

‘Oem walschedi?’

Touching on Tongues, Teeth and Skin in «Van den vos Reynaerde»

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Ende Cuaert riep ghenadelike:
‘Helpt mi, Belin! Waer sidi?
Dese peelgrijn verbijt mi!’
Dat roupen was sciere ghedaen,
bedi Reynaert hadde saen
sine kele ontwee ghebeten.
Doe sprac Reynaert: ‘Nu gaen wi heten
desen goeden vetten hase.’
Die welpine liepen ten ase
ende ghinghen heten al ghemeene.
Haren rauwe was wel cleene
dat Cuaert hadde verloren tlijf. (ll. 3121–32)¹

And Cuwaert shouted pitifully: ‘Help me, Belin! Where are you? This pilgrim is biting me to death!’ The shouting soon ceased, for Reynaert had straightaway bitten his throat asunder. Then Reynaert said: ‘Now let us eat of this good, fat hare.’ The cubs ran to the food and started to eat together. They did not in the least regret that Cuwaert had lost his life.

In real life, animals never speak²

To show one animal devouring another is natural history, re(a)d in tooth and claw. To show one animal either looking to cook another or – equally – either refusing or otherwise exercising a choice not to eat him/ her raw is comedy. (The first instance here is exemplified in Wiley Coyote’s ludicrously elaborate attempts to catch Roadrunner, the second in Gary Larson’s vision of a lioness lifting her head out of the pride busily tucking into a fresh kill, and, with the words ‘You know, I think I’d like a salad ...’, replacing one kind of *crudité* with another.) By contrast, an animal – such as Ysengrimus – that talks about ‘cooking’ his fellows while eating them raw is probably part of a satire.³ Any talk of *cuisine*, seasoning or sauces in such contexts is usually a sign of some more or less bitterly hyperbolic overegging of the pudding. More complicated is the idea that a hare’s squealing might be rendered as an eloquent appeal to values of pity, mercy or grace (*ghenadelike*, l. 3121), its beastly mirroring of human indifference to our fellow creatures compelling us to reflect on our own lack of empathy, our

¹ For edition and translation, see Bouwman & Besamusca 2009.

² Wackers 1994, 131.

³ Mann 1987. For the *Roman de Renart*, see Dufournet & Méline 1985 and Fukumoto, Harano & Suzuki 2005; for translation see Owen 1994. Branches are referred to according to the titles suggested by Varty 1988, 1, 7–12.

failure to respond like-for-like.⁴ In that regard, the question of speaking meat raises and mirrors the political distinction examined by Giorgio Agamben between sacrifice and killing, between life and 'bare life'.⁵ With such issues in mind, this essay explores a range of interconnected imagery pertaining to natural and cultural relations in *Van den Vos Reynaerde*, from cooking, trapping and skinning, to affective and ethical relations articulated in terms of either responsibility or pathos. In various ways and for a range of uses and effects, cultures and languages capture and process animals as part of their reflections on the intelligibility, contact and distance – whether in terms of similarity or sympathy – between past and present, nature and culture or predators and prey. Through such binaries, we map the nature and limits of the human and of 'humanity' on the most difficult terrain of our own uncertain relation to medieval cultures, acutely apparent in our understanding of the place of violence: the very fact Cuwaert's death is presented as a joke suggests something more complicated than an immediately and unreflectively 'idiotic' enjoyment of violence.⁶

This question of violence is also expressive of hermeneutic problems in approaching medieval texts. As I have argued elsewhere, beast literature speaks directly and meaningfully to theoretical concerns, a dialogue apparent in the work of Claude Reichler and Jean Scheidegger among others.⁷ In that sense, every genre presents differing tropes for defending or dismissing such approaches: in the case of the beast-epic the theoretical reading is readily characterised as a would-be trickster either caught up in the Bergsonian rigidity of his/ her intellectual overcooking or tripping over his/ her new imperial raiment in such a way as to leave him/ her blind to the 'native wit' of the text.⁸ In the context of the present essay, Grimbeert's astonished and suspicious reaction to the fox's confession – *walschedi?* (l. 1457 ['Are you speaking French?']) – reads as no mere coincidence. In terms of its international reception, the excessive or troubling 'Frenchness' associated with literary and cultural theory appears as a descendant of discourses of cultural influence associated with taste, distinction and the court.⁹ Accordingly, while I hope not to bore, baffle or alienate readers whose interests and engagements lie predominantly elsewhere, it would likewise seem a betrayal of the sheer vivacity and intelligence of the cultural engagements evident in *Van den Vos Reynaerde* not to locate them in what seem to me suggestive and pertinent traditions and contexts. This is certainly not to imply that critical reception of the Dutch text at home shows an unwillingness to engage with such issues. Rather, my comments here build on partly on my work elsewhere on 'provinciality' in early

4 For a useful overview of debate in this field, see Singer 2005, 32.

5 Agamben 1998.

6 On the difficulties attendant on understanding violence and anger in past cultures, see notably contributions in Rosenwein 1998 and in Kaeuper 2000.

7 Reichler 1979; Scheidegger 1989 as well as Simpson 1996.

8 On comic rigidity, see of course Bergson 1990. On beast literature in this regard, see especially Mann 2009, especially pp. 28–52. This is certainly not to suggest that Mann's position is in any way simply 'anti-theoretical'. Rather, her separation of animal literature, and especially fables, from philosophy underscores how the complexity of play inherent in anthropomorphic beast narratives frequently lies beyond capture in commentary, the tension between narrative and philosophical text mirroring the more general theme of the resistance of the animal to domesticating reduction.

9 On which, see Lechte 1990, 13–31 (chapter: "'Too French?': Setting the Intellectual Scene").

French Arthurian romance, a central thesis here being that medieval translations and adaptations position themselves as 'subaltern' in order to interrogate, contest and subvert assumptions regarding centrality and dominance.¹⁰

Whether conceived as an attempt to make intelligible the seemingly alien, to 'cook' or otherwise digest what might be hard to stomach raw and untreated or to provide a more closely familiar linguistic and cultural fit, translation and adaptation touch on a wide range of possible metaphors all mischievously capable of starting their own associational cascades. Thus, the kinds of cultural relations between versions of the 'raw' and their contraries mapped by Claude Lévi-Strauss show cooking itself as the most commonly 'cooked' of processes, a ready-to-serve metaphor for the operations of symbolic and cultural integration at work around any campfire or in any given interlinguistic kitchen where foreign material is digested.¹¹ That Lévi-Strauss here so emphasises the question of empirically 'tangible' qualities is mirrored in the importance the Middle Dutch text attaches to touch and sensing, a theme neatly captured in Paul Wackers' description of Reynaert's 'verbal massaging'.¹² Through its intimately but blindly tactile reading, Willem's poem locates itself in relation to the French source, its logic of sense translating the conversation between his adaptation and a model he simultaneously honours and betrays through misreporting.¹³ Such double work of faithfully rendering and unreliably 'touching on' the *Renart* material goes hand-in-hand – or perhaps rather hand-in-glove – with the text's treatment of embodiment and sensation, a domain which makes the Dutch poem a rich deconstructive reflection on how the 'here-ness' of either text or body can be mapped and problematised through engagements embodied in tongue, teeth or skin.¹⁴

10 Here see Simpson 2007. On 'subaltern studies', see notably Chakrabarty 2000; Prakash 1994, 1475–1490 and Spivak 1988, 271–313.

11 On which see notably Lévi-Strauss 1994. Such metaphors have the potential to rebound, of course: in addition to Lévi-Strauss's touchily defensive introduction to *The Raw and the Cooked* (especially pp. 1–14), for a notable critique of how Lévi-Strauss eurocentrically 'cooks' his raw anthropological data in *Tristes Tropiques*, see Derida 1976, 97–140.

12 Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, p. 1. Interestingly, a contrapuntal contrary to Lévi-Strauss's emphasis on touch can be found in his focus on 'indifference' (on which see pp. 81–83). Wackers 1994, 131–47, here at 132.

13 On intertextuality of various kinds in the poem, see Bouwman & Besamusca 2009, 19–28. 'Blind' here is of course somewhat ambiguous. For one thing there is a certain degree of uncertainty regarding the readership and reception of Willem's poem. As Prevenier argues (1994, 14), the work may reflect the interests of a non-French speaking bourgeois audience who did not have the ready linguistic access to French material evident in aristocratic and courtly circles. By contrast, Bouwman and Besamusca paint the implied audience as rather more knowing. These two possibilities are far from mutually exclusive. On Dutch language and literary production in the period, see notably Kooper, 'Introduction', in Kooper 1994, 1–8, as well as, in the same volume, Prevenier and Herman Pleij, 'The Rise of Urban Culture in the Low Countries' (pp. 62–79).

14 My comments here on touch and sense are derived from a variety of contexts. On touch here see Deleuze 1990; Derrida 1987, 161–196 as well as Derrida 2000; Nancy 1992 and Nancy 1994 and Zizek 1999. On Derrida's work in this regard, see among others Llewellyn 1986, and, as testimony to the recurring fruitfulness of the motif of touch with regard to Derrida's reflections on sense and influence (not to mention his engagements with Nancy's work more specifically), one might also cite Brannigan, Robbins & Wolfreys 1996, in particular Geoffrey Bennington, 'x' (pp. 1–20) and Roger Luckhurst, '(Touching on) Tele-Technology' (pp. 171–83). On textuality and touch in medieval literary culture see Kay, 'Legible Skins: Animals, Ethics and Reading in the Middle Ages' (unpublished paper) and Nicholson 2003. I would also like to acknowledge Whiteley 2008. On blindness, see especially Derida 1990, and on reading and translating this text, see Naas 2003, 119–135 (chapter: 'Better Believing It: Translating Skepticism in *Memoirs of the Blind*'). However, the immediate theme of blindness and sight also forms part of Derida's recurrent engagement with phenomenology, on which see Derrida 1999, 75–90 and Johnson 1993, 65–108).

If the predator is ostensibly the principal agent in the text, seemingly the quintessential monad, Willem's translation shows Reynaert patiently displacing and opening himself, dissimulated as pure surface in a manner suggestively echoed in explorations of gender and place emanating from French feminism and philosophy.¹⁵ A key text here is Jacques Derrida's extended reflection in *La Carte postale* on the illumination in Oxford, Bodleian, Ashmole 304 (fol. 31v) attributed to Matthew Paris showing Plato dictating to Socrates.¹⁶ The potentially sexual aspect of this image – for Derrida priapically apparent in the phallic support protruding from under Socrates's left leg – stands, in Derrida's reading in *La Carte Postale*, as metaphor and licence for a wider reflection on origin, debt and translation that problematises such oppositions as origin-descendant, active-passive. Here, the self-consciously tendentious 'perversity' of Derrida's reading is central to his wider discussion of reception and afterlife: the fragmented, (pseudo-)epistolary format of *La Carte postale* enacts and inscribes other kinds of violence, notably the 'originary violence' of writing itself. If history appears back-to-front here, Paris's drawing highlights the ambiguity at the heart of *translatio studii* and *imperii* where appropriations of the antique past to serve the political and cultural interests of the medieval present are dissimulated under a discourse of providential design.¹⁷ Accordingly, my approach here will highlight wider patterns of reversibility and inversion, motifs fundamental to the activity of translation and reworking apparent in the Middle Dutch adaptation of the French *Renart* tales. Here, Willem gives bodily form to narrative tendencies Hans Robert Jauss and Jill Mann see as evident in the *Ysengrimus*: as Paul Wackers observes, *Van den Vos Reynaerde* continues the Latin poem's habit of explaining events retrospectively.¹⁸ In this strangely 'incorporeal' world of excesses and insufficiencies of presence and information, running the gamut from spectrality, ambiguity and uncertainty to pain, we are reminded that in a translation, the original text is probably always either too or too little present, more or less of an agent than it at first appears.¹⁹

'Squeal, Piggy, Squeal': Tongues Raw and Cooked

Regularly every Friday Mrs Lánská killed rabbits. She'd take a rabbit from the hutch, clap him between her legs, and then she stuck a blunt knife into his neck and cut with it, and the poor little beast would squeal and whistle for a long time, until after a while his squealing grew

¹⁵ An interesting companion here would be Irigaray 1977, in particular pp. 205–17 (chapter: 'Quand nos lèvres se parlent').

¹⁶ Derrida 1980, especially 22–33, on which further below.

¹⁷ A useful comparator in this regard is the differing manuscript treatments of source and translation/ gloss in vernacular fable collections, some codices placing greater emphasis on the adaptor, some on the author. On this, see Busby 2002. Interestingly, continental attributions of the *Ysopets* can appear ambiguous: while in collections such as Arsenal 3142, Marie appears as an author through both naming and illumination, in other codices such as fr. 2173 'Aesop is [...] presented as the originator of the *materia* reworked by Marie, the "ancien" whose letter has been glossed by posterity' (Busby 2002, 1, 215).

¹⁸ See Wackers 1994, 140, as well as Jauss 1959, 101–103 and Mann 1987, 66–69.

¹⁹ In Deleuze's *Logic of Sense*, 'incorporeality' is a term used to describe the problem of sensory relations to external events as expressed in propositions such as 'the sun is shining' (On this see Lorraine 2005, 127–29).

weaker and died away. But all the time the station-master's wife would look exactly the same as when she was crocheting her big table-cover. She said that in this way, when the rabbit bled to death, his meat was much tastier and tenderer.²⁰

Sometimes, as in Bohumil Hrabal's evocation above, animal suffering is just a banal fact of life passed over in silence: from an ethical or biopolitical perspective, however pitiful a noise they might make, they do not 'speak'. However, sometimes the rumour of squeaks and squeals register and the predator is called to account, although, as is clear from the indictments regarding Coupée the hen in 'Le Jugement de Renart' (Martin, Br. 1) and Pelé the rat in 'Le Siège de Maupertuis' (Martin, Br. 1a), not without comedy.²¹ Making his confession to his cousin Grimbeert the badger prior to travelling to court, Reynaert admits he has offended all animals:

'Grimbeert, nu hoert haerwaert
 ende vandet mi gheraden.
 Siet, ic comme hu te ghenaden
 van allegader mire mesdaet.
 Nu hoert, Grimbeert, ende verstaet:
 confiteor pater, mater,
 dat ic den otter ende den cater
 ende alle diere hebbe mesdaen.
 Daeraf willic mi in biechten dwaen.'
 Grimbeert sprac: 'Oem, walschedi?
 Of ghi yet wilt, spreect jeghen mi
 in Dietsche, dat ict mach verstaen.' (ll. 1448-59)

[‘Grimbeert, now listen carefully and advise me, please. See, I come to you for absolution for all my offences. Listen now, Grimbeert and take note: *Confiteor pater, mater*, that I have wronged the otter and the cat and every animal.’ ‘Uncle, are you speaking French? If you please, speak to me in Dutch, so I can understand it.’]

Although, perhaps inevitably, comic disbelief lends itself more to interjection than to extended plots, it can be a delightful mechanism. As André Bouwman and Bart Besamusca suggest, the gag here hinges partly on Reynaert's deformation of the opening formula for confession (*Confiteor, pater, peccavi*) and partly on Grimbeert's seeming mistaking of mangled Latin for French.²² However, underlying this is perhaps a more subtle trick in that the *pater-mater* opening sets up the subsequent internal rhyme *den otter ende den cater*. That Reynaert might actually be thought to be speaking French is less the point, the joke being arguably more fundamentally *inter-linguistic* in nature. Whatever he is saying is neither the canonical higher reason of Latin nor the common sense of Dutch. Grimbeert's reaction thereby reflects the basic nature of deception in language: the would-be trickster speaks a tongue the potential dupe does not entirely or sufficiently understand and / or gestures towards a 'discursive world' devoid of any genuine solidity. Accordingly, the badger's objection is that, in passing from one language to another, Reynaert is seeking to pull the wool over his eyes and

²⁰ Hrabal 1990, 20-21.

²¹ On Pelé, see Simpson 1996, 190-201.

²² Bouwman & Besamusca 2009, 28 note.

draw him off safe ground into the uncertain world of what 'those foreigners' speak. This is particularly apparent in the fox's virtuoso throwaway subversion of the order of priority between Latin and the vernacular as, evidently thinking two moves ahead, the fox weaves his slickly labile *mater-patter*. The violence of the badger's rejection can be gauged from the fact that one of the senses of MhG. *walh/* MD. *walsch* is as a less specific and more crudely pejorative term for southern foreigners, a notable example being Walter von der Vogelweide's acerbic denunciation of papal meddling in the investiture contest: *Ah! wie kristenliche nu der bâbest lachet, / swenne er sinen Walhen seit "ich hânz alsô gemachet!"* ['Ah, hear the Pope's most Christian laughter now / as he says to his *walhen*, "It was I who arranged things so."'], a context in which the most faithful modern English renderings are to be found in raw insults such as *wop* or *spic*.²³

If to mangle Latin is to start cooking up 'French', it is certainly of interest – both specifically to this scene and more widely in terms of the audience for which this poem was composed, one where many spoke or understood (dialects and varieties of) 'French' and traded frequently with those domains – that French figures here as an absent third party.²⁴ In this regard, it is worth comparing the context of *Van den Vôs Reynaerde* with that of macaronic compositions working between Latin and French. Macaronic literature negotiates a two-way exchange between learned language and the vernacular. Viewed from an ecclesiastical perspective, it is a mode of popularising appeal, of a pastoral reaching out to a wider audience. Viewed from that of the lay congregation, it represents a passage from that which is obscure, mastered with difficulty or uncertainly understood back into a domain that allows greater space and freedom for independent expression and response. Thus, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr. 837 proposes a varied menu comprising both seemingly sincere macaronic confessions, credos and paternosters – for example, *La Letanie en françois* (fols 221v–22) and the accompanying *L'Oroison de la letanie* (fol. 222v), as well as *La Patrenostre en françois* (fols 227v–28v) – with caricatural parody pieces such as the *Usurer's Credo* (fols 219–220v). Accordingly, on the one side, we have evidence of popular and personal devotional meditation akin to other forms of vernacular or vocal embellishment, an object of cultural anxiety evident in sacred musics in contexts from Hildegard of Bingen through to modern Gospel.²⁵ (Here, Reynaert's appeal to Father and Mother might arguably mirror the sincere interweaving into the language of confession of the kind of Marian appeal associated in manuscript context with macaronic reworkings of Latin devotional materials.²⁶) On the other, we have a representation of misunderstanding and misuse. This may reflect a cultural and theological protocol: in an uncertain domain of potential error it is arguably doctrinally safer for such elaboration to take place in the vernacular.

If in common sense, raw precedes cooked as sure as Socrates does Plato, cultural 'cooking' can also be the site of disavowal, displacement and inversion. As materialised

²³ For text, see Wapenski 1982, 156–57 (ll. 1–2).

²⁴ For a recent account of the linguistic map of France in this regard, see Small 2009, 38–43.

²⁵ On medieval anxieties regarding the singing voice, see notably Holsinger 2001.

²⁶ Various questions arise at this point: were macaronic compositions more common in French than in Dutch or other Germanic language areas or is there some difference in how macaronic compositions are perceived in a multilingual or emergent dominant-subaltern relations?

in lures, traps and deception of all kinds, the 'translation' of form through disguise permits a dissimulation of predatory presence encapsulated by the statement 'the world you are entering is not my body', a theme to which I will return in more detail presently.²⁷ The badger knows this, of course, his caution stemming from awareness of Reynaert's tendency to try to eat other animals without them noticing. Reflecting on this history of disguise and deceptive abstraction, Willem's poem offers a hilariously overcooked commentary, the predator now subject to a threefold translation, first through his animal appropriation of human language, second through its *deceptive* use and finally through the passage from French into Dutch. However, in comedy Plato can precede Socrates, reversing the 'cooking' process, stripping cultural phenomena and practices of their new clothes and returning them to a raw state.

This ambiguous relation emerges particularly in the Dutch poem's presentation of harmony and dissonance between tongues. Here, *Van den Vos Reynaerde* presents us with a version of the idea that murder set to music is either the most grotesquely obscene or sublime of cultural gestures.²⁸ A common motif in beast literature, music, especially religious, encapsulates its underlying ontological comedy most neatly: the human voice's translation of the soul's longing for the divine is parodied and interrogated in the caterwauling and howling of the soulless animal, a theological counter to the profane topos expressed notably by the troubadour Bernart Marti of the relation between music and words in lyric poetry as 'tongues in a kiss'.²⁹ However, the animal voice also reflects an uncertainty fundamental to human expression, mirroring voice's assimilation to body rather than to mind or soul dramatised in the beast epic tradition in the contrapuntal relation of voices that features in at points in both the *Ysengrimus* and the *Renart* (see *Ysengrimus*, vii, ll. 87–206; *Les Vêpres de Tibert* (Martin, Br. xii)), in the former case notably in the choir of swine who devour the hapless wolf at the end. A particularly madcap but significant detail here is the fact that Salaura 'tunes' her voice not *one* fifth higher than the melody – normal practice in medieval discant – but *six* (vii, l. 102), a stratospheric three-and-a-half octaves above.³⁰ As much as to say, Nivard clearly means to carry the topos of the animal squeal to unheard of heights. Such obviously hyperbolic elevation of voice above (animal) body stands as prelude to the mocking theft of Ysengrimus's voice by Salaura's grandson, Baltero, in his impersonatory appeal on behalf of the punch-drunk animal (vii, ll. 209–32), a moment followed by the pell-mell energy of the subsequent dissociative enterprise of tearing the wolf limb-from-limb. Thus the music's exaggerated vertical (harmonic) dimension translates into the horizontal (melodic) one of narrative. In that sense, the wolf's incomprehension faced with the scene evolving around him and the non-recognition of the ventriloquial portrait Baltero makes of him is itself expressive of a musical structure: 'skin', the obscur-

27 On the problems associated with such a statement, see in particular Derrida 2000, 49–79 (chapter: 'Ceci est mon corps').

28 One of the most disturbing and intriguing examples here is Sergei Eisenstein's (dir.) *Ivan the Terrible: Part 2* (1959), with its 'ballet' of the courtiers (i.e. Party apparatchiks) on which see Žižek 2006, 293–95.

29 *C'aisi vauc entrebescant / los motz e'l so afinant: / langu'entrebescada / es en la baisada.* (4, ll. 60–64) 'Thus I intertwine the words and the music, refining [completing] them: tongue [language] are intertwined in the kiss.' For edition and comment, see Beggiano 1984, 83–90.

30 For discussion, see vii, l. 101, note. On discant, see Fuller 1978.

ing but tactile surface, is one way of describing what also exists between two voices in song, two parts in intimate contact and yet still separate, still 'blind' to one another.

In *Van den Vos Reynaerde*, the problematic relation between voices, minds and perceptions is perhaps most strikingly apparent in the relation between the fox and his particular prey, the hare Cuwaert, whose cousin in the *Renart* cycles, Couart, is not often in particular danger from the fox even though he seemingly lives in constant fear of him (and much else). Among the illuminations associated with *Van den Vos Reynaerde*, one (Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, MS 61, fol. 61) shows Reynaert sitting behind the hare Cuwaert, embracing him and biting on his ears. Reading from a book in the manner of Reynaert's pupil rather than simply his intended victim, the hare falls in with the fox's plan, the two of them blending into the design of the page. This image renders their 'singing together' (*haerre beeder sanc*, l. 151) evoked in Pancer's description of his discovery of the pair (ll. 136–69), a moment that shows two opposed and alien tongues braided together in the carnivorous intimacy of a fearful duet between predatory snarl and the desperate squeal of prey.³¹ What is particularly interesting here is the fact that Pancer presents a sequence of events: Reynaert affects to want to teach the hare to sing (ll. 144–48) but ends up with his teeth around his throat (ll. 154–61). In a text so consumed with intertextual reference and allusion, it is tempting to read metonyms such as this progression of *a* followed by *b* as sly narrative renderings of metaphors: *a* in place of *b* (or, for that matter, *b* for *a*). Thus, the beaver glosses an *evolving* scene in 'evolved' words. In that respect, the text's voyeuristic 'closet mentality' with regard to cruelty is perhaps also mirrored at a sexual level, the use of ecclesiastical vocabulary (*zingen crede*, l. 142; *maken capelaen*, l. 143) possibly a salacious hint at the coded negotiation of a more or less consensual sexual encounter, a dimension made graphically clear in a related illumination in Cambridge, Trinity Library, B.11.22, which according to Martine Meuwese shows Cuwaert bleeding from his anus.³² In that sense, Reynaert's 'seductive' coercion and deception of the hare parallels both the sophisticated predatory strategies described in priests engaging in sexual abuse and the raw brutality of the act.³³ What

31 *Van den Vos Reynaerde's* evocation and incorporation of the sounds of animals in distress can be located in a broader context, a key modern analogue being Louis Malle's (dir.) 1974 film, *Lacombe Lucien*. Here, in a sequence that is both part of the routine of rural life and also an echo of his initial gratuitously cruel killing of a songbird, Lucien is shown shooting rabbits, culminating in him taking one wounded animal, struggling and squealing, and snapping its neck. What is problematic here is the extent to which the routine killing of animals stands aside from or is a metaphor for the treatment of the French population by the occupying Germans. At one level, Lucien's activities can be read as part of an exploration of the 'banality of evil', and yet at another, it is arguable that the representation of peasant life in the film is part of a *longue durée* narrative quite at odds with and resistant to any specifically Vichy construction of nation. This inconclusive 'state of the nation' dialogue is especially apparent in Malle's raw *paysan* echo of the bourgeois-aristocratic hunt in Jean Renoir's *La Règle du jeu* (1939).

32 See Bouwman & Besamusca 2009, 50–51 note and Meuwese 2006, 175–95.

33 'Priestly paedophilia is also set apart from other varieties by the fact that the seduction technique employs religion. Almost always some form of prayer has been used as foreplay. The very places where the molestation occurs are redolent of religion – the sacristy, the confessional, the rectory, Catholic schools and clubs with sacred pictures on the walls. One of the victims of Father Paul Shanley, of the Boston archdiocese, says that his ordeal began in the confessional, when he confessed the "sin" of masturbation. The priest told him that masturbation could be a "lesser evil" and that he would help him work out his problem. He did this by taking him to a cabin he kept in the woods, where the priest taught the boy how they could masturbate each other. This pattern occurs over and over – a conjunction of the over-strict sexual instruction of the Church (e.g., on the mortal sinfulness of masturbation, even one occurrence of which can, if not confessed, send one to hell) and a guide who can free one of

Willem thereby contrives is a same-sex translation of the Renardian ‘primal scene’ of Isengrin’s discovery of the fox raping Hersent, the hare’s terror processed into and re-coded as song, with pain and distress obscenely and mockingly reglossed as spiritual or sexual bliss. In this, the text mischievously colludes: through the apparent incomprehension of Pancer’s witness account – one which both sees and does not see, perhaps even to the point of turning a blind eye to aspects of either animal or church life – Willem’s reading of raw animal music stages a comedy of disavowal and complicity.

‘[Fox] Got Your Tongue?’: Rendering the Hunter’s Mind

‘Or saura il trop de barat
 Renars, s’il ne nous let l’escorce.’
 Li marcheans d’aler s’esforce,
 Et ses compains venoit après
 Tant qu’il furent de Renart pres.
 Le gourpil trovent enversé,
 De toutes pars l’ont renversé,
 N’ont ore garde qu’il les morge.
 Present le dos et puis la gorge.
 Li uns a dit que trois sols vaut,
 Li autres dist: ‘Se Diex me saut,
 Ainz vaut bien quatre a bon marchié.
 Ne sommes mie trop chargé:
 Getons le sus nostre charrete.
 Vez con la gorge est blanche et nete!’
 A icest mot sont avancié,
 Si l’ont ou charretil lancié,
 Et puis se sont mis a la voie.
 Li uns a l’autre fait grant joie
 Et dient: ‘N’en ferons or el,
 Mes anquenuit en nostre hostel
 Li reverserons la gonnele.’
 Or leur plaist auques la favele,
 Mais Renart ne s’en fait fors rire,
 Que mout a entre faire et dire. (‘Renart et les anguilles’, ll. 58-82)

[‘He’ll have to be pretty crafty not to leave his skin with us.’ The merchant dashes forward followed by his companion until they come up to Reynard. Finding him on his back, they turned him over and over without any fear of being bitten. They value his coat, back and front, one of them saying it is worth three sous, whilst the other declares: ‘More like four, so help me God, and cheap at that. We’re not overloaded: let’s chuck him on the cart. Just look at that nice white throat of his.’ So saying, they proceeded to throw him onto the cart, then went on their way with mutual congratulations, saying: ‘That will do for now, but tonight in our lodging we’ll turn his coat inside out.’ So they chatter happily on, but their prattle only makes Reynard laugh, for there’s many a slip between cup and lip.]

inexplicably dark teaching by inexplicably sacred exceptions. The victim is disarmed by sophistication and the predator has a special arsenal of stun devices. He uses religion to sanction what he is up to, even calling sex part of his priestly ministry. One victim of Father Shanley says that he represented his sexual predation as an act of “healing”. Gary Wills, ‘Scandal’, in *New York Review of Books*, 23 May 2002; for further discussion, see Žižek 2004, 50-66 and, on the legal and historical context and issues, Robinson 2010.

It is said that a trap is necessarily an expression of the minds of both the hunter and his/her intended prey. As much as to say, a trap is a locus in which two minds meet, and indeed in which one mind becomes another, potentially a powerfully suggestive metaphor for translation and adaptation, most particularly in the beast epic. If the trap turns the body inside-out by externalising the mind, then this goes hand-in-hand in the *Roman de Renart* with the language of both devouring and skinning, both of which turn the body 'skin-side outside', so to speak, albeit in different ways. In the passage cited above, we see the contrast between the fox's cunning and the merchants' misplaced sense of triumph, believing they will take him 'skin-side outside' when in fact the contrary will happen: he will 'fleece' them. Thus, the fox not merely plays dead, he also presents himself as actantially 'reversible' to the would-be predator, who entraps himself through a delusion of mastery much as birds are caught by the bestial fox. The paradoxes evident here bear witness to the tremendous difficulties posed by beast literature, a reflection lucidly mapped in Jill Mann's recent study of the manifold complexities that characterise how beast fables mean or have meant at in different contexts and periods.³⁴ This trope recurs throughout *Van den Vos Reynaerde* in various forms: for one, the text presents itself as an unreliable witness to the fox's (French) past, Ysingrijn and his other enemies dissimulating their own duplicity as part of a teasingly flirtatious intertextual dialogue with Willem's French sources.³⁵

Although a trap can be characterised as a mechanistic instrument of violence of a kind that implies absence and distance (one example being Béroul's description of *l'arc-qui-ne-faut*, an apt metaphor for how Tristan becomes a ghostly but formidable 'man who wasn't there'-stranger in his own tale), it also feels its way towards its prey.³⁶ Here the trap is also an instrument of seduction that disguises presence. If it speaks with double tongue, then such contact is also partly intimate in nature, opening a ground for exploring relations between gender and agency as well as between pleasure and cruelty. Such dimensions form part of *Van den Vos Reynaerde's* reflection on the relation between languages and on the intercultural practice of translation and adaptation, on the implicit and explicit co-presences of two cultures in dynamic, multi-faceted and often ambivalent dialogue. In that sense, it can be compared to other objects perhaps less ostensibly sinister in nature, a case in point being the glove. As Francesca Nicholson shows in her study of their use in troubadour lyric, this garment provides a versatile poetic trope for exploring relations between inside and outside, masculine and feminine, poet and addressee, as well as between languages. What the glove particularly foregrounds is a closeness of contact where one side is not visible to the other, a perfect image of the difficulties of the love relation in which intimacy and strangeness coexist and haunt one another, manifest in recurrent themes of doubt, uncertainty, ambivalence and distrust. Animal embodiment in the beast epic is in that respect rather glove-like: these talking animals illuminate for us the uncanny intimacy of inhabiting one's own skin, their corporeality less to do with mass than with sensa-

³⁴ Mann 2009, 28–52.

³⁵ On which see Bouwman & Besamusca 2009, 19–23.

³⁶ Béroul, *Tristan*, ll. 1751–73 (for text and translation, see Lacroix & Walter, 1989). On location in the Tristan material, see most recently Robinson Kelly 2009, 227–84.

tion, the relation between inside and outside reduced to the point of becoming and experiencing oneself as pelt or skin. This is apparent in the recurrent images of Renart the fox either being valued in terms of his skin, or indeed impersonating fox pelts in the late branch, *Les Peaux du goupil* (Martin, Br. XIII). However, in other contexts, such as Chantecler's famous dream vision, the fox also appears as a skin transformed into clothing that then proceeds to 'fit' itself to its victim. In that sense, animal bodies are constantly inverted and everted, troubling stable constructions of agency and gender. Thus, if the fox is recurrently described in the form of masculine genitals, both in the *Ysengrimus* and in later branches such as *La Confession de Renart* (ll. 626–28), at the same time he also appears as a sort of externalised prehensile vagina, enrobing and devouring his victims, sensually interrogating the textures of the comic world he inhabits. In this way, the predatory animal appears as an image of the subject's existence in language, expressing, as Nicholson frames it, 'the fundamental duality of body and world, articulated as "two pages", which allows for the world to be inserted in the body and, reciprocally, for the body to be inserted into the world'.³⁷

Drawing on traditions of imagery of skinning and tailoring, *Van den vos Reynaerde* presents the tactility of skin and glove in a cross-linguistic context: one page in one language is brought into intimate dialogue with another in another, Willem's entrapment and digestion of the French original strategically problematising linguistic and cultural relations between the two 'pages'. What might appear as a 'passive' relation of internalisation is instead reglossed as an active, sensitively tactile apprehension. It is in this context that skinning becomes a vital trope, pelts taking on a life of their own in branches such as *Les Peaux du goupil*. Here Renart repeats and outdoes the bestiary motif of playing dead by hiding among a group of fox skins, his concealment a narrative rendering of Rutebeuf's satirical alarum about the power of the fox to turn himself inside out, *Renart le bestourné: Renars est morz, Renars est vis*.³⁸ Here, paradoxically alive in the presence of his own death, a pelt subject to manipulation and evaluating scrutiny (as in *Renart et les anguilles*) can return the look, exhibit a life of its own, and, in feeling *well* rather than feeling *good*, either become subject rather than object or – more subversively – inhabit a proteanly indeterminate state between worlds.³⁹

'Skin-side outside': Renart's Double Inverted Canon

He killed the noble Mudjokivis.
 Of the skin he made him mittens,
 Made them with the fur side inside,
 Made them with the skin side outside.
 He, to get the warm side inside,
 Put the inside skin side outside;
 He to get the cold side outside

³⁷ Nicholson 2003, 169.

³⁸ Rutebeuf, 'Renart le bestourné', l. 1. For edition, see Zink 2001, 283–91. Interestingly, Zink's Modern French rendering of Rutebeuf's title is 'Le Retournement de Renart'.

³⁹ This does not imply any support of the fur trade.

Put the warm side fur side inside.
 That's why he put the fur side inside,
 Why he put the skin side outside,
 Why he turned them inside outside.⁴⁰

There is a third type of canon, which is very rare both because of its excessive difficulty and because it is not normally very pleasant to listen to. Its only merit is that it is very difficult to compose. I refer to what might be called a *double inverted canon*, because of the inversion in part-singing, and the inverted relation between the parts themselves as they are sung. There is so much art in this kind of canon that, whether the parts are sung in their natural order or whether the score is turned round and they are sung backward (with the result that the beginning becomes the end and the top line the bass), the harmony remains sound and the canon regular.⁴¹

Longfellow's poem 'The Song of Hiawatha' is allegedly one of the most parodied in English literary history, one well-known example being Lewis Carroll's 'Hiawatha's Photographing'. Although the humour of the piece depends principally on its deliberate labouring of the technicalities of photography and the ridiculousness of contemporary cliché (in various senses), the poem still betrays a kinship with the beast epic through its parody of Longfellow's ponderously elaborated, cod-mythological imagery. Carroll's reworking presents the family as an animal court to rival that of the *Renart*, from the bathetic description of the father standing 'with a look of pensive meaning, / as of ducks that die in tempests', to his wife chattering 'like a monkey in a forest' and finally the entire family screeching and howling like cats and dogs when they see themselves seemingly abominably caricatured in the final picture. Thus, from Hiawatha's animistic empathy with his animal brothers in Longfellow, we move to exasperation and mutual incomprehension, the collapse of any kind of sympathetic or 'telepathic' relation.⁴² In short, Carroll's vision captures the bourgeoisie 'true to life' in a manner triangulated between two kinds of artifice, the technical one of photography and the literary one of satirical grotesque. Here the photographer is cast as native guide, as an 'innocent abroad' ethnographer and mirror to his times framing a precursor to Lawrence Durrell's title *My Family and Other Animals*.

If Carroll opts for a critique of the narcissism of bourgeois modernity, the relation to hunting is also foregrounded in other comic imitations of Longfellow's original. Cited above is an extract from another rewriting of Longfellow in the form of a later version of the skit, 'The Song of Milkanwatha', uncertainly attributed to a George Strong. Like Carroll's poem, this work targets Longfellow's use of repetition and chiasmus: in particular, the combination of mock-fussy emphasis on the sensual comfort of the mittens and deliberately excessive delight in their invention undercuts the original's gravitas. Indeed, Strong highlights how the grandeur of Longfellow's cosmic and rhythmic conception trips over details of word choice, cocking a snook at the very idea that a *mitten* can bear such weight of heroic ennoblement. Whether it can or not, however, the garment does point to more serious questions of touch and

⁴⁰ 'The Song of Milkanwatha', cited from Moyne 1957, 105-06.

⁴¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dictionary of Music*, 'Canon', cited from Lévi-Strauss 1994, 216.

⁴² On telepathy in Victorian culture and literature, see Royle 1991.

contact between cultures, constantly felt in the poem's metrical form, Longfellow's use of a Germanic heroic metre an attempt to fold together North American native and European traditions, by way perhaps of touching on a common construction of a lost past. However, as Ernest Moyne and Tauno Mustanoja point out, Longfellow derived his Hiawatha metre not from the Finnish *Kalevala* itself, but rather from that of Anton Schiefner and Martin Buber's 1850 German verse translation, a book Longfellow evidently owned, handled and annotated.⁴³ In that sense, Longfellow's simulacrum of native American mythology positions itself in a neatly symmetrical relation to Schiefner's translation, the two of them forming a skin-side/ fur-side pairing at the interstice of a double-layered intercultural contact, both separate from and yet applying to their respective objects of focus.⁴⁴

Before all this, of course, there was the *Renart*, one of whose most significant passages in this regard is Chantecler's dream of being devoured by the fox.

Molt ert Chantecler en grant peine
 Del songe qui si le demeine
 Endementiers que il somelle;
 Et del peliçon se meruelle
 Que la chevesce ert *en travers*,
 Et si l'avoit vestu *du envers*.
 Estrois estoit en la chevece
 Si qu'il en a si grant destrece,
 Qu'*a peines* s'en est esveilliez.
 Mes de ce s'est plus merveilliez
 Que blans estoit desos le ventre,
 Et que par la chevece i entre,
 Si que la *teste* est en la faille,
 Et la *coue* en la cheveçaille.
 Por le songe est tressailliz,
 Que bien cuide estre malbailliz.
 ('Renart et Chantecler', ll. 143–58,
 ed. by Dufournet, my emphasis)

Moult fu Chantecler en grant paine
 Du songe qui si le demaine
 Endementiers qu'il someillot,
 Et du peliçon se merveillot
 Dont la chevesce ert *a envers*,
 Et si li vestoit *du travers*.
 Estroit en estoit la chevesce
 Si qu'il en ert en grant destrece,
 Et *de peor* s'est esveilliez;
 Mes de ce est plus merveilliez
 Que blans estoit desoz le ventre,
 Et que par la chevesce i entre
 Et que la *queue* iert en la faille,
 Et la *teste* en la cheveçaille.
 Por le songe est tressailliz,
 Que bien cuide estre maubailliz.
 (ed. by Harano et al., ll. 121–36)

Chantecler was very troubled by this dream that so disturbed his sleep; and he was puzzled by the cloak, for its neck opening was all [awry / the wrong way round] and he was wearing it the [wrong way round / awry]. The neck was so tight on him and hurt him so much that he awoke in great [distress / fear]. What amazed him even more was that its front was white and he got into it so that his [head / tail] went into its cap, while his [tail / head] stayed in the neck opening. The dream made him shudder and convinced him he was in a sorry plight. (trans. after Owen)

Before we come to any consideration of translation as rereading, the variant versions of this passage illustrate how transmission and variance produce chiasmic reflections on the place of the fox within the same language. Indeed, while sensible cautions have been offered against excessive praise of variants in a culture that explicitly valorises

⁴³ See Moyne & Mustanoja 1953, 87–89. For the translation, see Steinitz & Semrau 1984.

⁴⁴ Although space does not permit, there would clearly be much to be made of the complementarities between different visions of contact apparent in the Longfellow–Strong foregrounding of skin and Carroll's motif of photography.

monological authority, it is clear that passages such as this offer particular licence to play and inversion foregrounded in manipulation of the animal body.⁴⁵ Textual transmission itself bears witness to a process of folding and refolding as the different versions turn the fox one way and then another: thus where the text of BnF, fr. 20043 (MS A) presents the fox in one orientation, that of fr. 1579 (MS C) shows him inverted. Here strategies such as the tradition's repeated folding of phrases back on themselves, mirrored by a tendency to disclose information after the event, appears as a textually baroque forerunner to musical forms such as the 'double inverted canon', the title and organising motif Lévi-Strauss adopts for one of the central chapters of *The Raw and the Cooked*, and perhaps the most apt encapsulation not only of the treatment of the animal body in both the *Renart* branches and Willem's adaptation, but also of the cultural and historical dialectic of *translatio studii*.⁴⁶

This vision of the cockerel being handled through the dream also shows the fox himself being handled, presented ambiguously as an ostensibly inanimate object (the cloak) endowed with an agency dissimulated in dream language – just as the fox himself will seek to divorce human words from animal doings after his failed attempt to pounce on Chantecler, Renart becoming 'all talk' by speaking of his attack as if it had been carried out by someone or something else (*Les Premières aventures*, ll. 303–06). This *mise en abyme* of the process of transmission also reflects the recurring emphasis in the tales on the collusive relation between what one might gloss after the Matthew Paris illumination as 'Platonic' narrator and 'Socratic' protagonist, a relation most immediately dramatised in passages where the fox is handled and touched on.

The idea that the fox can be seen as either 'alive' or 'dead' mirrors the use of the glove in lyric: 'alive', the object serves to fetishise a touch playfully, prophylactically veiled, although such contact can just as easily appear 'dead' in the blindness of artifice, convention or seeming insincerity.⁴⁷ In psychoanalytical terms, the intimacy and reversibility of the lyric glove describes the traumatic dimension of intersubjective contact, rendering the troubling gap in interlocking but separate fantasies. In the beast epic, such imagery is (literally) given teeth by the genre's emphasis on entrapment and deception: read against lyric, what it serves up dramatically raw is the troubled charge, the potential for betrayal and trauma in intimacy.⁴⁸ Here, amatory seduction and pred-

45 On the question of univocality and plurality in medieval textual cultures, see variously Cerquiglini 1989; Busby 1993 and Kay 2007.

46 See Lévi-Strauss 1994, 216–39.

47 In that sense, the most revealing descendant of the lyric tradition is Chloderlos de Laclous', *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. As Alenka Zupančič argues (Zupančič 2000, 107–121), the central traumatic revelation here, the mark of Valmont's monstrosity, is that to him women are simply machines to be manipulated, that in that moment of contact they are revealed as 'dead' rather than 'alive', a position precisely analogous to Descartes's view of animals (see Singer). For an analogous example of dissimulation, one might cite Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*: 'You know, the condom is the glass slipper of our generation. You slip it on when you meet a stranger. You dance all night, then you throw it away. The condom, I mean. Not the stranger.' (Palahniuk 2010, 66). Marla Singer's comment here inadvertently reveals the prophylactic nature of the narrator's dissociated fantasy alter-ego, Tyler Durden. This same fetishistic structure (the double as supplementary phallus) is repeated in David Fincher's film adaptation (1999), where the condom is displaced (both visually and in the narrative) as a mode of erotic contact by the more thickly utilitarian yellow rubber glove. On doubling here see Žižek 2003, 170–76.

48 Žižek returns repeatedly to this subject in various contexts and connections. For pertinent examples, see Žižek 2008, 217–43 and Žižek 1999, 281–312.

atory deception are revealed as two pages sharing a single folio. In that sense, what lyric presents in an hystericalised or neurotic mode of anxiety, the Dutch beast epic repeats as sadism with Cuwaert as the sacrificial focus.

The Sweet Fantasm of Things: Erotologies in Translation

Se tu eres toz vis ou coille,
Et teste et col et ventre et piez,
Ne seroit mie pleins li biés. (*La Confession de Renart*, ll. 626–28)

[‘Even if you were all cock or balls, head and neck, belly and feet, you would never fill that gash.’ (trans. mine after Dufournet and Meline)⁴⁹]

Rewriting and subverting lyric topoi, the *Renart* frequently strips the sublimity of desire back to the bathos of physicality: in an interspecies version of *Le Mantel mautailé*, poetic language cannot be tailored to the animal body. In similar wise, the wit of the trap depends on a certain tightness of fit, indicating the close observation necessary for being a successful predator. Yet, the fit might not be with the ostensible intended victim: after all, what eludes protagonists such as Ysengrin is there to be grasped by the implied audience. Comic foils are thus necessarily baggy and shaggy in both body and mind, dramatically illustrated in the *Ysengrimus* by Renart’s throwing a dish of pies straight down his uncle’s throat without them even touching the sides:⁵⁰

‘In somnis, Reinarde, sumus? Fantasmate rerum
Fallimur, an uera est res quasi uana tamen?
Dulcia nescio que michi iacta tulit?’
Atque hunc dicendo circumspiciebat et illuc,
Nescius in baratro uincta iacere suo. (*Ysengrimus*, v, ll. 373–78)

[‘Are we in dreamland, Reynard? Are we deceived by the fantasm of things, or is this seeming illusion true? I recall that some sweet things were thrown to me. You certainly threw them; who snatched them away from me after they had been thrown?’ And he looked here and there on all sides as he spoke, unaware that they lay penned in his belly.]

Every aspect of the wolf’s description (age, blunted teeth, slow wits) seems to speak of a lack of sharpness also evident in his capacious and indiscriminate maw. Such presentation lends itself to sexual humour with the operation of wit eroticised through the mapping of mouth onto vagina, especially apparent in the *Renart*’s recurrent meditations on Hersent’s genitalia, one striking instance being the kite’s disgust and outrage at Renart’s confession of his insatiable lust for such an object.⁵¹ Thus, where the comic disparity of the sexual encounter with the she-wolf is crudely presented in ‘La Confession de Renart’ (above), the exchange between *lupa* and Reinardus in the *Ysengrimus* relies on tight verbal play. The wolf’s gaping incomprehension makes him

49 Owen’s translation omits this section of the narrative.

50 Mann 1987.

51 On the use of Hersent’s body in the *Renart* branches see Simpson 1996, 33–85.

the butt of a joke in which, lumpenly devoid of any *jouissant* spark, he appears even more *con* than his wife.

In its sexualised tales of predatory cruelty, whether well-seasoned or crudely raw, the *Renart* tradition locates wit as a contact whose friction can either be pleasurable, troubling or unwelcomely traumatic, a range manifest in the comments attributed to the she-wolf in various versions of the rape scene, from her praise of the fox's savvy 'industria' in the *Ysengrimus* (v, l. 818.13), to Hersent's emphatic *Renars, c'est force et force soit* (*Les Premières aventures*, l. 1282).⁵² However, through the images of the fox deceiving and devouring his prey, *Van den Vos Reynaerde's* mapping of gender onto surface also reconfigures the predatory male body as a quasi-internal sensory membrane. Key here are the recurrent descriptions of Reynaert turning himself inside out to devour chickens:

Doe wart miere kindre saen
 een ghepronden huten ghetale;
dat leide Reynaert in sine male. (ll. 388-400, my emphasis)

[Then one of my children was rapidly taken from the group. Reynaert led it into his stomach.]

Doe hi dat hoen toten plumen
hadde gheleit in sine male,
 doe ghinc hi neder te dale
 eenen verholenliken pat. (ll. 888-91, my emphasis)

[When he had led the chicken into his stomach, except for the feathers, he went down the hill along a secret track.]

To regloss swallowing as prey being 'led' into the fox's jaws offers a vision of a mockingly seductive, cruelly intelligent suppleness that is the opposite remove from *Ysengrimus's* overblown threats in the form of invitations to Reinardus to 'get in ma' belly', travelling not in the saddle but in the manner of the prophet Jonah inside the whale (*At ne forte cadas, equitabis more prophete: / non tibi sella super dorsa sed intus erit. Ysengrimus*, I, ll. 35-36). However, the *Renart* poems do not simply present such contact as an immediately self-evident and legible physical juxtaposition or proximity. Instead, intimacy here relies on displacement and misrecognition, the raw object mystified and sublated through fantasy investments, a dissimulation echoed in more mischievous mode in comic writing. This topos appears in embryo of course in Chantecler's dream of being captured and eaten by a mysterious creature. Interestingly, when Chantecler dreams of being captured by some creature in the farmyard, it is precisely the same topos that returns. However, if the prophetic dream marks a dilation of the cock's consciousness, the fox also turns himself inside out, *Renart's* mind erotically 'present' in the dream trap through the ruse of being objectifyingly reduced to the

⁵² Translated by Owen as 'Renart, you're forcing me, but so be it' (p. 71), although there are other possibilities for 'force soit', such as 'and let it be known as such'.

cloak. For a trap to remain successfully camouflaged, the operation of subjectivity either side of the horizon of contact has effectively to be suspended. That this other 'little death' is not without its pleasures is perhaps most readily apparent in the second of the two instances cited above: having eaten the chicken, Reynaert, taking a 'secret' path down the valley, allows himself the pleasure of travelling down an externalised manifestation of his own gullet. Like the mythical serpent, the fox eats himself.

Willem's 'erotology' of entrapment mirrors the work of translation and adaptation: the cultural comedy of *Van den Vos Reynaerde* depends on the frisson of contact it stages between Dutch and French. This relation is both productive and tense, as can be seen in ambivalent references to French both as a high-status language associated with court and courtly cultures of the Netherlands and at the same time an object of resentment and hostility. In that sense, one might extend the metaphorical mapping of French on to the fox and of Dutch onto his dupes and prey, notably the hare Cuwaert, the creature he 'teaches to sing' even as the French tradition teaches the Dutch poem to speak, the latter thus positioned in receipt of foreign seed. Yet, *translatio* is more a two-way street than it ostensibly appears: even as the Dutch text presents its French source as an originary model, it is the adaptation that allows the original to 'write'. Here again one might compare the imagery and preoccupations of *Van den Vos Reynaerde* with Matthew Paris's illumination, the latter lacking the former's hyperbolic dimension. Unlike Cuwaert, Socrates (or should that be Plato?) is not shown with an (allegedly) bloody backside. Complicating the relation of translation, the 'sadistic' dimension of Reynaert's act lies in the fact that even as the originator 'teaches' the follower to speak, the latter's discourse is rendered insignificant. Accordingly, the relation of translated text to model appears uncertain, Willem's Dutch tale simultaneously playfully consensual and humiliatingly violated. However, in all this the layers of framing irony are baffling. Accordingly, while on the one hand the sadistic presentation of the hare may appear (in a Lacanian reading) as compensatory disavowal of some constitutively 'masochistic' element in the enterprise of translation in dominant-subaltern contexts, it may also be the case that the Dutch text claims the ethical right to both enjoy and interrogate its own viciousness.⁵³

Mentioning Aachen: Mapping Province and Empire

In that Empire, the Art of Cartography reached such Perfection that the map of one Province alone took up the whole of a City, and the map of the empire, the whole of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps did not satisfy, and the Colleges of Cartographers set up a Map of the Empire which had the size of the Empire itself, and coincided with it point by point. Less Addicted to the Study of Cartography, Succeeding Generations understood that this Widespread Map was Useless, and not without Impiety they abandoned it to the Inclemencies of the Sun and of the Winters. In the deserts of the West some mangled Ruins of the Map lasted on, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in the whole Country there are no other Relics of the Disciplines of Geography.⁵⁴

53 On sadism as a second-generation 'dénégation' of masochism, see Miller 1973, 169.

54 Borges 1964, 90.

Spaces are not to be constructed by discourse alone, and thus are not configured solely to be read. 'Haecceities' (places as events, for example) offer endless opportunities for the emergence of new materials that irrupt from multitudinous points and ripple outward across landscapes. These irrupting, smoothing forces need to be mapped and described, and even exploited (by the activists among us), for the State is never and should never be the last and only word in any landscape.⁵⁵

In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is – depending on whether any form of Braille is used, and much might depend here on how we understand Borges's 'point-for-point' coincidence – possibly the only one who can read the map. Perhaps the same holds for literacy more generally: through chancelleries and the charters that define and take the measure of territory, royal power feels its way out into a realm that both welcomes its support and remains suspicious of its will to 'have the last word in the landscape'. As I have commented elsewhere, the Old French *Renart* presents its characters as 'bad readers' in various ways, Willem seeming to take this relation a step further as his animals struggle with literacy, both misusing and misled by a written word seemingly as alien to them as French:

Doe ic die letteren began lesen,
dochte mi daeran ghescreven
dat ghi haddet coninlike
over alle huwen rike
alle dieren gheboden vrede
ende oec allen voghelen mede. (ll. 361-66)

[When I began to read the letters, I took them to signify that you, by your royal power, had declared in your entire kingdom peace to all the animals and to all the birds as well.]

Here, Chanticleer reveals himself cousin under the skin to Arthur who in some versions of *La Mort le roi Artu* appears as a slow reader, such being the case in Paris, Arsenal, 3347: *li rois Artus savoit bien tant de letres qu'il pooit auques un escrit entendre* ['The king knew enough of letters that he could *more or less* read a document.'] (*La Mort le roi Artu*, ed. by Frappier, § 51, my emphasis).⁵⁶ Chanticleer's hesitant reading but rapid fitting of the document to his own wishes and purposes neatly exemplifies the hybrid place and role of written documents in a largely pre-literate memorial culture, an issue explored notably by Michael Clanchy.⁵⁷ In a show of disingenuous passivity, Nobel's letter is deciphered principally through its form qua object, and its specific import fleshed out by the (interested) reader from there. Crucially, the movement Willem describes is internal: it is what Chanticleer *thought* was the case (*dochte mi ...*, l. 362) that mattered. Of course, while seemingly backward, such blindness paradoxically shows both insight and pragmatism: even as central power attempts to corral disantly outlying domains through edict and charter, the regions equally ready for their part to gloss and bend the letter of the king's ban to suit their local purposes.

⁵⁵ Bonta & Protevi 2006, 40.

⁵⁶ For the text of Arsenal 3347, see Frappier 1964. Compare this to the text of Lyon, Palais des Arts, 77: *li rois savoit bien tant de letres que bien pooit .i. escrit entendre* (Baumgartner & de Medeiros 2007, § 48, my emphasis).

⁵⁷ See Clanchy 1993, esp. 254–260.

The life of royal documents is comically apparent in the Renart tradition, inertly bodily and yet at the same time endowed with the capacity to speak volumes. Just as her grandson speaks on behalf of the wolf, so Salaura rips out Ysengrimus's liver (*Ysengrimus*, VII, ll. 286–87), and, claiming it is a charter of peace with its attached seal, proceeds to comment on its nature and 'contents' (VII, ll. 287–91). This act is echoed and varied closely after by her sister Sonoche's ripping out of his diaphragm and heart, claiming these to be the 'sealed letter of peace' accompanying the royal charter (VII, ll. 427–31). This room for play with regard to letters appears most dramatically in the message Reynaert gives Belin (*Van den Vos Reynaerde*, ll. 3248–70). That the ram does not read the letter and claims credit for its contents when he arrives at court (*Van den Vos Reynaerde*, ll. 3341–60) is emblematic of Willem's satire of vain aristocrats fumblingly adrift in a literate court technocracy and blindly dependent on the guidance of clerks such as Botsaerde.

What goes for the magnates goes for the king: Nobel's blindness to his own landscape is laid bare in Reynaert's confected narrative of the conspiracy (ll. 2239–490). Much as in the same way that Borges's story posits a separation between map and terrain, what Reynaert's tale highlights is that a trap is both logically designed and yet ultimately arbitrary in its conjugation / superposition of two independent minds in the same place. This kinship between trap and map in Willem's poem provides for an imaginative parallax between the specificity of their locality and a 'French' / *Walsche* landscape of romance and empire:

Reynaert, sal ic die vaert bestaen,
 ghi moet zijn mede in die vaert.
 Ende ghi moet ons, Reynaert,
 helpen den scat ontdehlen.
 Ic ne wane bi mi selven
 aldaer nemmermeer gheraken.
 Ic hebbe ghehoort nomen Aken
 ende Parijs. Eist daer yet na?
 Ende also als ic versta,
 so smeekedi, Reynaert, ende roomt.
 Kriekeputte dat ghi hier noomt,
 wanic es een gheveinsde name. (ll. 2624–35)

[Reynaert, if I were to undertake the journey, you must come along. And you, Reynaert, must help us dig up the treasure. I don't think by myself I shall ever get there. I have heard Aachen mentioned and Paris. Is it near there? But I fancy, Reynaert, that you are trying to curry favour and are bluffing. Kriekeputte, that you mention here is, I reckon, a made-up name.]

Nobel's uncertainty neatly encapsulates the subaltern character of European kingships mimetically dependent on the afterlives of Carolingian and other models: if the lion has 'heard of' Aachen or Paris rather than Kriekeputte, it is because such places are in ways more real and present to him than his immediate surroundings. Like the predator, he is not 'present' in his own place but rather aspires to put his kingdom on the Imperial (here, Carolingian) map, implicitly deploring the inert resistance of the 'Animals and Beggars' (to reprise Borges) inhabiting his miserable swamp to being

transformed into (another) Aachen. However, this virally influential character clearly has its dark side, since to touch on these sites is to be made vulnerable to potential 'Trojan Horse' effects through *Van den Vos Reynaerde's* elaborate intertextual play with accounts of the Carolingian past and the Roland legend. Crucially, the conspiracy of Bruun the bear is presented as an attempt not only to take Nobel's place at a local level, but moreover to supplant Charlemagne in his palace at Aachen.⁵⁸ In this regard, the shadowy 'conspiracy' Reynaert invents serves to open the door between world and netherworld, its apocalyptic dimension apparent in the fact that Charles's metaphorical dream of the bears coming to court (*La Chanson de Roland*, ll. 2555–69) – never realised in the epic poem, but only looming as a threat – will now be translated into 'literal' fact, the parody beast epic thereby becoming more epic than epic itself. Of course, what Reynaert presents as a threat also carries with it as its seductive obverse the possibility of aggrandisement: the impact on the lion's power locally is potentially to affirm a similitude with another place and time. Yet, as the saying goes, be careful what you wish for: the realisation hinted at in Reynaert's appropriation of *walsche* traditions appears far more extreme than that in Charles's original dream where the bear is not actually 'real' but rather an embodiment of forces seeking to subvert the proper exercise of royal power and justice.⁵⁹ Underscoring and re-activating connections between traditions, Reynaert's account of the plot's sealing by diabolical conjuration (ll. 2263–69) translates the dumb animal Bruun into the Carolingian dream: no longer simply a (Dutch-speaking) bear, he appears as a French-speaking creature of imperial nightmare. In such a densely overwritten inter-cultural and intertextual scenario, any sense of who is Plato and who is Socrates is practically irrecoverable.

What Willem's poem reveals is that, as in Borges's narrative, the life of maps is the life or, more particularly, the dream-life of a nation. In Borges's tale, even as the Empire's maps accede to a life-size co-extensivity with the world they represent, they lose their suppleness: 'Less Addicted to the Study of Cartography, Succeeding Generations understood that this Widespread Map was Useless.'⁶⁰ Here the pseudo-antique dream of imperial power modulates into resigned melancholy.⁶¹ In his attempt to relate it to a local topography he knows less well, Nobel's mental map of the empire appears as a lifeless, inflexible skin quite unlike that of the fox, who appears imbued with the obscene vitality characteristic of the Lacanian lamella.⁶² As with Rousseau's double inverted canon, a simple binary does not suffice: in the lamella life is not simply opposed to death, but rather divided internally between 'normal' life and 'undead' life.⁶³ In Borges's map we have a lamella that has 'remembered to die' and thus can

58 See Bouwman & Besamusca 2009, notes to 174–175.

59 For text, see Short 1990.

60 Borges, 1964, 90.

61 On melancholy in this regard, see Žižek 2004, 36–50.

62 Žižek 2006, 121. For introductory discussion of the lamella, see Lacan's comments in Miller 1973, 179–81. 'Whenever the membranes of the egg in which the foetus emerges on its way to becoming a new-born are broken, imagine for a moment that something flies off, and that one can do it with an egg as easily as with a man, namely the *hommelette*, or the lamella. The lamella is something extra-flat, which moves like the amoeba. It is just a little more complicated. But it goes everywhere.' (translation from Miller & Sheridan 1979, 197).

63 Žižek 2008, 112.

become an object of elegy.⁶⁴ This contrasts with the initially fragmented cultural map consuming the emperor's mind, its charting of the treasures of past culture resurrecting into a shadowy but seductive vitality that reaches through to the other side of the page with sufficient force to destabilise his understanding of the world around him, a power given form in the desire for treasure that will ensnare him. The question the Borges text asks of Willem's Noble is whether his downfall is the result of excessive or insufficient 'piety'.

Of course, although he is deceived into alienating some of his great barons and sees some of his followers killed, the king in *Van den Vos Reynaerde* is spared the pitiful end of the lion in *Reinhart Fuchs*:

Der kvnic weinende sprach,
 Daz er Reinharten ie gesach:
 'Des han ich verlorn daz min leben.
 Owe er hat mir gift gegeben
 Ane schvlde, ich han im niht getan.
 Minen edelen kaplan
 Hiez ich schinden dvrch sinen rat.
 Swer sich an den vngetruwen lat,
 Dem wirt iz leit, des muz ich iehen,
 Alsam ist ovch nv mir geschehen.'
 Er kerte sich zv der wende,
 Do nam der kvnic sin ende.
 Sin houbet im en drev spielt,
 Im nevne sich sin zvngve vielt.
 Sie weinten all dvrch not
 Umbe des edelen kvniges tot,
 Sie dreuweten alle harte
 Dem gvten Reinharte. (ll. 2231-49)

The king spoke, weeping at the fact he should ever have laid eyes on Reinhart: 'I have lost my life on account of this/ him. Alas, he has given me poison without me having deserved it: I did nothing to him. I ordered my noble chaplain to be skinned on account of him. Whoever allows himself to be persuaded by faithlessness will suffer for it – so much has now happened to me.' He turned to the wall and there the king met his end: his head split into three and his tongue into nine. They all wept for sorrow at the noble king's death and all made fierce threats against good Reinhart.

Only the German version of the fox tale kills the king and makes of him an object of pathos, in a sense a version of the Borgesian map, the splitting of the king's head into three and his tongue into nine (ll. 2243-44) an apocalyptic metaphor of political, territorial and linguistic fragmentation, the traumatic simultaneous ruin of body and nation.⁶⁵ Whether one sees this as the product of historical context (reflecting the conflict between Guelf and Hohenstaufen factions) or determined by literary rea-

64 As Žižek comments in various places, one way of glossing the phrase 'memento mori', is 'don't forget to die': that is to say that there is an irreducible tension between the uncanny, undead agency of either the Father or the drives and 'normal' life.

65 For edition see von Goetz, Henrichvark & Krause 1984.

sons (comedy stems either from keeping gags 'unnaturally' alive or killing them off at the punchline), Reinhart's regicide appears as a *passage à l'acte* that ends the German cycle. By contrast, the French *Renart* tradition 'translates' the rebellion and murder hinted at in Charlemagne's dreams in the *Roland* tradition into either a slow or living death of the monarchy. Against this, *Van den Vos Reynaerde* kills the empire but in a different way, Reynaert's callous dispatch of the hare sealing the dissolution of the royal peace: in compensation for his earlier decision to banish the wolf, Nobel gives Isengrijn and his kin both the right to hunt Belin and his kind and to pursue open war against the fox (ll. 3442–52), the peace between the animals has in effect ended even as it is seemingly upheld. However, is this an 'end of history' or a beginning? After all, in its imagining of the birth or restoration of a 'natural' relation of predator to prey, the Dutch poem seems also to echo episodes such as 'La Création de Renart et d'Isengrin' (Martin, Br. xxivA). In Willem's rewriting, which way up is the map and where are we in time?

Conclusions

'An animal can't be sarcastic, can it? Bah! Look at me getting caught up in stupid questions about animals' minds.'⁶⁶

Sarcasm [late L. *sarcasm-us*, a. late Gr. *sarkasmos*, from *sarkazein*: 'to tear flesh', 'gnash the teeth', 'speak bitterly', from *sark-*, *sarz-* 'flesh'] (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

As is hopefully clear from the above, the raw acts of devouring, swallowing and digesting admit of being served up 'cooked' in a vast range of extensions, of mappings onto other processes of internalisation, especially in the domains of thought and language. However, although it attributes an interior voice to brute beasts, the piquancy of this seasoning of the animal body lies in the remainder of thoughtless cruelty created by the translation of nature's pre-cultural business into a mocking mime of human attitudes and impulses. Perhaps this should seem less paradoxical given that we know from the dictionary that sarcasm, the use of irony to wound by (verbally) rending flesh, is perhaps the most distinctively animal use of language. Thus, if translation's domesticating serving up of a foreign tongue seems a second order activity, what beast epic stages particularly is the idea that all human culture is translation. All of this is compounded further in *Van den Vos Reynaerde* by the fact that we are dealing with a translation of a translation. Yet, for all the talk of teeth, by covering his rhetorical tracks, the seemingly ungainly herbivore also shows his mastery of a carnivore's trick for which Reynaert's nimble father (allegedly) used his tail. This dissimulation of origin is then also reflected in the multiple infoldings that characterise Willem's systematic and sensuous problematising of relations between active and passive, predator and victim, subject and object. In this world, Willem turns the French fox one way

⁶⁶ David Rees, *The Adventures of Confessions of Saint Augustine Bear*, episode 11, 21 January 2005. <<http://www.mnftiu.cc/2005/01/21/adventures-11/>> [accessed 13 September 2010].

and another in an inter-linguistic double inverted canon that both lays bare and subverts historical and cultural logics of all kinds. Both an address to a new audience and a far from subaltern post-card homage back to a French original, Willem shows how the importance of the beast epic's intimate examination of constructions of individual, communal and cultural identity, its sensual mapping of the limits of the human from the outside of culture, is certainly not lost, but only amplified in translation. Still, for all that, whether animals speak French or not, nobody weeps over a dead rabbit. Sorry, Cuwaert.

Samenvatting

Dit artikel onderzoekt hoe beelden van wreedheid van dieren en van het verslinden in het Middelnederlandse dierenepos *Van den Vós Reynaerde* worden aangewend als een vorm van commentaar op het vertaalproces. Centraal staat het idee van de 'blindheid' van het proces van interculturele adaptatie in een receptiecontext waarbinnen het aannemelijk is dat het publiek voldoende vertrouwd was met de originele Franse verhalen om afwijkingen van deze bronnen in de vorm van leugens en loopjes met de waarheid die in de mond van Willems personages worden gelegd te herkennen. Aan de hand van het werk van onder andere Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy en Claude Lévi-Strauss toont deze studie aan hoe Willems adaptatiewerk een sensueel tactiel, zelfs expliciet en op een sadistische manier geërotiseerd, proces blijkt te zijn dat niet enkel verhoudingen tussen subject en object, actief en passief, roofdier en prooi problematiseert en bevraagt maar ook zichtbaar wordt in het interculturele in kaart brengen in de tekst van verhoudingen tussen plaatselijke en literaire geografische voorstellingen.

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