Yael Klangwisan, "On Behalf of Holy Creatures: Hélène Cixous Reads Leviticus, or, *la lecture immonde*," *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception* 7, nos. 1–2 (2018): 9–22.

Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception is an independent, open-access academic journal dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of innovative research in reception history, broadly conceived, within and across religious traditions.

www.relegere.org
ISSN 1179–7231

Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception 7, no. 1–2 (2017): 9–22

Yael Klangwisan

On Behalf of Holy Creatures

Hélène Cixous Reads Leviticus, or, *la lecture immonde*

This article performs a critical creative reading of several texts: Lev 11, Lispector's *The Passion according to G. H.*, and Cixous's essay "The School of Roots". Each of these texts seeks to understand the human relation to the animal. Cixous's project in "The School of Roots" is, as Derrida does in *L'animal*, to interrogate and reinscribe the biblical text, so that another relation between the human and the animal might become possible. From the platform that Lispector and Cixous create, this reader seeks to open the biblical text to a counter-reading on behalf of the holy creature.

> *And these you shall abominate of the birds, they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination: the eagle and the vulture and the black vulture, and the kite and the buzzard according to its kind, and the ostrich and the night hawk and the seagull and the hawk according to its kind, and the horned owl and the cormorant and the puff owl, and the hoot owl and the pelican and the fish hawk, and the stork and the heron according to its kind and the hoopoe and the bat. Every winged swarming thing that goes on all fours is an abomination to you.* LEV 11: 13–20

Yael Klangwisan is is Head of Education in the School of Social Practice, Laidlaw College and Senior Lecturer (Biblical Literature) in Laidlaw Graduate School.

> *I was feeling unclean* [immundo] *as the Bible speaks of the unclean. Why was the Bible so concerned with the unclean, and made a list of unclean and forbidden animals? Why, if those animals, just like the rest, had been created too? And why was the unclean forbidden? I had committed the forbidden act of touching the unclean.*
>
> THE PASSION ACCORDING TO G. H.

What makes a living creature *immonde*,[1] asks Hélène Cixous in the third of her lectures on writing, published as "The School of Roots"?[2] She is reflecting here on the script of Lev 11 which divides animals into clean and unclean, pure and impure, and in these particular verses (13–20) it is the birds under the microscope.[3] By what right and by what power does the ancient text of the Hebrew Bible have to make it so she asks? For after all, the sea gulls don't know that they are *immonde* and if they did, they might be grateful to be off the menu. But the problem with this shadow in the Bible for Cixous is that it casts a divinely sanctioned, hierarchical shade on a company of beings, of kinds, that sets them apart from other kinds. The absolute separateness between human and animal becomes foregrounded in Lev 11, but also eventually a shadow is cast over numerous other binary pairs in insidious and embodied ways: self and other, national and foreigner, man and woman, legitimate and illegitimate, heterosexual and homosexual, as if one of each pair is touched irrevocably and stained in relief to the other. All these relations are coloured by the signifying of one of the pair as *immonde* and "abominable."

> Those who belong to the birds and their kind … to writings and their kind: they are all to be found—and a fair company it is—outside; in a place that is called by Those Bible, those who are the Bible, abominable … Elsewhere, outside, birds, women, and writing gather.[4]

[1] Unclean or impure.

[2] Hélène Cixous, "The School of Roots," in *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 111–56. This essay is also reproduced in Hélène Cixous, "Birds, Women and Writing," in *Animal Philosophy: Ethics and Identity*, ed. Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco (New York: Continuum, 2012), 165–73.

[3] Cixous, "School of Roots," 111.

[4] Ibid., 113.

Cixous finds herself captivated by a Brazilian literary response to this animal-othering pervasive in Leviticus, that of Clarice Lispector's experimental novel, *A paixão segundo G. H.—The Passion according to G. H.* In engaging the novel at length in the third session of her writing lectures, it is clear that Cixous finds *A paixão* a literary comrade in her quest for justice for the biblical animal. Lispector's mytho-poetic, Kafkaesque text describes G. H.'s face to face encounter with the most *immundo* of all creatures, the "bride in black jewels," the cockroach or *barata*.[5] The material of the novel unfolds in just a space of a few moments. G. H. experiences an epiphany in coming face to face with a cockroach which becomes even more pronounced when she realises that the cockroach is dying (having been squashed in a wardrobe door). G. H. is fixated by the sight of its white oozing insides. G. H. quotes Leviticus and engages in an emotional soliloquy that utilises Leviticus's lists of abominable birds as a platform to explore the human-animal relation. The Bible features in Lispector's novel as a kind of divine literary superego that structures G. H.'s instinctual, preconscious horror of the *barata*, yet in these few last moments of the creature's life, she questions all her former preconceptions:

> I opened my mouth astonished: it was to ask for help. Why? Why didn't I want to become as unclean as the roach? What ideal was fastening me to the sentiment of an idea? Why shouldn't I become unclean, exactly as I was discovering my whole self to be? What was I afraid of? Becoming unclean with what? Becoming unclean with joy.[6]

In contrast to humanity and its attendant "paradise of adornments"[7] G. H. describes the animal *immonde*, the bird, as "the root," a term which Cixous borrows for her lecture and associates with a mystical and primal joy—a joy outside of and before the law. G. H. has claimed that the animal *immonde* have never adorned themselves, never dressed themselves in skins, or leaves, never betrayed themselves with the clothing of humanity's "*monde*" of clever languages and logic. G. H. has a revelation that the *immonde* are not really *immonde* at all, and should one "eat," one would discover this to be true. But more than this, the animal *immonde* is a keeper of joy, "the first joy,"

[5] Clarice Lispector, *The Passion according to G. H.*, trans. Idra Novey (New York: New Directions, 2012), 67.

[6] Ibid., 70.

[7] Ibid., 69.

a joy without the requirement of redemption; an unknown, forbidden and unclean joy, a joy totally without hope and equally without pity.[8] G. H. has a foretaste of this joy, but it requires the sacrifice of her humanity. Cixous wants to borrow this mode of resistance against the legal inscription of abomination to better understand or celebrate that place, beyond the camp, where "outside, birds, women, and writing gather."[9]

> For thinking concerning the animal, if there is such a thing, derives from poetry.[10]

G. H. believes in her mystical reverie on the *barata* that it is impossible to think or relate to the cockroach from the human point of view, complicit as it is with the symbolic. Lispector explains that humanity is blind to this relation because of its underlying banishment from the root. Thus, G. H. can only forge a way to the cockroach through her mythopoetic discourse that hovers at the edge of language, the edge of the symbolic. The poetic is Lispector's route to the animal, to freeing herself of the symbolic and eventually she finds a way to give herself over for the animal, to taste it and to become as one more of "the winged, swarming things that go on all fours," to be stripped down, infinite, and indifferent.[11] She meets the *barata* at the boundary of its life and death. At this precipice she admits once and for all, "the roach is real," and momentarily she sees the face of God.[12]

> I was afraid of the face of God, I was afraid of my final nudity on the wall. Beauty, that new absence of beauty that had nothing to do with whatever I used to call beauty, horrified me.[13]

[8] Ibid., 71.

[9] Cixous, "School of Roots," 113.

[10] Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 7.

[11] Lev 11:23.

[12] Lispector, *Passion*, 93.

[13] Ibid., 97.

Seeing the roach's relation to the root, to creation, was akin to seeing the face of God for G. H.[14] This myopic face to face with the animal is a theme taken up by Cixous in "Savoir."[15] To approach the other, one must look very closely, just like G. H. who came face to face with a black jewelled *barata*. This is a kind of naked seeing. It is a final, terminal, precipitous nudity that goes beyond the Bible's safeguard of horror into the beyond. This kind of seeing is miraculous and sacred:

> She hadn't realised the day before that eyes are miraculous hands … She hadn't realised that eyes are lips on the lips of God … the joy is not to "get one's sight back" but getting to know *seeing with the naked eye*.[16]

Nudity is a prerequisite state before coming face to face with the animal in the most elemental way. For Derrida also in *L'animal que donc je suis* meeting the animal face to face requires an essential denouement in terms of an untying, *déshabillage*, a cataclysmic exuviation of the Proper: "The animal looks at us and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins here."[17] For Derrida, the poetic is the only way to think the animal, the only way to take on the 'address' of the animal, from the side, and not before the designation 'human' obscures the gaze. Cixous describes this failure of relation between human and animal as due to the oedipal condition and claims that one—like Lispector—can aspire, albeit fleetingly, to enter the animal point of view via a poetic writing practice (an *écriture féminine*). Cixous explores this kind of writing or "seeing" and its difficulties in her study of myopia in "Savoir":

> Only that myopia of a Tuesday in January—the myopia that was going away, leaving the woman like a slow inner sea—could see

[14] The rationale that Lispector provides for this, is that the animal is so given over to the infinite, that it remains as it was at the moment it was created, whereas humanity has drifted from creation via civilization, creating a simulacrum of paradise through all its adornments. This primal paradise where the animal has its being is for Lispector the root. Cixous links this notion of the root to Genet's notion of "nether realms" and Tsvetaeva's notion of the "abyss". This is Cixous' destination in writing practice. It is a place outside the Proper of civilization. A place of exile. Paradise. (Ibid., 69.)

[15] Hélène Cixous, "Savoir," in *Veils*, by Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 1–16.

[16] Ibid., 9–10.

[17] Derrida, *Animal*, 7.

> both shores. For it is not permitted to mortals to be on both sides.[18]

For Goh, who has written on both Lispector's *The Passion according to G. H.* and Cixous' engagements with the biblical animal, this human inability to (truly) see the animal is a divisive phenomenon in which eyes are open but do not see, a godly gaze that is at the same time blind.[19] The animal is free from such a paradox and is free to live intensely, without mourning claims Lispector; a freedom that is not synonymous with human being. But one will never see the animal, never truly perceive its life until one can get past language. In "The School of Roots," Cixous considers that a lecture or *écriture immonde* is a gateway one must pass through in order to enter the animal point of view (the roach's gaze). This way requires a difficult and vicious joy that must first pass beyond the foreclosure of loss and grief associated with blindness. Goh finds that because of the peculiarity of human sight and its conceptual relation to the Fall and "death by knowledge," every living moment is a work of mourning.[20] Goh sees this work of mourning as the force that blinds and gives sight at the same moment at the Fall of Man after eating the sacred fruit. Cixous plays on this paradoxical veiling and unveiling of sight in her essay "Savoir" and certainly moves beyond this in "The School of Roots" where with Lispector, Genet and Dante, she will take a ladder down into the earth—right down into primordial muck—in order to come face to face with this mysterious root.[21]

In Goh's exploration of Cixous and her response to the question of the animal in biblical literature he claims that Cixous' creative and theoretical work is a subtle reinscription and rereading of the Bible "in a certain manner."[22] In effect, Cixous' project becomes a kind of writing that discovers an 'other' Bible (or a Bible-of-Others) that gathers at the edge of the law. In this Bible, after the fashion of Derrida's rereading of Genesis in *L'animal que donc je suis*, the Bible's relation to the animal is deconstructed through

[18] Cixous, "Savoir," 9–10.

[19] Irving Goh, "The Passion according to Cixous: From Human Blindness to "Animots"," *MLN* 125, no. 5 (2010): 1052 and "Blindness and Animality, or Learning to Live Finally in Clarice Lispector's *The Passion according to G. H.*," *Differences* 25, no. 5 (2012): 113–35.

[20] Goh, "Passion," 1053.

[21] Cixous, "School of Roots," 118.

[22] Goh, "Passion," 1052. In this Goh guardedly agrees with Cohen-Safir (Claude Cohen-Safir. "La serpente et l'or: bible et contre-bible dans l'œuvre d'Hélène Cixous," in *Hélène Cixous: croisées d'une œuvre*, ed. Mireille Calle-Gruber (Paris: Galilée, 2000) 361–66).

a poetic writing practice. Her reading of the Bible is realised through *écriture féminine*, that is, an-other writing that in this case gives itself to an-other reading of the Bible. This kind of reading exists on the borderland between the symbolic and the imaginary, the law and love, where what is shared in the mysterious experience of animality comes to the fore. As Goh explains, in this reading the animal escapes "the malediction of the knowledge of shame in nakedness," never knowing "death-by-knowledge" or "divine damnation."[23] Thus, the animal escapes the law, and while the animal follows the human from the garden, it is never banished and remains at the root, and thus always face to face with God. To enter the animal point of view, the reader (according to G. H.), must also transgress by plunging into the forbidden territories that are beyond the law:

> We are creatures that must plunge into the depths in order to breathe there, as the fish plunges in the water in order to breathe, except my depths are in the air of the night. Night is our latent state. And it is so moist that plants are born. In house the lights go out in order to hear the crickets more clearly, and so the grasshoppers can walk atop the leaves almost without touching them, the leaves, the leaves, the leaves—in the night the soft anxiety is transmitted through the hollow of the air, the void is a means of transport.[24]

Goh suggests that in Cixous' own writing she hopes to unveil the excluded animal in the way that Derrida describes in *L'animal que donc je suis*, to be 'seen seen' by the animal,[25] to write in the borderlands, to invite *animots* (animal-words) into the realm of text, to give them spirit, and consciousness, and voice. In Cixous' texts, *animots* mediate between art and language, image and text. *Animots* return her sight to her, allowing her to become *humanimal*,[26] that is, to attain or return to her 'humanimality', to recover a 'myopia' that conversely allows her to see what has been erased. The Cixousian animalesque in light of the clean and unclean lists of animals in Leviticus realises a *lecture immonde*, which is a move, a conduit, or movement between

[23] Ibid., 1053.

[24] Lispector, *Passion*, 117.

[25] Derrida, *Animal*, 13.

[26] See Noelle Giguere, "Magic Lanterns: Artistic Vision and Hélène Cixous' Cats," *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 17, no. 3 (2013): 274–81.

text and image, between the animal, human and God, a return to paradise, to the root, and represents a novel way to think the biblical animal.

> The animal looks at us and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins here.[27]

❦

What Cixous might invite on behalf of the biblical animal is a way of reading Leviticus that invites us to enter the *immonde*. Cixous, in her writing lecture, labels the Bible a "he," "He-Bible," but the other-Bible is always already there in the background, *white fire on black fire*.[28] The root is there, she claims, if the myopic reader might only look and see. And while it is Cixous' uncle-narrator who calls on divine right to name and exile Leviticus's *immonde*, we may have the chance, as Lispector suggests, to read the text as ones "whose souls are already formed," that we might read as if it was the meeting of two roaches, where "one is the silence of the other."[29] Cixous seems unconvinced in "The School of Roots" about this possible celebration of the biblical text through an other-reading. She is too busy raging at it, and yet this very work hinges upon finding an escape route through its borders, checkpoints, and no-man's-lands. The dire text provides the grist for her fight on behalf of things forbidden. This rage allows her to "relearn" and "recapture" what has been lost, describing it as somehow regaining childhood's love of manna.[30] Thus while in her lecture she can say "the purpose of Those Bible is to forbid the root," in other works she can name other biblical texts as her literary companions through life "the most beautiful things in the world," "infinite" and "work of all works."[31] It is a paradox that while Cixous' love for the Song of Songs and for the Book of Job clearly overflows, of Leviticus she can simultaneously write with vehemence:

> Let those birds be "abominable": I associate women and writing with this abomination.… It is my way of indicating the reserved, secluded, or excluded path or place where you meet

[27] Derrida, *Animal*, 7.

[28] Cixous, "Birds," 168.

[29] Lispector, *Passion*, 117.

[30] Cixous, "School of Roots," 120.

[31] Hélène Cixous, *White Ink: Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2014), 42; eadem, "School of Roots," 117.

> those beings I think are worth knowing while we are alive. Those who belong to the birds and their kind (these may include some men), to writings and their kind: they are all to be found—and a fair company it is—outside; in a place that is called by Those Bible, those who are the Bible, abominable.[32]

What Cixous might reveal here is that there are escape routes and grottos in the biblical text and in particular, Leviticus, that might open up in a lecture *immonde*. If we were to enter wholeheartedly like G. H. into the "hell" of the biblical text, or what she terms "the neutral" or into Jean Genet's *les domaines inférieurs*, we might just invoke a reading that swarms like Dante's Paradiso, a supra-biblical text where abominable birds are liberated from their abomination and soar, forming letters in the sky.[33] If there were such a reading it would exist somewhere in the no-man's-land on the edge of the proper of thought and the proper of language, somewhere between the white fire and the black. This border country is only accessible, and even then, only partially via a kind of poetic reading practice.

For Cixous, the rule of the word "because" (you were told so, thus it is) does not have to be obeyed in the exercise of an-other reading.[34] In Cixous' third lecture we are encouraged to embrace Lispector's transgressive, *barata*-loving immundity. In this reading of the biblical animal we would reinscribe our relations to the animal, to the world, and strip down all the old clichés.[35] In this reading we would not be told whom to evade, avoid or not to touch, but embrace the outside-world of the *immonde* joyously and without reserve. We would engage in travels "elsewhere" and enter the universe of others somewhere "beyond the back door of thought," guided by our fully formed souls.[36] This kind of reading brings pain, exile and rage, though Cixous assures us, these things are a kind of joy in themselves; a difficult joy. In a world of the proper where we so regularly experience things stolen, this manner of poetic reading promises pain without theft. She swears that it "lives according to its own law" and thus, it can feel threatening, it can feel as though the neutral is whispering and requiring our human skin:[37]

[32] Cixous, "Birds," 168–69.
[33] Ibid., 169.
[34] Ibid., 171.
[35] Cixous, "School of Roots," 122.
[36] Ibid., 114.
[37] Ibid., 116.

> The neutral was whispering. I was reaching what I had sought all my life: whatever is the most final identity and that I had called inexpressive. That was what had always been in my eyes in the snapshot: an inexpressive joy, a pleasure that does not know that it is pleasure—a pleasure too delicate for my coarse humanity that had always been made of coarse concepts.[38]

Cixous invokes the word "*immonde*." In the French, the word foregrounds the frontier between the world (*monde*) and what is other to the world—*immonde*. The *Monde* signifies that which is clean, pure, proper and legitimate, but *immonde* signifies the dangerous other that the authorities warn us about: the unclean, the impure, the improper, and the illegitimate. The border country between these two, like Jean Genet's no-man's-land, is the clear purview of the law. On the inside is humanity and on the outside, "swans, storks and griffons" alongside a teeming host of forbidden others: lepers, menstruating women, *mamzrim*, prostitutes, witches, homosexuals, thieves, liars, and poets.[39] Joy, claims Cixous, is *immonde*, and here she relies on the Latin root. Joy is *immonde*. That is, out of the world and in exile. It is an outside that the world might declare "unclean" or "abominable" but as G. H. discovers, is not so.

It is claimed by Cixous that there is a force at work in the Bible to "forbid the root" but there is also a force that works to embrace it and to liberate it. While the work to find liberation in Leviticus requires undoubtedly momentous excavation, such a force seems tangibly bursting in the mystifying and exultant Song of Songs. To such a degree, in fact, that in the case of the canonization of the Song of Songs Rabbi Akiba must have met Lispector's roach face to face given his fight to preserve this scroll and include it as the holiest of writings, what must be the most *immonde* book of the Bible in its purely impure, out-of-the-world joy. Akiba claimed the Song of Songs was so pure it made hands unclean—a poignant play on words and deeply confronting in thinking about the *immonde*.[40] The Song is a text of joy that makes all kinds of border-crossings, and has never forbade a horse or a bird, a poet or a woman. It is a book of fire and a burning bush:

> J'ai un peu peur pour ce livre. Parce que c'est un livre d'amour.

[38] Lispector, *Passion*, 137–38.
[39] Cixous, "School of Roots," 117.
[40] *m. Yad.* 3:5

> C'est un buisson de feu. Mieux vaut s'y jeter, une fois dans le feu, on est inondé de douceur. J'y suis: je vous le jure.[41]

The Song of Songs is a Dantean space; a *Paradiso* where all kinds of border crossings are imminent. The joy of the Song of Songs paints itself with all the signs of a veritable animal parade. So, while Leviticus takes part in forbidding joy, relegating it as *immonde* and abyssal, and dark country, such as that text of Lev 11, we also find volcanic texts where the Bible's escaping or exiled joy is an inferno, wherein joy burns like a red giant, like a star, like Dante's vision of paradise. Cixous advocates entering these incendiary caverns, scouring the womb, the very roots of life itself, eating the fruit of the tree again and again. This shadow Bible is the other face of the He-Bible that sets itself up by legislating the eating of this, and the forbidding of that, and the inscription of the category *immonde* on both birds and women—banishing and censoring. This Other-Bible challenges the Proper in its charges against poets, such as, in Cixous' words, "Poets are unclean, abominable in the same way that women [and animals] are abominable … excluded and exiled."[42] These biblical, textual spaces of the Other-Bible open up and give generously. They appear as burning bushes in the wilderness, and as multiple gateways to trees of life: "Eat lovers and drink! Drink deeply of love!"[43]

❦

> I am now going to tell you how I entered the inexpressive that was always my blind and secret search. How I entered whatever exists between the number one and the number two, how I saw the line of mystery and fire, and which is surreptitious line. A note exists between two notes of music, between two facts exists a fact, between two grains of sand no matter how close together there exists an interval of space, a sense that exists between senses—in the interstices of primordial matter is the line of mystery and fire that is the breathing of the world, and

[41] Hélène Cixous, *Le Livre de Promethea* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 9; Song 8:6 (JPS). "I am a little afraid for this book. Because it is a book of love. It is a burning bush. Better to cast oneself in, once in the fire, one is flooded with sweetness. I am there. I swear to you."

[42] Cixous, "Birds," 173.

[43] Song 5:1 (JPS).

> the continual breathing of the world is what we hear and call silence.[44]

In *Rootprints*, Cixous revisits her thoughts around "The School of Roots" and professes that one must go to the *entredeux* in reading.[45] The *entredeux* is a kind of *lecture immonde*. It is a radical engagement of the present of the text resulting in a kind of life-writing, live-reading of the text. All sorts of barriers are crossed and simultaneously at multiple levels, creating a transgressive pastiche of *jouissance* and revenge. The reading is one of bracken, algae and marshes, where the structures and strictures of the world are left to seed in order to get back to the beginning. For Genet, it is textual work of bogs and wildflowers, and for Lispector, a moist desert where she wanders with staff in hand. For Dante, a raucous kaleidoscope of birds in flight:

> We are the place of structural unfaithfulness. To write we must be faithful to this unfaithfulness … *entredeux* … to designate a true in-between—between a life which is ending and a life which is beginning. … these are the innumerable moments that touch us with bereavements of all sorts … On the other hand, what I work on does not take place in the violent interruption—which opens up, and instead there is a soft strange material … In the passage from the one to the other, *de l'une à l'autre* … a dehierarchizing.[46]

This is the structure of her "other" Bible that she creates in her biblical readings. In a Bible that oft seems set on punitively separating *l'un* from *l'autre*, Cixous asks us to make the readerly journey into the no-man's-land between the two. The Other-Bible can be read then in this liminal space. This is a space where the reader is faithful to unfaithfulness. The reader reads faithfully with rage, with difficult joy and in full commitment to life, and to metamorphosis. The reader commits to go in exile to this country-of-the-other. To find those escaped birds and flying creatures, to encounter the textual *immonde*. To read a shadow text there where all kinds of winged creatures exist in joy. Genet is this kind of winged poet or sphinx and writes in this trans-

[44] Lispector, *Passion*, 99.

[45] Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Hélène Cixous Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (London: Routledge, 2003).

[46] Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Rootprints*, 10.

gressive space of faithful-unfaithfulness, with pitiless and exquisite attention to life and to love.

> J'ai vécu dans la peur des métamorphoses. C'est afin de rendre sensible au lecteur en reconnaissant l'amour sur moi fondre—ce n'est pas la seule rhétorique qui exige la comparaison: comme un gerfaut—la plus exquise des frayeurs que j'emploie l'idée de la tourterelle. Ce qu'alors j'éprouvai je l'ignore, mais il me suffit d'évoquer l'apparition de Stilitano pour que ma détresse aussitôt se traduise aujourd'hui par un rapport d'oiseau cruel à victime.[47]

Potentially, the kind of being in which the reader's soul takes shape, in metamorphosis, is the chimaera. The chimaera is a betwixt and between creature (such as a poet), a *humanimal*, who is a natural inhabitant of the *entredeux*.[48] Cixous warns of creating a new notion of citizenship there, as a kind of giving in to the proper or "home-neid."[49] It is a need to belong that ends up stripping us bare and exfoliating, like snake skin, our animal point of view. A journey to the animal must eschew the impulse to draw borders and take possessions. The fully formed reader, the chimaera, must leave behind social economies that restrict vision and behold the strange world of wild things lightly:

> People like Genet or Clarice are inhabitants of the uncountry, of the incountry, of the country hidden in the country, or lost in the country, of the other country, the country below, the country underneath.[50]

[47] Jean Genet, *Journal du Voleur* (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), 37–38. "I have lived in fear of metamorphoses. It is in order to make the reader fully conscious—as he sees love swooping down on me—it is not mere rhetoric which requires the comparison—like a falcon—of the most exquisite of frights that I employ the idea of a turtle-dove. I do not know what I felt at the moment but today all I need do is summon up the vision of Stilitano for my distress to appear at once in the relationship of a cruel bird to its victim." (Jean Genet, *The Thief's Journal*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), 30–31.)

[48] For the chimaera as mediator between God and mortals, child of night, sleep and death, and bringer of vengeance, see Almut-Barbara Renger, *Oedipus and the Sphinx: The Threshold Myth from Sophocles through Freud to Cocteau* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 81.

[49] Cixous, "School of Roots," 131.

[50] Ibid.

Dante's re-reading of the biblical text in *Paradiso*, alongside Genet and Lispector is also thus, for Cixous, a return to Eden, to the root. The humanimality of Dante in Paradiso is the material of *la lecture immonde* that holds open an exquisitely free "country underneath" where formerly abominable birds are flying in the air and forming letters both deep and light, and in sound and silence, holy winged creatures full of joy.

> E come augelli surti di rivera,
> quasi congratulando a lor pasture,
> fanno di sè or tonda or altra schiera,
> sì dentro ai lumi sate creature
> volitando cantavano, e faciensi
> or *D*, or *I*, or *L* in sue figure.
> Prima, cantando, a sua nota moviensi;
> poi, diventando l'undi questi segni,
> un poco s'arrestavano e taciensi.[51]

[51] "Like birds that rise above a river bank and, chorusing in joy at food they find, form flying discs and various other shapes, so deep in light, these holy creatures sang and, as they winged around, they now assumed the figure of a D, then I, then L. Singing, at first, the notes of their own tune, they then (becoming one of these three signs) paused for a moment and let silence fall." (Canto 18: 73–79. Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy 3: Paradiso*, ed. and trans. Robin Kirkpatrick (London: Penguin, 2007).)