

Multilingualism in *Van den vos Reynaerde* and its  
Reception in *Reynardus Vulpes*



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## Multilingualism in *Van den vos Reynaerde* and its Reception in *Reynardus Vulpes*<sup>1</sup>



BART BESAMUSCA

IN 2002, THE members of the respectable Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde (Society of Dutch Literature) were invited to participate in a survey of the most important Dutch authors and texts. Multatuli's novel *Max Havelaar*, published in 1860, turned out to be their favourite title, followed closely by the Middle Dutch verse text *Van den vos Reynaerde* (*Of Reynaert the Fox*).<sup>2</sup> Their high ranking of this thirteenth-century beast epic is understandable. Recently, for example, Geert Claassens characterised *Van den vos Reynaerde* as 'a perfectly composed text, with supple versification, irony, sarcasm and humour effortlessly upholding a story that runs along smoothly according to a perfect plot.'<sup>3</sup> Multilingualism is one of the textual features that contribute to the beast epic's humour, the author of *Van den vos Reynaerde* clearly used French and Latin elements for comic purposes.

<sup>1</sup> This article results from the research project 'The Multilingual Dynamics of the Literary Culture of Medieval Flanders, c. 1200–c. 1500' (<https://multilingualdynamics.sites.uu.nl/>), funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). I would like to thank Frank Brandsma, Jelmar Huguen, and Paul Wackers for their comments on an earlier draft of this contribution. A preliminary, German version of the text was read at the 47<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Internationales Mediävistisches Colloquium in Olomouc, Czech Republic, 24–31 August 2019. This chapter is available via Open Access thanks to the generous financial support of the Dutch Research Council.

<sup>2</sup> See: René van Stipriaan, *De Nederlandse klassieken anno 2002: Een enquête naar de canon onder de leden van de Maatschappij der Nederlandse letterkunde* (The Hague: DBNL, 2002). Available online: <https://www.dbnl.nl/letterkunde/enquete/index.php>. For a recent article in English on *Max Havelaar*, see: Jaap Grave, 'Multatuli – His Work Through the World', in *Dutch and Flemish Literature as World Literature*, ed. Theo D'haen (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), pp. 82–103.

<sup>3</sup> Geert H. M. Claassens, 'A King and Two Foxes: Middle Dutch Literature on European Crossroads', in *Dutch and Flemish Literature*, ed. D'haen, pp. 5–18 at p. 12.

This multilingualism was addressed by the author who translated the Middle Dutch beast epic into Latin. His adaptation of the French and Latin passages demonstrates his moralising intentions in writing *Reynardus Vulpes*.

At the beginning of *Van den vos Reynaerde*, King Nobel, the lion, holds court.<sup>4</sup> Various animals charge Reynaert with crimes *in absentia*. Even though Grimbeert the badger defends his nephew Reynaert eloquently, the king decides to summon the fox. His first two messengers, Bruun the bear and Tybeert the cat, fail to bring Reynaert along. Exploiting their weaknesses, the fox tricks them. The third messenger, Grimbeert, persuades Reynaert to accompany him to the court. On their way, the fox confesses his countless crimes to the badger. The court tries Reynaert and sentences him to death. However, due to his public confession, in which he presents an invented story about a hidden treasure and a conspiracy against the king's life, the greedy Nobel pardons him and imprisons Reynaert's opponents. Pretending to go on pilgrimage, the fox is allowed to leave the court in the company of Cuwaert the hare, whom he kills when he arrives at his home. Confronted with this murder, the king realizes that the fox has deceived him. Peace is seemingly restored after Nobel's reconciliation with Reynaert's enemies.

The author of this story introduces himself in the poem's first line as 'Willem die *Madocke* maecte' [Willem who made *Madocke*] and incorporates the acrostic *bi Willeme* 'by Willem' in the final lines of his text (3462–69). While Willem's reference to an earlier work merely contributes to the enigmatic character of the poet's authorship, as a text entitled *Madocke* has not survived, his language shows that he was born in Flanders.<sup>5</sup> Between approximately 1225 and 1275, he adapted the first branch of the Old French *Roman de Renart*, known as 'Le Plaid' or 'Le Jugement'.<sup>6</sup> Although he followed the broad outline of the plot of his French source, and even provided literal translations of French words and lines now and then, his beast epic is in essence an adaptation of the French text. Willem rearranged and reworked passages, added new characters and scenes, mostly inspired by narrative elements in other branches of the *Roman de Renart*, and changed the narrative's macrostructure by rewriting and extending the French concluding

<sup>4</sup> *Of Reynaert the Fox: Text and Facing Translation of the Middle Dutch Beast Epic Van den vos Reynaerde*, ed. André Bouwman and Bart Besamusca, trans. Thea Summerfield (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009). Both the Middle Dutch verses and the English translations are quoted from this edition, which is available online in open access, see: <http://oopen.org/search?identifier=340003>.

<sup>5</sup> *Of Reynaert the Fox*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>6</sup> For these dates, see: A. Th. Bouwman, *Reinaert en Renart. Het dierenepos Van den vos Reynaerde vergeleken met de Oudfranse Roman de Renart*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1991), 1: 418–20.

episode.<sup>7</sup> His use of locally known toponyms from the Ghent area such as Abstale (*Of Reynaert the Fox*, 802), Belsele (2097) and Elmare (373, 1483, 1493) shows that his intended audience was familiar with Flanders.

*Van den vos Reynaerde* was translated into the prestigious language of church and science.<sup>8</sup> In the prologue of the Latin poem, composed in elegiac distichs, the author dedicates his text to the *Brugis preposite* ‘provost of Bruges’, who is said to be a descendant of Liederic, the legendary founder of the dynasty of the Flemish counts, and whose name and second provostship is revealed in the poem’s epilogue: Iohannes, provost of Lille.<sup>9</sup> This is precious information, as it clarifies that *Reynardus Vulpes*’s dedicatee was John of Flanders (1250–90), the third son of the Flemish count Guy of Dampierre (c. 1226–1305). He was appointed provost of Saint Donas in Bruges in 1267 and of Saint Peter in Lille in 1272, and became bishop of Metz in 1279. The poem does not address John as bishop, which suggests that *Reynardus Vulpes* was written between 1272 and 1279.<sup>10</sup> In the poem’s epilogue, the translator states that his name is Baldwin, adding that he is called the Young, even though he is an old man (*Reynardus Vulpes*, 1841–42). Although historical persons named ‘Balduinus, dictus Iuvenis’ appear in various legal documents, it remains uncertain if one of them was the author of *Reynardus Vulpes*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Of crucial importance for our understanding of Willem’s translation technique is Bouwman, *Reinaert en Renart*. For English publications on this topic, see for example: A. Th. Bouwman, ‘*Van den vos Reynaerde* and Branch I of the *Roman de Renart*: Tradition and Originality in a Middle Dutch Beast Epic’, *Neophilologus* 76 (1992): 482–501; André Bouwman, ‘*Van den vos Reynaerde* and Branch VIII of the *Roman de Renart*’, *Reinardus* 5 (1992): 35–45; Bart Besamusca, ‘Rewriting the *Roman de Renart*: The Middle Dutch Beast Epic *Van den vos Reynaerde*’, in *The Medieval Opus: Imitation, Rewriting, and Transmission in the French Tradition. Proceedings of the Symposium Held at the Institute for Research in Humanities, October 5–7 1995, The University of Wisconsin-Madison*, ed. Douglas Kelly (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 387–404.

<sup>8</sup> For Latin translations of Middle Dutch texts, see: Paul Wackers, ‘Latinitas en Middelnederlandse letterkunde: Ter inleiding’, in *Verraders en bruggenbouwers: Verkenningen naar de relatie tussen Latinitas en Middelnederlandse letterkunde*, ed. Wackers (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1996), pp. 9–42, 265–75 at pp. 27–29, and Dirk Geirnaert, ‘Jan van Leeuwen in vertaling: Onderzoek rond een Latijnse excerptencollectie’, *Queeste* 15 (2008): 55–69 at pp. 55–56.

<sup>9</sup> *Reynardus Vulpes: De Latijnse Reinaert-vertaling van Balduinus Iuvenis*, ed. R. B. C. Huygens (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1968), lines 5–8, 1849–50. The Latin text is quoted from this edition.

<sup>10</sup> See: *Reynardus Vulpes*, pp. 22–25.

<sup>11</sup> See: *Reynardus Vulpes*, pp. 21–22, and A. Welkenhuysen, ‘A Latin Link in the Flemish Chain: The *Reynardus Vulpes*, its Authorship and Date’, in *Aspects of the Medieval Animal Epic: Proceedings of the International Conference Louvain May 15–17, 1972*, ed. E. Rombauts and A. Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975), pp. 113–28 at pp. 126–28.

The fame of *Van den vos Reynaerde* in medieval Flanders is attested by Balduinus Iuvenis in the opening lines of his poem: ‘Fabula Reynardi, sicut reor agnita multis / teutonice scripta, metrificata sonet’ [The story of Reynaert, known to many in Dutch as I think, may sound in Latin verse now] (*Reynardus Vulpes*, 1–2). This knowledge of the Dutch epic was shared by the court elite of Flanders. Two marginal illustrations in manuscripts point in this direction.<sup>12</sup> In the margin of folio 86r of the famous psalter of Guy of Dampierre, Brussels, Royal Library, MS 10.607, produced between 1266 and 1275, a fox and a hare, who sits between the legs of his companion, read a book. In another manuscript, New Haven, Yale University Library, MS 229 (c. 1280–1290), which contains the French Prose *Lancelot*, the same scene is depicted in the margin of folio 133v. This codex may have belonged to William of Dendermonde (Guillaume de Termonde), the second son of Guy of Dampierre.<sup>13</sup> These two images illustrate the accusation which Panzer the beaver raises against Reynaert in the opening scene of *Van den vos Reynaerde*:

‘En dedi ghistren in den daghe  
eene die meeste overdaet  
an Cuwaerde den hase, die hier staet,  
die noyt eenich dier ghedede?  
Want hi hem binnen sconinx vrede  
ende binnen des coninx gheleede  
ghelovede te leerne sinen crede  
ende soudene maken capelaen.  
Doe dedine sitten gaen  
vaste tusschen sine beene.  
Doe begonsten si overeene  
spellen ende lesen beede  
ende lude te zinghene crede’.

<sup>12</sup> See: Bouwman, *Reinaert en Renart*, pp. 567 (n. 34) and 594 (n. 169). The two marginal illustrations are reproduced in Jozef Janssens and Rik van Daele, *Reinaerts streken: Van 2000 voor tot 2000 na Christus* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2001), pp. 60–61. A third marginal illustration of the same scene appears in a late thirteenth-century Flemish psalter that is currently in Dublin (Chester Beatty Library, MS 61, folio 61r). There is no evidence, however, to connect this third example to the Flemish court. For these three images, see also: Martine Meuwese, ‘The Secret History of the Fox and the Hare in Trinity B.11.22’, in *Medieval Manuscripts in Transition: Tradition and Creative Recycling*, ed. Geert H. M. Claassens and Werner Verbeke (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2006), pp. 179–95 at pp. 182–83.

<sup>13</sup> The evidence is not irrefutable. See: Alison Stones, ‘The Illustrations of BN, Fr. 95 and Yale 229: Prolegomena to a Comparative Analysis’, in *Word and Image in Arthurian Literature*, ed. Keith Busby (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 203–83 at pp. 231–34.

[‘Did he not yesterday, in broad daylight, perpetrate one of the worst crimes ever committed by any animal against Cuwaert the hare, standing here? For at a time when the king’s peace and safe conduct have been proclaimed, he promised to teach him the creed and to make him chaplain. Then he made him sit tightly between his legs. Together they began to practice spelling and reading and to sing the creed loudly’]. (*Of Reynaert the Fox*, 136–48)

This passage has strong sexual connotations: the expressions ‘make him chaplain’ and ‘sing the creed’ are scabrous allusions to masturbation and sexual intercourse.<sup>14</sup> The scene seems unique to the Middle Dutch beast epic: it cannot be found in any branch of the *Roman de Renart* and the corresponding passage in *Reynardus Vulpes* (73–77) lacks the detail of the hare sitting between the legs of the fox.<sup>15</sup> The two marginal illustrations suggest, therefore, that the Dutch beast epic was known at the French-speaking court of Flanders.

This view is corroborated by research which has shown that the court culture of the medieval Low Countries was never solely francophone.<sup>16</sup> Multilingualism was, moreover, also a feature of the urban culture.<sup>17</sup> Scholars have been slow, however, to accept that Latin, French and Dutch were jointly in use in the various regions of the Low Countries. It is still unclear how these languages functioned and interacted. Against this background it is interesting that *Van den vos Reynaerde* features some Latin and French phrases. What did Willem have in mind when he wrote these lines? How was his Flemish audience supposed to understand the dynamics between Dutch, French and Latin in his text? And how was this multilingualism incorporated in *Reynardus Vulpes*?

Willem used French and Latin elements for comic purposes. He may have been inspired to employ this technique by the *Roman de Renart*. According to André Bouwman, Willem may have known and been inspired by Branch Va, in particular.<sup>18</sup> This story features a camel, Musart, who is said to come

<sup>14</sup> See: *Of Reynaert the Fox*, pp. 50–51.

<sup>15</sup> Martine Meuwese has suggested that a marginal illustration on folio 214v of a Flemish Book of Hours (now Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.11.22), produced in Ghent or Bruges around 1300, provides the continuation of the Cuwaert scene. This image shows, next to a book, a hare with a bloodied bottom, which may be caused by Reynaert’s penetration of the animal. See: Meuwese, ‘The Secret History’, p. 184.

<sup>16</sup> See, in particular: Malcolm Vale, *The Princely Court: Medieval Courts and Culture in North-West Europe 1270–1380* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 282–94.

<sup>17</sup> See: W. Prevenier, ‘Court and City Culture in the Low Countries from 1100 to 1530’, in *Medieval Dutch Literature in its European Context*, ed. Erik Kooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 11–29.

<sup>18</sup> For Willem’s assumed knowledge of Branch Va, see: Bouwman, *Reinaert en Renart*, pp. 239–40, 359, 386. For Willem’s use of French branches in general, see: A. Th. Bouwman, ‘Taal daden: Over intertekstualiteit in *Van den vos Reynaerde*’, in *Op avontuur*.

from Lombardy and functions as the papal legate to the king's court. When asked to advise the king on how to proceed in the case of Renart and the she-wolf, who are accused of having committed adultery, the Italian camel reveals his inability to speak French. Musart's speech, starting with the line "Quare, mesire, me audite" ['So, my lord, listen to me'], is a hilarious mixture of bad French, Italian phrases and Latin words.<sup>19</sup>

In *Van den vos Reynaerde* six passages involve multilingualism. Two cases employ French and the other four concern Latin. The first time that Willem offers a language other than Dutch, he does not write in that language, but merely mentions that an animal speaks French:

Doe Ysengrijn dit hadde ghesproken,  
 stont up een hondekijn, hiet Cortoys,  
 ende claghede den coninc in Francsoys  
 hoet so arem was wijleneere  
 dat alles goets en hadde mere  
 in eenen winter, in eene vorst,  
 dan alleene eene worst  
 ende hem Reynaert, die felle man,  
 die selve worst stal ende nam.

[When Ysingrijn had spoken thus, a small dog stood up, called Cortoys, and complained to the king in French how a while ago it had been so poor that it had nothing left one winter when there was a frost except for one sausage and that Reynaert, the scoundrel, had stolen that very sausage from him]. (*Of Reynaert the Fox*, 98–106)

Why does the little dog speak French? His motivation is best understood when interpreted from a sociolinguistic point of view. Like medieval Flanders, Nobel's court is a trilingual community, since Dutch, French and Latin are in use there. These languages were, however, not equally esteemed by speakers in Flanders. Latin and French were the languages of the religious and secular elite, respectively, and were more prestigious than the local vernacular, Dutch. Latin and French, the two H (high) languages, were used in situations in which status and prestige were important to the extent that Dutch, the L (low) language, was ignored.<sup>20</sup> Willem employed this situation of triglossia

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*Middeleeuwse epiek in de Lage Landen*, ed. Jozef D. Janssens (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1998), pp. 125–43, 322–27.

<sup>19</sup> See: *The Earliest Branches of the Roman de Renart*, ed. R. Anthony Lodge and Kenneth Varty (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), lines 1613–50 (lines 457–94 in Martin's line numbering). For a discussion of the camel's speech, see pp. LXXVII–LXXXII.

<sup>20</sup> The notions of H and L languages are related to the concept of diglossia (two varieties



to poke fun at the dog. Cortoys is involved in what may be called a status-raising speech act.<sup>21</sup> As his speaking name, ‘courtly one’, indicates, the dog feels his own importance. Since he is not one of the *meeste heren* ‘highest lords’ (*Of Reynaert the Fox*, 1006), at Nobel’s court, he code-switches from Dutch to the H language French to lend himself more prestige and give his complaint more weight.<sup>22</sup> However, his accusation is a trifle. Furious about the complaint, Tybeert the cat, one of the high-placed barons, indicates this. It seems, so he remarks, that Reynaert may be accused of every possible offence, as the king bears the fox ill will (110–13). Cortoys’s self-importance, as evidenced by his use of French, contrasts starkly with the futility of his complaint. This confronts the readers and listeners of *Van den vos Reynaerde* with a situation of what, in humour theory, is called incongruity, ‘a sudden or simultaneous comprehension of appropriately divergent realities’.<sup>23</sup> Because of this incongruity, Cortoys’s complaint is comic.

The reception of this passage in *Reynardus Vulpes* is in need of a methodological reservation. Whereas the Latin poem dates from the period 1272–79, the text has come down to us in a unique incunabulum published by the Utrecht printers Nicolaus Ketelaar and Gerardus de Leempt in 1473–74.<sup>24</sup> It is, therefore, conceivable that a difference between the Middle Dutch source and its Latin translation did not result from Baldwin’s working method, but was introduced at some moment in the textual transmission by a scribe or a typesetter. It is certain, in addition, that the incunabulum is a low-quality product.<sup>25</sup> The text ‘is teeming with evident mistakes’ and ‘a fine specimen of a brainracker for editors’, according to L. J. Engels.<sup>26</sup> Against this background,

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of a language are in use in a speech community, each having a definitive role), introduced by Charles Ferguson and extended to genetically unrelated languages by Joshua Fishman. See: Charles A. Ferguson, ‘Diglossia’, *Word: Journal of the Linguistic Circle of New York* 15 (1959): 325–40, and Joshua A. Fishman, ‘Bilingualism With and Without Diglossia; Diglossia With and Without Bilingualism’, *Journal of Social Issues* 23 (1967), nr. 2: 29–38. For a summarizing description of (extended) diglossia, see: Carol Myers-Scotton, *Multiple Voices: An Introduction to Bilingualism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 76–89.

<sup>21</sup> Analogous to what Myers-Scotton terms ‘status-raising situations’, p. 81.

<sup>22</sup> For code-switching, ‘the use of several languages or dialects in the same conversation or sentence by bilingual people’, see: Penelope Gardner-Chloros, *Code-switching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> For incongruity, see: Jonathan Wilcox, ‘Introduction’, in *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 1–10 at pp. 4–5.

<sup>24</sup> ISTC ir00136700, GW 12732. The two surviving copies of this early print are described in L. and W. Hellinga, ‘The Two Copies of Reynardus Vulpes, CA 978’, *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* 43 (1968): 100–05.

<sup>25</sup> See: *De vijfhonderdste verjaring van de boekdrukkunst in de Nederlanden: Catalogus* (Brussels: Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, 1973), pp. 104–05, number 53.

<sup>26</sup> L. J. Engels, ‘*Van den vos Reynaerde* and *Reynardus Vulpes*: A Middle Dutch Source Text and Its Latin Version, and Vice Versa’, in *Media Latinitas: A Collection of Essays*

all conclusions drawn about Baldwin's adaptation are, of necessity, tentative.

In *Reynardus Vulpes* the dog has the same name as in Baldwin's Middle Dutch source: Curtoys (53). However, the text does not indicate his small size. As in *Van den vos Reynaerde*, Curtoys addresses the king after the wolf has voiced his complaint:

Finierat lupus atque venit Curtoys canis. Intrat  
ad regum: 'Quando bruma rigeret', ait,  
'pauper inopsque fui, nisi sola lyencrea nullus  
pastus erat: vulpes me spoliavit et hoc!'

[The wolf was finished and then came the dog Curtoys. He approached the king: 'When the winter cold was severe,' he said, 'I was poor and needy and I had nothing to eat but a sausage: and the fox robbed me even of that!']. (*Reynardus Vulpes*, 53–56)

It may be that the audience of *Reynardus Vulpes* was aware of the dog's speaking name and noticed the comic contrast between his courtly milieu and his minor complaint. However, Baldwin does not stress Curtoys's self-importance, ignoring his small size and not mentioning that the dog addresses the king in French. As a result, the incongruity of the scene is less evident in the Latin text.

The second passage which includes French in *Van den vos Reynaerde* occurs near the end of the episode which relates the bear Bruun's failed attempt to summon Reynaert to court. The bear, trapped in a half-split oak due to Reynaert's cunning, frees himself at the expense of the skin torn from his face, an ear, both his cheeks and the skin and nails of his paws. After his escape, he lies down at the bank of a river, where he is spotted by Reynaert, who thought he had succeeded in killing the bear. Reynaert addresses his blood-covered opponent 'te sinen scheerne' [for his amusement] (*Of Reynaert the Fox*, 936), according to the narrator. The fox says:

'Siere priester, dieu vo saut!  
Kendi Reynaert, den rybaut?  
Wildine scauwen, so siettene hier,  
den roden scalc, den fellen ghier.  
Seght mi priester, soete vrient,

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to Mark the Occasion of the Retirement of L. J. Engels, ed. R. I. A. Nip et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996), pp. 1–28 at p. 18. In the Dutch version of Engels's text, he calls the Latin text a 'ware breinbreker'. See: L. J. Engels, *Reynardus vulpes: College gegeven op 26 april 1994 bij het afscheid als hoogleraar Middeleeuwse Latijnse taal en letterkunde aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen* (Groningen: n. p., 1994), p. 11.

bi den Heere dien ghi dient,  
 in wat ordinen wildi hu doen,  
 dat ghi draghet roeden capproen?  
 So weder sidi abd no pryhore?  
 Hi ghinc u arde na den hore  
 die hu dese crune hevet bescoren!  
 Ghi hebt huwen top verloren,  
 ghi hebt hu anscoen afghedaen:  
 ic wane ghi wilt zinghen gaen  
 van huwen complete dat ghetijde.’

[‘My lord priest, dieu vos saut! Do you know the villain Reynaert? If you want to see him, then you see him here, the red scoundrel, the wicked glutton. Tell me, priest, dear friend, by the Lord that you serve, which order do you intend to join, as you are wearing a red hat? Are you an abbot or prior? Whoever gave you this tonsure sheared very close to your ears! You have lost the hair on your crown, you have taken off your gloves: I take it that you intend to sing the hour of compline’]. (*Of Reynaert the Fox*, 937–51)

Reynaert mocks the wounded bear by ironically addressing him as a priest, associating Bruun’s injured head and paws with the skull cap, the tonsure and the discarded gloves of an abbot or prior. His use of French is part of this mockery. By addressing Bruun in one of the two H languages Reynaert seems to express his high opinion of the bear, who is in fact a deeply humiliated opponent. This incongruity, which has a comic effect, is reinforced by the contents of the blessing. In view of what has happened to the bear, the phrase ‘May God protect you’ is highly cynical.<sup>27</sup>

In *Reynardus Vulpes* the fox mocks the bear as follows:

Dicit: ‘Presul, ave! Reynardus adest, tuus ille  
 hostis et invisus, quem modo cerne, precor!  
 Quis barbam rasis, et tonsuram tibi talem  
 quis dedit? Hec leva transit ab aure caput!

<sup>27</sup> The reading ‘dieu vo saut’ is found in MS A, the so-called Comburg manuscript (now Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Cod. poet. et phil. 2<sup>o</sup> 22), probably copied in Ghent around 1400. The scribe of the second complete manuscript of *Van den vos Reynaerde*, MS F, did not understand the French phrase and wrote ‘deuosant’, a nonsense word, as part of the incorrect rhyme ‘deuosant : ribaut’. This so-called Dyck manuscript was produced in the eastern part of the county of Holland around 1350. For a synoptic edition of these two manuscripts, see: *Van den vos Reynaerde I Teksten: Diplomatisch uitgegeven naar de bronnen vóór het jaar 1500*, ed. W. Gs Hellinga (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1952).

Abbas aut prior es? Tonsura probat tua talem,  
 namque tuum decorat magna corona caput  
 atque cirotecas hirsutas exposuisti,  
 quod manibus nudis, estimo, sacra colas’.

[He says: ‘Hail Monsignor! Here is Reynaert, your enemy, so detested; just look at him, I beg you! Who shaved your beard and who gave you such tonsure? It passes from your left ear right over your head! Are you an abbot or prior? Your tonsure points at such a person, since a large crown adorns your head and you have pulled off your shaggy gloves, because you celebrate Mass bare handed, I suppose’]. (*Reynardus Vulpes*, 395–402)

As in *Van den vos Reynaerde*, the Latin fox ridicules his wounded and defeated enemy. However, he does not address him in French. Baldwin seems to have opted for another way of creating incongruity. He translates *Siere priester* ‘my lord priest’ as *Presul* ‘monsignor’, instead of the literal rendition *presbiter*.<sup>28</sup> By stressing Bruun’s supposed venerability, which is in stark contrast with his deplorable condition, the Latin text produces a comic effect, to the amusement of Reynaert and presumably the audience.

The third multilingual passage in *Van den vos Reynaerde* does not involve French but Latin. It is part of the opening episode of the beast epic, at the moment when Grimbeert the badger delivers a long and ingenious speech in order to refute the accusations against his nephew Reynaert (*Of Reynaert the Fox*, 177–281).<sup>29</sup> Grimbeert disproves Cortoys’s complaint about the sausage, discussed above, as follows:

‘Die claghe ware bet verholen:  
 ende hoerdi dat so was ghestolen?  
 Male quesite male perdite:  
 over recht wert men qualike quite  
 dat men hevet qualic ghewonnen.  
 Wie sal Reynaerde dat verjonnen  
 of hi ghestolen goet ghinc an?  
 Niemen die recht versceeden can’.

<sup>28</sup> See: M. C. J. M. Jonkers, *Reynardus en Reynaert. Verkenningen rond de Reynaert-receptie in de Reynardus Vulpes van Balduinus, nomine Iuvenis* (Groningen: n. p., 1985), p. 201.

<sup>29</sup> For a thorough analysis of this speech, see: E. Rombauts, ‘Grimbeert’s Defense of Reynaert in *Van den vos Reynaerde*. An Example of *oratio iudicialis*?’ in *Aspects of the Medieval Animal Epic. Proceedings of the International Conference Louvain May 15–17, 1972*, ed. E. Rombauts and A. Welkenhuysen (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975), pp. 129–41.

[‘The charge had better not been made: didn’t you hear that it had been stolen? Male quesite male perdite: it is right to lose in an unlawful way that which has been acquired by unlawful means. Who will blame Reynaert for confiscating stolen goods? Surely no one conversant with the law’]. (*Of Reynaert the Fox*, 255–62)

As a result of Grimbeert’s line of reasoning, the dog’s accusation is swept aside. After all, the seizure of stolen goods cannot be prosecuted. The badger clearly intends to lend authority to his speech by quoting a legal maxim in Latin, which he translates into Dutch immediately to show his command of the H language.<sup>30</sup> His refutation seems entirely convincing, but is, however, put in doubt by his incorrect use of the language. He undermines his authority by quoting the maxim, ‘male quaesita male perdita’, in kitchen Latin.<sup>31</sup> The audience of *Van den vos Reynaerde* will have been amused at the ironic treatment of the badger.

In *Reynardus Vulpes*, the badger disproves Curtoys’s complaint in the same straightforward way:

‘Pro sibi sublatis queritur Curtoys canis extis,  
que male quesivit per sua furta catus:  
que male queruntur, male perduntur, patruusque  
furta quod arripuit, nil forefecit in hoc’.

[‘Curtoys the dog complains about a bunch of bowels which were stolen from him and which the cat had obtained vilely by means of theft; but nasty come, nasty go, and as to my uncle’s seizure of stolen good, in this he did nothing wrong’]. (*Reynardus Vulpes*, 121–24)

In Baldwin’s rendition of the beast epic, however, the badger does not undermine his authority. He uses the maxim to strengthen his argumentation adequately. The audience of the Latin text has no reason to doubt Grimbeert’s refutation of the dog’s accusation. In *Reynardus Vulpes*, the badger’s words do not have a comic effect.

The remaining three multilingual passages in Willem’s beast epic corrupt the Church Latin. This phenomenon occurs for the first time in the episode in which, after two failed summons, Grimbeert persuades Reynaert to go

<sup>30</sup> For other examples of language-mixing meant to construct authority in literary texts, see: Mary Catherine Davidson, ‘Code-switching and Authority in Late Medieval England’, *Neophilologus* 87 (2003): 473–86.

<sup>31</sup> See: Rombauts, ‘Grimbeert’s Defense’, p. 140, and *Of Reynaert the Fox*, p. 58. The reading of MS F is also incorrect: ‘Male quesijt male perdiijt’ (resulting in the rhyme ‘perdiijt : quijt’).

to Nobel's court to defend himself against the accusations that the animals put forward at the beginning of the story. On their way, Reynaert wishes to confess his sins to the badger, since there is no one else who can act as priest (*Of Reynaert the Fox*, 1438). The opening lines of the fox's confession are verbal slapstick:

'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.'

[‘Listen, now, Grimbeert, and take note: Confiteor pater, mater, that I have wronged the otter and the cat and every animal. Of that I desire to cleanse myself through confession.’ Grimbeert said: ‘Uncle, are you speaking French? If you please, speak to me in Dutch, so I can understand it’]. (*Of Reynaert the Fox*, 1452–59)

The confessant is supposed to pronounce the standard formula ‘Confiteor, pater, peccavi’ [I confess, father, that I have sinned], but Reynaert mangles it, saying something like ‘I confess, father, mother’.<sup>32</sup> As in his earlier speech in defence of Reynaert, Grimbeert shows his ignorance of Latin here, thinking that the fox speaks French. As a result of this comic beginning to Reynaert's outpourings, the audience of the beast epic will understand that the confession is not a serious affair. This idea is confirmed by the way in which the fox relates his sins, revealing his bad behaviour extensively and full of malicious delight.<sup>33</sup>

In *Reynardus Vulpes*, the narrator describes the opening words of the fox and the badger stresses that Reynaert's confession should be clear and complete:

Incipit hic et operta simul perversaque fari.  
 Alter ait: ‘Nequeo sic tibi consulere:  
 ut sunt facta, michi debes probra cuncta fateri  
 utque sciam, veniam si cupis inde dari.’

<sup>32</sup> For a more detailed analysis of Reynaert's formula, see: Jonkers, *Reynardus en Reynaert*, p. 190.

<sup>33</sup> *Of Reynaert the Fox*, p. 18.

[Then he began to speak concealed and cunningly. The other said: ‘In this way I cannot advise you: you have to confess to me all your crimes as they have taken place, so that I have knowledge of them, if you want to be pardoned for them’]. (*Reynardus Vulpes*, 635–38)

It is evident from these lines that Baldwin has avoided Willem’s parodic approach.<sup>34</sup> This is also the case in the two other passages.

The second passage in which Church Latin is corrupted is part of Reynaert’s confession. He tells the badger that once he stole a capon under the eyes of its owner, a rich priest. The clergyman called for help and threatened the fox: ‘So helpe mi Sancta Spiritus. Te wers hem dat hire quam!’ [So help me Sancta Spiritus. It will be the worse for him for coming here!] (*Of Reynaert the Fox*, 1544–45). The priest’s corrupt Latin makes him the laughingstock of the beast epic’s audience, pointing at his virtual illiteracy, at least in the text witness that is preserved in one of the two complete manuscripts.<sup>35</sup> In his adaptation, Baldwin ignores the invocation of the Holy Spirit. His priest shouts at the fox: ‘quod venerit huc, ve sibi, namque luet!’ [that he has come here, too bad for him, because he will pay for it!] (*Reynardus Vulpes*, 718).

The third, and final, example of corrupted Church Latin in *Van den vos Reynaerde* occurs at the moment that Reynaert arrives at the king’s court. The outraged Nobel announces his intention to hang the fox as soon as possible. Reynaert’s reply opens with a formula: ‘Nomine patrum, christum filye’ (*Of Reynaert the Fox*, 1820). These words mean something like ‘in the name of the fathers and Christ the son’, garbled Latin that should read ‘In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti’.<sup>36</sup> Reynaert’s mangled formula provides comic relief. It suggests that the fox is unacquainted with Latin, reducing the tension that results from Nobel’s anger. In Baldwin’s Latin adaptation, the fox addresses his mighty opponent straightforwardly: *Rex* ‘King’ (*Reynardus Vulpes*, 845). In this text, the comic effect of Reynaert’s reply is absent. The confrontation between the fox and the lion is menacing.

None of the six passages involving multilingualism in *Van den vos Reynaerde* appear in *Reynardus Vulpes*. Various considerations may have prevented Baldwin from following his Middle Dutch source text in this respect. It is, first of all, easy to understand why he did not include the three instances of corrupted Church Latin in his adaptation. It is highly likely that this was

<sup>34</sup> Jonkers, *Reynardus en Reynaert*, p. 204.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Sancta Spiritus’ is the reading of MS A. The correct Latin, ‘Spiritus Sanctus’, is preserved in MS F, see: Hellinga, ed., *Van den vos Reynaerde*, p. 96. It is assumed here that the scribe of MS F corrected his source, but it cannot be excluded that the corrupt Latin in MS A results from scribal intervention.

<sup>36</sup> *Of Reynaert the Fox*, pp. 148–49. MS F reads: ‘Nomine domine christum file’. Hellinga, ed., *Van den vos Reynaerde*, p. 114.



done in an effort not to defile the H language he used himself and displease his ecclesiastical dedicatee, John of Flanders. He would have avoided the use of sacred words and notions for the same reason.<sup>37</sup>

The absence in *Reynardus Vulpes* of the three status-raising instances of code-switching that occur in *Van den vos Reynaerde* can be explained in a different way. These speech acts by Cortoys, Reynaert, and Grimbeert involve a switch from the L language Dutch to the H languages French and Latin. This is, of course, feasible in a Dutch text such as *Van den vos Reynaerde*, but not in *Reynardus Vulpes*, as this text is already written in the H language. It may be that Baldwin noticed that the incongruity of these passages resulted in comical situations, as is indicated by the fox's use of the word *Presul* to address the humiliated bear (*Reynardus Vulpes*, 395), but he could not imitate these code-switches.

The relationship between the two stories and their meaning provides a more fundamental explanation for the presence and absence of multilingual passages in *Van den vos Reynaerde* and *Reynardus Vulpes*. As Jill Mann eloquently asserts, beast epics deviate from beast fables in their presentation of the animal world as decisively amoral.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, she states, 'there is little point in analysing the animals' behaviour in moral terms, despite the narrative continuity that endows them with consistent character traits and individual names'.<sup>39</sup> Mann uses the *Ysengrimus* as her example of the genre of the beast epic, but the same is true for *Van den vos Reynaerde*. Joris Reynaert convincingly argues that Willem's text cannot be interpreted as a narrative with a (hidden) moral message of some kind.<sup>40</sup> The amorality of this story finds its most prominent expression in the abuse of language. As Paul Wackers demonstrates, dialogues are the defining feature of *Van den vos Reynaerde*.<sup>41</sup> The animals use language 'to justify or to disguise undesirable behaviour, or to manipulate the behaviour of others to the advantage of the speaker'.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, 'words regularly dominate reality; they transform the way in which reality is perceived'.<sup>43</sup> This statement is certainly true for the six multilingual passages in the epic. They assign status to characters which

<sup>37</sup> See: Jonkers, *Reynardus en Reynaert*, pp. 141–81.

<sup>38</sup> Jill Mann, *From Aesop to Reynard: Beast Literature in Medieval Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 28–52.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> J. Reynaert, 'Botsaerts verbijstering. Over de interpretatie van *Van den vos Reynaerde*', *Spiegel der Letteren* 38 (1996): 44–61. Reprinted in *Pade crom ende menichfoude: Het Reynaertonderzoek in de tweede helft van de twintigste eeuw*, ed. Hans van Dijk and Paul Wackers (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999), pp. 267–83.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Wackers, 'Words and Deeds in the Middle Dutch Reynaert Stories', in *Medieval Dutch Literature in its European Context*, ed. Kooper, pp. 131–47 at pp. 132–39.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.



does not accord with reality and mock the Christian world view in which this reality is grounded. As a result, Willem's beast epic is a story not narrated by a moralist but by a cynic.

In *Reynardus Vulpes*, the relation between the narrative and its meaning is strikingly different. This is indicated, for example, by the passage which follows immediately after Grimbeert's warning that the statements of his confessant Reynaert should be clear and complete. The narrator adds:

Denotat hoc quod sit confessio raro fidelis  
 ultima, quando venit sera metuque necis:  
 quidam verborum per pallia probra fateri  
 sic cupiunt, sed non est dolor ille bonus.  
 Vera, frequens, humilis confessio, pura, fidelis,  
 sic sit, ut auditor crimina cuncta sciat.

[This indicates that a confession at the last moments is seldom sincere, being too late and out of fear of death: thus some people intend to confess their shameful acts under the cloak of words, but that grief is not real. A true, repeated and humble confession, pure and honest, should be such that the hearer knows all crimes]. (*Reynardus Vulpes*, 639–44)

Deviating from the genre characteristics of the beast epic, Baldwin adds this type of authorial moralisation to his source text. There are fourteen of them and they are highly typical of *Reynardus Vulpes*.<sup>44</sup> With these passages, the Latin beast epic incorporates a crucial feature of the beast fables, and can even be seen as a Latin precursor of the Dutch Reynaert edition that was printed between 1487 and 1490 by Gheraert Leeu in Antwerp, because in this print the verse text, divided into chapters, is accompanied by moralisations (in prose).<sup>45</sup> Baldwin's additions show that the authors of *Van den vos Reynaerde* and *Reynardus Vulpes* had different intentions with their beast epics. Unlike the cynic Willem, Baldwin was a moralist. He preferred narrative elements that lent itself to moralising explanations. For this reason, Willem's multilingual passages had to be dismissed. Since they transformed the perception of reality and ridiculed the Christian way of life, their presence would undermine the lessons which Baldwin wanted to teach.

<sup>44</sup> See: *Reynardus Vulpes*, p. 17; Jonkers, *Reynardus en Reynaert*, pp. 33–45; L. J. Engels, 'Reynardus Vulpes als bewerking van de Reinaert', in *Verraders en bruggenbouwers: Verkenningen naar de relatie tussen Latinitas en Middelnederlandse letterkunde*, ed. Wackers, pp. 63–84, 282–91 at pp. 71–72.

<sup>45</sup> See: Paul Wackers, 'The Printed Dutch Reynaert Tradition: From the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century', in *Reynard the Fox: Social Engagement and Cultural Metamorphoses in the Beast Epic from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Kenneth Varty (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), pp. 73–103 at p. 88.