is no punishment after all. The story of Philomela, however, does appear as a subtext in the *Lai d'Ignaure*. When introducing the hero, the narrator states that ladies call him *Lousignol*, or *rossignol* in French (v. 37). Here the highly charged symbol of the nightingale orients the reader, signalling to him or her that the tale is one in which various tropes may be expected and enjoyed: the pleasures of May, the exchange of words, and the erotic silence of imagined lovers' meetings. The symbol of the nightingale is an ambivalent one, as it stands at once for the lyrical masculine identity of the poet as well as for female desire, which can still sing despite its brutal loss of voice[14]. This early identification of Ignaure, the lover and poet, with this bird, who represents an earlier metamorphosis of a silenced yet still vocal woman, places the text at a pivotal conjunction where female desire and male poetic voice meet.

In order to understand in what context medieval readers might have come across the tale, I will start with a brief consideration of the *lai* in its material literary context. I first came across the *Lai d'Ignaure* when, at the beginning of my dissertation, I was transcribing the BnF fr. 1553 for an electronic edition for the digital humanities project *Hypercodex*, based at the University of Geneva. This homogeneous compilation manuscript had been selected from a range of thirteenth century collections as promisingly representative of a manuscript tradition that favored diversity. Sometime in the late thirteenth century, somewhere

s'approprier la divinité d'Amour au plus haut degré d'union par le biais paradoxal de la sauvagerie et du cannibalisme."

14 Philomela, whose tongue was removed so she could not tell her tale, narrates to her rape to her sister on a tapestry and they then plan their revenge: W. Pfeffer, *The Change of Philomel: The Nightingale in Medieval Literature*, New York, Peter Lang, 1985, p. 158. For a different reading of this symbol, see Di Febo ("Ignauré", p. 174); Rossi reads it as a "symbol of the mystery of lyric poetry" ("Suggestion métaphorique", p. 485).

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in northern France, a compiler had included this short tragi-comedic tale on love and cannibalism in an illuminated manuscript that contains 53 works, including the *Roman de Troie* by Benoit de Saint Maur, *Barlaam et Josaphat* by Gui de Cambrai, and the *Roman de la violette* by Gerbert de Montreuil. Its compiler brought together courtly romance, epic, history, hagiography and fabliau in a complex composition that favors the weaving together of meaning through productive juxtaposition[15]. The *Lai d'Ignaure* exists only in this collection, where it is situated towards the end of the manuscript, number 35, on folios 485r-488v out of a total of 524. It is at the beginning of what can be qualified as the third section of the manuscript, which, as opposed to the previous two that are more didactic in nature, is devoted to lighter, bawdy and more entertaining works on the topic of love[16].

The *Lai d'Ignaure* is the third work in this section, after two texts on love, *Li lais de l'espine*[17] and *Li flours d'amour*[18]. The first is a Breton *lai* that describes an idyllic love story of loss and reunion while the second is a debate between a lover's body and heart that ends with the death of the lover who despairs that his lady loves others as well as him. Our cannibalistic narrative takes up where the debate ends, rendering the body, the heart and the theme of infidelity all the more material. It also shifts the tone of the discussion: the text it precedes is the fabliau

15 For some readings on this manuscript and its structure, see M. Uhlig, "Un *Voyage en Orient:* Le *Barlaam et Josaphat* de Gui de Cambrai et le manuscrit de Paris BnF, MS Fr. 1553", *D'Orient en Occident: les recueils de fables enchassées avant les* Mille et une nuits *de Galland* (*Barlaam et Josaphat*, *Calila et Dimna*, *Disciplina clericalis*, *Roman des Sept Sages*), ed. M. Uhlig et Y. Foehr-Janssens, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014, p. 351-371; O. Collet, "Du 'manuscrit de jongleur' au 'recueil aristocratique': réflexions sur les premières anthologies françaises", *Le Moyen Âge*, 113, 2007, p. 481-499. For further thoughts on compilation manuscripts during this period, some of which inspired or came out of the *Hypercodex* project, see W. Azzam, O. Collet and Y. Foehr-Janssens, "Les manuscrits littéraires français: Pour une sémiotique du recueil medieval", *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 83, 2005, p. 639-669; O. Collet et Y. Foehr-Janssens, "Cohérence et éclatement: réflexion sur les recueils littéraires du Moyen Âge", *La mise en recueil des textes médiévaux*, ed. X. Leroux, *Babel*, 16, 2007, p. 31-59.

16 On the role of love more broadly in this manuscript and others, see my article on the topic: A. Heneveld, "'Chi commence d'amours', ou commencer pour finir: la place des arts d'aimer dans les manuscrits-recueils du XIIIe siècle", *Le recueil au Moyen Âge: Le Moyen Âge central*, ed. Y. Foehr-Janssen et O. Collet, Turnhout, Brepols, 2010, p. 139-156.

17 A. Hopkins, "Espine", *French Arthurian Literature IV: Eleven Old French Narrative Lays*, ed. G. S. Burgess and L. C. Brook, Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2007, p. 197-242.

18 J. Morawski, "La *Flours d'amour*", *Romania*, 53, 1927, p. 187-197.

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De dant Constant de Hamiel, which mocks adulterers and validates the constancy of the eponymous character, a lady who takes revenge on her would-be seducers by having her husband violate their wives while they watch. The *Lai d'Ignaure* thus seems to mark the passage from a discourse of courtly romantic love to more lurid descriptions of its associated acts in the *fabliau*[19]. As a doctoral transcriber, my own gaze was certainly surprised and shifted. I was fascinated by the passage between the metaphorical heart of the lover in the debate to the literally consumed heart of Ignaure and then to the very incarnated love of the peasant couple in the fabliau. But before we consider in more detail what insights reading these three tales together might allow, let us consider this singular version of the Eaten Heart theme, and how its cannibalism might offer us a key to understanding the broader message about love in the collection.

The *Lai d'Ignaure*, which was written by a certain Renaut[20], tells the story of a valiant knight who wins the love of not one but 12 ladies, who are married to the 12 *pairs* that live in the castle near him[21]. He manages to love all of them simultaneously for a time, until one fateful feast of Saint John when, gathered together in an orchard, one lady, who loves to speak her mind, explains that, because they are all beautiful, joyful and in love, wants to name one woman priest and enact a group confession in order to see who loves the most noble man. The others respond by telling her that she may be priest and she is consistently referred to in this scene as "li prestres", both by the narrator and the women who confess to her (v. 106, 138, 184, 196, 201). She listens to five confessions one by one, at first blushing then becoming angry and incredulous when she realizes that they all name the same man, while they each think that they are his only one. This confessional scene is primarily in direct discourse, as we hear

19 On the *Lai d'Ignaure*'s relationship to the *fabliau*, see N. Zufferey, "Renaut de Bâgé ou les infortunes du gai savoir", *Romania*, 124, 2006, p. 273-300, at p. 291.

20 R. Lejeune, in her 1938 edition, identified the author with Renaut de Beajeu/Bâgé, author of the *Bel Inconnu*, but this attribution no longer stands (Renaut [de Beaujeu], *Le Lai d'Ignaure ou Lai du Prisonnier*, Bruxelles-Liège, Palais des académies, 1938). See Zufferey ("Renaut de Bâgé", p. 288-292) for a detailed description of the text's linguistic traits, which are Picard, and its probable composition date, during the first third of the thirteenth century.

21 "Ignaure", *The Old French Lays of 'Ignaure', 'Oiselet' and 'Amours'*, ed. G. S. Burgess and L. C. Brook, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2010, p. 5-114.

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the leading lady propose the idea, get agreement from the others, and begin to take confession (v. 76-222).

Ignaure, as described by his lovers, is of course exceedingly noble, well learned and courteous, the flower of Brittany, the flower of chivalry, and, most strikingly, the thunderbolt of the land, heartily welcomed by the last lady to speak. These comedic exchanges seem to poke fun at the rite of confession itself: what language might one use to describe love in the context of confession? The 4th Lateran Council decreed in 1215 that priests needed to hear confession once a year, so it is not surprising to find concern about the modality of confession expressed here. The tale seems to ask, what will happen once we all must speak our deepest desires? The lady playing the priest tells the second woman to confess, who comes to her beating her breast, to "beat her bum", rhyming *croupe* with *coupe*[22]. The third lady to confess kisses a ring on her finger when she hears a nightingale sing in the flowering tree under which the "priest" has taken up court (v. 164-166). The tension between courtly love and priestly injunction can indeed be comical. When the last woman to confess weaves an extended metaphor on how Ignaure is like a thunderbolt upon the land, stating that she welcomes his "thunderclaps" and doesn't mind their "bonne fusion" (their multiplication), the "priest" tells her to please stop, to cut to the chase and name her lover: "'Dame, or laissiés ceste raison, / Si nommés le non, douche suer[23]". The satire here seems to fall not on the women, however, since they are simply following their hearts and bodies, but rather on the figure of the priest who the noble lady impersonates and who must bide his tongue while he listens to such diverse expressions of "sin".

After hearing everyone, the "priest" declares to her friends, much to their dismay, that they all love the same man. They decide to arrange a meeting with Ignaure in order to confront him and kill him, arranging to meet in lady Clemence's garden. The priest here is "la prestresse" (v. 285) and once again she speaks first, inviting all the other women to speak as well. This second scene in direct discourse (v. 286-358) is notable for the wide range of emotions exhibited by the women who express their displeasure to him; they show contempt and pride ("desdaigneuse…

22 "Ignaure", v. 123-126: "A la destre main batoit sa coupe. / 'Douche suer, mais batés la crupe, / Ki vous fait faire les pechiés / Dont vostre cors est entechiés.'"

23 "Ignaure", v. 192-193.

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orgilleuse", v. 295-294), jealousy and cruelty ("envie… a cruel chiere", v. 302-303). He naively replies that he loves them all, completely and faithfully, which prompts all the women to begin to scream at him as they draw their knives, preparing to kill him. The name of the garden's proprietor foreshadows what ensues, however. He eloquently declares he loves them all truly and pleads for mercy. Describing himself as a knight on the battlefield, he eloquently begs them to spare his life as he would from a worthy adversary. He concludes by saying he would be a saint in heaven if he were to die by such beautiful hands: "Se je muir a si bieles mains, / G'iere martyrs avoec les sains; / Bien sai que fui nés en bonne eure[24]". These lines foreshadow his demise, as well as suggest the sacramental reading of the tale, in which Ignaure is a figure for Christ[25].

His speech causes them to cry and softens them (*amolliier*, v. 335) and so they decide to let him live, on one condition. He must choose the one he loves best and be faithful to her, for every women wants to have their own lover: "Chascune velt son dru avoir[26]". After insisting that he does not want to abandon any of his loves, he finally complies, but only because the priestess says she will kill him if he does not. Here, once again, she is the priest: "'Fai mon commant', che dis li prestre…" (v. 351). The switch back to a masculine nominative form here strikes the reader who is not surprised to learn that he chooses the very woman who threatens him last, the one who first learned of his multiple loves and here holds discursive power. He says that he is sad to lose the others, but that she is the one that fills him with the most desire.

'Dame', dist il, 'chou estes vous.
De ma perte sui molt dolans
Qu'eles sont toutes molt vaillans,
Mais li vostre amors m'atalente.' (v. 354-357)

'My lady', he said, 'you are the one.
I am very upset over the loss of the others,
Because they are mostly all worthy,
But your love fills me with desire.'

24 "Ignaure", v. 331-333.
25 M. L. Price, *Consuming Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 42-44.
26 "Ignaure", v. 347.

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At this point, about half way through the text, the narrator turns away from the ladies to focus on the discovery of the adultery. This doesn't take very long, because, as the text explains, now that he only has one lover, he must go quite frequently to her. This transition is marked by a proverb, "soris ki n'a c'un trau poi dure", the mouse that only has one hole doesn't last long and with this the narration seems to shift from an implied female reader to an implied male reader. Up until this point, the narrator had sided with the women who loved Ignaure, focusing on their feelings and actions, the confessional scene in the garden and their desire for revenge. The proverb, which causes the reader to identify Ignaure with the unlucky mouse, identifies the women by metonymy with a simplified version of their sexual anatomy, reducing them from their previous active, embodied state. The narrator also refers to the women as "foles" for the first time (v. 376). A few lines later the priestess herself fails to hide what she is doing, "folement se cuevre" (v. 381), and the cruel "losengier" in the castle (v. 378), also referred to as a "lechier", a rogue (v. 384, 392), soon discovers that the Ignaure is coming to her and he tells the lords. He presents the events of the first part of the tale at a dinner of all twelve lords, as a story that will cause anger, but one that is causing him great laughter: a single man is cuckolding them all, but one lady is "sire et mestre", lord and master (v. 412-414). The gathering of the twelve lords echoes the women's gathering in the garden, their game and desire for revenge, yet here the men are listening and reacting, prisoners of their own desire for control. The rogue, by referring to the lady as a master, further stresses her active, desiring role, but according to this masculine company, she has overstepped her bounds. The evil *losengier* is the one speaking these words, however, and he is the most despicable figure in the tale. The reader is aware of the change in focalization, yet cannot fully identify with these new narrative masters.

The *losengier* speaks Ignaure's name and tells them the whole story, in a moment of *mise-en-abime*, from the scene in the garden when the ladies confess, to their subsequent confrontation of Ignaure and their desire to kill him with their knives.

> *Toute leor conte l'aventure*
> *Et del vregié et des confiesses,*
> *Et ensi comme les engresses*
> *Le vaurent mordrir as coutiaus.* (v. 422-425)

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> He told them the whole story,
> All about the garden and the confessions,
> And how the angry ladies
> Had intended to kill him with their knives.

It's as if the *losengier* had been watching them the whole time, and the reader again feels the discomfort of standing in the shoes of this spy. The traitor then reveals the lord whose wife has been chosen, using the same words as Ignaure used to designate his preferred one, "'Chou estes vous'" (v. 437). The chosen lord replies in a fury that he must then be worth much more than all his peers! He promises the others that he will follow Ignaure until they can capture him and punish him. They want to catch the one who didn't take care to hide what he was doing: "Desirent de chelui confondre / Qui n'avoit cure de respondre" (v. 469-470).

This last word, *respondre*, echos the first line of the tale, in which the narrator says that a body that loves must not hide it, just as someone who has knowledge must share it:

> *Cors ki aimme ne doit reponre,*
> *Ains doit auchun biel mot despondre*
> *U li autre puissant aprendre*
> *Et auchun biel example prendre.* (v. 1-4)

> Anyone who is in love should not conceal the fact,
> Rather should he express it in fine words,
> From which others can learn
> And extract some fine lesson.

The sentiment expressed here is relatively common in medieval French prologues, most memorably in the prologue to Marie de France's *Lais*: "Qui Deus a duné esciënce / e de parler bone eloquence, / ne s'en deit voluntiers mustrer[27]". The narrator of the *Lai d'Ignaure* eloquently transposes Marie's injunction to share knowledge to the realm of love, to this *cors ki aimme*, the body that loves. Here the poet-narrator himself declares one must not hide one's love, specifically in order that others may learn from one's example. The meaning which is covered cannot be sown, and thus cannot give rise to further knowledge: "Sens est perdu ki est couvers; / Cis k'est moustrés et descouvers / Puet en auchun liu semenchier[28]".

27 Marie de France, *Lais*, ed. K. Warnke, trad. L. Harf-Lancner, Paris, LGF, 1990, v 1-4.
28 "Ignaure", v. 11-13.

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This last reference to sowing recalls Chrétien de Troyes' rhetorical metaphor for the writer as one who sows words in the prologue to the *Roman de Perceval*.

> *Ki petit semme petit quelt,*
> *Et qui auques requeillir velt,*
> *En tel liu sa semence espande*
> *Que fruit a.c. doubles li rande;*
> *Car en terre qui riens ne valt*
> *Bone semence seche et faut.*
> *Crestïens semme et fait semence*
> *D'un romans que il encomence*
> *Et si le seime en si bon leu*
> *Qu'il ne puet [ester] sanz grant preu*[29].

> He who sows sparingly, reaps sparingly, but he who wishes to reap plentifully casts his seed on ground that will bear him fruit a hundredfold; for good seed withers and dies in worthless soil. Chrétien sows and casts the seed of a romance that he is beginning, and sows it in such a good place that it cannot fail to be bountiful[30].

Chrétien's message here is that his dedicatee, Count Philippe of Flanders, is a worthy reader of his tale. This is a clear reference to Matthew 13, the Parable of the sower, an injunction to the reader, the believer, to hear and seek to understand Christ's revelation, which is spoken in riddles. Yet, in both prologues, these words also bring the reader back to the body, to the sexual metaphor of sowing and to the *matière* of the story that will be told: "Pour chou voel romans coumenchier[31]".

The word *couvers*, "Sens est perdu ki est couvers", and the play around the topic of hiding and showing in the prologue, also suggests another literary and poetical connection. The name Ignaure appears in Chrétien de Troyes' *Chevalier de la Charette* during a tournament scene where he is introduced as Ignaure "li covoitiez / li amoreus et li pleisanz[32]". L. Rossi has traced the associated coat of arms described in this scene to the troubadour Raimbaut d'Aurenga, who was also

29 Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Roman de Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*, ed. K. Busby, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1993, v. 1-10.

30 Translation by W. W. Kibler, from Chrétien de Troyes, *Arthurian Romances*, transl. W. W. Kibler and C. W. Carroll, London, Penguin, 1991, p. 381.

31 "Ignaure", v. 14.

32 "The coveted, the lover and the pleaser". Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier de la Charette*, ed. A. Foulet and K. D. Uitti, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2010, v. 5808-5809, p. 326.

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known by the *senhal* Linhaure[33]. The name Linaura appears in a late twelfth century text, the *Ensenhamen* d'Arnaut Guillem de Marsan, which describes a similar story of revenge[34]. Furthermore, Raimbaut d'Aurenga wrote a poem, *Lonc temps ai estat cubertz* in which he describes himself as castrated and therefore only able to long for his lady; he poses no threat to any husbands[35]. Though there is no explicit mention of heart, penis or cannibalism here, the first stanza plays on the same topic of uncovering what has been covered, of making known what has been hidden, and of sharing in order to teach others, however painful it may be[36]. An injunction to knights to listen in the last line is echoed in the *envoi* at the end of the poem when he entreats his lady to hear his joy. It is impossible to know whether Raimbaut's poem or its inspiration may have influenced the author of the *Lai d'Ignaure*, but the similarities do confirm the rich exchanges that existed between literary communities during this period. They have a shared associated literary theme: the ambiguous value of uncovering experience and transmitting its meaning. The noble lady in *Ignaure* who doesn't hide her love thus acts in the same way as the poet and lover who must sing what he knows, what he loves, or what he is missing, even though this will lead to his downfall.

To return to Ignaure, his fate is sealed. In order to introduce the scene of the discovery of his adultery, the narrator rewords the proverb he had mentioned earlier: "La soris ki n'a c'un pertruis / Est molt tost prise et enganee[37]". The chosen lady's husband, armed and wearing his helmet, enters her room by an underground passage and finds him making love ("dosnoiant", v. 491) to his wife. Ignaure's words of excuse are courtly and inclusive:

> *'Sire', fait il, 'por Diu, merchi.*
> *Vous veés bien ques est nos fais.*
> *Durement sui vers vous mesfais;*
> *N'i vaut escondis ne celers.'* (v. 494-497)

33 Rossi, "Suggestion métaphorique", p. 491. For a summary in English of this connection, see "Ignaure", p. 15.

34 Rossi, "Suggestion métaphorique", p. 496.

35 Rossi, "Suggestion métaphorique", p. 492-495.

36 *Ibid.*: "*Lonc temps ai estat cubertz, / mas Dieus no vole qu'ieu oimais / puesca cobrir ma besoigna, / don't mi ven ira et esglais. / Ez escoutatz, cavallier, / s'ar en ai obs ni mestier!*"

37 "Ignaure", v. 480-481.

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> 'My lord', he said, 'in God's name, have mercy on me.
> You can see what a grim situation this is for us.
> I have sorely wronged you;
> It's no use my denying or concealing this.'

Here Ignaure declares that he does not want to hide what he has done, and pleads for mercy. He insists on the husband's perception of the facts, contrasting an inclusive *nos* with a respectful *vous*, and says that there is no longer any worth in hiding whe he has done. His words fall, however, on the husband's deaf ears. The lady begs for his mercy in direct discourse but her husband only replies with mockery: "'Dame, il couvient vo dru baignier, / Et apriés le ferai saignier; / Gardés que blans dras ait vos sire[38]'". As cruelly and ironically as the husband intends them, these lines can also be read as another reference to Ignaure as a Christ figure[39]. He takes Ignaure prisoner while he decides with the others how to take revenge – the narrator explains that his meals will be very meager (v. 515). She tells all her friends who also love him to share in her grief and fast with her. "'…Or m'aidiés a faire mon doel. / Ensi con joie en ot chascune, / Si nous soit la dolors commune[40]'". She calls on the shared, communal aspect of their love, and they all begin to fast together, until the day they will know what is to become of Ignaure.

The men decide to serve and cook Ignaure's "lower parts" to which they will add the heart, in order to feed to the women that which brought them the most pleasure:

> *Au quart jor prendons le vassal*
> *Tout le daerrain membre aval,*
> *Dont li delis lor soloit plaire,*
> *Si en fache on.I. mangier faire;*
> *Le cuer avoec nous meterons.*
> *.XII. escuieles en ferons;*
> *Par engien lor faisons mangier,*
> *Car nous n'en poons mieus vengier.'* (v. 542-548)

> In four days time let us remove from the vassal
> His lowest member down below,
> The delights of which used to please them,
> And have it made into a meal;

38 "Ignaure", v. 505-507.
39 Price, *Consuming Passions*, p. 43.
40 "Ignaure", v. 524-526.

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We'll put the heart in as well.
We'll make twelve bows out of all this
And trick them into eating it,
For we couldn't take any better revenge on them.'

These jealous husbands, far from deserving the reader's compassion, incarnate an evil collective body that hates female pleasure. The lord who thinks of this plan refers to the women as "filthy sluts" ("Ces ordes gloutes…", v. 537), in stark contrast to the fact that they are now all fasting and thus controlling their desire. As other critics have noted, it is hard not to hear in this passage an echo of the Last Supper, the sacrificial lamb of Passover that will be prepared and eaten by the 12 apostles[41]. For this reason Barbara Newman reads the tale as an "obscene parody" directed at medieval religious women, reading the cannibalistic turn to the plot as "obscene and macabre[42]". Yet one can easily judge on which side of things the men in the narrative stand, and it isn't with Christ. The women, who show mercy to Ignaure in the first part of the tale and choose to fast for him when his life is in danger offer a more productive, sympathetic group for the reader to identify with. This, in a sense, redeems their cannibalism, suggesting, on the contrary, that the narrative hides a story of satisfied female desire.

Indeed, the women are all already so satisfied that at first they do not want to eat, but their husbands praise the dish so much that they finally try it.

Chascune ot le cuer asasé,
Tant qu'eles en ont mise arriere
Douch saveur et bonne et biele.
Lor signor tant le losengierent
K'eles burent et si mangierent;
Ne l'ont pas en despit tenu. (v. 554-559)

Each one already had what her heart desired,
So much so that they rejected
The sweet aroma, good and fine.
But their lords praised the dish so much that
They drank and also ate,
And they did not despise the dish.

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41 Rossi, "Suggestion métaphorique", p. 477.

42 See Chapter 4, "Parody", of Newman, *Medieval Crossover*. On the *Lai d'Ignaure* as a "dialectic parody", see Di Febo, "Ignauré", p. 4-5.

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Here the women have no need to be satisfied by Ignaure as food because they have all known him sexually. Their satisfaction only further encourages their husbands to convince them to eat the succulent dish made of his penis and heart. The adjectives *douche*, *bonne*, and *biele*, here used to describe the dish, appear frequently in medieval French courtly love lyric, often in reference to the desired lady or related objects[43]. In particular, to cite one well-known example, Machaut's *virelai* "*Tres bonne et belle*" refers in the last line to how the lover's heart finds sweet food in his lover's welcome[44]. This contrast softens the descriptive passage of the cannibalistic act itself, again placing the reader on the side of the women who love. The men once more represent falsity as they praise the food ("losengierent", v. 557), in order to convince the women to eat.

When, after eating, each woman asks her husband what has happened to Ignaure, the priestess' husband tells her what she has just eaten, asking her if they have not all now shared in the pleasure of that which women desire the most:

Cil qui le prist en sa maison
A respondu: 'Dame prestresse,
Ja fustes vous sa maistresse.
Mangié avés le grant desir
Ki si vous estoit em plaisir,
Car d'autre n'aviés vous envie;
En la fin en estes servie.
Vostre drut ai mort et destruit;
Toutes partirés au deduit
De chou que femme plus goulouse.
End avés assés en vous douse?
Bien nous sommes vengié del blasme.' (v. 564-575)

The one who had caught him in his house
Replied: 'My lady priestess,
You used to be his mistress.
You have eaten the object of your great desire,
Which gave you so much pleasure,

43 Marion's song "Robin m'aime" which begins Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de Robin et Marion* came immediately to mind, where she sings "d'escarlate, bonne et belle" in reference to the belt Robin has given her. Adam de la Halle, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. P.-Y. Badel, Paris, LGF, 1995, p. 206-285, v. 1-8.

44 "Tres bonne et bele, mi oueil / Joieuse pasture / Prennent en vostre figure, / Simple et sans orgueil, / Et mes cuers en vostre acueil / Vie et douce norriture." Guillaume de Machaut, *Poésies lyriques*, ed. V. Chichmaref, Paris, 1909, t. 1, p. 185, v. 1-6.

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> For you had no wish for anything else;
> In the end it has been served up to you.
> I have killed and destroyed your lover;
> You can all share in the pleasure
> That comes from what women crave for.
> Is there enough of it for the twelve of you?
> We are now well avenged for your misdeed.'

His admonition is redundant; the ladies have all had what they were longing for. They have indeed eaten their desire, and because of this, they all swear to never eat again. They compose a *complainte*, a lament for him, which takes up twenty lines of the text and describes Ignaure's physical beauty, his body, his eyes, his flanks, as well as his valor and largesse, which will be so greatly missed. The 12 ladies all waste away, and the narrator describes the *lai* of twelve stanzas that was written to remember them. The narrator ends his own telling with a tribute to the lady that had this *lai* written, and a description of his attachment to her. Her physical beauty, also described over twenty lines, is like a chain that binds him to her. She is the perfect parallel to Ignaure's physical beauty. The story has another name, "le lay del Prison", which describes the sweet prison the poet is also in. It was written to remember Ignaure, "who was dismembered for love". These last lines intermingle the identity of the poet, who names himself at line 620, and Ignaure, who dies again in the following line: "Ensi con tiesmoigne Renaus, / Morut Ignaures, li bons vassaus." One is dismembered, one remembers. Yet it also confuses the body of Ignaure with the body of the his lady love, crossing his own desire with the desire of the women in the tale he just told, and replacing the sanctified body of the male lover with his own object of desire, the lady he is writing for.

The formal symmetry of the tale mirrors this game of reflection to hold the reader's attention, as though the poet wanted to create a perfect parallel between feminine and masculine desire. The text can be divided into two almost equal parts, the first telling of Ignaure's multiple loves and the ways all his lovers adore him, while the second part, after his choice of one woman, details his demise. The poem ends with two passages of exactly equal length, one describing Ignaure's beauty and the other the beauty of the poet's patron. This chain of words, or prison of love, monumentalizes the devotion of the poet, while the reader, who takes the place of his lady dedicatee feels enchained by his words, as she consumes them.

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The cannibalistic act, as a metaphor for reading, encourages the reader to imagine her desire fulfilled, while the poet, who offers himself to her, also reads her, reads her desire, amplified by the twelve female protagonists of the tale who all lament, writing their own *lai* of satisfied desire and loss. Female desire here becomes hyperbolic, the subject, the cause and the result of the tale, and Ignaure, for a time, is able to satisfy it all. Just as the twelve women and twelve men amplify the representation of human desire in the tale, Ignaure's desirable essence is also hyperbolized as the object of female desire: his heart is consumed along with his penis, which becomes the prime mover in the tale, the object of all female desire, while also reflecting the desire of the masculine poet, the prime mover of the word. This establishes different levels of possible symmetry between the reader and the text – as object of desire, as desiring subject, as both at once.

The poet plays one last time on the trope of covering and uncovering when, in the middle of his portrait of his beloved, he writes that he cannot say any more about her beauty (v. 635-636): "Plus n'end arés parole aperte; / L'autre partie en est couverte." Here the words, like clothes, both cover and reveal the female body, which, in a clever conjoining of the two meanings, describe how her breasts look in her dress. This echoes again the lines in the prologue to *Ignaure*, on the importance of uncovering that which needs to be told. This message, when coupled with such a tragic story of betrayal, develops a tension between the need to keep love, and knowledge, secret and the importance of sharing or speaking it. In view of these lines, we sense that the narrator sides with the lover, and so we are also called to support Ignaure the man, the one who loves and shows it, as well as the poet, the one who tells his tale, even as the tale itself reveals the dangers of being found out. This tension, built around the body as a locus of desire, finds resolution in the cannibalistic act, as the ladies enact their desire and ultimately die for it, sowing the seeds of love's teachings[45]. The ladies' desire, which was fulfilled by loving and being loved by Ignaure, becomes literally embodied when they consume him; all is covered and uncovered, secret and found out. The jealous husbands don't realize with their atrocious punishment that they are only playing into this dynamic, giving their wives what they truly want, and revealing what must be revealed in order for their love to be

45 For another reading of this prologue along similar lines but with the opposite conclusion, see Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, p. 126-128.

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redeemed and the narrative to exist[46]. The 12 husbands are the opposite of their wives, their vilified other halves that seek to deny their pleasure and passion, while Ignaure is the pivot between the two, the figure that says, you can have all you desire. The husbands, who stand against the lover, frame the tale and in some sense allow for the multiplication of narrative instances, of moments of hidden yet imagined erotic exchange. Thanks to them there is desire, and a story to tell.

Coming back to the manuscript collection in which the *Lai d'Ignaure* can be found, I'll return to my initial reading of the tale in that context. When I first came across it, I was held between a feeling of disgust at the murder and subsequent cannibalistic act and a fascination with the creative sacrifice of the lovers who dare embody such forbidden and destructive desire. I was also puzzled because, although everything points to the fault of the lovers, much like when faced with the Tristan and Yseut story, the reader has no choice but to side with those standing outside of matrimonial law. The jealous husband is the true culprit. The reader experiences a certain amount of ambivalence, as though balancing between pleasure and pain, similar to that which the author expresses in the debate between the heart and the body which precedes it in the BnF fr. 1553 manuscript. The text which follows the *Lai d'Ignaure* in the collection brings a lighter tone to this balancing act, as if the heart, once outside the body and consumed, can be re-embodied by the clever peasant wife and her simple husband in the fabliau *De dant Constant de Hamiel*. As an example of female revenge, this woman does not kill anyone, but simply makes the men see, with the example of their own wives, what they wanted to do to her. She demands empathy of them. Is this a less cruel form of revenge? The reader can decide. Balancing between the heart and body, between male and female characters, he or she learns something of the truth of love, of its impossibility and its immediacy, of its rules and chaos, but also how these become one when you experience it.

In conclusion, does cannibalism in the Eaten Heart narrative have the symbolic potential to erase the difference between self and other?

46 "In their violent and gruesome attempt to punish transgression by transgressing, they achieve not a reversal or a mitigation of the original transgression, but an invocation of a shared sense of the sacred… The women regain, then, a final dignity, which includes the power to punish their husbands doubly by choosing to die rather than to dishonor Ignaure's memory by eating profane food." Price, *Consuming Passions*, p. 43.

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The weight of understanding the story's message falls on the shoulders of the reader, who must discern the wisdom behind it, holding the meaning of what has become a Eucharistic symbol up to the light of erotic love. As a metaphor for love, the act of cannibalism gives voice to the wordless acts of physical love and intimate exchange that are difficult if not impossible to describe, and thus articulates the possibility of unity between two desiring subjects. In the *Lai d'Ignaure*, the lady lovers are active, bringing balance to a typically one-sided paradigm of expressive male lover and passive, admired female, making coincide the oppositional roles of the love relationship. Ambiguity also surrounds each protagonist, allowing the reader to rethink his or her relationship to the other. Otherness here is thus not seen as fixed opposition, but rather as something one can incorporate and bring closer, as the reader or listener does the text through interpretation. In a sense, each lover becomes the other, through desire, and through the written word.

The literary weaving in the *lai* allows for pleasurable interpretation, and the reader observes another kind of interpenetration: the lyric combines with the narrative, the Ovidian with the Occitan and with the Breton, the comedic with the tragic. The teller does this with a wink of awareness, the recognizable self-referentiality of someone who is also a reader and conscious of his own re-telling. Thus, the *lai* insists on the importance of teaching by example, through parable, of covering and uncovering. While it is being read, the story does satisfy, as its multiple retellings prove. This literary satisfaction does several things: it presents longing for the other as positive in that the love in the tale satisfies as the tale does in its telling. Placing satisfied female desire at the center of the tale also reclaims female literary influence, putting women in charge of heart and penis, in charge of desire and its related lyric outpouring. Love's greatest lesson here then is perhaps how to eat what is different to make it the same, and this offers us another way to think about cannibalism, which, as we know, when it isn't literal, can be sacred.

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