B⫶E

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Die Zeit der sprachbegabten Tiere

Ordnung, Varianz und Geschichtlichkeit (in) der Tierepik

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Narrative Structures in Medieval Animal Epic

Abstract. Der Beitrag stellt dar, welche mittelalterlichen Texte als Tierepen gelten könnten, und charakterisiert dann bei einigen von ihnen die Erzähltechnik, die episodische Strukturen aufweist, aber auch durch Kausalität bestimmte übergreifende Handlungszusammenhänge. Episodisches Erzählen findet sich in der gesamten Tradition; der Grad der Kohärenz sowie die Art und Weise, wie die Episoden miteinander verbunden sind, variieren jedoch. Dass sich übergreifende *plots* weitgehend durchsetzen, scheint eine spätere Entwicklung zu sein, die mit einer anderen Vorstellung von der Figur des Fuchses und einer pessimistischeren Sicht auf das Leben an Höfen zusammenhängt.

1. Introduction

This article is inspired by the Exposé that was spread as preparation for the Tagung ›Zeitlose Ordnungen? Episodische Varianz und historischer Wandel (in) der Tierepik‹. I found that text very interesting but also problematical. The authors argued that »die Zeitlosigkeit einer unveränderlichen Natur-Ordnung« that we find in animal fables was taken over in the world view of animal epics. However, in animal epics the repetition that results from this timelessness becomes an instrument for the creation of meaningful differences. These differences could lead to stories with a coherent general plot – consisting of beginning, middle, and end – but this did not happen. The animal epic is determined by its episodic character. The authors use the lack of coherence between and the episodic nature of the *branches* of the ›Roman de Renart‹ as arguments for this statement. I disagree on two

points with this line of reasoning. The first is that I think that animal fables and animal epics are fundamentally different, especially regarding their use of the stable nature of animal protagonists (Mann 2009). The second is that in this way the ›Roman de Renart‹ is presented as the ›archetype‹ of animal epic. And although the ›Roman de Renart‹ was evidently very well known and clearly influential, there are many other texts that one may include in the medieval animal epic, and these are often different. The place of the ›Roman de Renart‹ in the tradition as a whole is an important topic and it is handled again, and in a more nuanced way in the introduction to this Sonderheft.[1] In this article it is my aim to show that the ›Roman de Renart‹ is not the norm but one phenomenon amongst others by discussing the narrative structures that may be found in the medieval tradition as a whole.

2. The European Animal Epic Tradition

When one consults modern studies about medieval stories about beasts (Jauß 1959; Knapp 1979; Flinn 1963; Best 1983, Ziolkowksi 1993, Mann 2009; Knapp 2013) it becomes clear that there is no general accepted view on the best way to classify or to subdivide them, nor on the grouping of texts within a subdivision.[2] When one takes a liberal view and includes every text that could belong to the animal epic, the result is the following list:

Text	Date	Localisation
Latin beast stories	Ca. 750–after 1000	
›Ecbasis Captivi‹	1046–1048	Toul
›Ysengrimus‹	1148–1149	Ghent
Nigel of Longchamp, ›Speculum Stultorum‹	End 12th century	Canterbury
›Roman de Renart‹	Begin 1174–1177 First ms. collections ca. 1200 End before 1250	Unclear Suggestions of Northern France and Flanders

›Reinhart Fuchs‹	Ca. 1200	Alsace
›Rainaldo e Lesengrino‹	Begin 13th century	Italy
Philippe de Novare, an animal epic *branche* as part of his ›Mémoires‹	First half 13th century	Cyprus
Ménestrel de Reims, part of his ›Récits‹	Ca. 1260	Reims / Northern France / Flanders
›Van den vos Reynaerde‹	Middle 13th century (before 1279)	Ghent
Rutebeuf, ›Renart le Bestourné‹	Ca. 1261	Paris / Champagne
›Le Couronnement de Renart‹	1263–1270	Flanders
›Reynardus Vulpes‹	Ca. 1275	Bruges
Jacquemart Gielée, ›Renart le Nouvel‹	Before 1288	Lille
›The Vox and the Wolf‹	13th century	Southern England
John of Capua, ›Directorium Humanae Vitae‹	13th century	Italy
›Roman de Fauvel‹	1310 (bk. 1) + 1314 (bk. 2)	Paris
›Renart le Contrefait‹	1st red. 1319–1323 2nd red. 1328–1348	Author is from Troyes Mss. from Northern France
›Reynaerts historie‹	1373–ca. 1470 Probably 15th century	Ypres
Chaucer, ›Nun's Priest Tale‹	Between 1387 and 1400	London
Anton von Pforr, ›Buch der Beispiele der alten Weisen‹	Seventies of the 15th century	Württemberg

This list starts with the short Latin texts that were written at the court of Charlemagne and later and that experiment with the possibilities of stories with animal protagonists. They are the forerunners of the later vernacular texts that are generally seen as animal epic. They are admirably studied by Jan Ziolkowski (1993).

Then follow three Latin texts. The ›Ecbasis Captivi‹ and the ›Ysengrimus‹ are always seen as part of the animal epic but the ›Speculum stultorum‹ is not.[3] The last text is peculiar because its main protagonist is an ass and not a fox, as is the case in the majority of the texts.

Then comes the ›Roman de Renart‹ which is always included and which is sometimes almost seen as the archetype of animal epic, as already stated.[4] Many texts that follow resemble *branches* of the ›Roman de Renart‹. It concerns ›Rainaldo e Lesengrino‹, Philippe de Novare's insertion of a *branche* into his ›Mémoires‹, a part of the ›Récits‹ of the Ménestrel de Reims, ›The Vox and the Wolf‹, and Chaucer's ›Nun's Priest Tale‹. And lastly one could add Rutebeuf's ›Renart le Bestourné‹ to this list, although that is not a story in the strict sense but a complaint.[5]

The list contains also some texts that use material from the *branches* of the ›Roman de Renart‹ to create something new. These are: ›Reinhart Fuchs‹, ›Van den vos Reynaerde‹, ›Le Couronnement de Renart‹, ›Reynardus Vulpes‹, ›Renart le Nouvel‹, ›Renart le Contrefait‹, and ›Reynaerts historie‹. They will play a large role in what follows here.

And lastly there are two texts in the list that are seldom discussed with regard to animal epic: the Latin ›Directorium Humanae Vitae‹ and the French ›Roman de Fauvel‹.[6] The ›Directorium‹ is mostly discussed within a fable context because it is a fable collection. But these fables are embedded in a continuing and coherent overarching story. That is the reason why I have mentioned the text here. The ›Roman de Fauvel‹ is mostly discussed as an allegorical or a satirical text, and rightly so, but its main protagonist is an ass, just as in the ›Speculum Stultorum‹, so it could also be seen as part of animal epic.[7] The fact that Margherita Lecco (2004) sees ›Renart le

Nouvel‹ as a model for the ›Roman de Fauvel‹ is a supporting argument for this view. The last text on the list is a German translation/adaptation of the ›Directorium‹ (see Obermaier 2004).

The variance in this list is fairly large but I am convinced that it would be worthwhile to study this corpus as a whole and pay special attention to the correspondences and the differences between the texts in which the animals have names and those in which they are anonymous, and between texts in which the fox is the main protagonist and those in which another animal is the leading character. My aim here, however, is more restricted. I want to research whether the episodic character of the ›Roman de Renart‹ is typical for the animal epic as a whole or not, so I restrict myself to all fox stories in which the animals have names. I will discuss them in chronological order.

3. Narrative Structures

3.1. ›Ysengrimus‹

The ›Ysengrimus‹ is structured like a classical epic: it starts *in medias res*.[8] The wolf Ysengrimus captures the fox Reinardus and threatens to eat him because of their long enmity. The fox promises to get for them both a bacon, carried by a passing peasant, if they will afterwards share it. Reinardus tricks the peasant to lay his bacon down. Ysengrimus takes it away and eats it completely, leaving the fox only the willow rope by which it had been tied to the rafters. This is the only time that the wolf gets the better of the fox. In all the following episodes he will be the loser and in the last episode he dies. The eighth episode tells about the sickness of the lion king. While the king is recovering, he wants to hear why fox and wolf are enemies and this is told to him. After that the story goes on until the death of the wolf.

In one of the manuscripts (A) the text is divided into 7 books of unequal length; another one (Y2) has 4 books and 24 episodes (Knapp 1979, p. 48).

The 7 book division has been taken over by Voigt, who made the first standard edition and so it is now a generally accepted division. However, it is a purely formal one. Regarding content one must make a finer division. There have been several attempts to do this. Jill Mann (ed. 1987; ed. 2013) distinguishes 12 episodes on the basis of content, Knapp (1979, p. 49–54) 24, following manuscript Y2. Knapp suggests the following structure:

Exposition	Court, sick lion	Destruction of wolf
Bk. I–II	Bk. III–V	Bk. VI–VII
Ep. 1–7	Ep. 8–17	Ep. 18–24
	Inner story	
	Bk. IV–V, l. 1128	
	Ep. 9–15	

The episodes are linked by themes. The enmity between fox and wolf is not really an important theme. There are episodes in which the wolf meets other animals, but he loses always. What is important is that in all episodes the wolf tries to trick another animal but is tricked in the end himself, with the exception of the first one. And the one time that Reinardus confronts another animal than the wolf, i. e. Sprotinus the cock, he tries to trick the cock but is tricked himself in the end. Nobody in this story wins always. All dupers are at times duped. That is a central theme (Mann 1987, p. 20–25). Another theme is that of the wolf monk (ibd., p. 10–20). The wolf is traditionally presented as a very greedy animal but in the ›Ysengrimus‹ he says that his natural greed has been doubled since he became a monk (I, l. 628–652). This is played out in several episodes but most specifically in two attacks on real historical persons: Anselm, bishop of Tournai and abbot of St.-Vincent at Laon, and Eugenius, then pope but before that abbot of a Cistercian monastery in Rome (Mann 1987, p. 107–145). The greed of monks comes fully to fruition when they can ›shear‹ a worldly flock.

And a last unifying element is an apocalyptic character (ed. Mann 1987, p. 131–145 and 186–187). This comes regularly to the fore, especially in the last episode in which the wolf sees that he is about to suffer the (alleged) fate of the prophet Mohammed in being eaten by pigs and then asks leave to prophecy the future (VII, l. 294–298). He then describes the type of signs that announce the last judgment, but after that he is killed and devoured by a herd of pigs, which is presented by them as giving him the (liturgical) peace (VII, l. 292–436). The text ends with a speech by Reinardus which gives again a very pessimistic view of the state in the world (VII, l. 664–708).

So this text is episodic in character but has a strong unity because of its themes and its satiric content. And its end is very different from its beginning: It began with a triumph of the wolf, it ends with his death. A new adventure in the same vein is impossible.

3.2. ›Roman de Renart‹

The ›Roman de Renart‹ as such does not exist.[9] It is a name for a collection of anecdotes and short stories that is never complete. Every manuscript has his own selection. The stories consist of building blocks that can be used infinitely to make new combinations. Jauß (1959, p. 201–203) explained this by stating that the characters are determined by their animal nature. They can only react in a specific way and have no possibility for development. Because the characters are fairly constant, the type of conflicts they have also resemble each other. This seems to me still a very good explanation.

The ›Roman de Renart‹ has 27 *branches* and thus many themes but according to Elina Suomela-Härmä (1981, 1986), the quest for food and the quest for justice are dominant themes. These quests lead within the *branches* always only to a temporary result so there is always room for a new story.

These stories are all episodic. There is no fixed general structure. The handling of the episodes within a *branche* can be very different:

1. There can be a clear relationship between the episodes. *Branche* IV (ed. Dufournet/Méline, vol. I, p. 309–333) is here a good example. Renart is hungry. He finds food (chickens) near a monastery. By eating the chickens he becomes thirsty. He finds a well, he sees his reflection in the water below and thinks that is his wife. He jumps into the well and then discovers that he has a problem because he cannot get out again. Ysengrin arrives and makes the same mistake. He thinks that Renart and his wife are together in the well. Then Renart tells the wolf that they are in the heavenly paradise and that Ysengrin can get there also by jumping into the bucket. The wolf goes down, Renart goes up and escapes. The next morning Ysengrin is freed by monks from the well and beaten by them. He escapes, however, is treated and fox and wolf are ready for the next confrontation. We see here a nice little plot in which all episodes are carefully linked.

2. In other *branches* there is no direct relation between the individual episodes. An example of this situation is *branche* II (ed. Dufournet/Méline, vol. I, p. 209–279). It tells about four meetings of Renart with a small animal, and then about his adultery with the she-wolf. All episodes are separate unities, although the four meetings are linked by the fact that Renart does not succeed in catching his prey. The last one gives a variation: Renart does not succeed in catching Tiecelin, but he gets Tiecelin's cheese, so he has at least partly success. In this *branche* we have a combination of loose parts, and if Kenneth Varty (1985) is right, these parts functioned separately before they were combined.

In *branche* XVI (ed. Dufournet/Méline, vol. II, p. 375–451) we have something of both situations. This *branche* consists of two parts. The first part is based on the Chantecler story in *branche* II (l. 81–463), the second part on the booty-sharing episode in the ›Ysengrimus‹ (bk. VI, l. 133–348). Regarding the plot both parts are completely different but they can be linked because both regard feudal relationships: in the first part between

Renart and the villain Bertaud, in the second part between king Noble and Ysengrin and Renart. And next to that the first part takes place in the human world but contains one scene in which humans are absent and only two animals function; the second part takes place in the animal realm but contains one scene in which an animal meets (and kills) a human being.

The meaning of this type of story can differ enormously. As far as I know the developments within the *branches* of the ›Roman de Renart‹ have not been researched intensively, but the researchers that formulate an opinion on it (Flinn 1963, p. 35–109; Strubel 1989, p. 229–243; ›Roman de Renart‹, ed. Strubel [e.a.] 1998, p. XVI–LXIII) suggest that the oldest *branches* are amusing stories, and are meant for recreation. However, slowly the *branches* become longer, and sometimes more serious; Renart becomes more a representation of bad behaviour (or even the devil?) than a trickster, and the role of sex and faeces becomes bigger (see for instance *branches* XI, XVI and XXII). This changed figure of Renart plays a decisive role in the later fox stories.

The episodic character of the ›Roman de Renart‹ is always stressed in modern research, but the great manuscript anthologies seem to strive for a certain overarching structure (Varty 1991). They start with *branche* I or II and end with ›Renart Empereur‹ (XI) or with ›La mort et procession Renart‹ (XVII). *Branche* I describes Noble's court and indicates that Renart has a conflict with many of the animals at court. Many *branches* that follow can be seen as a follow up of that initial conflict situation. *Branche* II opens with the announcement that now the beginning of the great conflict between wolf and fox will be told. Many *branches* that follow can be seen as belonging to that conflict. At the end of ›Renart empereur‹ there is peace between Noble and Ysengrin on the one hand and Renart on the other hand. That is a fitting end for a cycle. At the end of ›La mort et procession Renart‹ the other animals think that Renart is dead. That also is a fitting end for a cycle. So perhaps there was more unity in the collections for their original public than we tend to think.[10]

3.3. ›Reinhart Fuchs‹

›Reinhart Fuchs‹ is divided into three parts.[11] The first two are a series of episodes, the third is more focused on one plot line. All three parts describe conflicts and each (set of) conflict(s) is larger than the preceding one. In each the fox is more successful (and more wrong?). The order of the narrative is not the chronological order. The first two parts happened probably after the beginning of the third part.[12]

The first part describes meetings of the fox with small animals: Scantecler the cock, a titmouse, the raven Diezelin and Diepreht the tomcat. The source is clearly *branche* II but the order of the episodes is slightly different. Again the fox does never succeed, again with the exception of his getting the cheese from the raven, but here a new variation is introduced: Reinhart on his turn must abandon the cheese to escape from the dogs of a hunter. In the second part we find a series of confrontations between the fox and the wolf, the she-wolf and their children. This time the fox is mostly successful and he hurts the wolves several times. In the third part the fox comes to the court of the sick king. He manipulates the king by promising to heal him, wreaks havoc to the existing order, poisons the king and leaves the court with his nephew Krimel. The king dies.

This narrative is based on episodes. This is less so in the last part but there is no general plot for the whole. The unity is created by the main theme: *untriuwe* (›unfaithfulness‹). The fox shows this in all three parts in different manners. The story works towards a climax and its end is fairly final. The king is dead and of course he can be replaced but the situation at the end of the story is completely different from that at the beginning (cf. also Knapp 2013, p. 224–231). It is not really clear what the public should learn from this, but the way the meaning of the story is transmitted differs from that in the ›Roman de Renart‹. And some remarks from the narrator suggest to me that the story wants to show how the situation now (in the time of the public) is in the human world.[13]

3.4. ›Van den vos Reynaerde‹ / ›Reynardus Vulpes‹

I discuss these two texts together because ›Reynardus Vulpes‹ is a Latin adaptation of ›Van den vos Reynaerde‹.[14] ›Reynardus Vulpes‹ is shorter and stylistically different because the text follows the Latin rhetorical style but regarding their narrative structures both texts are identical. This implies that the following remarks about ›Van den vos Reynaerde‹ are also valid for ›Reynardus Vulpes‹.

›Van den vos Reynaerde‹ is remarkable within the medieval animal epic because it has a very coherent plot. The story starts with complaints. Grimbeert the badger, a nephew of the fox, defends Reynaert. He seems to succeed but then arrives the dead body of Coppe the hen and Reynaert's guilt is proven. He is summoned three times. Twice he dupes his summoner, the third time he comes with Grimbeert to court. He is convicted to be hanged. He asks permission to speak a public confession. In that confession he mentions a conspiracy of Reynaert's father and his nephew Grimbeert, together with his enemies the bear and the wolf, against the king, financed with an enormous treasure. Of course this is a bunch of blatant lies, but the king and the queen are very interested in that treasure and pardon Reynaert in exchange for it. Reynaert then tells a new lie. He is excommunicated and must immediately go to Rome and the Holy Land to lift the ban. Hence he is unable to travel together with the king to the place where the treasure is hidden. The king accepts this, takes the wolf and the bear prisoner and allows Reynaert to leave the court together with Belijn the ram and Kuwaert the hare. In his den Reynaert kills Kuwaert, gives him as food to his wife and children, but sends the head back to court, hidden in a bag. He then leaves Nobel's realm with wife and children. At court the king sees that he is cheated and offers compensation to wolf and bear. The peace seems to have been restored.

The source for ›Van den vos Reynaerde‹ is *branche* I (cf. Bouwman 1992). Both stories develop along similar lines until the conviction of the

fox. After that in *branche* I the fox begs the king to be allowed to go to the Holy Land and to die in the fight against the infidels. Magnanimous as the king is, he allows this. Renart receives the cross, attacks Couart the hare while leaving the court and escapes to Malpertuus where he rests from his adventure and is soon ready for a new confrontation. There is no internal or plausible reason for the king to pardon Renart. It seems a very mechanic or automatic process: because a king is magnanimous Noble is unable not to pardon Renart. In the Dutch text however, it is perfectly clear why the king does as he does and this throws a negative light on him (see Irmgard Fuchs' article in this volume, p. 253–288).

In Dutch scholarship is generally accepted that this coherent plot is used to show the tricks of the fox, and especially their verbal character (see Wackers 1994 and Bouwman & Besamusca 2009, p. 19–23). By his *scone tale* (›beautiful words‹) the fox manipulates all other characters and so determines the outcome of the close knit plot.

The end of the story is enigmatic (see Van Daele 1996 and De Putter 2000). The last sentence is: *Ende maecten pays van allen dinghen* (l. 3470: ›[bear, wolf and king] ended by making peace all round‹). This seems positive, but the price for this peace is that from that moment on sheep are the legitimate prey for bears and wolves and foxes are scot free. So it is not a general peace, and if you are a sheep, the price seems terribly high. And the end is also unique: the fox and his family leave the realm of Nobel (l. 3326–3339). This has got relatively little attention of modern scholars, but for me it is the biggest riddle of ›Van den vos Reynaerde‹. I have not the slightest idea what this means. However, as this is the only medieval text in which the fox leaves the animal realm and so creates a unique situation, I think it deserves far more attention than it has got until now.

3.5. ›Le Couronnement de Renart‹

The story of ›Le Couronnement‹ starts in Malpertus (cf. Flinn 1963, p. 201–245). Ermengarde, Renart's wife, wants to know why Renart does not strive to become king. He would have the capacities for it. After initial hesitation Renart leaves to try to reach this goal. Three fairly loose episodes follow: Renart meets Timer the ass, a villain with eels, and Ysengrin whom he saves from a hunter. The first two have as moral that avarice is bad. The third one introduces the main theme. Ysengrin is grateful and promises to help Renart to become king. Renart seeks help from the Franciscans and the Dominicans. Disguised as a cleric he goes to court and prophecies a change of ruler. Noble felt already sick and his situation worsens by this prophecy. He asks a ram and a hedgehog to choose a successor. They nominate Renart in the hope to gain favours from him. This hope of course proves vain. The barons accept the nomination. Noble dies and Renart becomes king. The pope invites the new king to Rome and there he teaches all the cardinals his craft. Since then they use it always. After that Renart goes to England and Germany and there also he gets many followers. Renart returns to his castle Grenomaisnil. There he stays in the company of Orgueil (pride), Calumnie (slander) and Fausseté (falseness). The poor must stay outside. Only Argent (money) gives access.

So ›Le Couronnement‹ is a story with episodic parts, especially in the beginning but also further on because the process that makes Renart king is more complex than I have described it here. There is, however, a clear general plotline and a clear link between beginning and end. There is also a clear message: Renart's behaviour is dominant in the world. It would be better if that situation would be ended.

3.6. ›Renart le Nouvel‹

›Renart le Nouvel‹, written by Jacquemart Gielée, an author from Lille, is a long and complex story with many allegorical passages but the division in the manuscripts into two books is a sensible one (cf. Flinn 1963, p. 247–363).[15] The story describes two conflicts between Renart and Noble. The first book describes the first one, the second book opens with an interlude about illicit love that is at the same time the starting point for the second conflict. After that conflict is ended, it describes also the rise of Renart in the religious orders.

The story starts with a big feast at the court of the king. Noble makes his son Orgueil a knight and organises a tourney to mark this festive occasion. During the tourney Renart wounds Ysengrin and Primaus, the wolf's son. This leads to a long siege of Malpertus. In the end, however, fox and king make peace. During the peace Renart discovers that Noble is in love with Harouge, the wife of Noble's chancellor, the leopard Hardi. Renart promises to help the king to see his love and really arranges a meeting, but then he tricks them both and lets Noble wait in a garden while he himself sleeps with / rapes Harouge, who thinks she is having intercourse with the king. This becomes known and leads to a new war between fox and king. This war ends undecided and the two parties make peace again. Renart becomes head of the king's advisors. Noble disappears from the story.

Then a new theme is introduced. The Dominicans and the Franciscans want to become rich without violating their rule. Hence they ask Renart to become their head. Renart refuses but gives both orders one of his sons as head. The Templars and the Hospitallers also want Renart as their head and they ask the pope to choose between them. This time, however, Renart accepts both posts. He will wear both habits and will shave himself to the right side as the Hospitallers do and keep a beard to the left side as is the habit of the Templars. Fortuna offers Renart the place on top of her wheel. Renart refuses because he knows Fortuna's inconstancy but she promises

that she will stop her wheel when he is seated and since then Renart reigns supreme in the world.

›Renart le nouvel‹ is far more complex than this summary suggests. There are many minor episodes that are always linked to the main storyline but this link is sometimes very weak so the impression of the whole is episodic and a bit incoherent. Typical for ›Renart le Nouvel‹ is also that other genres are interspersed in the text. There are long allegorical passages, for instance descriptions of the ship of sins and the ship of virtues, and of course the end with Fortune's wheel. Characters in the story sing songs and write letters and the text (and the music) of these are given. This hybrid whole has a clear and single message, however: in the world Renart reigns, and he does this in the worldly and the ecclesiastical domain. *Renardie* is all powerful.

3.7. ›Renart le Contrefait‹

›Renart le Contrefait‹ is by far the longest text from the genre.[16] It is a very complex text that consists of a series of episodes without a clear overarching plot. In the manuscripts it is divided into two books. The first book contains two *branches*, the second six. Some *branches* contain one episode, some several. The narrative is full with extraneous material that is at least as voluminous as the narrative itself. It seems to stop just because the writer does not want to go on after more than 40000 verse and a long prose fragment. I must confess that I do not know what to do with this text because I do not understand its aim. Regarding its narrative structures I would call it very comparable to the ›Roman de Renart‹.

3.8. ›Reynaerts historie‹

›Reynaerts historie‹ is a bipartite story.[17] Its structure is comparable to that of the Arthurian romances in the tradition of Chrétien de Troyes with their

»Doppelweg« structure (Haug 1992, p. 97–100). The story tells twice about a confrontation between the fox and the king at court. The first time the only aim of the fox is getting away again. The second part ends with the fox as *souverein baljuw*, the highest law officer in the realm, and as the actual power in the court.

The first part is a retelling of the plot of ›Van den vos Reynaerde‹ with many minor changes and one big change at the end: Reynaert's wife refuses to go away and the fox's family stays in Malpertuus, so they stay part of the realm of Nobel. The second part is a repetition of this plot with variants. Again there are complaints about the fox, again there is a summoning by Grimbeert. Again the fox defends himself with a long story about a treasure, and again the king believes this story. But then the wolf protests and demands a duel. The fox wins by using very dirty tricks (dirty in both senses of the word) and obtains the power at court.

The second part is characterised by an enormous domination of the spoken word (Wackers 1986, p. 133–136; Wackers 1994, p. 139–143). Of the ca. 4320 lines of the second part ca. 3090 give the words of one of the characters, so three quarters of the text consists of words of the characters. The narrator plays a minor role in the second part. Some of the speeches are very long and they have a complex structure. In the most extreme case (Reynaert's story about the meeting with his uncle Mertijn; l. 4368–4631) the past of the past is presented with help of dialogues in direct speech. One could call this a flash-back-in-flash-back technique (cf. Wackers 1986, p. 130–132 and 180–185). The separate parts of these speeches have an episodic character but they are always linked in an indirect way to the situation within the story and the general message of the text. This message is very comparable to that of the ›Couronnement‹ and especially to that of ›Renart le Nouvel‹.

4. Conclusion

Let us now look back on what has been remarked before. We have seen that in the whole tradition of stories about the fox episodic stories may be found, from the beginning (›Ysengrimus‹) to the end (›Renart le Contrefait‹). And of course the ›Roman de Renart‹ has a place firmly in the centre of that tradition and the *branches* of the ›Roman de Renart‹ are clearly marked by their episodic character. The ›Roman de Renart‹ has been widely influential, so it is probably correct to state that in the medieval perception there was a clear link between fox stories and an episodic way of narration. But if the remarks made above about the structure of the manuscripts of the ›Roman de Renart‹ are correct this episodic nature is combined with ideas about some overarching principle, perhaps the idea of a cycle (Bellon 1986; cf. also Besamusca [e.a.] 1994).

The episodes in this tradition have been used in different ways:

1. Sometimes there is no relation between them. They are the separate links of a chain and their only relationship seems to be that they are about animals and that they follow each other. As already stated the two parts of *branche* XVI have no relation whatsoever on the level of the plot. And in *branche* II the meetings of Renart with small animals, discussed above, are followed by the story of Renart's visit to the wolf's den and his adultery with the she-wolf. There is no relation between these two parts of the *branche*. Another example are the first two episodes after the opening scene in Malpertus in ›Le Couronnement de Renart‹. They seem to have no bearing at all on the story as a whole.

2. Sometimes episodes are used to create a coherent part of a larger whole. The first four episodes in *branche* II are not connected by plot, but they are related because in all of them Renart's ruses fail. Cf. also the first two parts of ›Reinhart Fuchs‹: the first part resembles the beginning of *branche* II and the second part consists of loose episodes that are linked because in all we see a confrontation between Reinhart and the wolves.

3. Episodes may also be used to create a unity of meaning. This can be done by linking all the episodes of a text by one or more general themes, as was done in the ›Ysengrimus‹. It is also possible to embed episodes in a larger whole to support the plot or the message of that larger whole. Examples are here the fable of the frogs in ›Van den vos Reynaerde‹ and the story about the man and the snake in ›Reynaerts historie‹. The first is told by Reynaert to explain why he wanted to stop the conspiracy against the king. The second is told to make clear that Reynaert has been useful to the king in the past and that is used as an argument in a plea to the king not to condemn Reynaert. This is an important point because many medieval narratives are more based on unity of meaning than on unity of plot. As Allen stated it:

> In any modern analysis which presumes the genuine Aristotelian notion of plot, the crucial question is, for any given series of parts, ›Why does this part come next?‹ The answer bases itself on an analysis of causality, and reaches an aesthetically satisfactory conclusion when it announces some kind of tragic or comic inevitability. The crucial question which the medieval analysis asks is superficially similar, but in essence utterly different. It is, ›Why do this part and the next one go together?‹ The answer bases itself on an analysis of logical, analogical, and allegorical relationships. The analysis reaches a conclusion that is both sententially and morally satisfactory by showing that the two parts whose relationship is in question have, because of their relationship, more significance and definition than either would have had in isolation. (Allen 1982, p. 120)

The search for beginning, middle and end in animal stories is based on the modern idea that stories are unified by their plot. Many medieval stories, however, are striving for something else. Because they do not state this explicitly we have to try to find or to guess their aim and as we have other presuppositions that is sometimes very difficult. This seems to me the explanation for the – at times very – different modern interpretations of some medieval animal stories. Above I have indicated regularly the way in which

episodes helped to create a unity of meaning. I think this way of research will prove more productive than a search for coherent plots.

However, the tradition contains more than episodic stories. From the beginning of the thirteenth century onwards we find also stories with a beginning-middle-end structure, or in any case a final end that differs from the open situation at the end of many episodic stories. These stories still are composed out of episodes, but these are no longer (semi-)autonomous but they are used as building blocks to create a larger whole (cf. Kragl 2017). The ›Ysengrimus‹ was an announcement of this type of story. ›Reinhart Fuchs‹, ›Le Couronnement de Renart‹, ›Renart le Nouvel‹, ›Van den vos Reynaerde‹, ›Reynardus vulpes‹, and ›Reynaerts historie‹ are examples of this type. For modern readers the literary structures of the two Dutch texts are the most impressive, because they match our modern expectations most.

The coherence of the plot differs in these texts but they all give a comparable message: at courts the situation is very bad. Sly impostors have power, virtuous and honest people are powerless and they are often suppressed or maltreated. This is true for secular and ecclesiastical courts. The last aspect is absent in ›Van den vos Reynaerde‹. It is only hinted at in ›Reinhart Fuchs‹ (cf. l. 2117–2164) and it is the strongest in ›Le Couronnement de Renart‹ and ›Renart le Nouvel‹, but all these texts seem to have an aetiological aim: they want to explain the situation at human courts by showing that the behaviour of the humans there is determined by animal traits such as egoism, avarice, deceit, and hypocrisy. There is a boost of this type in the second half of the thirteenth century, especially in Flanders and the northern parts of France.

When printing became the standard technique to produce books the biggest part of the medieval fox stories was forgotten. They lost their primary public and rested in manuscripts until the nineteenth century, when they were gradually rediscovered by scholars. Only three of the texts discussed here were printed in the fifteenth and sixteenth century:

1. ›Reynardus Vulpes‹ was only printed once, in Utrecht by Nicolaes Ketelaar and Geraerd de Leempt in 1473/1474 (Menke 1992, p. 49). There are no traces of any further influence.

2. ›Renart le Nouvel‹ was rewritten in prose as ›Le Livre de Regnart‹ (ed. Suomela-Härmä 1998). We know that text from one manuscript and from six printed books from the period between 1516 and 1551 (Menke 1992, p. 78−83). Thereafter the interest in the text seems to have disappeared.

3. ›Reynaerts historie‹ was printed in a prose version in 1479 by Gheraert Leeu in Gouda and in verse ca. 1487−1490, again by Gheraert Leeu but now in Antwerp (Menke 1992, p. 111−116; cf. Wackers 2000). The prose version was translated into English and a later Dutch version of it into French; the verse version was translated into Low German, and then in High German, Latin, the Scandinavian languages, and English.[18] It was the indirect source for Goethe's ›Reineke Fuchs‹ and in that form it spread all over the world. It has now an unbroken tradition of circa 500 years.

So for the early modern period (and later) the ›plot based‹ part of the medieval animal epic is more important than the episodic part and the Dutch tradition is of central importance to understand what remained of the medieval animal epic in that period. I do not dare to draw conclusions from these data, but these are nice last words for a Dutch scholar.

Anmerkungen

1 Cf. p. 6f.
2 I will not go into that problem here. I do not discuss subdivisions and use the term ›animal epic‹ in a general way. With the term I refer to stories in which the protagonists are individuals and not representatives of a type of animal (what is mostly indicated by them having a name), in which there is at least some social structure and a shared past. I ignore the length of the stories and also the possibility that they could be labelled differently.

3 See on the ›Ecbasis‹: Knapp 1979, p. 1–39, and Ziolkowski 1993, p. 153–197. On the ›Ysengrimus‹: Knapp 1979, p. 40–89; Mann 1987 and Ziolkowski 1993, p. 198–234. The ›Speculum Stultorum‹ is excluded by Knapp 1979, p. 122–126, included by Mann 2009, p. 98–148.

4 Flinn 1963 is still a useful introduction to the ›Roman de Renart‹. For an overview of more recent scholarly work on this text corpus see Varty 1998.

5 ›Rainaldo e Lesengrino‹: see Flinn 1963, p. 530–549, and ed. Lomazzi 1972. Philippe de Novare: see Flinn 1963, p. 158–173, and ›Roman de Renart‹, ed. Strubel [e.a.] 1998, p. 1386–1396. Ménestrel: see Flinn 1963, p. 243–245, and ›Roman de Renart‹, ed. Strubel [e.a.] 1998, p. 1397–1410. ›The Vox and the Wolf‹: see Mann 2009, p. 229–238; edition in ›Early Middle English verse and prose‹, p. 65–76. ›Nun's Priest Tale‹: Mann 2009, p. 250–261. There are many editions of the Canterbury tales. A reliable electronic version of the ›Nun's Priest Tale‹ is: https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/CT/1:7.12?rgn=div2;view=fulltext (text based on the edition of F.N. Robinson, originally published in Boston 1933). Rutebeuf: Flinn 1963, p. 174–201, and ›Roman de Renart‹, ed. Strubel [e.a.] 1998, p. 1411–1420.

6 See on the ›Directorium‹ Mann 2009, p. 20–23. Its edition has a German title: ›Beispiele der alten Weisen‹. On the ›Roman de Fauvel‹ see not only Strubel's edition (2012) but also Mühlethaler 1994.

7 This text contains also many musical insertions. I have the impression that this combination of epical and lyrical aspects is also a problem in modern discussions of genre.

8 I use as edition Mann 1987. Mann 2013 is an alternative but has less commentary. I used also Knapp 1979, p. 40–89, and Ziolkowski 1993, p. 198–234.

9 I use the editions of Dufournet/Méline 1985 and Strubel [e.a.] 1998, but there are many editions. See Varty 1998, p. 9–30. Helga Jauß-Meyer (1965) prepared an edition of some of the most studied *branches* with a German translation. I use Martin's numbering of the *branches*: see Varty 1998, p. 1–2.

10 Bellon (1986) points out the same tendency to form a cycle in the manuscripts C and M of the ›Roman de Renart‹ as Varty indicates, but he also shows that in these manuscripts the episodes of *branches* are presented as separate unities. A tendency towards unity is thus combined with a tendency towards ›fragmentation‹. Bellon has no explanation for this phenomenon, nor have I.

11 The standard edition is Düwel 1984. For an overview of the research see Knapp 2013 and the bibliographical references in that study. See also Fuchs 2018 and the article of Irmgard Fuchs in this volume, p. 253–288.

12 Krause 1988 has argued that all preceding adventures took place during the *lantvride* that Vrevel ordered. She does this on the basis of line 1239, that starts with: *Ditz geschah* [...]. It is not clear, however, whether this *ditz* refers to all preceding adventures or only to the rape of the she-wolf that has been told immediately before.

13 See lines 2069–2074, 2157–2164, 2177–2186.

14 The standard edition of ›Van den vos Reynaerde‹ is ›Reynaert in tweevoud‹ 2002, vol. I. An edition with English translation is ›Of Reynaert the Fox‹. This book gives also a good introduction to the text. The best edition of ›Reynardus Vulpes‹ is Huygens 1968. See on this text Engels 1996.

15 Roussel (1980, p. 329) connects the structure of ›Renart le Nouvel‹ with the three traditional enemies of humankind: the World, our own Flesh, and the Devil. He suggests that book I is dedicated to the World, book II to the Flesh and that Renart represents the Devil when he sits on top of Fortune's wheel at the end of the story. He has not convinced me, mainly because for me a large part of book II is not about lust, but it is an interesting idea.

16 Ed. Raynaud/Lemaître 1975. See also Baker [e.a.] 2014.

17 Standard edition: Wackers 2002. Edition with German translation: Schlusemann/Wackers 2005. See also Wackers 1986.

18 The best bibliographical guide to this European tradition up to 1800 is Menke 1992. For a more global overview with characterisations see Wackers 1998 and for an analysis of the Dutch part Wackers 2000.

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