Reynard the Fox

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Reynard the Fox: Social Engagement and Cultural Metamorphoses in the Beast Epic from the Middle Ages to the Present
Edited by Kenneth Varty

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REYNARD THE FOX

Social Engagement and Cultural Metamorphoses in the Beast Epic from the Middle Ages to the Present

studies by
Elaine C. Block, Jean Dufournet,
Jan Goossens, Jill Mann,
Jean-Marc Pastré, Wilfried Schouwink,
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Kenneth Varty

Introduction

The Itinerant Fox

The fox we call Reynard has had a long life and has wandered far and wide in the world of fiction. At the beginning he was a high-ranking baron in the Animal Kingdom where he served, when it suited him, the Lion-King. Even in his early days he travelled considerable distances across numerous boundaries, often leaving behind him offspring whose descendants lived through stirring times, adapting their name to the language of the new culture which they had made their own, adjusting to new religious creeds and political systems, practising numerous professions and fitting into different social classes as they and their new masters (poets and storytellers, critics and commentators) thought fit.

Reynard saw the light of day, it seems, in Ghent in 1149 or thereabouts. Although this was then, as now, in Dutch-speaking territory, his first words were in Latin and he was known as Reinardus. From Ghent he travelled in the 1170s into French-speaking lands where he was called Renart. At that time the French for a fox was *goupil*, and he was *Renart le goupil*, Renart being his personal name just as Noble was that of the lion (*Noble le lion*), and Fière that of the lioness. His immense popularity in medieval France was to bring about, eventually, the death of the word *goupil* and its replacement by *renard*. About twenty years later, in the 1190s, he turned up in Alsace with the name Reinhart, but soon he returned to Flanders and, as Reynaert, spoke Dutch. While he lingered there, one of his French descendants made an excursion, at the end of the thir-

teenth century, into Italy where he established himself as Rainaldo. The Dutch-speaking Flanders fox's first foray abroad was to cross the Channel in 1481 in the company of William Caxton who named him Reynard and helped him found, in Westminster, what was to be a long-lived English branch of the family. Not long back in Flanders, in 1498, he made for Lübeck where he established another thriving branch of the family, one which spoke Low German and made famous the name Reynke. About fifty years later he moved south, to Frankfurt am Main, spoke High German and came to be known as Reinicke but, since Goethe, as Reineke. Further afield, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he crossed into Denmark and Sweden first as Reynicke, then, in Sweden only, as Reinick and Reninge. Lastly, in the nineteenth century, he made for Luxemburg where he is celebrated as Renert.

In six or seven different cultures which share just four languages, generation after generation of Reinardus's offspring have played central roles in poems, stories, historiated sculptures and drawings: French in France and francophone Belgium; Dutch in Flanders and the Netherlands; English in England, Scotland and, more recently, North America; German in Germany, Austria and parts of Switzerland. And it is chiefly from Reynardian texts in these languages that, through translations and adaptations, the Beast Epic fox's fame has been noised abroad. For example, parts of the medieval French *Roman de Renart* have been rendered into Portuguese, Romanian, Russian and Japanese.

The Main Objective

The chief aim of this volume of essays is to give some telling examples of the metamorphoses of the Beast Epic fox as he travelled through time and space entertaining people (rather like the travelling minstrel he once pretended to be in the *Roman de Renart*), and of his involvement in some of the basic problems and issues men and women have faced in many different kinds of society.

The Beast Epic

The title *Beast Epic* is given by literary historians to a genre which depicts an animal kingdom of the feudal kind ruled by a lion-king. In the medieval French model his name is Noble, and that of his queen is Fière (who, from time to time, reveals

her amorous feelings for Renart). One of the most powerful barons at Noble's court is the wolf, Ysengrin (as his name suggests, a man of iron, but not a very clever one). He has a notoriously lascivious wife, Hersent. (The Latin for a she-wolf is *lupa*, slang for prostitute). In one of the very first stories of the many that make up the *Roman de Renart*, she seduces Renart, and soon afterwards, when Ysengrin knows about her adultery with Renart, the fox rapes her in full view of her helpless husband: hence the never-ending hatred of the wolf for the fox, and their enduring enmity. Hermeline is Renart's long-suffering wife, mistress of their castle-den, Malpertuis, and they have three sons (Malebranche, Percehaie and Rovel) who appear in just a few of the Beast Epic stories. Renart's only effective ally in all these tales is his first cousin, the badger Grimbert; but the monkey Cointereau is also a friend and, over time, he (or another of his tribe) plays a bigger and bigger role as a companion in mischief. The fox also has a love-hate relationship with the cat, Tibert (ancestor of all our tibby or tabby cats). They respect each other's stealth and cunning, and often form short-term alliances which lead to a conflict of interests in which Reynard usually comes off the worse. Other animals who play a major role invariably opposed to Renart are the clumsy, gullible bear, Brun; and the pompous cock, Chantecler (who has a wise wife called Pinte and many less-wise sisters-in-law, chief of whom is Couppée (who gets her head cut off by Renart's teeth). All these animals are portrayed as high-ranking barons who owe allegiance to Noble and (with the exception of Grimbert and Cointereau) have, sooner or later, grounds to complain to him about Renart.

In the essays which make up this volume, the Latin, Dutch, English and German equivalents of the French names just given are usually easily recognised. Occasionally they are totally different (in the *Ysengrimus*, the lion is Rufanus, the cock Sprotinus) but when that is so, the authors make clear who is who.

The Beast Epic context of the essays in this volume

The Ysengrimus

As mentioned above, it was as Reinardus that Reynard the Fox made his literary début in one of the finest masterpieces of all time, the *Ysengrimus*, a Latin verse epic of over 6,500 lines, composed in 1148-49, in a clerical milieu in Ghent. The narrative focuses on a strong but not-so-bright wolf named Ysen-

grimus. His main opponent and tormenter is a cunning little fox, his nephew, Reinardus. It is here that, for the first time in a literary work of art, the antagonism between a named wolf and a named fox becomes the animating force which drives a story from beginning to end, and in this case a fiercely critical, satiric and wonderfully comic story which targets, in particular, monk-bishops. This, appropriately, is the topic of the first essay here, by Jill Mann.

The Roman de Renart

The *Ysengrimus*'s fox becomes Renart le Goupil in the forty-odd tales which make up the twenty-six branches and nearly 30,000 lines of the French *Roman de Renart*. They were mostly composed as separate, only loosely-linked narrative poems, over a period of about seventy years, beginning in the 1170s. At one point in the *Ysengrimus*, as mentioned above, the fox first commits adultery with, then rapes, the wolf's wife and it is this more than any other crime or insult which lies at the heart of their enmity, and it is this which seems to have inspired a Frenchman known as Pierre de Saint Cloud to compose and to put together the first group of narrative poems in French centred on the fox. Since the publication in the 1870s of the first scholarly edition of the *Roman de Renart*, this is known as Branch II, and tells of Renart's brushes with a cock called Chantecler, an unnamed titmouse, a crow called Tiécelin, and a cat called Tibert, before climaxing with an account of his adultery with, then rape of Hersent. The author of this exceptionally entertaining, artistically splendid and earliest branch was careful not to resolve the quarrel between the fox and the wolf, and to leave the situation open so that their story might be continued. And so it was, first by the branch known as *Le Serment* (Reynard's Solemn Oath) in which Ysengrin complains to the king chiefly about Reynard's criminal violation of his wife, and the fox is brought to court to answer the charges made against him. This is one of several of his court appearances. At all of them he wins the day by verbal dexterity, trickery, lying and bribery. Within the next few years, and probably by 1180, this first *Roman de Renart* quickly attracted seven or eight more individual or little groups of tales, the best of which by far is Branch I, *Le Plaid* (Reynard's Trial). For the second time, Reynard is brought to trial at the king-lion's court, this time on a charge of murder, the murder of Chantecler's close relation, Couppée. Prior to this the wolf has once more brought the charge of rape, and other animals have brought other

charges. The royal emmissaries, Brun and Tibert, are deceitfully received and shamefully treated, but Grimbert finally persuades Renart to come to court where, eventually, after much entertaining and intriguing debate, Renart is condemned to death. But he gets off. Easily the most successful and artistically accomplished of this early group of branches (as these stories are labelled), and although one of the later ones, it was placed first in most medieval French anthologies of Reynardian tales, and was to inspire the composition of other branches (especially of the juridical kind), as well as long narrative poems, beast epics in their own right, in other languages. It is to these juridical branches, to the administration of justice and in particular for the crime of rape in northern, twelfth-century France, that the second essay in this volume, by Jean Subrenat, draws our attention.

Reinhart Fuchs

The renown of Renart was such that, very soon after the composition of the first seven or eight branches, and in particular after Branch I, Reynard's Trial, he made his first appearance in German. Called Reinhart, he repeats many a crime and commits many a new one in the 2,260-odd lines of the German-speaking Alsatian Heinrich der Glichesaere's *Reinhart Fuchs*, probably composed around 1191. Especially in the opening sections of his epic, Heinrich selected much of his material from those first branches of the *Roman de Renart*, but then went on to add new material and mould it into a well-unified whole. His poem is one of the truly great satirical works of medieval German literature, and one of the most interesting of the Beast Epics. Jean-Marc Pastré's essay concentrates on the questionable administration of justice along with moral values and geopolitics in a region which seems to reflect parts of the territories of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries belonging to the Holy Roman Empire.

The Roman de Renart, Van den Vos Reynaerde, Reynaerts Historie

The fox's next known appearance in another foreign literature is as Reinaert in the thirteenth-century, 3,500-line Flemish Beast Epic entitled *Van den Vos Reynaerde*, better known as *Reynaert de Vos*. The story-line of this masterpiece is much the same as that in Branch I of the *Roman de Renart*, to which it owes a great deal. It survives in two complete manuscripts, the Comburg manuscript and the Dyck manuscript, both of which

were copied in the fourteenth century. Later in that same century, or early in the fifteenth, a new version appeared, chiefly made by the addition of a substantial new ending which sometimes incorporates non-*Roman-de-Renart* material, and sometimes repeats material already present in the earlier part. This longer rehandling of the epic is entitled *Reynaerts Historie*. For simplicity, scholars and literary historians sometimes refer to the earlier one as *Reinaert I*, and to the later one as *Reinaert II*. Although so much of the story-line of the French Branch I, of *Reynaert de Vos* and of *Reynaerts Historie* is very similar, the authors of these three versions of the Beast Epic had considerably different readerships in mind, and different expectations in their readers' understanding and reactions. It is to these that Paul Wackers addresses himself in his first essay.

The Metamorphoses of the Dutch Reynaert Tradition in Print from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century

It is in Dutch-speaking territory that the Beast Epic was created as early as 1150; and it is in Dutch that it has the longest, continuous history and appeal, where it still lives as nowhere else. But its authors have constantly adapted their material (mostly found in *Reynaerts Historie*) to changing circumstances and to new readers, as this second chapter by Paul Wakers shows.

Reynaerts Historie*: An Ideological Weapon*

In almost every language and period in which the Beast Epic has appeared, sooner or later the theme of conflict and war is treated, usually slanted by the author to make a sociopolitical point. In this essay, after looking over his shoulder at a few examples from the Middle Ages, Rik van Daele concentrates on this theme and the ways in which it has been treated in twentieth-century Flanders.

Reynard, Tibert, and the Misfortunes of a Village Priest

One of the most entertaining episodes in the Beast Epic is that in which Reynard tricks the cat Tibert so that he gets caught in a snare meant for himself, a snare which a village priest had set in a hole in his barn wall through which the fox was wont to go looking for poultry. Alerted by noises coming from his barn in the middle of the night, the priest rushes from his bed, armed but naked, together with his concubine and some of his sons. In the dark they attack their prisoner who, in self-defence, counter-attacks with teeth and claws and bites off one of the priest's testicles. This episode is first recounted in Branch

I of the *Roman de Renart*, and is repeated in almost every version of the Beast Epic from the Middle Ages to the present day, but it gets modified (both in words and pictures, for it has often been illustrated) to suit the sensibilities of the perceived readership. It is to these changing sensibilites that Jan Goossens addresses himself in this illustrated essay.

Choir-stall Carvings of Reynard and Other Foxes

Foxes have been carved on choir-stalls all over medieval Europe, along with many other animals, some of them imaginary, some real, almost all having a symbolic or moral value. In a small minority of cases, these foxes can be identified as Reynard in one or other of his adventures; others may well be him; others have been absorbed into his History. Elaine C. Block has examined and photographed every known set of misericords in situ apart from the ones in Funchal, Madeira. This illustrated essay, in which Elaine C. Block is joined by Kenneth Varty, concentrates on misericord carvings of the fox, and it reveals some interesting regional varieties and variants in the themes depicted. The only ones which can be identified with certainty as Reynard are to be found in England, whilst others which are at least very closely related to him are also only in England.

Reynard in England: From Caxton to the Present

It was in 1479, in Gouda, that Gheraert Leeu published a prose version of *Reynaerts Historie* which he called *Die Hystorie van Reyaert die Vos*. This is the text which William Caxton translated into English in 1481. Leeu also published another, illustrated edition in Antwerp between 1487 and 1490, and it was the illustrations in this edition which the artist who made the series of woodcuts for Wynkin de Worde's *c.*1495 version of Caxton's text closely imitated. Both Caxton's text and Wynkyn de Worde's woodcuts had a long history in England, often modified, sometimes subtly, sometimes boldly. Eventually they were replaced by new Reynard stories and pictures intended for different groups of people. This illustrated essay by Kenneth Varty traces the fortunes and characteristics of the English descendants of the Dutch Reynaert.

Hartmann Schopper's Latin Reinike *of 1567*

The Beast Epic in Latin is something of a rarity. We have the *Ysengrimus* of *c.*1150 (the only truly original Beast Epic in Latin); the *Reynardus Vulpes* of 1279 (an abbreviated transla-

tion and adaptation of the Dutch *Van den Vos Reynaerde*); and Schopper's translation and adaptation of a High German text which descended from the first Low German version of the Beast Epic *Reynke de Vos* (1498), which was a translation of the Dutch *Reynaerts Historie*. Schopper's text was composed when religious controversy and conflict raged fiercely, and in his essay Wilfried Schouwink brings this out, as well as certain characteristics due chiefly to the author's military experiences and the Latinisation of the story.

Goethe's Reineke Fuchs *of 1794*

Perhaps the most famous Beast Epic composed on German soil is Goethe's, which also goes back, but via a different route from that taken by Schopper's, to *Reynke de Vos* and to *Reinaerts Historie*. Goethe's most immediate source was a translation into High German (by J.C. Gottsched in 1752) from the Low German (as edited by F.A Hackmann in 1711). But he also had in his library several other versions of the Epic, including Schopper's and a 1780 adaptation in German of a popular Dutch *Reynaert* published by Plantijn in Antwerp in 1564, as well as the 1564 edition itself. He composed his *Reineke* in the wake of the French Revolution when he and his readers were very much aware of its consequences in France, and of social unrest, often fearful, often hopeful about their own political future. This is why Roger Stephenson has chosen to write about the political import of Goethe's *Reineke Fuchs*.

Paul Weber's Satirical Use of Reineke in Cartoon Form

One of Germany's finest book illustrators and political cartoonists, Paul Weber (1893-1980) came to admire Reineke when he illustrated, in 1924, Goethe's Beast Epic. Subsequently he took the fox out of his History and used him as one of his principal cartoon characters, some aspect of which are examined in this illustrated essay by Kenneth Varty.

Metamorphoses of the Roman de Renart *in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in France*

While the Beast Epic flourished in many forms in medieval France, the finest of which were some of the branches of the *Roman de Renart*, it went underground from the end of the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century. When it reappeared above ground in the nineteenth century, a number of distinguished scholars, talented literary artists, enterprising publishers and a mixture of mediocre and good book-illustrators

revived its fortunes, bringing about some marked changes in style, content, purpose and presentation when compared with the *Renarts* of old. In this illustrated essay, Kenneth Varty focuses on Paulin Paris's version (1861); while Jean Dufournet concentrates on that of Albert-Marie Schmidt (1963), and then on that of J.-L. Hubert and G.J. Imbar, *Le Polar de Renart* (1973).

The Fox and the Wolf in the Well

Many literary artists from different cultures have treated in several literary forms, over a long period of time, for quite different publics, and with different objects, the way the fox gets into and out of a well at the wolf's expense. Concentrating on their comic qualities, this essay by the editor looks at two Jewish fables from before the *Roman de Renart*, which may well have been sources of two distinctly different branches in the French epic and probably intended for clerical audiences; then at these two branches, and at a thirteenth-century English parallel to the French branches; and finally at the modern negro American version by R. Chandler Harris in which the rabbit replaces the fox (and the fox replaces the wolf), which leaves us well placed to appreciate the topic of the final essay.

The Fox and the Hare: the Peregrinations and Adventures of an Odd Couple

The final essay treats the fox, and in particular the fox and the hare in the folklore of northern Europe, more especially in Scandinavia and in Finland where so much pioneering scientific work was done in this field. The Beast Epic, and especially the *Roman de Renart*, fed on folklore, contains parallels with well-attested folktales, and very probably contributed to folktales. Elina Suomela-Härmä leads us eventually to the rape of the vixen by the hare, and reminds us of the rape recounted in the very first Beast Epic, the rape which inspired the author of Branch II, then the author of Branch I (composed after Branch II) and from which almost all the rest followed.

Chapter 1

The Satiric Fiction of the *Ysengrimus*

Jill Mann

The *Ysengrimus* is a Latin beast epic of more than 6,500 lines, which was written in the middle of the twelfth century, probably in Ghent.[1] It is at once one of the most important and the most neglected works of medieval literature. It is neglected mainly because it is very hard to read; not only is its Latin unusually difficult, but the peculiarly compressed and contorted nature of the poet's wit often makes his thought difficult to follow. It is important, first of all, because it initiates a major literary tradition. It stands at the head of the long line of medieval beast-literature – the line that includes the *Roman de Renart*, *Reinhart Fuchs*, *Van den Vos Reinaerde*, and a whole host of others. It is the first work to make the undying hostility between the fox and the wolf into the dynamic force of a full-length narrative, and the first to invest them with fictional personalities by giving them the now familiar names of Reynard and Ysengrimus. But the importance of this Latin poem is not merely historical; it is also important in its own right as a literary masterpiece. Ernst Voigt, the editor of the only critical edition of the poem, called it the 'comprehensive, systematically planned, wittily and artfully executed work of one of the greatest poets of the Middle Ages' (Voigt 1884). The *Ysengrimus* merits the title 'epic' not simply by virtue of length, but above all because it realises an autonomous fictional world, a world constructed on coherent laws which express a central satiric vision. It is the nature of this satiric vision that is the main concern of this essay. To understand the subtlety and originality

of this poem, we need both to identify the features of the poet's contemporary society which are the objects of his attack, and to analyse the narrative fictions in which he embodies his vision of social disorder.

The *Ysengrimus* follows the classic epic structure; it begins *in mediis rebus*, and later recapitulates a sequence of earlier events. Book I opens with the only episode in which the wolf gets the better of the fox: the 'bacon-sharing', in which Ysengrimus devours the whole of a ham that Reynard has won from its peasant owner by trickery. The fox takes his revenge in the fishing episode, in which the wolf loses his tail after it is frozen fast in the river, and the field-division episode in Book II, in which the wolf attempts to cloak his predatory designs on four sheep by pretending to mark out the boundaries of their field, but is then battered senseless when they all charge at him. Book III describes the assembly of the animals at the court of the lion, who wants them to advise on a cure for his sickness: the fox persuades the lion that he will be cured if he is wrapped in the skin of a wolf, and Ysengrimus is flayed in order to provide the skin in question. The court is then entertained by hearing the relation of previous adventures, which make up an 'inset narrative' (Books IV–V): first, we hear of the pilgrimage of eight animals, which the wolf attempts, unsuccessfully, to join (as usual, he is beaten within an inch of his life by his intended victims). We then hear how the fox, too, was twice outwitted by the cock. Reynard next persuades the wolf to enter a monastery, which is named as 'Blandinium' – that is, the monastery of St Peter's in the town of Ghent – but the wolf is soon thrown out and beaten yet again, as a punishment for having drunk all the wine in the monks' cellar. This episode concludes the inset narrative, and the main narrative resumes with an account of the departure of the skinless wolf from the lion's court; attempting to claim a replacement skin from the horse Corvigarus, and then to devour the sheep Joseph, he is kicked senseless by the former and pulverised by the latter (Books V–VI). When the wolf's skin has grown again, Reynard organises a hunting expedition in which they are joined by the lion; when the wolf proposes that their spoils should be equally divided, the enraged lion, with one swipe of his paw, tears off his skin for the second time. Next, the fox persuades Ysengrimus to swear an oath on some 'relics', which turn out to be a trap, and he is forced to bite off his foot in order to free himself. In Book VII, the hapless wolf meets his end; he is eaten alive by the massive sow Salaura and sixty-six other pigs.

It is evident that the wolf is not very successful as a predator. The episodes of the poem, although not linked into a tightly organised plot, nevertheless follow a clear trajectory as they chronicle his progressive mutilation, torture and death at the hands of the animals he plans to make his victims. The epic arrangement of the narrated events means that after the bacon-sharing episode, in which he enjoys a brief triumph, it is downhill all the way. Gruesome as the descriptions of the wolf's torture are, the spirit which animates this relentless sequence of destruction is not a simple delight in sadistic violence. Rather, it is driven by a satiric impulse which transforms the apparently arbitrary features of each episode into a meaningful structure. The target against which this satiric impulse is directed will become clearer if we examine more closely the central figure of the wolf.

The wolf's dominating characteristic is his greed. He is always ready to eat, and his stomach and jaws are of monstrous size. His stomach is metaphorically equated with the pit of hell ('baratrum', 'Gehenna', 'Avernus'); it is also referred to, for example, as a lodging-house, a whirlpool, or a vaulted hall. His jaws are so huge they take on a life of their own. The wolf refers to them as a gaping doorway which he invites the fox to enter. When the wolf clashes them together, we are told that they resound like the banging of a weaver's combs, or like a sheet of metal being hammered on an anvil. On hearing the noise, the fox asks if someone is cutting down trees. The teeth inside these jaws are said to cut through bones like a knife through butter; they are described as pick-axes, or as scythes. When the fox throws over to the wolf a plate with eight pies on it, Ysengrimus swallows the lot in one gulp without even noticing that he has done so.

The wolf is not, however, a symbol of greed pure and simple; as his entry into the monastery indicates, he represents the greed of a monk. The satiric purpose of the poem is here clearly evident. But we do not have to wait until the monastery episode in Book V to perceive it. In the very first episode of the poem, Ysengrimus refers to his earlier profession as a monk, and explains that its effect was to intensify his natural rapacity, for he now unites the greed of a monk to that of a wolf.

> 'For when a monk sees any wealth on offer, he falls on it like the flash of lightning produced by a stormy sky. Should a twofold Charybdis acknowledge a limit, when a single one doesn't?

> Holy ardour spurs me on from one side, and my destructive urges from the other. A monk's kindness is more savage than a wolf's cruelty; I say "that's enough" when I'm full, while a monk still says "that's not much". In the old days I used to be guilty of sin whenever I committed violence, and my depredations were not granted pardon, but once I had taken on the holy cowl, and the good brothers had taught me their example, both lawful and unlawful things were immediately permissible to me, and nothing is forbidden me except that I should go without.' (I 639–50)

The author's satiric target is not, however, monks in general; his aim is more specific, as becomes clear if we look at two important passages, in each of which the poet presents a contemporary cleric in a very unflattering light. The first of these clerics is Anselm, bishop of Tournai, who is mentioned by Reynard when he is cursing his teeth for having let go of the cock he held in his mouth; he should never have been so foolish, he says, as to forget to place profit above all other considerations. He cites the pope as an excellent example of someone who pursues profit in total disregard of morality and religion. But an even better example is provided by Bishop Anselm.

> 'In the pursuit of this virtue, Rome is outstripped by Tournai, the city blessed with Bishop Anselm. This good shepherd of Tournai himself shears off the fleeces from sheep and goats alike down to the living flesh. If only he were one of my teeth! He'd give his brothers a lesson in biting. He prowls around the churches as a hungry lion does the sheepfold, leaving only what he can't find. Whoever offers him less than he is told to (whether it's within his power or not) is compelled on his obedience to leave off reciting the holy offices. It's as if he bristles with as many robbers as he has teeth, and he doesn't allow the shorn fleeces to grow again; he gets in first, and would take, if he could, more than he finds – what a pity that he *can't* take more than he finds! He is sorry that he can't alter the limit to taking, and is sure that this is the only thing wrong with plunder. This is the bishop I hold up to you for imitation. What does that rag-wearer from Clairvaux know about anything? He's a straw-plaiter, someone who looks for knots in sedge, a pebble-peeler – let him go and milk cranes! You should imitate the excellent behaviour of this bishop, who devours like Satan and holds like Hell!' (V 109–30)[2]

Anselm was appointed bishop of Tournai in 1146, and died in 1149. He had not much time, therefore, to practise financial extortion in his diocese, but it is of some importance that he

visited Ghent in 1147, to consecrate the leper-chapel belonging to the abbey of St Bavo's; what he did there, we do not know, but it seems to have been responsible for the poet's unfavourable impression of Anselm's character.

The second passage that contains an unflattering picture of a contemporary cleric occurs at the very end of the poem, and it too emerges abruptly from an animal monologue. After the death of the wolf, the sow Salaura rejects the suggestion that he should be buried. The only money that would be fit to pay for his burial, she says, is 'the cash for which the crafty pope sold Christians to the duke of Sicily'. She then breaks into incoherent cries of grief:

> 'Oh, disgrace to heaven! grief to the world! laughter in hell! One feeble monk has overthrown two kingdoms! Ah, woe is me! How lamentable is the tale I have heard, which is the cause of my loosening the bridle on my tongue in this way!' (VII 465–70)

When the sow is asked to explain herself, it becomes clear that she is referring to the Second Crusade, which took place in 1147–49, and ended in complete disaster for the Christian armies. The 'two kingdoms' she mentions are France and Germany, the participants in this Crusade; the 'one wretched monk' who has overthrown them is Pope Eugenius III, who launched the Crusade, with the backing of St Bernard of Clairvaux. Reynard the fox spells out the implied accusation against the pope: that he was bribed by Roger, Duke of Sicily, to send the crusaders by land to the Holy Land instead of by ship from Sicily, and thus to expose them to the disasters that befell them.

> 'I already know what you're thinking: you want to condemn the Bishop of Rome for wrongdoing and deception, treacherous swine. You're going to say that the duke of the volcanic region was afraid to let the Christians pass through his realm on their way to Jerusalem, so the pope, seduced by the gold and silver of the duke, persuaded the people to take the road through Greece, and one feeble monk overthrew two kingdoms, giving them up to hunger and misfortunes and the cunning of the Greeks. Besides those who were destroyed by the fury of the sea and the pestilence-laden air and the deceit of the Argolids, two thousand men perished through sleep and a storm, in a closed valley, surrounded by hills on all sides.' (VII 665–76)

These two historical figures – Anselm of Tournai and Pope Eugenius III – are the two principal real-life villains identified by the *Ysengrimus*, and they provide the key to its satiric fic-

tion. For they have one important thing in common: both of them were monks who had taken office in the secular clergy. Anselm, before being appointed bishop of Tournai, had been abbot of the abbey of Saint-Vincent in Laon. Eugenius was a former monk of Cîteaux and a disciple of St Bernard of Clairvaux; at the time of his election as pope he was abbot of the monastery of Saints Anastasius and Vincent in Rome. The objects of attack, therefore, are not just a bishop and a pope, but a monk-bishop and a monk-pope.

When we look closely at the titles given to the wolf Ysengrimus in the poem, we see that he is not only called 'monk' ('monachus'), but also 'abbot' and 'bishop' ('abbas et presul'/'pontifex'). Scholars for a long time failed to notice both the *consistency* with which these two titles are applied to the wolf, and also the fact that they are not alternatives (that is, the poet is not attacking bishops at one moment and abbots at the next), but are to be taken together as a composite title indicating a dual role. If we grasp the fact that it is the monk-bishops who are the object of satiric attack, we shall immediately be able to understand how this aim determines the form of the fictional narrative in its two most important episodes – the court episode and the monastery episode. For, in each of them, the physical torture which the other animals inflict on the wolf is mockingly interpreted as an episcopal consecration. In the scene at the lion's court, Ysengrimus is, as elsewhere in the poem, represented as a monk – for example, he claims to be able to cure the sick lion because he has learned medicine in the cloister – and the other animals likewise refer to him as 'abbot'. When the bear flays the wolf, he slices the skin with such rapidity that he leaves some pieces of skin behind; there remains a strip of skin on his head, running between his ears, and little 'socks' of skin on each of his front paws. The sheep mockingly interprets these pieces of skin as the mitre and *suralia* (hose) which formed part of the distinctive insignia of a bishop (known as the pontificals). 'Take off the mitre, Bruno!', he says, 'If you don't take it off, he'll be called a fop; take the mitre off, Bruno!' (III 991–2). The wolf is already an abbot, he continues; is he now to be made a bishop as well? Why should all the honours go to wolves? (III 1,000–01) This central episode of the poem thus represents the wolf as an abbot who is consecrated bishop by a grotesquely parodic ceremony.

The monastery episode, too, climaxes with a sadistic parody of an episcopal consecration. The wolf, having complained of

thirst, is taken to the wine cellar and left to his own devices. He samples the wine in every barrel, but does not bother to turn off the taps, so that the monk who comes to see what he is doing finds him swimming in a sea of wine. Incensed at this outrage to monastic property, the monks seize whatever weapon they can find and set off to punish the wolf. Terrified at the sight of this threatening crowd, the wolf tries to excuse himself by claiming that he was trying to prove his suitability to be a new kind of bishop, a monk-bishop. Bishops drawn from the secular clergy practise rapine, it is true, but only half-heartedly; what is needed is a new order of bishops, drawn from the ranks of monks. Their depredations will make the secular clergy look like mere amateurs.

> 'I'll tell you my idea. From the company of our order [monks] the majority of bishops are to be chosen, men whose life is publicly approved, and who shall demonstrate with how much tenderness they care for their sheep, and with what pure reverence they fear God. They shall decide that everything possessed by the people, the clergy, or the cloister, is legitimately to be seized for themselves, by force, by persuasion, by lawsuits, by simulation, by deceit, by threats, and whatever means are alien to order, morality, or moderation. This rule is only partially familiar to the bishops chosen from the secular clergy, and they observe it only partially, as they have learned it. They don't gulp down everything, but sip in half-mouthfuls; appeased by what they have grabbed, they allow many things to get away from them. So the more foresighted sections of the clergy must elect holy monks, whose practice is to leave nothing, and who may first gobble, then scrape, and finally lick. Truly, to them is the whole rule of virtues disclosed. I, hoping to become a high priest of these rituals, am giving an advance demonstration of my zeal: I devour, plunder, swallow. I have accomplished the work of numberless days in a single heroic act, in emptying the vessels of their gushing wine. Rumour usually travels far and fast once some notable subject-matter has set it going. Therefore I wanted to commit an outstanding deed, desirous of making my greed known at once, so that if any bishop is perhaps to be got rid of because his ravages are too restricted, I might fitly be appointed in his place.' (V 995–1,022)

The monks respond to the wolf's attempts at exculpation with the mocking claim that his wishes are about to be fulfilled: he is to be 'consecrated' with the implements they carry. The sacristan empties over him an incense-casket full of fleas, claiming that he is 'anointing him with oil'. Another monk breaks

an earthernware pot over his head, claiming that he is 'setting the mitre in place'. A horse-collar is wrapped around his neck in place of the bishop's pallium. And so on.

As these two episodes show, the satiric attack in the *Ysengrimus* is relentlessly and ruthlessly directed against the type of cleric with whom the wolf here associates himself: the monk who leaves his monastery and takes office as a bishop. Since the beginnings of monasticism, monks had been elevated to the rank of bishop. The hybrid state of monk-bishop had caused difficulties for the canonists, who had to define the extent to which the new bishop was dispensed from the obligations of monastic life. It also aroused great hostility in certain quarters: Peter Abelard, for example, denounced the monk-bishop as a monstrosity, a man who had abandoned his monastic profession for the sake of soft living. The author of the *Ysengrimus* was, it appears, at one with Abelard in his dislike of and contempt for the monk-bishop.

This dislike appears not only in the two episodes we have just examined; features of the satiric fiction in other episodes of the poem are precisely moulded to fit the object of the satiric attack. Apparently arbitrary or gratuitous details turn out to be brilliant imaginative strokes which both identify the monk-bishop as the satiric target represented by the wolf and inflict a fitting punishment on the monk-bishop's crimes. The clearest example of this is in the pilgrimage episode. The wolf arrives at the house where the animal-pilgrims are spending the night and obtrudes himself on the company, to whom he is an unwanted guest. They pretend, however, to be delighted at his arrival, and Reynard sends the sheep to the larder in the next room to fetch some food. The sheep protests that all there is to eat is a pile of wolf-heads. The fox says they will serve the purpose very well. The sheep has in fact only *one* wolf-head, which the animals had earlier removed from a house-gable (where it had been nailed to ward off evil spirits). He offers it to the fox for approval, saying it was the head of 'an old Angevin'. The fox, however, rejects it as not good enough, and sends the sheep away for another. The sheep takes the head away, tears out its hair so as to give it a 'tonsure', and brings it back to the fox, saying it was the head of 'an English abbot'. Reynard rejects this one also, and orders the sheep to fetch the huge head in the corner, the one that has its mouth propped open by a stick. The sheep asks if he means the one belonging to 'a Danish bishop', which the goose accidentally pecked off his shoulders as he lay asleep in the grass, and then hissed so hard that he blew it all

the way to the house? Yes, says the fox, that is the one he means. The sheep goes away and tears off all the hair and the ears as well from his one wolf-head and props open its jaws with a stick; then he returns and offers it to the wolf.

> Its drawn-back lips gaped in a horrible grin. The old man stiffened at the sight and turned his face aside; his hunger was shaken off, driven away by great fear. Then for the first time it was obvious that Fortune was not playing games; never before had he experienced fear to the same degree. 'What devil', he said, 'led me to these lupicides? Oh, misery, is the day tied by a rope, that it drags so slowly? Why this horned army? This Gerard – not content with having murdered unfortunate wolves – is said to have blown off his hair and ears and to have rolled his head here with hissing! Can I endure this without losing my mind?' The goose replied: 'Do you reckon this is something new, Ysengrimus? Truly, this has happened to me more than once. If I wanted, I could blow eight heads from wolves bigger than this one – and yours too, sir hermit! Do you think I haven't come out of my mother's egg yet?' – and he emitted an enormous noise from his hissing throat. When he heard it, the wolf cried 'Aaagh!' three times, and suddenly losing consciousness, fell flat on his back; for a long time he thought his head had been blown off and he had lost it, and that it had bounced away over the snows of Germany. (IV 312–32)

The point of this comic scene is that the wolf is terrified by an image of *himself*. The three versions of the head (as 'old Angevin', 'English abbot', 'Danish bishop') correspond to the three aspects of the wolf, as he is characterised in the text. He is old: the poet tells us he is 160 years old, and he is constantly referred to as *senex*, 'old man', throughout the poem. He is an abbot, and in addition, he is a bishop. The fact that it is the *same* head that is brought back every time in a different guise is precisely designed to make clear that it represents three different facets of the same wolf. The series of three reaches its climax with the last head, which has its mouth propped open by a stick, and which thus presents a compelling picture of the wolf's all-devouring greed. The wolf is confronted with a mirror-image of himself, with his own gaping jaws, symbolising the terrifying greed of the aged abbot-bishop.

In this episode, the arch-devourer is offered himself to devour. His punishment, that is, is determined by a law of comic reversal – 'the biter bit', 'the trickster tricked'. This principle underlies all the narrative episodes of the poem (Mann 1977); in every case, the predator is outwitted by his victim,

the stronger animal is defeated by the weaker. Thus the wolf is beaten by the sheep, the fox is outwitted by the cock. The horse is tricked by the stork; the wolf is in turn tricked by the horse. Only in the bacon-sharing episode does the predator manage to fulfil his customary role: the wolf outwits the fox and devours the whole bacon. But this apparent exception only proves the rule, if we set this opening episode in the context of the whole poem. For we then see that the last episode of the poem precisely reverses the first: the wolf who began by devouring pork ends up being eaten by pigs.

If we look again at the central episode of the poem, we shall see how this vision of a 'world-upside-down' serves the satiric purposes of the poet. First, we may notice that the court episode contains a strange echo of the passage on Anselm of Tournai. As the bear prepares to flay the wolf, Reynard suddenly rushes forward with the plea that he should 'take no more than he finds' – because, says the fox, the wolf himself always acted on this principle.

> 'I make one small request – let there be room for it – grant it – and I'll show myself deserving: that you shouldn't take more than you find! He himself never took more than he found. It's right to take away what someone has, but wrong to take away more than that!' (III 931–4)

The fox's plea exactly echoes what is said about Anselm of Tournai: that he does not take more than he finds. (Naturally, this is merely an ironic way of saying that he takes everything he *can* find – a way of representing his greed as 'mercy'.) This verbal echo draws attention to the fact that the Anselm passage also contains a parallel to the flaying: the bishop does not shear his flock, which would allow the shorn fleeces to grow again; instead he 'fleeces' them, cutting down to the living flesh. The flaying of the wolf – who is the fictional representative of the 'abbot-bishops' – is thus an appropriate punishment imagined for the real-life abbot-bishops, who themselves 'flay' their flock.

The animals talk as if the wolf's skin was only a garment, easily and painlessly removed. Once it has been stripped from him, and Ysengrimus (still alive) is covered only by an inner membrane, dripping with scarlet blood, Reynard pretends to be indignant that the wolf has insulted the court by covering this splendid scarlet 'robe' with an ugly wolf-skin. This fiction raises the horrifying possibility that the fox is about to insist that this 'robe' too must be removed – that the flaying is to be