

## The Importance of the Animal in *Sir Orfeo*\*

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The Breton Lay *Sir Orfeo* describes its protagonist, King Orfeo, traversing different realms with his harp at his side. Through the king's journey, the poem describes Orfeo utilizing animals to validate music and minstrelsy, love and marriage, loyalty and vows, qualities often associated with the human. The poem proves the human superiority in relation to the other, in the form of animals and wilderness. This paper argues that that the poem's depiction of the superiority of human arts and human qualities betray a tension between the human and the non-human, the latter being animals that Orfeo subdues in the wilderness, and uses as a tool in testing his steward. By describing Orfeo's appropriation of animals, the poem demonstrates an anthropocentric viewpoint of the world where the wild, the strange, and the animals are brought under human rule and contribute to defining the human civilization as ideal. The title—the "importance" of animals—is to stress that the poem's celebration of harmony and civilization through Orfeo is made possible by using animals as tools that

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validate ideals that are considered as exclusively human qualities.

Previous studies on *Sir Orfeo* pay attention to the significance of the non-human species and worlds depicted in the poem. As Kathy Lavezzo puts it, “[f]or all its seemingly monolithic power in the medieval West, patriarchal Christian identity is, it turns out, as fragile as any other identity formation, and depends for its production on the creation of imagined identities from which it differs” (434). For many critics, the different identity that builds the human one in *Sir Orfeo* is the Fairies. For one, Seth Lerer sets a contrast between the Fairy Kingdom and Winchester, putting the former as an artificial world capable only of surface-level awe, and the latter as the world of artistry that has the power to genuinely move the spirit (93). Jeff Rider states that the different spaces, or the “other worlds,” serve as a foil for the human society, so that the negative aspects of civilization is criticized and the positive aspects highlighted: “...the other worlds of medieval romance were the laboratories of fears and longings whose monstrous, elegant and fantasized elaborations medieval audiences enjoyed in the same ways that we do those of our media” (129). Anne Marie D’Arcy reads the Fairy kingdom and the fairy king as signifying the demonized imperial force of the Holy Roman Empire set in contrast to the English State: “From a medieval Christian perspective, the principal demonic preoccupation is the emulation of the divine...[The Fairy Castle] is an inflated, albeit eminently haptic, architectural maquette, puffed with pride and featuring lifesize demiurgic statuary in the round, pointing ultimately to the Fairie King’s role as an imperial, Luciferian *kosmokrator*” (26-27). The studies summarized above focus on the contrast between Winchester and the Fairy Kingdom, between Orfeo and the Fairy king, and put the latter as the other world against the human world of Winchester, Orfeo, and his harmonious music.

There are indeed differences that mark the Fairy Kingdom as an entity different from the humans-occupied Winchester; however, there is a more

prominent “other” in this poem that functions in a more significant way to validate Orfeo and his human values. The animals in this poem are subject to the control and dominion of both rulers of Winchester and the Fairy Kingdom, when both entities use animals as a means to demonstrate their superiority. During his ten-year exile in the wilderness, Orfeo frequently witnesses the Fairy king leading his knights in a hunt *a force*:

He might se him besides,  
 Oft in hot undertides,  
 The king o fairy with his rout  
 Com to hunt him al about  
 With dim cri and bloweing,  
 And houndes also with him berking;  
 Ac no best thay no nome. . . . (281-87)<sup>1</sup>

The comment that the fairy hunters take no game back suggests that for them, and for many royal hunts in the Middle Ages, the hunt does not serve a practical purpose of putting meat to the table, but the symbolic function of demonstrating one’s superiority by subduing the animal. Concerning wolf hunts, Karl Steel points out that “the degradation of wolves’ status from feared predator to prey—and at that, inedible prey—suggests that such hunts functioned primarily to reaffirm the human, and particularly the elite, position as masters of violence” (63). As such, hunting for the medieval society was considered a symbolic act of staging human superiority. The hunt *a force* was, according to historians, the most prestigious form of medieval hunts, celebrated in literature, art, as the only form of hunt appropriate for a hero (Stuhmiller).<sup>2</sup> The hawking scene that

<sup>1</sup> All citation of *Sir Orfeo* are from Laskaya and Salisbury, eds., *The Middle English Breton Lays* (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University Press, 1995), and are henceforth marked by line numbers in parentheses.

<sup>2</sup> “[t]he most prestigious hunt of all was the aristocratic hunt *a force*, which achieved its most elaborate form in the late Middle Ages. In this hunt, mounted hunters,

ultimately enables Orfeo to rebuild his vows to his wife, Heurodis, is another instance in which humans boast their dominion over the wilderness. Hawking was done only after capturing the birds of prey and taming them; taming this force of wilderness was considered a form of entertainment for prestigious households. Winchester and the Fairy Kingdom share the same custom of minstrelsy and the idea of good kingship; in addition, they also have in common the notion that animals are to be subdued for the purpose of human values and pleasure. As a kingdom sharing Winchester's attitude towards a more readily identifiable group of the "other," Fairy Kingdom in *Sir Orfeo* is another version of the human world, maintaining ideals, customs, and violence that can be called human with the animal as the most prominent non-human that are subdued and tamed for the human purpose.

Recent developments in animal studies point to the importance of animals and wilderness as beings utilized to define the human in medieval literature; animal studies seek to consider the animal without making them human or tools for human. Susan Crane argues that the humanist traditions have rendered animals almost invisible, and animal studies consider ways to disrupt the hierarchy between humankind and other kinds (4). According to Karl Steel, critical animal studies reconsider the relationships between humans and animals, so that "the category 'human' is best understood by examining its dependent relation on the category 'animal'"(4). Both authors examine the relationship between humans and non-humans in ways that call for a renewed understanding between species and highlight the anthropocentrism in literature.

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accompanied by hunt servants and several specialized types of dogs (including scenthounds, sighthounds, and mastiffs), located the quarry and ran it down. The animal was often dispatched in a safe manner, though a hunter who dared to face a large and dangerous beast in single combat won great respect from his peers. This is the type of hunt that is widely celebrated in medieval art and literature, and the only one considered to be suitable for a warrior or hero." (Stuhmiller)

*Sir Orfeo* benefits from such a reading because the poem utilizes animals to establish human superiority. The poem's celebration of harmony and arts is fortified through the poem's non-human elements, particularly the animals that are depicted as silent entities that can be molded into whatever position the human forces see fit. This paper focuses more on the animals, the moving creatures that become proofs for Orfeo's superiority, than the space in which the animals reside. While wilderness as a spatial concept is significant, the poem depicts the wilderness in relation to the bodies that occupies the space, such as the animals that come and go as Orfeo plays his music, Orfeo's own animal-like behaviors of eating and sleeping, and the hunts with hounds, horses, and hawks. Considering also that the more immediate opposition of the human, at least according to medieval perspectives, is the animal, focusing on animals and how they are utilized would help gain insight into the poem. The animals in *Sir Orfeo* deserves greater attention because the changing relationships between animals and the human protagonist highlight and validate the human ideals celebrated in the poem. In the contrasting worlds of civilizations and wilderness, Orfeo and his human qualities, such as his musical skills, his human emotions, human vows, are celebrated through Orfeo's appropriation of—or reliance on—the animals.

As the one item and skill that Orfeo maintains throughout the poem, music functions as the symbol of human order and harmony for all spaces and beings; this symbol receives a cosmic significance when it is applied to animals. Lerer argues that *Sir Orfeo* contrasts the artifice of the fairy kingdom with Orfeo's musical artistry, which "does not simply dazzle the senses but which can move the spirit" and "has the power to bring out the order inherent in Creation"(93). According to Anne Laskaya and Eve Salisbury, ". . . the harp is the central image of the poem, since, from beginning to end, its presence is known" (19). Lisa Myers argues that the poem demonstrates a keen awareness of music philosophy, performance,

and composition, which “emphasize the philosophical nature of music as a representation of cosmic harmony” (123). Dorothy Yamamoto states that Orfeo’s harp is what maintains Orfeo’s human identity: “we, as readers, must never be allowed to doubt his humanity. One or two details in the story seem designed to remind us of this: his harp, for instance, which he takes with him on his journey into exile, and continues to play, occasionally, to the wild animals, acts as a pledge of his fully human capacity” (160-61). Such studies focus on Orfeo’s music as the quintessentially human force that generates harmony and the happy ending of the poem.

Throughout the poem, Orfeo’s music establishes an Orfeo-centric order and peace amongst humans and animals. The poem famously begins and ends with the composition process of a lay, in which the harp plays a crucial role<sup>3</sup>; the world of the lay is built around harp-playing, as is Orfeo’s kingdom and its order.

In al the warld was no man bore  
That ones Orfeo sat bifore -

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<sup>3</sup> In Breteyne this layes were wrought,  
First y-founde and forth y-brought,  
Of aventours that fel bi dayes,  
Wherof Bretouns maked her layes.  
When kinges might ovr y-here  
Of ani mervailes that ther were,  
Thai token an harp in gle and game  
And maked a lay and gaf it name. (13-20)

Harpours in Bretaine after than  
Herd hou this mervaille bigan,  
And made herof a lay of gode likeing,  
And nempned it after the king.  
That lay “Orfeo” is y-hote;  
Gode is the lay, swete is the note. (597-602)

For an argument on *Sir Orfeo* as a meta-poem focusing on minstrelsy of Orfeo and that of the poet, see Hyonjin Kim, “오르페오의 시의 창: 중세 로맨스 「오르페오 경」 연구,” *중세영문학* 11. 1 (2003), 97-115.

And he might of his harping here -  
Bot he schuld thenche that he were  
In on of the joies of Paradis,  
Swiche melody in his harping is. (33-38)

The poem describes Orfeo's music-making as a reconstruction of "joies of Paradis" for everyone in "al the world." Thus additional significance is added to Orfeo's role as the ruler of Winchester. Orfeo is a creator, whose melody restructures the reality into one that more closely resembles Paradise. This depiction of Orfeo as a creator reminds the readers of the first two books of Genesis, in which God creates the world and appoints the first human to have dominion over it: "And God created man to his own image; to the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, *saying*, "Increase, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule over the fishes of the sea and the fowls of the air and all living creatures that move upon the earth" (*The Vulgate Bible* Douay-Rheims Translation, Gen. 1.27-28). Creation and imposing of hierarchy and order is thus a work of God, and Orfeo's music replicates that power in the human realm. Orfeo's creative force puts him as an ideal, moral human being who is more closely aligned with God than the flesh. As Crane summarizes, medieval thinkers considered human morality in terms of turning to the divine while rejecting the animal nature within humans: "The double nature assigned to humans, eternal but also fleshly, takes on a didactic role: we should turn away from our animal desires toward heavenly goals" (49). Orfeo is thus a human being that more closely resembles the divine than the animal, an ideal human who lives up to the medieval morals. Medieval audiences would have considered Orfeo's recreation of heavenly joys in the human realm an ultimate emulation of God, which puts him as the ideal human embodying moral qualities that make human superior than other creations of God.

Orfeo's musical harmony influences not only the humans, but also the

animals that occupy the wilderness during his exile. Orfeo's harping and its creative power leads to harmony of his realm: according to Myers, such emphasis on the harmony of Orfeo's music "affirm[s] the connection between heavenly and earthly harmony that, according to Boethian principles, helps to preserve peace and concord among Orfeo's subjects and within society" (128). This peace and concord expands to the animals occupying the wilderness, and their response to Orfeo's harping highlights the power that Orfeo enacts through his music.

His harp, whereon was al his gle,  
 He hidde in an holwe tre;  
 And when the weder was clere and bright,  
 He toke his harp to him wel right  
 And harped at his owen wille.  
 Into alle the wode the soun gan schille,  
 That alle the wilde bestes that ther beth  
 For joie abouten him thai teth,  
 And alle the foules that ther were  
 Come and sete on ich a brene  
 To here his harping a-fine -  
 So miche melody was therin;  
 And when he his harping lete wold,  
 No best bi him abide nold. (266-80)

Thus Orfeo successfully imposes the order of Winchester upon the animals, who are exposed to the music. The animals are given the opportunity to partake in the hagiographic portrait not by their own volition, but dependent on Orfeo's "owen wille." This scene of harmony led by Orfeo and completed through the submission of animals forms a hagiographic portrait familiar to medieval consciousness. Orfeo's harping scene uses the animals and their ability to understand music, or the music's ability to subdue and control the animals, to stress the awe-inspiring quality of



human civilization. Salter argues that the picture painted in Orfeo's harping in the wilderness reminds readers of saintly figures that extended Christian harmony to insentient beings:

Through the melodious power of his music . . . Orfeo is momentarily able to re-establish amongst his audience of animals the peaceful condition that prevailed in the Garden of Eden—a miraculous power that is earlier alluded to in the prologue, when the poet compares the beauty of Orfeo's harping to the joys of paradise. (102)

He goes on to point out that this scene demonstrates the poem's connection between the human and animal worlds (103). The animals in the wilderness help to establish Orfeo as a human figure capable of generating harmonious existence among different entities. Thus the animals in the wilderness define and confirm Orfeo's kingship as valid and effective, despite the change of scenery and subjects. Thus the animals prepare the readers for the happy ending in the end, where the human order returns to human civilization, again with the help of animals.

Another human quality that the poem highlights in addition to the harmony created by music is the appropriation of animals, and utilizing animals for elevating the human. Animals as tools for humans is no new idea: the Genesis establishes the hierarchy between humans and animals, by appointing the human as the namer and ruler of all other creatures. Animals provide food and clothing for the humans, as well as moral, spiritual edification for humans. Concerning the animals depicted in medieval manuscripts, Christian Heck and Rémy Cordonnier argue that "animals were thought to hold up a mirror to humanity. On the principle that it is easier to grasp the qualities and faults of others than of oneself, the observed or posited traits of animals were used as surrogates for aspects of human psychology" (10). Similarly, Richard Barber argues that the medieval bestiary's purpose was not to study the natural world but to expound it:

[the writers of bestiaries] knew that everything in Creation had a purpose, and that the Creator had made nothing without an ulterior aim in mind. And they knew, too, what that purpose was: the edification and instruction of sinful man. The Creator had made animals, birds and fishes, and had given them their natures or habits, so that the sinner could see the world of mankind reflected in the kingdom of nature, and learn the way to redemption by the examples of different creatures. (7)

As such, documenting and characterizing animals in the Middle Ages served a moral purpose that is aimed towards improving human behaviors rather than understanding animals as-is. This kind of distinction implies that morality is one of the inherent qualities that set humans apart from animals and makes human superior: summarizing Lacan, Steel points out that “[h]umans attempt to form themselves as human by (mis)recognizing themselves as ‘not animal,’ and then by subjecting themselves to the impossible demands of living up to the this ideal self, one distinctively rational, ensouled, responsible, linguistic, and so on—to give this assertion strength, they treat animals ‘like animals,’ as instruments available for labor or slaughter” (5). Sir Orfeo showcases human superiority over animals through Orfeo and his music, at the same time revealing that human superiority is dependent on the presence of animals.

Even without the harp or a direct reference to Orfeo’s musical abilities, the poem *Sir Orfeo* celebrates the human and civilized as it describes Orfeo appropriating animals to maintain and uphold human qualities. In *Sir Orfeo*, the protagonist’s connection to animals fortify the human values and orders and bring about the happy ending in the end. The passage describing Orfeo’s transformation as he moves out of Winchester to the wilderness highlights not only the tragic circumstance of Orfeo after the abduction of Heurodis, but also the fact that Orfeo was—and still is—the center of human civilization. When Orfeo fails to prevent Heurodis’s

kidnapping, he declares to his kingdom that he will go on an exile, delegating the ruling over to his Steward while holding onto the title of the king.

“Lordinges,” he said, “bifor you here  
 Ich ordainy min heighe steward  
 To wite mi kingdom afterward;  
 In mi stede ben he schal  
 To kepe mi londes overal. . . .  
 Into wildernes ichil te  
 And live ther evermore  
 With wilde bestes in holtes hore;  
 And when ye understond that y be spent,  
 Make you than a parlement,  
 And chese you a newe king.  
 Now doth your best with al mi thing.” (204-18)

Orfeo announces that he will live with wild beasts in the wilderness, but as explained above, the change of scenery and audience does not diminish Orfeo’s capacity to reconstruct harmony in his surroundings. The hagiographic portrait completed by the animals paying attention to Orfeo’s music mirrors the joys of harmony that Orfeo’s human audiences are reported to have experienced. Moreover, Orfeo still holds onto the title of the king even when he removes himself from Winchester. His minstrelsy enabled him to establish order in his kingdom and become the ideal human who turns to the divine; such moral significance of Orfeo’s identity continues outside Winchester as he subdues the wild beasts through his music.

Even the physical changes that Orfeo goes through function as a reminder of Orfeo’s position as human in the center of civilization. Orfeo’s transformation as he goes on exile is described in words that render Orfeo as an animal rather than human: he now must live in the wilderness,

sleeping on leaves, grass, and moss, living among snakes and eating whatever the nature has to offer. While the change of state is dramatic, the passage depicting Orfeo's exile does not allow the readers to abandon his human qualities and focus on the animalistic characters. The stacking of contrasts emphasizes not only the present state but also the past; the poem reminds readers of Orfeo's position as the center of human community even as it describes his exile from it.

O way! What ther was wepe and wo,  
 When he that hadde ben king with croun  
 Went so poverlich out of toun!  
 Thurth wode and over heth  
 Into the wildernes he geth.  
 Nothing he fint that him is ays,  
 Bot ever he liveth in gret malais.  
 He that hadde y-werd the fowe and griis,  
 And on bed the purper biis,  
 Now on hard hethe he lith,  
 With leves and gresse he him writh.  
 He that hadde had castels and tours,  
 River, forest, frith with flours,  
 Now, thei it comenci to snewe and frese,  
 This king mot make his bed in mese.  
 He that had y-had knightes of priis  
 Bifor him kneland, and levedis,  
 Now seth he nothing that him liketh,  
 Bot wilde wormes bi him striketh.  
 He that had y-had plenté  
 Of mete and drink, of ich deynté,  
 Now may he al day digge and wrote  
 Er he finde his fille of rote.  
 In somer he liveth bi wild frut,  
 And berien bot gode lite;  
 In winter may he nothing finde

Bot rote, grases, and the rinde.  
Al his bodi was oway dwine  
For missays, and al to-chine. (234-62)

This oft-quoted passage on Orfeo's exile into the wilderness serves two purposes: first, it highlights Orfeo's change from the kingly to the animalistic, and second, it reminds the readers of Orfeo's past identity as the king at the center of human civilization is just as strong as his current one in the wilderness. Ji-Soo Kang argues that the wilderness provides Orfeo with the chance to grow into the role as the king, and comments on the above passage as follows: "The form of past-present, court-wilderness, and community-solitude binaries in this passage serves to define Orfeo's self-consciousness of his surroundings and his consciousness of his self contingent upon his inner-outer identity" (98). To which I would like to add that the definition of Orfeo's changed state through stacking of comparisons and contrasts serve as a reminder of Orfeo's position at Winchester. The past tensed descriptions remind the readers of Orfeo in Winchester, functioning as the core of human civilization, and the passage serves as a reminder that the king and the wild man are both sides of Orfeo's identity.

In addition, the stacking of contrasts in the above-quoted passage highlights just how completely and effortlessly Orfeo embraces both the kingly and animalistic state. Even in the wilderness, Orfeo is the core of human civilization, the master harper who maintains human qualities as a "wild" man living among the beasts. Orfeo thus succeeds in owning the animal qualities as his own, conquering such wild qualities so that they are used to express human emotions and human relationships. According to Salter, "Orfeo's sojourn in the wilderness is couched in religious language and imagery, and seems to owe more to the hagiographical tradition of the saintly hermit than to the romance convention of the forlorn lover (101).

The religious imagery of Orfeo's life in the wilderness refers back to the harmonious music that made up the order in Winchester; thus Orfeo in the wilderness among the beasts is still the center of human, Christian harmony.

The poem also describes animals as a means to uphold and renew human values and vows. Having vowed "Whider thou gost, ichil with the, / And whider y go, thou schalt with me" (129-30), Orfeo moves away from Winchester after Heurodis's abduction, towards wilderness in order to "live with the beasts for evermore." The poem considers Orfeo's association with wilderness and animals as his way of upholding his vows to his wife; the romance conventions of the forlorn lover that goes "wild" associates intense love—a human emotion—with wilderness and animals. Thus *Sir Orfeo* uses animals as a means to keep human vows and human institution of marriage. Dean R. Baldwin argues that Orfeo's time in the wilderness fulfils the trope of the forlorn lover in medieval romances (137). In addition to being associated with the emotion of love, animals in *Sir Orfeo* also establish a connection to the institution of love, namely marriage. The renewal of Orfeo's marriage vow takes place in the wilderness, with animals as the trigger: as Orfeo witnesses the hawking of the fairy ladies, he remembers his time in Winchester, moves up close to see more, and sees his own queen.

And on a day he seighe him biside  
 Sexti levedis on hors ride,  
 Gentil and jolif as brid on ris;  
 Nought o man amonges hem ther nis;  
 And ich a faucoun on hond bere,  
 And riden on haukin bi o rivere.  
 Of game thai founde wel gode haunt -  
 Maulardes, hayroun, and cormeraunt;  
 The foules of the water ariseth,

The faucouns hem wele deviseth;  
 Ich faucoun his pray slough -  
 That seigh Orfeo, and lough:  
 "Parfay!" quath he, "ther is fair game;  
 Thider ichil, bi Godes name;  
 Ich was y-won swiche werk to se!"  
 He aros, and thider gan te.  
 To a levedi he was y-come,  
 Biheld, and hath wele undernome,  
 And seth bi al thing that it is  
 His owen quen, Dam Heurodis. (303-22)

Until this moment of hawking, Orfeo showed no intention of seeking out the Fairy Kingdom and rescuing his wife. Critics have argued for various reasons for such lack of action; I focus on how the poem describes the moment in which Orfeo meets his wife again, in relation to animals and human use of animals in the form of hawking. The hawking scene is significant because it renews Orfeo's earlier vow to Heurodis in a moment known for its utilization of animal for human purposes. Hawking involves capturing the animal in the wilderness and taming it to serve human needs and desires: as Jacqueline Stuhmiller states, "[a]ll hunting birds were captured in the wild and tamed; they could not be bred in captivity." Falcons were, according to Susan Crane, considered as noble beasts that signify virtue and aristocracy; Crane quotes Levi-Strauss in pointing out that such practice of imposing human virtues on the animal world is meant to validate the human class difference natural (125). As Salter argues, "the sight of the falcons hunting their prey actually enables Orfeo to recover or rediscover within himself his own aristocratic identity" (105). In addition, the falcons also remind Orfeo of his role within the human institution of marriage. Earlier in the poem, Orfeo emphasized the need to be together with his consort as he promises Heurodis "Whider thou gost, ichil with

the/ And whider y go, thou schalt with me" (129-30). The bond and love between the husband and wife is renewed, and animals provide the chance for the human emotions to come striking back. As such, the animal in *Sir Orfeo* brings to the forefront the characteristics associated with civilization, and help to celebrate the love and happiness between two human characters in the end.

Finally, *Sir Orfeo* uses animals to highlight loyalty as a virtue and restore Orfeo's kingship in Winchester, going so far as to impose an identity over animals that suits his purpose. After retrieving Heurodis from the fairy realm, Orfeo returns to Winchester in the guise of a minstrel. To test his steward's loyalty, Orfeo claims that he found the king's harp in the wilderness, after the king was eaten by the animals.

"Lord," quath he, "in uncouthe thede  
 Thurth a wildernes as y yede,  
 Ther y founde in a dale  
 With lyouns a man totorn smale,  
 And wolves him frete with teth so scharp.  
 Bi him y fond this ich harp;  
 Wele ten yere it is y-go." (535-41)

Although the poem has declared that music was able to tame the animals and appropriate the wilderness and wildness, Orfeo makes up a story in which the human and the animal are in a hostile relationship. This testing appears after the steward welcomes Orfeo disguised as a minstrel, in honor of his former king, and after the steward recognizes the harp. By including this episode, the poem suggests that human ideals need animals and appropriation of animals to be proved and established. The animals here are subject to Orfeo's own will, just as they were when they became pieces that complete the hagiographic significance of Orfeo's musical performance in the wild. The poem describes a changing relationship between the



human and the animal, coexisting peacefully at one moment and violently harmful in another; this change is led by the human, to validate virtues and morals associated with humans. This violence done to the animal in depicting them as aggressive and harmful stresses the integrity of human values and institutions. Concerning the depiction of violence against animals in medieval literature, Karl Steel points out, quoting Judith Butler:

[t]he human concern with independent animal violence aimed to do far more than just defend humans and their property. It aimed to support the human system by allocating vulnerability differentially...humans reject their involvement in the "primary vulnerability" shared by all worldly beings, all of whom can be damaged; all of whom can cease to be, even die; all of whom, more fundamentally, can not be able. (Steel 66)

In *Sir Orfeo*, the human's refusal of "primary vulnerability" is revealed in Orfeo's story in which the lions violate the human body but not the human symbol, the harp. Even this make-up attack that animals make on the human demonstrate the ultimate inferiority of animal forces, because the harp, the one quintessentially human symbol that maintains its integrity throughout Orfeo's trajectory, remains intact and makes its way back to the human realm to prove human virtues. Thus Orfeo's final test of the Steward's integrity subdue the animal as a tool for the test, and elevate the human as the force and symbol that cannot be destroyed by the inferior force of the animal.

*Sir Orfeo* ends with Orfeo reversing the process of transformation he went through earlier on; the king-turned-animal returns to his position at the center of human society, this time dressing the part (584-86). This very smooth transition between what seems to be two contrasting states suggest that both the wild man and the well-groomed king co-exist in one being. Moreover, the poem's consistent reliance on the presence of animals to emphasize the virtues of Orfeo and other humans raise the question: when

the human needs the non-human to define itself as human, can one even readily say that the human is human, but a combination of human and non-human elements? The poem demonstrates that there is no human-ness without a counterpart, and the human identity occupies a superior position by succumbing the animal in favor of the human. The poem celebrates the victory of the human-centered harmony, but in the process reveals the tension that exists in defining the human in relation to others.

*Sir Orfeo's* happy ending, as well as the poem's celebration of humanity and human artistry, are achieved thanks to the animals and wilderness. The poem describes Orfeo as the center of human values, who defines aspects of human civilization with characteristics of the wilderness and the animals. While his musical abilities remain a crucial element, his ability to embrace and appropriate the entities potentially hostile to the human—such as the wilderness, wildness, and animals—function as important means for the poem to celebrate human emotions, vows, and harmony. This is done at the expense of the Other that remain silent and malleable to the human purpose. Perhaps the poem would not have been able to reach its happy ending without the wilderness and animals, which contribute to the human world by renewing and fortifying the human values. In that regard, *Sir Orfeo* presents an important viewpoint to reconsider the relationship between the human and the animal, the civilization and the wilderness.

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**ABSTRACT****The Importance of the Animal in *Sir Orfeo*****Hwanhee Park**

In *Sir Orfeo*, the human values such as harmony, loyalty, love, and marriage are validated through the main human protagonist's appropriation of the animal. While previous studies have read the fairy kingdom as the contrasting Other to Orfeo's Winchester, this study argues that the animals are the non-human entity that deserves critical attention. Animals in the poem are utilized primarily as tools for elevating human qualities; by describing the animal as subjects to Orfeo's musical harmony and passive, silent beings on whom the human can impose any identity as convenient, the poem demonstrates an anthropocentric viewpoint often found in medieval literature. In addition, the reliance on the animal to establish the human implies that the boundary between the human and animal is fluid, and suggests that human identity is not completely separated from different groups of Others.

**Key Words** | *Sir Orfeo*, Animal Studies, animals in medieval literature, anthropocentrism in literature

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