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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Morton, J. (2016). The Book of the World at an Anglo-Norman Court: The Bestiaire de Philippe de Thaon as a Theological Performance. In *New Medieval Literatures* (Vol. 16, pp. 1-38). (New Medieval Literatures; Vol. 16). Boydell & Brewer.

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**The Book of the World at an Anglo-Norman Court: The *Bestiaire de Philippe de Thaon* as a Theological Performance**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Bestiaries, which describe the natures of animals, birds, and stones and derive allegorical meanings from them, occupy a curious position in relation to medieval theology.<sup>1</sup> The content of these books, almost always illuminated, often lavishly so, saw an explosion in popularity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, particularly, but not exclusively, in Northern Europe. Up to that point bestiaries had circulated widely in monastic circles but lay audiences increasingly sought the improving pleasure that came from learning about the wondrous creatures of the world and the spiritual messages inscribed in their behaviour by God. Translated into the vernacular, bestiaries became hybrid and mediational texts, situated between clerical and lay spheres, between theology and natural history, and between the school and the court. The diversity of their uses can be seen in the variation in form, language, and manuscript context and makes it hard to categorize them under one modern

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<sup>1</sup> This article has been greatly enriched by generous comments on its earlier incarnations given by Laura Ashe, Emma Campbell, Brian FitzGerald, Sarah Kay, Philip Knox, Marco Nievergelt, Francesca Southerden, and Liza Strakhov. I would like to express my gratitude to them. Any errors that follow, however, belong to me alone.

disciplinary category.<sup>2</sup> Such variety, moreover, makes it hard to offer generalizations about their content, meaning, and purpose. This article arises out of a desire to explore the relationship between bestiaries and medieval theology, particularly the question of how the allegories of bestiaries (seeing in the unicorn a sign of Jesus or in the hedgehog a sign of the devil) were informed by ideas of a signifying natural world found amongst authoritative theologians. Bestiaries, in which creatures are sometimes read allegorically, sometimes read for moral messages, and sometimes simply described literally or proto-zoologically – can partly be explained by the fact they imply an understanding of a created world that signifies in a similar way to the book of Scripture. The Bible describes events according to different modes of signification: the historical (the literal account of what happened), the allegorical (when what is described signifies another event in the past, present, or future), or the tropological

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<sup>2</sup> For discussion of different types or ‘families’ of Latin bestiaries, see Florence McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill, 1960), 21-44; M. R. James, *The Bestiary* (Oxford, 1928), 1-10; Ron Baxter, *Bestiaries and their Users in the Middle Ages* (Stroud, 1998), especially 83-145; Willene B. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts: The Second-Family Bestiary: Commentary, Art, Text and Translation* (Woodbridge, 2006), 8-14. These works give an account of the bestiary tradition focused primarily on works dominant in Britain, while continental scholars offer accounts of bestiaries similarly biased in favour of versions particularly prominent in France, Germany, or Italy. An article in preparation by Sarah Kay, entitled ‘The English Bestiary, the Continental *Physiologus*, and the intersections between them’, provides a compelling Europe-wide account of the various textual traditions of bestiaries and emphasises the links between bestiaries written in the same period across Europe rather than privileging James and McCulloch’s genealogical narrative of ‘families’ of bestiaries. I thank Professor Kay for allowing me to read a draft version of the piece.

(when what is described offers moral lessons).<sup>3</sup> Even if the surface appearance, the literal sense, may appear confusing or disjointed, the exegete who has, over time, acquired knowledge of the hidden senses will begin to discover a hidden unity and coherence to the Bible. In a similar way, the apparent disunity and patchwork composition of bestiaries can be reconciled by using differing strategies of interpretation to read creatures' natures either historically, as they literally are, or allegorically or tropologically. What appears confused will gradually come to seem connected to the wise reader, and bestiaries convey mimetically the hidden principles that unify creation despite its wondrous variety.

This raises the question of what kind of understanding of the world is needed to believe that it is possible to study the behaviours of animals or the natures of stones and thus to derive religious truths from them as one would from the study of Scripture. Important work has been done on this, particularly by Francesco Zambon. Given the diversity of bestiaries, it is not, however, tenable to imply, as Zambon has done, that all bestiaries are animated by the same principles and that they can be assimilated within a grander tradition of theological allegory.<sup>4</sup> Bestiaries cannot be seen as

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<sup>3</sup> For the most authoritative twelfth-century articulation of this, see Hugh of Saint Victor, *De sacramentis Christiani fidei*, pr.4, *PL* 176:184C-185A. For other exegetical schema see John Cassian, *Collationes*, 2.14.8, *PL* 49:962B-965B; Augustine of Hippo, *De genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, 1.1, *PL* 34:247. For a history of the senses of Scripture, see Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, 4 vols (Paris, 1959-64), especially 1:182.

<sup>4</sup> See, especially, Francesco Zambon, 'Teologia del Bestiario', *Museum Patavinum*, 2:1 (1984), 23-51, as well as Francesco Zambon, 'Figura bestialis: Les fondements théorique du bestiaire médiéval', in *Épopée animale, fable, fabliau: Actes du IVe Colloque de la Société*

simplified echoes of the principles expressed by medieval theologians, nor do they all bear witness to an identical allegorical perspective. Given the variety of species of bestiary it is possible to identify their underlying principles by considering the local and specific details of individual versions. While offering conclusions that will be pertinent to the study of bestiaries more general, then, this article, will focus on one in particular, the first to be written in the French vernacular,<sup>5</sup> the *Bestiaire de Philippe de Thaon*, composed in Anglo-Norman verse at the court of Henry I of England. Philippe's work has not been noted for its sophistication. Max Friedrich Mann described the text as 'a careless agglomeration of unpalatable natural historical idiocies' ('eine müssige Anhäufung von ungenießbaren naturwissenschaftlichen Armseligkeiten') and for Paul Meyer it lacked original ideas and stylistic distinction.<sup>6</sup> A close reading of Philippe's bestiary alongside a consideration of the specifics of twelfth-century monastic Neoplatonic theology will demonstrate Philippe's *Bestiaire* in fact to be a bold and, at times, dazzling intellectual experiment in using the

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*Internationale Renardienne Evreux, 7-11 septembre 1981*, ed. Gabriel Bianciotto and Michel Salvat, *Cahiers d'études médiévales*, 2-3 (Paris, 1984), 709-19.

<sup>5</sup> An Old High German verse bestiary had appeared in the late eleventh century, adapted from the Latin verse *Physiologus*, attributed to Theobaldus. See *Der altdutsche Physiologus*, ed. Friedrich Maurer (Tübingen, 1967); *Theobaldi 'Physiologus'*, ed. P. T. Eden. *Mittellateinische Studien und Texte*, 6 (Leiden and Cologne, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> Max Friedrich Mann, 'Der Physiologus des Philipp von Thaün und seine Quellen', *Anglia*, 7 (1884), 420-68 (447); Paul Meyer, 'Les Bestiaires', *Histoire littéraire de la France*, 34 (1914), 362-90, (368), both cited in McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries*, 54. As will be clear, I am equally unpersuaded by McCulloch's defence of Philippe: 'it should be remembered [...] that no more than a translation was proposed, and that this is an early work in a language still groping to express itself' (ibid., 54).

descriptions of animals to generate a collective mystical experience for his courtly audience. It will suggest both the theological complexity and variation in the bestiary tradition and the potential of vernacular poetry, even very early vernacular poetry, for spiritual sophistication. Rather than seeing vernacular bestiaries and lay culture as a pale and simplistic reflection of grander trends in Latinate culture, the courtly performance suggested by the *Bestiaire* shows that the exchange between religious and secular spheres demanded considerable innovation in reworking themes and content for new audiences. The *Bestiaire* implies a cultural context in which the court's demands for an affective and collective spiritual experience could be met through a vernacular poetic performance.

Philippe's project of writing a 3000-verse poem in rhyming six-syllable couplets will be interpreted by considering the Latin tradition from which he drew and twelfth-century monastic theology, in particular the Augustinian exegetical practice whose centre was the school of Saint Victor in Paris. This comparison, while suggesting links between Europe-wide theological currents and the English Francophone court, will make it possible to show how Philippe himself reworks the unusual allegory of a signifying world expressed in bestiary material along with more orthodox Augustinian Neoplatonic accounts of a signifying world in entertaining and edifying an uneducated or semi-educated audience.<sup>7</sup> Philippe thus emerges as a learned figure, closely associated with monastic culture and familiar with exegesis and mystical theology, mediating between the learned ascetic sphere and the secular world of the court. Mystical reading processes, sometimes termed 'material manuduction' by the Victorines, following Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite,

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<sup>7</sup> This is not, though, to suggest an unsophisticated audience or an exclusively illiterate one.

involved using the physical natural signs that formed the book-of-the-world to transcend the physical and the visible and thus to recognize the invisible truths of which visible creatures are the signs. A consideration of this theology makes it possible to determine how the implicit mysticism in Philippe's bestiary both relates to that of the bestiaries on which he drew even as it departs from it, showing his work to be anything but a simplistic re-rendering of an earlier text.

## II. BESTIARIES AND THE BOOK OF THE WORLD

Bestiary material, as has been stated, implies a signifying world that can be read allegorically in a similar way to a book and the relationship between the world and the word, between the world understood as an interpretable book and the book written about that signifying world, is at stake in Latin and vernacular bestiaries.<sup>8</sup> The spiritual truths figured by the natures of creatures can only be accessed through the mediation of language and the written and painted pages of bestiaries. In Augustine's theology, particularly as received by Hugh of Saint Victor and his school, the world is regularly represented as a book written by the finger of God, whose truths are only accessible through the mediation of the Word made flesh in Jesus and through the mediation of divinely inspired Scripture. The *Physiologus*, whose roots lie in the early Christian Neoplatonic tradition of the school of Clement of Alexandria,<sup>9</sup> offers a

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<sup>8</sup> The Greek and Byzantine bestiary tradition remains far beyond the scope of this article. See, however, *Physiologos: Le bestiaire des bestiaires*, ed. Arnaud Zucker (Grenoble, 2004) and Francesco Sbordone, *Ricerche sulle fonti e sulla composizione del Physiologus greco* (Naples, 1936).

<sup>9</sup> *Physiologos*, ed. Zucker, 12-13; 19-20.

different kind of signifying world and before coming to *Le bestiaire de Philippe de Thaon* it will be necessary to describe these two differing but not necessarily incompatible accounts of the signifying book of the world as received in the twelfth century.

The originary text for the bestiary is the Greek *Physiologus*, written in North Africa probably in the second century. It combined the description of natural phenomena with their spiritual meanings or moral teachings.<sup>10</sup> It was translated into Latin at an uncertain date, and significantly reworked, enlarged, modified, and translated from the eleventh century onwards.<sup>11</sup> In Europe, versions of the *Physiologus* were written exclusively in Latin until the late eleventh century, but throughout its medieval history, material was reordered, added to, or removed from the work to result in different bestiaries, such as the *Dicta Chysostomi*, falsely

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<sup>10</sup> Emma Campbell notes that while the work could have been composed at any time between the second and fifth centuries, the scholarly consensus is to date it to the second century. See her forthcoming *Translation and Untranslatability in Medieval Francophone Texts and Manuscripts* as well as Ursula Treu, 'Zur Datierung des *Physiologus*', *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 57:1 (1966), 101-04.

<sup>11</sup> See Nikolaus Henkel, *Studien zum 'Physiologus' im Mittelalter* (Tübingen, 1976), 21-24. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, 9. For the dating of the Greek version, see *Physiologus*, ed. Francesco Sbordone (Milan, 1936), 154-59. Ron Baxter, following Carmody, argues that the Latin translation almost certainly predates 386, on the basis of a word-for-word correspondence between the *Physiologus-B*'s discussion of the partridge and that of Ambrose of Milan in his *Hexaëmeron*, 6. 13. 3. See Baxter, *Bestiaries and their Users*, p. 29, n1, as well as *Physiologus latinus: Éditions préliminaires versio B*, ed. by Francis J. Carmody (Paris, 1939), 7-8 (henceforth, *Physiologus-B*).



attributed to John Chrysostom, and the *Physiologus Theobaldi*, a poetic version of the text, which circulated particularly in Germany, or different versions of the *Physiologus* with additions from Book XII of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* that have been called B-Is *Physiologus* bestiaries.<sup>12</sup> The content of Philippe's *Bestiaire*, especially the insertions from Isidore, suggests that he drew on at least one bestiary containing such additions.<sup>13</sup> Further additions resulting in different kinds of bestiaries came from Solinus' *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, with extracts from Ambrose's *Hexaëmeron*, and at times with Peter of Cornwall's *Pantheologus*. Various different textual traditions split off in Latin and a range of vernaculars incorporating different passages.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the considerable variation among bestiaries,<sup>15</sup> however, they share an implicit Neoplatonic conception of the world as a kind of book in which creatures can be read figuratively as signs. Bestiaries, books made about the book-of-the-world, can offer subtle and distinctive reflections about language and meaning, both human and divine, and the central role of Jesus, the Word-made-flesh, in allowing creation and the Bible to signify. Ostensibly about nature and its role in salvation, bestiaries show a

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<sup>12</sup> See Francesco Sbordone, 'La tradizione manoscritta del *Physiologus* latino', *Athenaeum*, New Series, 27 (1949), 246-280, especially 248-49; Clark, 10-11.

<sup>13</sup> Luigina Morini, *Bestiari medievali* (Turin, 1996), 106. At xvi-xvi, Morini suggests that Philippe's version is very faithful to its source both in letter and spirit, a claim that is hard to test given the absence of such a confirmed source (see McCulloch, 45).

<sup>14</sup> Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, 11-14; *Theobaldi 'Physiologus'*, 2-4; McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries*, 34; Morini, *Bestiari medievali*, xii-xvi.

<sup>15</sup> For an account of the differences in the meaning and purpose of different bestiaries in medieval Britain, see Baxter, *Bestiaries and their Users*.

concern with that most human of tools, language. Many bestiaries opening with a scene of Adam giving names to the animals in Eden, both differentiating the human from the animal by means of language and suggesting the importance of the Isidorean etymology that became incorporated into many Latin bestiaries, especially those circulating in medieval Britain.<sup>16</sup>

There are 37 entries in the so-called B version of the *Physiologus*, which saw additions from Isidore to become the version generally called the B-Is *Physiologus*. Each entry recounts a creature's nature or natures, its properties or behavior. It is implicit that the natures described are true and, for the *Physiologus* and presumably for its readers, the unicorn, for example, is not a mythical creature, but every bit as real as the ibis or the hedgehog, which also feature. Each nature contains an allegorical meaning, as in the case of the unicorn's nature that stands for Jesus's virgin birth and crucifixion, or a tropological or moral teaching, as in the case of the 'serra' (saw-fish). When it sees a ship, it rises to the surface of the water and races it until it becomes tired and sinks back into the sea. The ship figures the righteous and the serra those who begin with good works and then are dragged down by vices into the traps of the world, figured by the sea into which the exhausted saw-fish returns. Throughout, verses from Scripture and descriptions of creatures' natures are interwoven and the descriptions of the natures of different creatures are allegorized along the same lines as historical events in the Bible. The Latin *Physiologus*, like the

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<sup>16</sup> See Xenia Muratova, "'Adam donne leurs noms aux animaux': L'iconographie de la scène dans l'art du Moyen Age: les manuscrits des bestiaires enluminés du XIIe et du XIIIe siècles", *Studi Medievali*, 16 (1975), 367-94; Christopher Lucken, 'Écriture et vocation des Bestiaires', *Compar(a)ison*, 1 (1996), 185-202; Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, 36-37.

vast majority of bestiaries that followed it, begins with an entry on the lion. Before it describes the lion's three natures, the entry starts with the first half of Genesis 49.9 when Jacob blesses each his sons on his deathbed:

Iacob, benedicens filium suum Iudam, ait, 'Catulus leonis Iudas, filius  
de germine meo, quis suscitabit eum?'

(Jacob, blessing his son Judah, said, 'Judah is a lion-cub, son of my  
seed, who will wake him?' (Gen 49.9))<sup>17</sup>

It proceeds to discuss the lion's three natures, all of which are interpreted allegorically. The first is that it walks on mountains and effaces its tracks with its tail when it smells hunters approaching; so Jesus, ascending to heaven, was not recognized by the angels. The second is that the lion sleeps with its eyes open, just as the Jesus's body slept the sleep of death on the cross and in the tomb, while his divinity was still awake. The third nature is as follows:

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<sup>17</sup> *Physiologus-B*, 11. There is as yet no scholarly edition of the *Physiologus*, but Carmody published his preliminary versions of the B and Y versions. See Carmody, 'Physiologus Latinus Version Y', *University of California Publications in Classical Philology*, 12 (1941), 95-134. During this article references to the *Physiologus* will be to Carmody's preliminary sketches for his edition of the B version. This sketch does not include the final three entries on Amos the prophet, diamond, and pearl. Readers may usefully consult the version of the B-Is (First-Family) Bestiary transcribed in Max Friedrich Mann, 'Der *Bestiaire divin* des Guillaume le Clerc', *Französische Studien*, 6 (1888), 1-106, (69-73) and reproduced in Morini, *Bestiari medievali*, 10-95.

Cum leaena peperit catulum, generat eum mortuum, et custodit eum  
tribus diebus; donec veniens pater eius die tertia, insufflat in faciem  
eius et vivificat eum. Sic omnipotens pater dominum nostrum Iesum  
Christum filium suum tertia die suscitavit a mortuis, dicente Iacob:  
Dormitabit tamquam leo, et sicut catulus leonis, quis suscitabit eum?

(When the lioness gives birth to a cub, she whelps it dead, and watches  
over it for three days, until, arriving on the third day, the father  
breathes on its face and brings it to life. In the same way, the almighty  
father awakened our lord Jesus Christ his son from amongst the dead,  
as Jacob said [of Judah]: ‘He will sleep like a lion and like a lion-cub,  
who will awaken him?’ (Gen 49.9))<sup>18</sup>

The nature of the lion is read allegorically alongside an implied reading of Genesis  
49:9. This entry, it is implied, is coterminous with the Old Testament verse, whose  
opening begins it and whose close ends it as can be seen in the lines just cited. Jacob’s  
blessing of Judah is read allegorically so that lion stands for the lordship of Jesus.  
While Jesus himself is described as the ‘spiritual lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of  
David son of Jesse’,<sup>19</sup> echoing Rev 5:5, the properties of the lion – covering its tracks  
with its tail, sleeping with its eyes open, bringing its cubs to life with its breath – are  
not being used to explain verses from Scripture but rather, in this passage, the book of  
the world and the book of the Old Testament appear to be analogous in their legibility  
and equally susceptible to a figural reading. The parallel between the natural world

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<sup>18</sup> *Physiologus-B*, 11-12.

<sup>19</sup> ‘spiritalis leo de tribu Iuda, radix Iesse, filius David.’ *Physiologus-B*, 11.

and Scripture does not end there, however. The lion who breathes (‘insufflat’) life onto its cub recalls God who breathes life into Adam when creating him (‘insufflavivit’ in the Vetus Latina version of Genesis 2.7.)<sup>20</sup> Thus the lion recalls God creating Adam and the new Adam, Jesus, who redeems, inscribing the nature of the lion as a mediating sign in the salvation history pointing both to the Fall and to the resurrection.

The implication is that from its creation, the lion was endowed with a nature that prefigured the resurrection. For the allegories of bestiaries to make sense, a certain conception of the world is needed which sees creatures instituted by divine design to figure the events of Jesus’s death and resurrection or the invisible truths of heaven, or else to embody and signify moral messages to humans. The *Physiologus* and the bestiaries that drew substantially from it have a curious logic. They are books of nature or, more specifically, books of natures, of the properties of different animals, birds, stones, and the occasional tree, and they bear witness to a certain degree of curiosity about the natural world, whose appearance not only delights, but can also be useful. This world, which signifies and is interpretable, is a book filled with hidden meaning. The legible world is not, though, to be read directly as a text, and bestiaries do not encourage – or even open the possibility of – the direct observation of, for example, the nature of lions. Any sustained study could well reveal that lion-cubs are not born dead or that hedgehogs do not roll around in fruit and then carry it off on their spines to feed their young. Rather than observing and interpreting the world directly, readers encounter the signifying book-of-the-world through the book that is a bestiary.

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<sup>20</sup> See *Genesis*, ed. Bonifatius Fischer. Vetus Latina, 2 (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1951), 38-41. It is worth noting that the Latin *Physiologus* text predates the Vulgate Latin.

The allegory whose, hidden sense is derived from a creature's nature as it was thought to exist in the world, differs from Biblical exegesis, however, which allegorizes historical events as mediated by divinely inspired Scripture. In contrast to bestiaries, the lion does not have the same allegorical meaning at all times but one that depends on the context in which it is described in the Bible. It is possible to find occasional echoes or analogues of bestiaries' more fixed allegoresis of the non-Scriptural natural world, as, for example, in Isidore of Seville's *De natura rerum*,<sup>21</sup> but this should not detract from how much this practice differs from standard medieval exegetical and theological principles.<sup>22</sup> With only the rarest of exceptions, twelfth-century accounts of the signifying world allow creatures to signify as sacraments – 'things done literally which represent [...] spiritual things'<sup>23</sup> – only as

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<sup>21</sup> Isidore of Seville, *De natura rerum*, 24, *PL* 83:997B. Cf. Alain de Lille, *Literary Works*, ed./trans. Winthrop Wetherbee. Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, 22 (Cambridge MA and London, 2013), 544-47, lines 1-3: 'Omnis mundi creatura / quasi liber et pictura / nobis est et speculum.' (Every thing in the created universe is like a book for us, a picture, a mirror.) Lucken ('Les hiéroglyphes de Dieu', 59-60) suggests similarities between the *Physiologus*'s approach and that of Ambrose of Milan's *Hexaëmeron*.

<sup>22</sup> As should be apparent, in my understanding both of Augustine's account of Scriptural allegory and in the kind of allegory suggested by bestiaries, I differ from Francesco Zambon, who sees bestiaries' allegoresis justified by the final pages of Augustine, *De doctrina*, 2. See his *L'alfabeto simbolico degli animali : I bestiari del medioevo* (Milan, 2001), 34-35.

<sup>23</sup> Hugh of Saint Victor, *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris praenotatiunculae*, 3, *PL* 175:12C: 'facta ad litteram, quae representant [...] spiritualia.'

they are recounted in Scripture.<sup>24</sup> Entries in the *Physiologus*, however, derive allegorical or tropological meanings from extra-Scriptural phenomena, such as the lion bringing its cubs to life. Christopher Lucken has shown the difference between Augustine's approach of interpreting the spiritual meaning of natural creatures according to the Biblical context in which they are mentioned<sup>25</sup> and that of the *Physiologus* (and thus the bestiaries that followed it):

Pour le *Physiologus*, ce n'est pas le texte biblique qui est expliqué à l'aide des connaissances 'physiologiques' qui ont pu être acquises sur les animaux, mais le livre du monde qui est rendu à son intelligibilité grâce aux saintes Ecritures.

(For the *Physiologus* it is not the Biblical text which is explained with the aid of 'physiological' knowledge that can be acquired from animals, but the book of the world which is rendered intelligible thanks to holy Scripture.)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Brian D. FitzGerald, 'Time, History, and Mutability in Hugh of St. Victor's *Homilies on Ecclesiastes* and *De vanitate mundi*', *Viator*, 43:1 (2012), 215-40, (217-19).

<sup>25</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *De doctrina christiana*, 3.35.78-3.37.83, ed./trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford, 1995), 166-69. See also his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 103.3.22, ed. Eligius Dekkers and Jean Fraipont, *CCSL* 38-40 (Turnhout, 1956), 40:1518-19.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Lucken, 'Les hiéroglyphes de Dieu: La *demonstrance* des *Bestiaires* au regard de la *senefiance* des animaux selon l'exégèse de saint Augustin', *Compar(a)ison*, 1994/1, 33-70 (56). For further discussion of the relationship between Augustine's semiotics of natural creatures and that of bestiary material, see also *Physiologos*, ed. Zucker, 36-44 and Zambon, *L'alfabeto simbolico*, 34-38.

That this approach was seen as potentially suspect is evidenced by Hugh of Saint-Victor's mention of the *Physiologus* among a list of apocryphal writings, describing it as 'composed by heretics' (ab haereticis conscriptus).<sup>27</sup> Medieval writers, copiers, or translators of bestiaries thus negotiated between the potentially heterodox understanding of a legible world full of meanings to be decoded and more orthodox accounts of the signifying created world.

Philippe de Thaon was closely linked with monastic culture and almost certainly the product of a monastic education as the content of his bestiary suggests. In order to show how he mediates this culture for his lay audience, the rest of this article will first will consider Augustinian and Victorine accounts of the world as a kind of book written by the finger of God. It will then look at Philippe's reworking of the bestiary material in relation to this idea of the mystical book-of-the-world.

### III. THE LEGIBLE WORLD OF THE THEOLOGIANS

What did it mean for the world to be like a book at the moment that Philippe received the *Physiologus* material and rewrote it? In the twelfth century, when the production of bestiaries increased dramatically, Neoplatonic doctrines held sway in

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<sup>27</sup> Hugh of Saint Victor, *Didascalicon*, 4.15, ed. Charles Buttimer (Washington DC, 1939), 91.

See Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, trans. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Toronto, Buffalo and London, 1997; first publ. 1968), 105; idem, *La théologie au douzième siècle* (Paris, 1957), 163. Hugh's definition is taken from the sixth-century *Decretum Gelasianum*. See *Decretum Gelasianum*, 5, ed. Ernst von Dobschütz (Leipzig, 1912), 5.



the European West – more philosophical among thinkers associated with the cathedral school at Chartres, more theological in the school of Saint Victor.<sup>28</sup> Of particular concern for this investigation is the conception of a world in which sublunary creatures are copies of divine forms of those things.<sup>29</sup> For the Victorines, it was possible through a process of contemplative ascent and mystical purification to train one's mind so as to be able to transcend the visible world in reading Scripture to arrive at the knowledge of invisible divine truths.

Hugh of Saint-Victor in his *De tribus diebus* articulated the principle that

[u]niversus [...] mundus iste sensibilis quasi quidam liber est scriptus digito Dei, hoc est virtute divina creatus, et singulae creaturae quasi figurae quaedam sunt non humano placito inventae, sed divino arbitrio institutae ad manifestandam invisibilium Dei sapientiam.

Quemadmodum autem si illiteratus quis apertum librum videat, figuras aspicit, litteras non cognoscit: ita stultus et animalis homo, qui non percipit ea quae Dei sunt, in visibilibus istis creaturis foris videt speciem, sed non intelligit rationem.

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<sup>28</sup> For an overview of this trend, see Chenu, *Man, Nature, and Society*, 99-145; Chenu, *La théologie*, 108-41, and Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. William R. Trask (London: Routledge, 1953), 319-26.

<sup>29</sup> See Origen, *Commentaire sur le Cantique des cantiques*, 3.13.9, ed./trans. Luc Brésard and Henri Crouzel, 2 vols (Paris, 1991-92), 2:628-31.

(this whole sensible world [...] is like a book written by the finger of God; for this it was created by divine power, and individual creatures, being like figures, were not invented to please humans, but were instituted by divine judgment in order to reveal wisdom of God's invisible truths. Just as an illiterate person, seeing an open book might see the shapes but not know the letters, so the stupid and the sensual man, who does not perceive those things which are of God,<sup>30</sup> sees the external appearances of those visible creatures, but does not understand their meaning.)<sup>31</sup>

This passage is cited ubiquitously in discussions of medieval allegory, especially that of bestiaries and with good reason as it offers authoritative support to the principle of an allegoresis of the natural. However, as will become clear, the analogy of the book for twelfth-century Victorines carries with it an idea of spiritual progress through repeated, contemplative monastic reading, and the world is not simply offered up as a series of easily legible signs. Rather, learning the correct reading of the world is an ongoing process, a gradually purifying activity.<sup>32</sup> In Christianity, the idea of the created world's potential to bear messages of the invisible truths of God goes back to Paul's letter to the Romans (1.19-20):

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<sup>30</sup> See 1 Cor. 2.14.

<sup>31</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *De tribus diebus*, 4, ed. Dominique Poirel, CCCM 177 (Turnhout: 2002), 9.

<sup>32</sup> See Grover A. Zinn, 'De Gradibus Ascensionum: The Stages of Contemplative Ascent in *Two Treatises on Noah's Ark* by Hugh of St. Victor', *Studies in Medieval Culture*, 5 (1975), 61-79, (69-79).

quod notum est Dei manifestum est in illis Deus enim illis  
manifestavit. Invisibilia enim ipsius a creatura mundi per ea quae facta  
sunt intellecta conspiciuntur sempiterna quoque eius virtus et divinitas  
ut sint inexcusabiles.

(That which is known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown  
it to them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the  
world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made,  
even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.)

Augustine cites this passage in a hugely influential chapter of the *De civitate Dei* (8.6) when discussing the Neoplatonic model of a mutable physical world that depends on celestial archetypes or ideas. In this model, an imperfect creature with a finite lifespan takes its true nature from the unchanging, perfect, eternal Form or Idea that gives it its being.<sup>33</sup> Augustine's authoritative imprimatur made it natural for the twelfth-century Victorines to use the model of hierarchical resemblance to underpin their conception of a legible world. Richard of St. Victor in his commentary on the Apocalypse, draws both on Romans 1.20 and on Augustine's account of resemblance to higher Forms in order to justify the allegorical reading of Scripture in a process of contemplation:

Nec solum excellentissimarum rerum visibilium praeclaris et lucidis  
similitudinibus, quae invisibilia sunt figurantur, sed mediarum et

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<sup>33</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 8.6, ed. Bernardus Dombart and Alfons Kalb, *CCSL* 47, 5th edn (Stuttgart, 1981), 222-24. See Lucken, 'Les hiéroglyphes de Dieu', 34-35.

infirmarum rerum qualitatibus multoties convenientissime designantur.

Nam quia nihil eorum quae sunt, est universaliter boni participatione privatum.

(Not only are invisible things figured by the wholly clear and lucid resemblance to them found in the most excellent visible things, but very often they are most aptly represented by the qualities of common and feeble things. For nothing that exists is wholly cut off from participation in the good.)<sup>34</sup>

The world, participating in the good and full of resemblance, enables material manuduction, ‘id est rerum corporalium similitudine, quae secundum ipsum est, id est, quam novit, ad immaterialem minime posset ascendere contemplationem’ (which is the similitude of corporeal things, according to that which is, i.e. what it knows, our spirit can, in a small way, lift its contemplation up to the immaterial.)<sup>35</sup>

Richard has already drawn the distinction between vision with the eyes of the flesh, which is ‘base and infirm, and because it is narrow, does not apprehend the greatest things’,<sup>36</sup> and vision with the eyes of the heart when the ‘mind, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, is led to knowledge of invisible things by the similar models of visible

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<sup>34</sup> Richard of Saint-Victor, *In Apocalypsim Joannis Libri Septem*, 1.1, *PL* 196:688C.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.1, *PL* 196:688C.

<sup>36</sup> ‘[H]aec visio infima et infirma est: quae, quia angusta est, maxima non comprehendit.’ *Ibid.*, 1.1, *PL* 196:686B. Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 1.12.24; ed./trans. Green, 22-23.

things'.<sup>37</sup> Humans unaided cannot read the world as it is, but are reliant on the divinely inspired written accounts of it that are Scripture. The use of visible images serves thus to accommodate the perceptual and intellectual limitations of carnal humans whose faculties and intellect were corrupted with the Fall. Hugh in his *Didascalicon* says that

[o]mnis natura Deum loquitur. Omnis natura hominem docet. Omnis natura rationem parit, et nihil in universitate infecundum est.

(every nature declares God. Every nature teaches man. Every nature produces meaning, and nothing in the universe is sterile.)<sup>38</sup>

While this might seem to lend justification to the allegorical practice by which bestiaries identify meaning in the natures of beasts, birds, or stones, such a claim is, in fact, used to explain the allegory or tropology of historical events in Scripture and there is no suggestion of reading the world unmediated by the Bible. Even in his *De sacramentis Christiani fidei*, where Hugh sees the disposition of birds and fishes in the sky and sea as a sacrament bearing a tropological message about those who fall

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<sup>37</sup> 'animus per Spiritum sanctum illuminatus formalibus rerum visibilium similitudinibus [...] ad invisibilium ducitur cognitionem.' Ibid., 1.1, *PL* 196:686D.

<sup>38</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Didascalicon*, 6.5; ed. Buttner, 223.

into sin or who ascend to heaven through grace, he does so in the context of the discussion of creation in Genesis.<sup>39</sup>

In both suggesting a legible world but circumscribing the very specific conditions of its legibility, Hugh follows directly in the footsteps of Augustine, who suggests a legible world, when expounding Psalm 45:

Liber tibi sit pagina divina, ut haec audias, liber tibi sit orbis terrarum,  
ut haec videas. In istis codicibus non ea legunt, nisi qui litteras  
noverunt: in toto mundo legat et idiota.

(Let the page of divine scripture be a book to you, that you might hear  
it; let the whole of the Earth be a book to you, that you might see it.  
Only the literate can read those books, but even the illiterate can read  
the entire world.)<sup>40</sup>

Augustine has been glossing the psalm's description of the mountains being moved to the middle of the sea (Psalms 45.3) to understand it allegorically as predicting how the mountain – understood as Jesus – was to leave the Jews to be established amongst the Gentiles. This depiction of the world as a book is an invocation to Augustine's (Gentile, Christian) audience to see the historical reality that has, in fact, come to pass.

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<sup>39</sup> Hugh of Saint Victor, *De sacramentis*, 1.1.27, *PL* 176:203C-D. Cf. FitzGerald, 'Time, History, and Mutability', 220. I disagree slightly with FitzGerald in understanding Hugh to assert the sacramental value of the created world only as mediated by Scripture.

<sup>40</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 45.7, *CCSL* 38:552.

They do not need to be literate to see that Paul's preaching of Jesus was rejected by the Jews,<sup>41</sup> and that it is the Gentiles who are Christians now. This relatively simple message does not quite explain the curious importance that Augustine places on the idea of the legible world, which is being used here as a counterpoint to the obscure images of the mountain and the sea through which the psalm foretold this historical event. For Augustine, as later for Hugh of Saint-Victor, the visible things of the world can only be interpreted figuratively in relation to the book that is Scripture. However, even if Augustine's explicit message in reading the world – to notice how history has played out – is rather limited, the rhetorical yoking together of the testimony of the world and the testimony of the Bible is significant. The rhetoric stresses the fundamental analogy between the world and text, between things and words.

Such a parallel can be seen in Augustine's commentary on Psalms 8.4 in which he sees in the heavens, 'opera digitorum tuorum' (works of your fingers), an allegory for the Law given to Moses, which is 'digito Dei scriptam' (written by the finger of God).<sup>42</sup> This passage is surely in Hugh of Saint-Victor's mind when he describes the world as a book 'scriptus digito Dei' in his *De tribus diebus*. Beyond the reading of Scripture, then, there is strong strain in Augustinian thinking that understands the created world made up of signs for interpretation, like a book.

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Acts. 13.46.

<sup>42</sup> Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 8.7, CCSL 38:52. Cf. his *Confessiones*, 13.15.17, ed. Martin Skutella and Lucas Verheijen, CCSL 27 (Turnhout, 1981), 251: 'Videamus, domine, caelos, opera digitorum tuorum: disserena oculis nostris nubilum, quo subtextisti eos.' (Let us see, Lord, the heavens, the works of your fingers; clear from our eyes the cloud with which you have covered them.)

Another version of the Neoplatonic conception of a created and legible world which participates in the divine and can be used to arrive at it can be seen in John Scotus Eriugena's ninth-century account of resemblance in his *Homily on the Prologue to John's Gospel*, also available in a twelfth-century monastic context.

Lux divinae cognitionis de mundo recessit, dum homo deum deservit.

Dupliciter ergo lux aeterna se ipsam mundo declarat, per scripturam videlicet et creaturam. Non enim aliter in nobis divina cognitio renouatur, nisi per divinae scripturae apices et creaturae species.

(The light of divine cognition retreated from the world when man abandoned God. Therefore eternal light declares itself to the world in two ways, that is through Scripture and through creation. For divine cognition is not renewed in us in any way other than by the letters of divine scripture and the appearances of creatures.)<sup>43</sup>

Given the limitations of the human intellect and senses after the Fall, it was no easy matter to penetrate the visible forms of things to see the invisible truths of divine wisdom. The monks of the twelfth century could, however, turn to the Neoplatonic writings of the sixth century Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite as mediated by his commentator John Scotus to articulate a process of mystical contemplation and

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<sup>43</sup> John Scotus, *Homilia super 'In principio erat Verbum'*, 11, ed. Édouard A. Jeauneau and Andrew Hicks, *CCCM* 166 (Turnhout, 2008), 21.



spiritual ascent.<sup>44</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor explained Pseudo-Dionysius's concept of 'material manuduction' as the steps by which the human mind, shrouded in the clouds of its ignorance, could be led from the sight of material creatures to the invisible things of which those creatures were signs and ultimately, as Augustine had written, to knowledge of the Trinity.<sup>45</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius's concept of material manuduction that John Scotus made available in Latin and through his commentary is a process that relies on revelation, as Hugh of Saint-Victor makes clear in his own commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius's *De hierarchia coelesti*. While through its outward appearance nature can testify to the Creator who made it, its contemplation alone cannot bring salvation. Instead,

[m]ajor autem, ut diximus, declaratio divinitatis in sacramentis gratiae,  
et carne Verbi, et mystica operatione ipsius ostenditur, quam naturali  
rerum specie praedicetur.

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<sup>44</sup> In his *Didascalicon* written before 1121, Hugh names Dionysius as a canonical author worthy of study. See Dominique Poirel, *Des symboles et des anges: Hugues de Saint-Victor et le réveil dionysien du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Bibliotheca Victorina, 23 (Turnhout, 2013), 20.

<sup>45</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Commentarium in Hierarchiam coelestem S. Dionysii Areopagitae secundum interpretatione Joannis Scoti*, 2.1, PL 175:947D-948D. Cf. Augustine of Hippo, *De trinitate*, 6.10.12, ed. W. J. Mountain and François Glorie, CCSL 50 (Turnhout, 1968), 242-43. For the importance and influence of Hugh of Saint-Victor's rediscovery of Pseudo-Dionysius, see Poirel, *Des symboles et des anges*, 337-502 and Csaba Nemeth, 'The Victorines and the Areopagite', in *L'école de Saint-Victor de Paris: Influence et rayonnement à l'époque moderne*, ed. Dominique Poirel. Bibliotheca Victorina, 22 (Turnhout, 2010), 333-83.

(there is a greater declaration of divinity shown in the sacraments of grace and by the flesh of the Word and its mystical operation, than might be proclaimed by the natural appearance of things.)<sup>46</sup>

For all the importance of the motif of the world as a kind of book that bears witness to its Divine author, for theologians the ways in which it was possible to read it were narrowly circumscribed. Only aided by grace and through a mystical reading process that combined the ascetic life and meditation on Scripture was it possible to use the appearances of visible creatures to gain knowledge of the invisible things described by Paul in Romans 1.

From the twelfth-century theological perspective, then, the allegory of the *Physiologus* and of the bestiaries that followed it goes further than the theologians would allow in its interpretation of the world. It suggests a world that *is* legible in that its creatures, whose fixed meanings can be interpreted and whose natures, if they are studied, can serve as visible signs of invisible truths, even if they are not described in the Bible.<sup>47</sup> Implicitly, bestiaries present the world as a book whose pages can be read like those of Scripture, capable of signifying in a manner analogous – although not identical – to the Eucharist or the Bible and susceptible to the same kinds of allegorical or tropological readings that were used in Scriptural exegesis. The

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<sup>46</sup> Hugh of Saint-Victor, *Commentariorum in hierarchiam coelestem*, 1.1, PL 175:927A.

<sup>47</sup> I here disagree with Zucker (*Physiologos*, 42-44) for whom the creatures of the *Physiologus* do not offer fixed, definitive meanings. I am unable to judge whether his claim holds for the Greek material in his edition but the Latin versions of the text received in the High Middle Ages differ considerably in fixing the allegorical meanings of these animals.

implication is that God, in his providence, so ordered the natures of animals that they would reveal messages to Christians who knew how to read them, not just as they behave in Biblical narratives.

Zambon has associated the allegory of the *Physiologus* (and thus all subsequent bestiaries) with that described by Origen, especially in his commentary on the Songs of Songs.<sup>48</sup> For Origen, the concealed patterns of the world are a support for an allegorical Biblical hermeneutics, but unlike Augustine he suggests patterns of resemblance that are fixed in the nature of living creatures. The visible world has patterns or copies ('exemplaria') of the celestial archetypes, so that all visible things have some invisible likeness and all the invisible things can be understood and deduced from the things that are seen.<sup>49</sup> There is some affinity here with bestiaries which posit universal natures of creatures which themselves signify in a fixed way. However, despite the *Physiologus* being composed in Greek in the same Alexandrian context in which Origen worked, Origen's practice differs significantly from that of the bestiary in that, as for Augustine, his concern is with scriptural exegesis and animals as they are mentioned in the Bible. The *Physiologus*, in contrast, while at moments glossing the Bible, interprets creatures as they are said to behave in general to derive a fixed, spiritual sense from their nature. The example given above – that of the lion-father bringing his cubs to life with his breath – has no Scriptural foundation, but, it is suggested, is a potentially observable zoological phenomenon. Moreover, some creatures, such as the aspidochelone, do not even feature in the Bible. Finally,

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<sup>48</sup> Zambon, 'Figura bestialis', 709; 'Teologia del Bestiario', 26-27; and Richard de Fournival, *Il bestiario d'amore e la risposta al Bestiario*, ed. Francesco Zambon, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Parma, 1991), 5.

<sup>49</sup> Origen, *Commentaire*, 3.13.16, 2:632-34.

the material in the Greek and Latin versions of the *Physiologus*, not to mention that of later bestiaries, does not suggest, even if it does not exclude, anything like the systematic economy of allegorical signification that Origen outlines in his commentary on the Song of Songs. The Origenian identifying of patterns in the very nature of things, an approach that may usefully be compared with the ontological truth of the ‘symbol’ at the heart of Pseudo-Dionysian Neoplatonism, differs from Augustine’s more mutable sign.<sup>50</sup> Bestiaries assign meaning to natural creatures as signs giving specific, fixed messages rather treating them as signifiers dependent on historical context or as mystical symbols and thus differ substantially both from Augustine and from the Pseudo-Dionysian approach of the twelfth-century Victorine theologians.<sup>51</sup>

Assigning such fixed meanings to the natures of animals clearly does not square with twelfth-century Augustinian practice in which the thing that signifies does so in historical time, as recounted in Scripture. In his *De scripturis et scriptoribus sacris*, Hugh of Saint Victor attacks those who attempt to fix allegorical meanings to creatures independently of Scriptural context.<sup>52</sup> Following Augustine,<sup>53</sup> Hugh

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<sup>50</sup> See Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society*, 124-28. Zambon does, however, make a plausible case for John Scotus having been familiar with bestiary material in ‘Teologia del Bestiario’, 45-47.

<sup>51</sup> The liberty, however, with which some bestiaries, in particular that written by Philippe, change the allegorical meanings found on earlier books or add new ones suggests that not all writers of bestiaries shared the same conception of a fixed natural sign.

<sup>52</sup> Hugh of Saint Victor, *De scripturis*, 5, *PL* 175:13A-15A.

<sup>53</sup> Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, 3.35.78-3.38.82, ed./trans, Green, 166-69.

criticizes those who rashly identify a lion as always standing for Jesus. He writes of these people that they interpret the lion who sleeps with its eyes open as a sign of Jesus' death before the resurrection and subsequently see it as a fixed allegory to read every lion in Scripture as standing for Jesus. Hugh is establishing a clear Augustinian position that relies on a reading practice of a signifying world where creatures can only signify allegorically in a historical context.<sup>54</sup> What is quite striking about the allegory of the lion that Hugh mentions is that its source, in fact, is the *Physiologus*, where the lion who sleeps with its eyes open stands for Jesus.<sup>55</sup> While there are grounds for suggesting that the *Physiologus* does not necessarily propose the approach to Scriptural exegesis that Hugh describes, it is clear that he sees its practice of identifying fixed allegory of the natures of creatures to be dangerously misguided, which chimes with his description of the *Physiologus* as written by heretics mentioned above.

Where the Neoplatonism of the *Physiologus* tradition accords better with Augustinian theology is in the importance of the Incarnation for allowing the natural world to signify; Jesus is what binds the whole world (as well as the *Physiologus*,

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<sup>54</sup> See Grover A. Zinn, 'The Influence of the *De Doctrina Christiana* upon the Writings of Hugh of St. Victor', in *Reading and Wisdom: The De Doctrina Christiana of Augustine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Edward D. English (Notre Dame and London, 1995), 48-60 (53-54). Chenu, *La théologie au douzième siècle*, 191-209 discusses how the Victorine approach to symbolic theology placed a particular emphasis on the historical and literal senses for the understanding of Scriptural allegory.

<sup>55</sup> *Physiologus-B*, 11. This property of the lion appeared after the *Physiologus*, although without the allegory in Isidore *Etymologiae*, 12.2.5, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911).

book of the book-of-the-world) together in a signifying system. Origen, in his commentary on Romans 1.20, stresses how the visible world is evidence of the invisible truths of its creator, Jesus Christ, who made both the visible and the invisible things, citing Col. 1.16: ‘quia in ipso condita sunt universa in caelis et in terra visibilia et invisibilia.’ (for in him were all things created in heaven and earth, visible and invisible.)<sup>56</sup> In the *Physiologus* (as in Philippe de Thaon’s French *Bestiaire*) there is an insistent focus on the person of Jesus, which also accords very well with the tradition of Augustine and the theologians who followed him. As mentioned earlier, in Book 10 of his *De civitate Dei*, Augustine emphasizes the centrality of Jesus, ‘verus ille Mediator’ (that true Mediator),<sup>57</sup> for the understanding of the Platonic model by which spiritual truths are made available to humans thanks to Divine providence.<sup>58</sup> The *Physiologus* and bestiaries founded on its model imply an allegorical book of nature by which higher truths can be read in the properties of earthly creatures, a process which depends on a Neoplatonic model of concordance between visible and invisible realities. As for Hugh of Saint-Victor, because of sin and the Fall, the human understanding of this connection is only possible thanks to the Incarnation. While later bestiaries, notably the Second-Family bestiaries so popular in medieval Britain, take a less allegorical and more descriptive approach overall, earlier bestiaries, such as the *Dicta Chysostomi* or the B-Is versions of the *Physiologus* present themselves as tools for the contemplation of and meditation on the mediation of Jesus, the Word

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<sup>56</sup> Origen, *Commentaria in epistolam S. Pauli ad Romanos*, 1, PG 14:864B.

<sup>57</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 10.20, ed. Dombart and Kalb, 294. See also *Confessiones*, 10.43.68, ed. Skutella and Verheijen, 192.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Ann R. Meyer, *Medieval Allegory and the Building of the New Jerusalem* (Cambridge, 2003), 47-53.

made flesh that makes it possible for the flesh of created creatures to be treated as natural, allegorical signs.

#### IV, THE BOOK OF THE WORLD AND MATERIAL MANUDUCTION IN THE *BESTIAIRE DE PHILIPPE DE THAON*

It is with these different versions of the idea of a signifying book-of-the-world that we can give a new account of Philippe's bestiary, the first written in French. It is not a crude translation of a B-Is Latin bestiary or an inept collection of curiosities and allegories, as suggested by McCulloch, Meyer, and Mann, but a mystical reading of the natural world informed both by the bestiary tradition within which it is inscribed and the dominant strains of Augustinian and Victorine exegetical practices that were so important in twelfth-century monastic culture. Philippe seeks to rework monastic mysticism into a lay context by modifying the slightly unorthodox Neoplatonism of the Latin *Physiologus* so that it accords with the more authoritative Victorine spiritual, reading process implied by Hugh's idea of the book-of-the-world. The individual allegories themselves are of secondary importance to the overall construction of the poem, which is a sophisticated attempt to engineer a material manuduction, an ascent from the visible to the invisible, in quite a different way from that suggested by the Neoplatonic theologians for the meditation on and exegesis of Scripture. Philippe's concern is to offer his Francophone and not primarily Latinate audience a collective ascent – enabled by a rhetorical, verse performance in a courtly setting – towards the contemplation of spiritual realities, dependent on the relationship between a legible world and the Word. Far from faithfully translating, the *Bestiaire* is full of insertions and modifications not found in other bestiaries that reveal Philippe's careful

reworking of bestiary material, such as a particular stress on questions of avarice and covetousness that, in principle at least, pertain far more to the court than to the monastery.<sup>59</sup>

Mary Carruthers has suggested a monastic readership of Philippe's bestiary, noting that in one of the three surviving manuscripts of the *Bestiaire*, the late twelfth-century British Library, MS. Cotton Nero A. V., the folia containing the bestiary come from the English Cistercian library of St. Mary's, Holmcultram. She thus associates the text as among the 'puerilia' of a medieval monastic education, presumably for those not yet Latinate.<sup>60</sup> This point is, moreover, supported by another manuscript, Merton 249, also thirteenth-century, which binds the *Bestiaire* with a collection of Latin religious texts by Gregory I, Innocent III, and Maurice of Sully among others.<sup>61</sup> The internal evidence of the *Bestiaire* itself, though, suggests very

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<sup>59</sup> See, for example, his glossing of sirens to stand for money at lines 1375-1414 or the sand on the whale's back, which stands for 'les richesses del mund' (the riches of the world) at line 1932, both of which readings are original to Philippe, unless they occur in a non-extant bestiary that might be Philippe's source. The sheer number of Philippe's additions makes it highly unlikely that a lost source or sources can account for them all.

<sup>60</sup> See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*. Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 126-27.

<sup>61</sup> The slightly later third manuscript, Copenhagen, Royal Library, GKS 3466, contains only an incomplete version of the *Bestiaire* and is a far more lavishly decorated book. See <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/225/eng/> (accessed 22 September 2014). A postmedieval hand has inscribed 'Ex libris Sancti Martini in Campis' (from the library of the Saint-Martin-les-Champs priory) on fol. 3r, which allows that manuscript to be placed tentatively in a clerical context as well.



strongly that it was composed for a courtly audience, specifically that of Henry I of England. This is not to disagree with Carruthers. Rather, it is to highlight the hybrid nature of bestiary material in the High Middle Ages, passing between clerical and lay contexts, particularly as an increasing number of bestiaries were written in the vernacular. A series of Latin rubrications run through the *Bestiaire*, which translate aspects of the Anglo-Norman verse and offer rubrications for the text's illuminations.

The text's Latin proemium begins with this dedication:

In nomine sancte et individue Trinitatis, Bestiarius incipit quem  
Philippus Taonensis fecit in laude et memoria regine Anglie, Aelidis.

(In the holy and individual name of the Trinity begins the Bestiary that  
Philippe of Thaon made in praise and memory of the queen of England,  
Adeliza.)<sup>62</sup>

This Latin is a rendering of the French opening which follows:

Philippe de Thaün  
en franceise raisun  
at estrait Bestiaire,  
un livre de gramaire,  
pur l'onur d'une gemme

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<sup>62</sup> Philippe de Thaon, *Le bestiaire de Philippe de Thaün*, in *Bestiari medievali*, ed. Morini, 103-285 (112).

ki mult est bele femme,  
[E est curteise e sage,  
de bonis murs e large:]  
Aliz est numee,  
reïne est corunee,  
reïne est d'Engleterre.

(Philippe de Thaon has translated the Bestiary, a book of Latin (or grammar), into French, for the honor of a gem who is a very beautiful, courteous, and wise woman, moral and generous. She is named Adeliza and is crowned queen of England.)<sup>63</sup>

The French dedication to Philippe de Thaon's Anglo-Norman *Bestiaire* dates it to the period 1120-1135, from Henry I's marriage to his second wife Adeliza to his death.<sup>64</sup> The Latin version, however, is dedicated to her praise and memory ('in laude et memoria') which implies that it was written well after Adeliza's death in 1151 and thus significantly after the composition of the French material. The likely explanation seems to be that the bestiary was originally an Anglo-Norman courtly poem that saw later Latin prose additions appropriate for a monastic readership. In any case, it demonstrates the mobility and mutability of bestiary material, between clerical and lay, between Latin and the vernacular. The question of mediation between languages

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<sup>63</sup> *Le bestiaire*, lines 1-11.

<sup>64</sup> A thirteenth-century manuscript bears witness to a later, updated dedication which refers not to Adeliza but to Eleanor of Aquitaine, whom King Henry II married in 1151. See Oxford, Merton College, M. 249, fol. 1r.

is emphasized at the work's opening as Philippe gives an invented Hebrew etymology of Adeliza's name to mean the 'praise of God'.<sup>65</sup> Then the first entry, on the lion, opens with a reference to Greek etymology, taken from Isidore's *Etymologiae*.

Ceo qu'en griu est *leün*  
en franceis 'rei' ad num.  
Leüins en mainte guise  
mutes bestes justise;  
pur ceo est reis leüins.

(That which in the Greek is lion means 'king' in French. The lion rules over mute beasts in many ways, and so the lion is king.)<sup>66</sup>

Philippe establishes himself as a translator of Latin material for the Francophone royal court (in which the lion's kingly aspects would not go unnoticed), and the narrator's role in the *Bestiaire* is significant for how material taken from the *Physiologus* tradition is reworked. His naming of the bestiary as a 'livre de gramaire' is significant. While the primary meaning of 'livre de gramaire' here is a book in Latin, the term

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<sup>65</sup> *Le bestiaire*, 112 for the Latin, lines 13-18 for the French.

<sup>66</sup> *Le bestiaire*, lines 25-29. Cf. *Etymologiae*, 12.2.3: 'Leo autem Graece, Latine rex interpretatur, eo quod princeps sit omnium bestiarum.' (However, the Greek word 'lion' is rendered 'king' in Latin, and this comes from the fact that the lion is ruler of all the beasts.) Philippe was almost certainly working from a B-Is version of the *Physiologus*, one with significant additions from the *Etymologiae*. See McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries*, 28-29.

may also suggest the status of the *Physiologus* as book used in grammar teaching, as it was in monastic schools.<sup>67</sup> The rhyme ‘Bestiaire/gramaire’ recurs three times more in Philippe’s text<sup>68</sup> and suggests his position as a mediator between the Latin culture of the monastic schools and the non-Latinate space of courtly performance.

In his *Enarratio* on Psalm 45, Augustine, ultimately drawing on Paul’s letter to the Romans, suggested that while the book of scripture could be read by the literate the world could be interpreted even by the illiterate. The qualified and limited way in which the world could be read, despite Augustine’s stirring invocation of a hermeneutics of visible things, has been discussed, and a circumspect approach to

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<sup>67</sup> An *accessus* to the *Physiologus* circulated in German monastic circles. See *Accessus ad auctores*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Leiden, 1970), 26. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, 91 attributes the *accessus* to Conrad of Hirsau. For a discussion of bestiaries and education, with particular reference to so-called Second-Family Bestiaries, see Clark, 98-113. However, as Baudouin van den Abeele notes in his review, there is far more evidence for seeing the use of the *Dicta Chrysostomi* and the eleventh-century verse *Physiologus Theobaldi* as a monastic school-text in German circles than there is for Second-Family Bestiaries in England. See Baudouin Van den Abeele, ‘Review of Willene C. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*’, *Le Moyen Age*, 118:1 (2012), 241-43 (242-43). The evidence for the German context can be found in Henkel, *Studien zum ‘Physiologus’ im Mittelalter*, 53-58.

<sup>68</sup> *Le bestiaire*, lines 1773-74; 1957-58; 3043-44. At lines 3007-08, Philippe’s audience is directed to the Lapidary, the ‘lapidaire’, already ‘estrait de grammaire’ (translated from the grammar) by Philippe himself. He also composed a verse translation of the *Computus*, a text used to calculate the date of Easter. See Philippe de Thaon, *Comput: MS BL Cotton Nero A. V*, ed. Ian Short (London, 1984) and *Li Cumpoz Philipe de Thain*, ed. Eduard Mall (Strasbourg, 1873).

interpreting the world, cognizant of the role of fallen language in the hermeneutic process, informs Philippe's controlling presence. As reported by William of Malmesbury in his *Gesta regum Anglorum*, Henry had a park at Woodstock containing animals sent to him from foreign countries including lions, leopards, lynxes, camels, and a porcupine.<sup>69</sup> Philippe does not, however, suggest to Henry and Adeliza's court the option of interpreting animals, birds, or stones themselves, or even of contemplating any of the real animals in the menagerie or beyond it to reflect on their meanings. The emphasis is placed on receiving the correct allegory from textual authoritative sources, and the *Bestiaire*, like the *Physiologus*, directs its audience from the natural world to written sources, and ultimately to the book of Scripture.

The structure of the B-text of the *Physiologus* depends on the allegories of its creatures. Ron Baxter has convincingly argued that creatures in the B-version of the *Physiologus* are ordered according to their allegorical meaning rather than to their genus, suggesting a thematic unity. Each thematic section starts with an animal that figures Jesus and continues with several others whose allegorical meaning is on a similar theme. One series of animals, for example, comprises of allegories that teach about the relationship between the spirit and letter of the Law and another on the relationship between Jews and Gentiles).<sup>70</sup> Philippe's *Bestiaire*, while significantly

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<sup>69</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 5.409.2-3, ed./trans. R.A.B. Mynors, Rodney M. Thomson, and Michael Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998-99), 1:740-41. Clark, *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, 18 notes how Henry, on conquering Caen in April 1105, paraded his menagerie, which also included an ostrich, in front an enraptured audience.

<sup>70</sup> Baxter, *Medieval Bestiaries and their Users*, 30-35. While the thematic ordering is quite a bit looser and the allegorical messages are less systematic than his model suggests, Baxter

reordering the different entries, preserves the practice of composing a bestiary whose order is governed by allegory. He sharpens the focus on Jesus, the Word-made-flesh who serves as a mediator between the material and the divine, and, informed by the idea of mystical ascent that Hugh of Saint-Victor was making central to twelfth-century theology, he seeks to draw his audience from the noble and beautiful beasts towards the invisible realities of God. Philippe's project is to engineer a spiritual progression to result in the collective contemplation of the divine as the ecstatic final result of a collective reading of the *Bestiaire*.

There is a fairly clear structure to the *Bestiaire* and it is one which suggests affinities with Victorine mystical theology. As Emanuel Walberg notes in his edition of the text, Philippe divides his entries into (1) beasts, for the first twenty-three creatures; (2) birds, the next eleven; and finally (3) stones, for the final four sections.<sup>71</sup> This kind of organization is a significant departure from the B-Is *Physiologus* whose order depends on the allegorical (or invisible) level of meaning rather than the literal (or visible) level of the creatures' *genus*. It does, though, fit into a European trend in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries in which bestiaries such as

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convincingly shows how throughout the text, the entries are arranged in patterns according to their allegorical, spiritual sense, rather than according to a taxonomy based on their physical, visible genera, such as reptiles or beasts of burden.

<sup>71</sup> See also Philippe, *Le Bestiaire de Philippe de Thaün*, ed. Emmanuel Walberg (Lund and Paris, 1900), xxix and J. R. Smeets, 'L'ordre des "animaux" dans le "Physiologus" de Philippe de Thaün et la prétendue préséance de la perdrix sur l'aigle', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 40 (1962), 798-803, (799). Smeets notes (803) that Philippe omits the entries in the *Physiologus* about the peredixion, a kind of tree, and on the prophet Amos, in order to have a tripartite structure of animals, birds, and stones.

the *Dicta Chrysostomi* and to a lesser extent the H-type of the B-Is *Physiologus* (witnessed by London, British Library, MS Stowe 1067 and the later Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 22), organize their entries by genus. Philippe could well be influenced by the taxonomy of the *Dicta Chrysostomi*, which circulated more widely in a European monastic context, especially in Austria and Germany, and which ordered its creatures into beasts and birds,<sup>72</sup> although the ordering of his material and the detail of the material itself differ from any other bestiary.<sup>73</sup> The first six animals, including the lion and the hydrus are all interpreted allegorically (‘Ço est allegorie’) as representing aspects of Jesus. Creatures 7-17 (from the aptalon to the asp) give moral messages about human behavior. Entries 18-24 (from the serra to the partridge, the first avian entry) all give messages about the devil. The following five birds (25-29) all represent Jesus. Number 30, the turtle-dove, represents the Church and Mary. Entries 31-35 represent man again, and the final three entries on stones (the diamond,

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<sup>72</sup> Morini, *Bestiari medievali*, xvii makes this suggestion and discusses the order of entries (107). For the order of the *Dicta Chrysostomi*, see Francesco Sbordone, ‘La tradizione manoscritta’, 253 and *Theobaldi ‘Physiologus’*, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Xenia Muratova notes the scholarly consensus that the order in Philippe’s bestiary is different from every known Latin bestiary, although she notes Paul Meyer’s observation that Philippe may be following a bestiary that is not currently known to scholars. See her ‘The decorated MSS of the bestiary of Philippe de Thaon (The MS. 3466 from the Royal Library in Copenhagen and the MS. 249 in the Merton College Library, Oxford) and the problem of the illustrations of the medieval poetical bestiary’, in *Third International Beast Epic, Fable and Fabliau Colloquium, Münster 1979*, ed. Jan Goossens and Timothy Sodmann. *Niederdeutsche Studien*, 30 (Cologne and Vienna, 1981), 217-46, (224).

the twelve stones of the Apocalypse,<sup>74</sup> and the ‘union’ or pearl, which includes discussion of the beryl) represent Jesus and finally the Trinity. Philippe has ordered his text with the aim of provoking a journey of spiritual development through the reading process in a way that has some similarities with the allegorical models of earlier Latin bestiaries. A similar reading trajectory can be found in the *Dicta Chrysostomi* bestiary that circulated widely in continental Europe and in a forthcoming article Sarah Kay, following a suggestion by Nikolaus Henkel, makes a strong case for Philippe’s having been influenced by the *Dicta* in his ordering.<sup>75</sup> Accordingly, some of the conclusions drawn below about the programmed spiritual experience in the performance of Philippe’s *Bestiaire* will also be of relevance to the ordering of other bestiaries.

The trajectory goes as follows. The reader and audience start with Jesus and then descend with the animals to the lower depths of human behavior, resulting in teachings warning of the devil. At the very middle of the text, is the entry for the elephant, in which the dragon attacking the chaste elephants prompts the narration of the Fall, the justification for the Incarnation, and, more indirectly, for the bestiary:

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<sup>74</sup> This description of the twelve stones of the Apocalypse is the only entry in Philippe’s bestiary that is not found in the *Physiologus*. See Philippe, *Le bestiaire*, ed. Walberg, xixx and Friedrich Lauchert, *Geschichte des Physiologus* (Strasbourg, 1889), 137.

<sup>75</sup> I am grateful to Sarah Kay for drawing my attention to the importance of the *Dicta Chrysostomi* for this point, which she discusses in her forthcoming article, provisionally entitled ‘The English Bestiary, the Continental *Physiologus*, and the intersections between them’. See, also, Henkel, *Studien zum Physiologus*, 31 n. 52.



E pur ceo li fiz Dé  
vint de sa majesté  
e pur hom charn prist,  
en grant peine se mist;  
puis dunat a sa gent,  
a tuz, ferm fundement;  
sur pere nus assist,  
a praier nus asprist,<sup>76</sup>  
et sur pere se sist,  
sa ureisen i escrist.

(And for this reason, the son of God came from his majesty and took on flesh for the sake of man, and underwent great suffering; then he gave to his people, to all, a firm foundation; he set us on rock, he taught us how to pray, and he sat on rock, and wrote his prayer there.)<sup>77</sup>

The theme of Jesus is then reintroduced with the soaring eagle, closely associated with the Gospel of John whose opening discussion of the Word is so important for mystical theology. The Church mediates between God and man in the entry on the turtle dove, following which there are descriptions of birds and then stones giving moral lessons about how to orientate oneself towards righteousness, which leads back towards Jesus and the Trinity at the close of the text. The organization is clearly important in suggesting a trajectory in the reading process that,

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<sup>76</sup> The emphasis on prayer recurs with the entry on the ibis at lines 2688 and 2727, and becomes the primary focus of the close of the text, as discussed below.

<sup>77</sup> *Le bestiaire*, lines 1497-1506.

returning again and again to meditation on the hypostatic union, gradually leaves behind the terrestrial and the flawed to arrive at the spiritual truths of heaven. This idea of a spiritual internal journey towards God through the reading process ultimately comes from Augustine who, in the *De doctrina*, understands it as a moral and intellectual progress, removing oneself ‘ab omni mortifera iucunditate rerum transeuntium’ (from the fatal charms of transient things) and converting oneself ‘ad dilectionem aeternorum, incommutabilem scilicet unitatem eandemque trinitatem’ (to the love of eternal things, namely the unchangeable unity which is also the Trinity).<sup>78</sup>

Such a process is also suggested by the ethical progression or its hierarchy, symbolized by the *Bestiaire*’s tripartite structure as described in its *Bestiaire*’s epilogue:

[Beste] est mue encline [a] terre,  
aillurs ne volt pulture quere:  
tut issi funt li hom del mund,  
richeises querent kis cunfunt,  
quant tant les aiment a tenir  
que pur Deu nes volent partir.  
Li oisel vunt dreit volant  
la sus vers le ciel joiant:

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<sup>78</sup> Augustine, *De doctrina*, 2.7.20; ed./trans. Green, 64-65. Augustine’s individual journey of spiritual progress is articulated at *De doctrina*, 2.7.16-23; ed./trans. Green, 62-67. Cf. also 1.4.9; Green, 16-17 and 1.17.34; Green, 26-27.

tut issi est de mainte gent,  
vers le cel lur curage tent.  
Pere est ferme, par sei stable,  
tuz jurz est chose permeivable:  
signefiance est d'ume sage  
ki en ben tuz jurs ad curage.  
[Beste] est demustringe d'enfant,  
e oisels d'ume a De tendant.

(A beast is mute, facing the ground and does not wish to look for food elsewhere. Men of the world do exactly the same thing; they seek wealth, which kills them when they love to hold on to it so much that they do not wish to leave it for God. Birds fly straight up happily to the sky. In the same way many people have their hearts set for the sky. The stone is firm and stable on its own; it is always a permanent thing. It signifies a wise man who always has his heart fixed on goodness. The beast represents a child and the bird represents a man drawn to God.)<sup>79</sup>

This trio of genera standing for a hierarchy of three types of people reveals a similarity with the hierarchy drawn by Hugh of Saint Victor in his *De arca Noe mystica*. For Hugh, the three categories of animals that enter the ark stand mystically for three categories of believers. The reptiles are those who live in the world lawfully, the quadrupeds in the ark stand for those who flee the world and the birds are those

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<sup>79</sup> *Le bestiaire*, lines 3169-84.

who have forgotten the world and left it far behind.<sup>80</sup> This is not to say that that Philippe necessarily read the *De arca Noe mystica* or its companion piece the *De arca Noe morali*. Rather, it is to show how his moralizing approach shares the same monastic mentality of the allegories of the school of Hugh of Saint Victor who, in their understanding of Augustine and the very different Pseudo-Dionysius, repeatedly understand the contemplative and exegetical process as one of gradual moral and epistemological ascent.<sup>81</sup>

The *Bestiaire*, then, proceeding from animals to birds to stones, moves from worldly snares to the desire for salvation and then to permanent righteousness. It would be too much, though, to identify a wholly consistent schema here – in fact, there are several allegories of ascent, which overlap and inform each other, just as there might be several allegorical interpretations for a single animal. What is more significant than outlining a specific allegorical understanding of the structure of the work, however, is the impression of that structure and this is where it is particularly important to consider the *Bestiaire* as an oral performance. If it is understood as an attempt to engender in its audience a sense of progression from the compromised natural world up through the mediation of Jesus to the contemplation of eternal truths, the nuances or inconsistencies of the depiction of that journey are less important than the feeling of a journey itself. There is a wholly intended sense of a spiritual ascent

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<sup>80</sup> Hugh of Saint Victor, *De arca Noe mystica*, 7, PL 176:695AB. See Grover A. Zinn, ‘De Gradibus Ascensionum’, 77-78.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 61-63.

that runs through the book that starts, is sustained by, and finishes with Jesus.<sup>82</sup> This journey is a process of material manuduction, of Philippe's leading his audience by the hand so that they can use the material visible world, while transcending it to arrive at greater knowledge of invisible truths. This is not the kind of monastic, ascetic process advocated by the Victorines following Pseudo-Dionysius, but a version adapted initially for a lay audience. Having started with attractive and exotic animals, Philippe has gradually led them up away from lower, terrestrial, animal life to the heavens and the invisible truths of the Trinity and at the end of the text he suggests another way in which the tripartite structure of his text testifies to the nature of God, to the Trinity and to salvation:

Mustré ai de treis maneres  
de bestes, de oisels e de peres;  
que de chascun de ces est un rai  
ceo demustre que Deus est rei;  
en persone est trinité  
e un suls est en deité.  
  
Icist Deus nus sait en aïe  
e la virgine sainte Marie  
  
Icist Deus nus otreit veir sen  
e vie perdurable. Amen.

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<sup>82</sup> The motif of reading as a journey of spiritual progression may draw on chapter 14 of Augustine's *De utilitate credendi*, PL 42:86-88; see Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1996), 174.

(I have now shown the three ways, of beasts, birds and stones, each of which is a ray that demonstrates that God is king. He is a unified trinity and is alone in his divinity. May God and the virgin Holy Mary help us. Let this God grant us true understanding and eternal life. Amen.)<sup>83</sup>

Just before the final sections of the *Bestiaire* – the diamond, the twelve stones of the Apocalypse, the beryl and the pearl, and the closing epilogue – Philippe’s verse switches from six-syllable lines to the more standard eight syllables – ‘Or voil mun metre muer / pur ma raison melz ordener’ (Now I want to change my meter the better to order my argument)<sup>84</sup> – as can be seen in the two passages cited immediately above. This signals a turn in this final section of just over 200 lines (lines 2989-3194), as the narrator directs his audience towards the splendor of Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven. These final sections see an elevated subject matter, a more exhortatory tone, and a far greater attention to Scripture, quite different from what has come before, while departing significantly from the material in any Latin versions of the

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<sup>83</sup> *Le bestiaire*, lines 3185-94.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 2889-90. The use of hexasyllabic lines is highly unusual, and the *Bestiaire* is one of the earliest examples of six-syllable lines in French literature. Philippe also uses it in his earlier *Comput*, bound in London, British Library, Cotton Nero A. V, along with Herbert of Bosham’s *Life of Thomas Becket*. Hugh Shields suggests that Philippe may have been the first author to use six-syllable couplets in French poetry. See Philippe de Thaon, *Le livre de Sibile*, ed. Hugh Shields (London, 1979), 44.

*Physiologus* text that might have served him as sources.<sup>85</sup> This holds particularly true for the entry on the beryl and the ‘union’ or pearl. The pearl stands for the grace that led to the Incarnation:

par grace fud que li fiz Dé  
fud a la Virgine présenté,  
par grace en cuillit le salud  
e par grace fud cunceüd.

(It happened by grace that the Son of God was brought to the virgin;  
by grace he thus enabled salvation and by grace he was conceived.)<sup>86</sup>

The ray that passes through the beryl (that represents Mary) stands, again, for the Incarnation, also suggesting a parallel between the Virgin and the poem’s female dedicatee, Adeliza, described at the beginning of the text as a ‘gemme’. Then Philippe refers to 1 Cor. 4.10 in which Jesus is described as a rock (‘petra’) and 1 Peter 2.4-5 in which Christ is described as a living stone (‘lapis visus’) and his followers as living stones (‘lapides vivi’), before quoting Jesus who at Matt. 16.18 tells Peter that he is the rock on which he will build his church. Up to this point the *Bestiaire* has alluded to Scripture following the Latin source/s, but has not quoted it repeatedly in the way that the *Physiologus* does. Here, however, Saints Paul, John, and Peter are named and quoted, along with Jesus. The more thorough combination or interweaving of the

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<sup>85</sup> See Mann, ‘Der *Bestiaire divin*’, 69-73 and Morini, *Bestiari medievali*, 84-89 for the comparable material from a B-Is *Physiologus* text.

<sup>86</sup> *Le bestiaire*, lines 3069-72.

book of the world and the book of Scripture that takes place throughout the *Physiologus* – as seen in the entry for the lion – only happens at this climactic end of Philippe’s rhetorical performance. Here, far from suggesting an equivalence between the natural world and the Bible, at the moment of spiritual climax it indicates Scripture as the true vehicle for salvation.

The program of rubricated images that run through Philippe’s text as through almost all bestiaries clearly indicates a work designed in part for visual contemplation, but the words indicate its use, at least at the time of its composition, as a public rhetorical performance. Like Augustine’s injunction in the *Enarrationes* to ‘hear the book’ of Scripture, the poetic *Bestiaire* is a book to be heard. It is designed to be performed over a period over around three hours and to result in a dramatic conclusion in which the courtly audience contemplate their salvation and the Word made flesh that make it possible. The injunction ‘oez’ (hear) runs throughout the text, occurring over forty times, along with reference to the ‘lords’ (‘Seignurs’) in the aristocratic audience, quite different from the ‘homines dei’ addressed by the *Physiologus*. The command, ‘Aiez en remembrance’ issued 12 times over the course of the poem – almost always rhymed with ‘ceo est signefiance’ – suggests a speaker urging his audience, potentially semi-literate or illiterate, to inscribe his teachings in the fleshly tables of their hearts, and suggests either an incantatory purpose to the text’s repetitiveness that belies its apparently clunky artlessness or a mnemonic function, admonishing listeners continually to remain concentrated on the spiritual sense of what they are hearing.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Le bestiaire*, lines 155-56; 279-80; 287-88; 385-86; 631-32; 954; 2065-66; 2139-40; 2215-16; 2387-88; 2595-96; 2871-72



The close of this bestiary is sui generis. Even while it draws on earlier Latin bestiaries it aims at a final, uplifting close designed to move its courtly listeners to pious contemplation. The entry on the pearl finishes with rhetorical fireworks, punning on the Old French word for a large pearl – ‘union’ – that at the beginning of the entry had the literal meaning of a pearl but now comes to be understood as linguistic pun on the union of the Trinity. At the same time, following the bestiary tradition of the signifying world, the material pearl both is itself a thing and is also a sign, a physical allegory of the union of the Trinity. This punning on ‘union’ demands a reevaluation of the literal and the material in order to prompt a turn towards the spiritual and the invisible. The material sign is discarded in real time as part at this final stage of the courtly material manuduction effected by the performance of the bestiary. By the end of the entry, ‘union’ only means Trinity: the material world has been left far behind and in its place Philippe offers an almost ecstatic declamation of the blessed life of heaven and the eternal mystery of the Divine.

Et tuit cil ki el cel irunt

cez oit boneurtez averunt:

vie, juvent, sant[é], amur,

repos, joie, pais e luur.

Union ceo durat senz fin,

issi cum dient clerc devin.

Union e sainte Marie

nus doinst ices .viii. duns de vie!

E Deus li otreit majesté

pur quei cest livere fud trové!

Et tuz ces ki ceo praierunt

e Pater Noster en dirunt

la merite aient Saint Johan,

el sain saient Saint Abraam.

Union est Pere et Fiz,

Union est sainz Espiriz,

Union est cumencement,

Union est definement,

Union est alpha e ω.

Benedicamus Domino.

(And all those who will go to heaven will have these eight blessings: life, youth, health, love, rest, joy, peace and light. This union will last without end, just as holy clerics say. May the Union and Holy Mary give us these eight gifts of life! And may God grant majesty to her for whom this book was composed! And may all those who pray for this and who say Paternosters for it have the merit of Saint John, and may they be in the bosom of Saint Abraham. Union is the Father and the Son, union is the Holy Ghost, union is the beginning, union is the end, union is alpha and omega. Let us praise the Lord.)<sup>88</sup>

The final line in Latin, ‘Benedicamus Domino’, would have been familiar to the *Bestiaire*’s audience. It is a versicle that concludes every canonical hour except

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<sup>88</sup> *Le bestiaire*, lines 3149-68.

Matins, in addition to Masses during the penitential period and on feast days. Philippe has laid the groundwork for this close as early as his first entry on the lion. When discussing how the lion is scared of the white cock, Philippe parallels the crowing of the cock day and night with humans who praise God day and night before relating all the canonical hours of prayer to the time of day of different moments in the crucifixion in an extraordinary adaptation of the first five chapters of the Benedictine Rupert of Deutz's homiletic sermon on the canonical offices, the *De divinis officiis*, completed not more than a few years before Philippe's *Bestiaire*.<sup>89</sup> According to Rupert's (and also Philippe's) homiletic, matins is sung in the morning when God was judged, beaten, and bound, and prime is sung at sunrise because that was the hour when God was resurrected and delivered humans from death.<sup>90</sup> Philippe's knowledge of this sermon is a clear indication of his familiarity with monastic culture and makes it highly probable that he would have read Augustine and almost certainly some of Hugh of Saint Victor as well, either in England or in continental Europe.

This interpolation of monastic homilectics into the bestiary material suggests the self-consciousness of the narrating voice's role mediation between clerical and lay spheres and also suggests this bestiary's particular devotional focus that is recalled at the very end of the piece. With this highly unusual call of 'Benedicamus Domino' those listening would have been interpellated to answer 'Deo gratias' (thanks be to God), the standard response. Having started with the contemplation of animals, the audience, now participants in the performance, are supposed to find themselves

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., lines 249-314.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., lines 255-62. Cf. Rupert of Deutz, *Ruperti Tuitensis Liber de divinis officiis*, 1.1-5, ed. Hrabanus Haacke, *CCCM* 7 (Turnhout, 1967), 7-8.

sharing in an activity that is part sermon, part prayer, and far beyond the concerns of the material world, the glass through which the glory of God can only be seen darkly. The visible union that is the pearl becomes the invisible union of the Trinity, of which all material things show traces, as Augustine wrote in his *De trinitate*.<sup>91</sup> The process of material manuduction is adapted into a rhetorical performance by a cleric well-versed in the Neoplatonic theology of his time. He adapts the unorthodox, but clearly popular, paratheology of bestiaries, which read creatures figuratively outside of (but dependent on) Scripture and shapes it in order to direct his audience to a moment of contemplation of the invisible by means of the visible.

The particularity of Philippe's *Bestiaire* is that while it takes the legibility of the world as a theoretical principle, its concern is less with reading the book-of-the-world than it is with using the communal reading of a physical book to arrive at a vision of the Trinity. The *Bestiaire*, then, is less visual than it is verbal, which perhaps explains the lack of pictures in Cotton Nero, A. V. and the hastily executed drawings found in Merton M. 249 (even if Copenhagen, Royal Library, GKS 3466 has a more visual focus). It is less concerned with the world than it is with words and with the use of inspired rhetoric to move the minds of its audience to a spiritual level appropriate to reflect on the truths of Scripture and of the Word that allows both the Old Testament and the created world to save. Such a process follows the model of

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<sup>91</sup> *De trinitate*, 6.10.12; ed. and Glorie, 242-43. See also Armand Strubel, "Allegoria in factis" et "allegoria in verbis", *Poétique*, 23 (1975), 342-57, (346-47) and Rita Copeland, 'Rhetoric and the Politics of the Literal Sense in Medieval Literary Theory: Aquinas, Wyclif, and the Lollards', in *Interpretation: Medieval and Modern*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge, 1993), 1-23 (1-5).

Augustine who, in his *Confessiones* recounts his conversation with Monica, his mother, in their garden at Ostia shortly before she died. As mother and son converse, they pass up from the terrestrial and the celestial sphere to have a vision of the Divine.<sup>92</sup> They gradually leave the perceptible world behind them and arrive at knowledge of invisible things through their shared speech. Philippe's *Bestiaire* is designed to produce a similar gradual ascent, via the visible world but also via the medium of language, from the corporeal to the spiritual, anagogically from the union of the pearl to the union of the Trinity.<sup>93</sup> Philippe, like Augustine, recognizes that to ascend higher and truly know God, language too must be surpassed and ultimately give way to silence.

## V. CONCLUSION

Philippe's bestiary is unlike any other. It testifies in a more pronounced way than most its foundation in the Neoplatonic principle of the legibility of the world, on which all bestiaries depend to some extent. It is closer to the different versions of the *Physiologus* (such as the B-Is *Physiologus* and the *Dicta Chrysostomi*) in its content and in its more thorough-going attention to allegory and tropology than it is to the more expanded Second-Family Bestiaries that circulated particularly in England. As opposed to Second-Family Bestiaries, it is less encyclopaedic than it is performative, concerned generating a communal mystical experience. It depends on Scripture for its

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<sup>92</sup> *Confessiones*, 9. 10. 24; ed. Skutella and Lucas Verheijen, 147.

<sup>93</sup> Richard of Saint-Victor defines anagogy as 'ascensio sive elevatio mentis ad superna contemplanda' (the ascent or elevation of the mind to the contemplation of celestial things) in *In Apocalypsim Joannis*, 1.1, PL 196:687A.

meaning and its purpose and must continually point back to the Bible and to the Word-made-flesh even as it draws its readers' and audiences' attention towards both the potentially distracting beauty and wonder of the created world and that world's ability to serve as a legible text.<sup>94</sup> The book-of-the-world on its own cannot suffice for salvation and bestiaries, books of the book-of-the-world, serve as a conduit, mediating and translating the invisible and at times inexpressible truths of divine wisdom.

All bestiaries, positioned as they are between the fields of theology, grammar, poetry, and painting, offer varied and nuanced attempts to use human craft to mediate the natural world of beasts, birds, and stones for a fallen audience and to direct the appeal of beautiful, visible creation towards the invisible truths that ultimately redeem. However, Philippe de Thaon's bestiary is particularly crafted to create a lay version of material manuduction, a courtly performance of spiritual ascendance, leading his audience from the visible to the invisible. His poem demonstrates not the clunky simplicity, but rather the striking virtuosity of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman verse production that not only reflected currents in contemporary theology, but offered scope to innovate in response to Victorine monastic mysticism, making the natural world into a new kind of book to be seen, heard, contemplated, and, finally, to be left behind.

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. Hugh of Victor, *De tribus diebus*, 4: 'Bonum ergo est assidue contemplari et admirari opera divina, sed ei qui rerum corporalium pulchritudinem in usum novit vertere spiritualement.' (It is good to contemplate and admire divine works assiduously but only to the person who knows how to turn the beauty of corporeal things towards a spiritual use.)