

*Misconceptions about Beast Fables and Beast Tales, and the
Role of the Fox in All of It*

Lilian Schutter
s1281593

Supervisor: Dr. K.E.E. Olsen
Second reader: Dr. C. Dekker

22-07-2008

Masterscriptie opleiding Engelse Taal- en Cultuur
Faculteit der Letteren
Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

Misconceptions about Beast Fables and Beast Tales, and the Role of the Fox in All of It

Summary

In this dissertation, the genres of the beast fable and beast tale will be looked at more closely, as well as the role that the fox plays in these stories.

Beast tales are often mistaken for beast fables because these genres share certain characteristics, such as the fact that the protagonists are played by animals, who act and talk like human beings. The reason why animals represent humans in these stories is because this gives the author a chance to express his or her opinion about certain people or societies. However, there are significant differences between beast tales and beast fables which make it impossible to mistake the one for the other. These differences can occur in the length of the stories, as well as in the number of subplots, the significance of the roles that humans play, and the presence of a moral lesson.

In order to corroborate the similarities and differences between these two genres, four different tales will be analyzed and discussed in great detail. The tales that will be used here are *The Fox and the Wolf* written by an anonymous author, the *Nun's Priest's Tale* by Geoffrey Chaucer, and two tales from the English translation that William Caxton made of *Le Roman de Renart*, the *Historye of Reynart the Foxe*. What these tales all have in common is that, first of all, their authors all used two separate branches, number II and IV, of the original *Le Roman de Renart* as a source of information for their own tales, and secondly, the tales are all mistaken for beast fables whereas in fact they are beast tales. These statements will be discussed extensively and proven to be true based on solid evidence.

The third and final feature that these four tales have in common is that they all feature a fox as the main protagonist. This animal played, and still plays, a very important role within literature as well as in animated films. The fox is usually described as an animal with mainly negative characteristics, as is also the case in these four tales. An analysis of this specific role

will be given, as are, in my opinion, the reasons why these characteristics are usually portrayed in this way.

List of Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter 1	7
The fable: definitions	9
Beast tales as opposed to beast fables	10
The origin of fables	12
The fable in Europe	16
The function of fables	18
Chapter 2	22
<i>The Fox and the Wolf</i>	23
<i>The Nun's Priest's Tale</i>	28
<i>Historye of Reynart the Foxe</i>	35
Chapter 3	42
The fox and medieval literature	43
The fox and modern literature	48
Conclusion	50
Bibliography	52

Introduction

Animals have always played an important part in human life. Not only do many people keep them as pets, but they are also used a lot as help with labour, for food supply, etc. The list of purposes for which human beings use animals is endless. The importance of these animals can also be found in many different stories or tales. There are even several literary genres, such as the beast fable, beast tale, beast epic, and bestiary, which focus solely on the animals.

Beast fables and beast tales are stories which describe animals that act like humans. In the Middle Ages, these stories were very important. Not only did most of them contain a moral lesson for their audience to learn, but usually the stories concealed a hidden message about certain people, societies or events. These fables and tales were a means for their authors to express their opinion in a, sometimes, satirical or judgemental manner. The authors could say anything they wanted, because, if done correctly, it could not be determined with absolute certainty who or what was being judged or criticised. I will both look at the characteristics that define a fable, a beast fable and a beast tale, and, of course, compare these different genres. The genres share certain characteristics, such as the presence of animal protagonists in the stories, and, in some cases, the inclusion of a moral. There are also other features that can never be the same. These features concern the length of the beast fable and the beast tale, as well as the roles that human beings play within the stories. All of these features and characteristics will be compared and analysed in three different beast tales, namely *The Fox and the Wolf* written by an anonymous author, the *Nun's Priest's Tale* by Geoffrey Chaucer, and the English translation that William Caxton made of *Le Roman de Renart*, the *Historye of Reynart the Foxe*.

Therefore, the focus of this dissertation will be on the importance of the beast fable and beast tale during the Middle Ages. These stories and tales were usually very funny, but at the same time, most of these stories and tales were not meant to be just entertainment. They normally contained a very serious moral, as well as an opinion about certain people or

societies which was usually not pleasant at all, but rather harsh and critical. A rather important part in these beast tales and beast fables was played by the fox. This animal was usually portrayed as a lying, cheating, deceitful trickster, which is an image that does not really correspond with reality. And this role has not exactly changed through the centuries. Even nowadays, it is rather rare to find a story in which a fox plays a different role from the one assigned to him during the Middle Ages.

Chapter 1

Throughout the centuries, a lot of different stories or tales were written that include animals. In these stories, the animals usually represent human beings by acting like them, and sometimes even talking like them. Most of these stories are labelled as fables. However, according to Jan M. Ziolkowski,

not all stories about animals are fables, but in English the only common term to designate fiction in which animals are important characters is beast fable, often reduced to fable. [...] When authors or readers are confronted with an animal protagonist, they are inclined automatically to think of other types of literature about animals, regardless of whether those other types of literature are in the same genre.

The moral of the story is that beasts override genre. (1)

A lot of scholars agree with Ziolkowski that many other forms of literature which include animals are labelled as beast fables or just plain fables. Some of these literary forms are the beast tales, bestiaries, and folktales and debate literature in which animals play a role. The term 'fable' is so commonly used for animal stories because it is a term that is widely known throughout the whole world. Almost all adults and children are familiar with the genre of the fable and its characteristics, such as animals or plants as protagonists and the lesson that the reader is taught in form of a moral, usually at the end of the story. Still, since not all literary texts that feature animals are beast fables, Jan Ziolkowski suggests a different, more general name for these stories:

A more inclusive label for fiction about animals would be beast literature. [...] Beast literature is not a genre on the order of the epic, romance, or novel. Rather, it comprehends texts from many genres – texts in which the principal actors are animals, usually talking animals. (1)

And this is exactly what all the different texts mentioned above have in common: the presence of animals. However, it must be said that this is, most of the times, one of the few features

that they have in common. There are a lot of differences among the genres that are gathered under the name of the fable. For instance, the differences between the beast tale and the beast fable are numerous, as will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections. If there are so many differences between these literary genres, why are they all put together under the term 'beast fable'? According to Ziolkowski,

the literary freedoms that beast stories offer their authors are not restricted to style.

Both the authors and the readers of beast stories tend naturally to concentrate upon the beasts so much that they insist less upon adherence to rules of genre than they would do normally. In other words, authors who write animal satires, dream-visions, novels, or epics have only half their minds upon the customary mechanics of those genres; the other half turns willy-nilly to memories of literature in which animals are prominent, regardless of whether or not such literature is in the genre in which they are writing.

(11)

The genre of the fable comprehends a rather broad stock of different types of stories and poems. The types are Aesopic fables, beast fables, beast tales, bestiaries, parables, debate literature, and sometimes even folktales. All of these different types of stories and poems are put together as one genre because they have certain characteristics in common. Most of them, usually, feature animals, and they all (try to) teach their readers some kind of lesson or moral. According to B.E. Perry, this is why certain genres, which are not general known to the public, are put together under one more familiar genre:

'Form' or 'genre' or 'species', when applied to a group of compositions qualitatively considered, or with reference to their content, is only a name used for convenience in referring collectively to a number of otherwise unnamed particular forms, which happen to be similar one to another. They are similar, not because they imitate a universal, or other antecedent particulars, but because they are projected independently by similar minds in similar environments, or for similar purposes, although each in

reality is something unique and individual. 'Form' in this collective sense is a useful concept, so long as we are not deceived by it; but, unlike such categories as narrative, it has no counterpart in the world of objective reality. (Perry, 17)

The fable: definitions

In the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, a fable is defined as "a traditional short story that teaches a moral lesson, especially one with animals as characters" (448). As this definition already implies, fables do not have to feature animals per se; plants can also play these roles. However, when the protagonists are animals, the fable is called a beast fable. This is also the genre that we will be focusing on here.

The characteristics mentioned in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* are the most significant and well known features of the genre of the (beast) fable. However, this seems to be a much too simple explanation for the genre of the fable. As already mentioned, there are a lot of stories which feature animals, but which are not beast fables. And there are also tales that have morals that again are not beast fables. According to H.J. Blackham, "a fable gets past the garrison of resident assumptions, the mind's defenses, to bring home its point or raise its questions: it is a tactical manoeuvre to prompt new thinking, [...] not a didactic story" (XI). (Beast) fables are usually full of allegory and personification. This means that when animals play the roles of the protagonists in the stories, they act like humans, sometimes talk like humans, and in some beast fables the animals even have names that are similar to those of the humans that they represent. Due to this, beast fables are often mistaken for an allegory, a parable or a proverb. However, there are some significant differences between these genres:

An allegory in narrative form may seem close to fable. Again, the principal difference is that the allusion in allegory is to something particular, and in fable to something general. Rather, although both may employ general conceptions in particular forms,

with roles in a particular action, fable will do this to focus attention on an illuminated patch exposed to thought, whereas allegory tends to explore labyrinthine manifestations with delight in the description. Allegory constructs a series of specific correspondences in two systems, so that one translates into the other, either way.

(Blackham, XV)

A parable also differs slightly from a fable. Whereas both genres are short stories which contain a moral, a parable can also be a spiritual lesson, like the parables told by Jesus in the Bible. Furthermore, the characters in a fable are usually animals, whereas those in a parable are usually humans.

Proverbs, on the other hand, do resemble fables in many ways. They are almost “indistinguishable in respect to form, meaning, and function” (Perry, 19). There are even proverbs that are derived from fables such as ‘a wolf in sheep’s clothing’, ‘sour grapes’, and ‘the lion’s share’. The difference lies in the fact that “the proverb [...] depends for its effect on epigrammatic formulation, not on graphic action” (Blackham, 62), as the fable does.

After all these definitions and explanations, it seems fairly straightforward what a (beast) fable exactly is: a very short story in which plants or animals play the roles of the protagonists, and which always tries to teach its audience a moral lesson. When the protagonists are indeed animals, the fable is called a beast fable. Still, it does not always seem to be very clear what a beast fable exactly is as opposed to a beast tale. Beast tales are most commonly defined as beast fables, due to the similarities that can be found in these genres. However, some significant differences clearly indicate that it is not correct to treat these beast tales as beast fables.

Beast tales as opposed to beast fables

The most important and obvious characteristic that the beast fable and beast tale have in common is, of course, the presence of animals. However, this is also the only characteristic

that these types of texts share. The differences between a beast fable and a beast tale are quite significant. The first difference between these two is the length of these stories. A beast fable is a very short story, whereas a beast tale does not necessarily have to be short. “Fable is notoriously one of the smallest of “small” literary forms. The longest item in Marie de France’s collection [...] has 124 lines, and the typical length of fables in her collection and other medieval Aesops is from fifteen to thirty-five verses” (Needler, 428). Beast tales do not have to be long per se; however, they usually are quite longer than the average fable. Two examples of beast tales are Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* and the anonymous *The Fox and the Wolf*. *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* consists of 448 lines, *The Fox and the Wolf* of 295 lines; in short, both texts are significantly longer than a (beast) fable normally is.

The length of the fables and tales brings us to another characteristic: one of the reasons why a (beast) fable is so short is that it focuses on only one action, or a very short chain of actions: “it must recount either one action or a progression of actions that are supposed to have taken place once in the past” (Ziolkowski, 17). The beast tale, on the other hand, does almost always present various actions, which not necessarily have to have taken place all at the same time. They do not even have to be connected at all.

The third difference is that the (beast) fable is defined through its moral. Without a moral, the beast fable would be just another animal story or tale. The beast tale can contain a moral, but this is not necessary. It is more common for a beast tale to lack a moral than to have one. When a moral is present, it is usually more subtle than the ones given in beast fables. Unlike beast fables, beast tales do not have the explicit function to teach something to its readers. Generally speaking, beast tales are mostly valued for their entertainment: “They are designed usually to show the cleverness of one animal and the stupidity of another, and their interest usually lies in the humor of the deceptions or the absurd predicaments the animal’s stupidity leads him into” (Thompson, 9). Although it is possible to learn a valuable

lesson from a beast tale, in most cases these lessons are well hidden within the story, and it takes some clever thinking to discover its message.

The fourth and final significant difference can be found in the protagonists in the beast fables and the beast tales. In beast fables, the protagonists are always animals that interact with each other. They represent humans in the way they act and sometimes talk; in several fables, they even have names like human beings. Still, it always remains a representation. Humans can be mentioned, but they do not play a role in these beast fables. In the beast tales, it is possible that there are only animals which interact with each other. Another possibility is that human beings play significant roles in these tales. When this is the case, the animals interact with humans, although they still remain the main characters within these stories.

On the whole it can be said that beast tales look a lot like beast fables. They both contain animals as protagonists. However, whereas the fable tries to teach its audience certain valuable lessons about either life or certain social cultures, the beast tale does not necessarily share this characteristic. Some beast tales do, but this is not compulsory for this type of text. Beast tales are usually longer than the (beast) fables, due to the multiple actions that take place in such tales, and they do not always feature only animals but human beings as well.

The origin of fables

(Beast) fables and beast literature can be traced back many centuries in time. Many of the old beast tales and (beast) fables are said to have been written even before the Christian era began, namely during the sixth century B.C. It is clear that we do not know exactly how old this genre of beast literature is. It could be much older than we assume. What we do know is that the beast tales and beast fables became very popular during the time of Aesop and his contemporaries. Aesop was a freed slave from Greece who wrote many of the fables that are still known today. It is said that Aesop already used sources from different authors who lived

well before his time; however, there are no records of former writers that can be linked to this specific genre. Aesop's fables were written down some centuries after his time, which means that at first these tales and fables were passed on orally:

This oral art of tale-telling is far older than history, and it is not bounded by one continent or one civilization. Stories may differ in subject from place to place, the conditions and purposes of tale-telling may change as we move from land to land or from century to century, and yet everywhere it ministers to the same basic social and individual needs. The call for entertainment to fill in the hours of leisure has found most peoples very limited in their resources, and except where modern urban civilization has penetrated deeply they have found the telling of stories one of the most satisfying of pastimes. Curiosity about the past has always brought eager listeners to tales of the long ago which supply the simple man with all he knows of the history of his folk. [...] Religion also has played a mighty role everywhere in the encouragement of the narrative art, for the religious mind has tried to understand beginnings and for ages has told stories of ancient days and sacred beings. (Thompson, 5)

Not much is known about Aesop or his life. One of the few things that is known for certain is that he narrated many (beast) fables. Better yet, he is only known because of the genre of the fable, which is ascribed to him. Some scholars have also called him "the first fabulist" (Wheatley, 5). Although the genre of the fable is attributed to Aesop by some scholars, other scholars have said that this is not true because he probably used information from other storytellers or writers for his own works. In this case, he cannot be the inventor of this genre. Joseph Jacobs states that "Aesop was not the Father of the Fable, but only the inventor (or most conspicuous applier) of a new use for it" (qtd. in Patterson, 17). There may have been other people who invented or told stories that resembled the fable and which were a source of inspiration to Aesop. Due to the lack of written evidence we will probably never

know how old the fable is and if Aesop is the real inventor of this genre. Still, he remains the only person that we know who contributed greatly to the development of the fable.

Aesop passed his fables on orally. Already in his days and also the centuries to come, Aesop's fables were and remained very popular. "Thus Aesopic fables exist not just from the period in which the largely legendary Aesop lived but from all periods" (Ziolkowski, 16). Some scholars ascribe the genre of the fable to slaves and other lower class people because Aesop had belonged to the lower classes of society. He was a slave for the most part of his life. Furthermore, some fables are derived from folktales which belonged mainly to tribes and people from the lower classes, not only during the classical period but also during the Middle Ages. Finally, most fables express critique on aspects of societies which usually affected the poor and lower classes. Ziolkowski states:

There is reason to believe that peasants were not just the audience of fables, but themselves created fables or at least the story parts of fables. If so, then in the Middle Ages fable retained the associations with low social classes – "low culture" – that it had acquired thanks to the slave/freedman status of Aesop and Phaedrus. (28)

After Aesop's death, the fables were still passed on orally for some time. However, the Greek philosopher Plato (428-347 B.C.) stated in his book *Phaedo* that his teacher Socrates (469-399 B.C.), while he awaited his death in prison, turned some of the fables of Aesop into verse. During the centuries to come, several writers and poets translated some Aesopic fables and turned them into small collections. The first collection of fables was made in the fourth century B.C. by the Greek philosopher Demetrius Phalereus. The Athenian philosopher Phaedrus (15 B.C.-50 A.D.), a slave by birth like Aesop, translated many of these fables into Latin around 25 A.D. And during the Christian era, the Aesopic fables became even more important. In the fourth century A.D., Aphthonius of Antioch, a Greek sophist and rhetorician, translated a few fables into Latin prose:

This translation is the more worthy of notice, as it illustrates a custom of common use, both in these and in later times. The rhetoricians and philosophers were accustomed to give the Fables of Aesop as an exercise to their scholars, not only inviting them to discuss the moral of the tale, but also to practice and to perfect themselves thereby in style and rules of grammar, by making for themselves new and various versions of the fables. (Jacobs, 2)

After this century, it is as if the Aesopic fables lay low for a while. (Jacobs, 3) Not much is heard of them until they surface again in the Byzantine Empire at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Again, collections were made, and some of these collections were turned into schoolbooks and taught not only to children, but also to students at the universities: “[...] transmission and interpretation of fable took place under the control of schoolteachers. To these teachers fell the responsibility of reinforcing the classical fable canon, helping students distinguish between less authoritative folktale and fully authoritative Aesopic fable” (Wheatley, 4). (Beast) fables did not just become children’s literature, but this genre also fully integrated into adult literature. Due to this, fables became part of European literature, with the logical result that many of them were translated into other (European) languages. Another reason why beast fables were so widely known is because of their occurrence in the Bible:

The importance and popularity of the fable is also indicated in *The Book of the Judges*:
The trees went forth *on a time* to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?
And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, *and* reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, *and* reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou,

and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon. (Jud. 9:8-15)

This example shows that the genre of the (beast) fable was well known in several parts of the world, as well as that it had a function other than just mere entertainment. It indicates what is wrong and what is right through a moral in each story. According H.J. Blackham,

the books of the Bible are in general rich in imagery, and are studded with similitudes and allusive forms, allegories, dreams, visions, parables, and the like. Among them all, one is recognized as a fable. [...] In so far as it is a fable, it is so because it can stand on its own with a moral general application – and there are Aesopic fables which it does resemble. (XIII)

The fable in Europe

The Aesopic fables, although maybe the most influential and popular ones, were not the only ones that circulated in the world, specifically not in Europe. While the Aesopic fables only arrived in Europe during the fourteenth century, this area was already very familiar with this genre. There were several writers and poets who already wrote (beast) fables as early as the twelfth and thirteenth century. One of these writers is Marie de France. She was a poetess who was born in France, but who lived most of her life in England during the end of the twelfth century. Marie de France wrote several beast fables which together formed the collection called *Ysopet*. Some scholars have said that her fables resemble the Aesopic fable, which is somewhat strange considering that these fables came to Europe long after Marie wrote her own fables, which make it impossible for her to have copied them or used them as examples. This is exactly the reason why other scholars state that she clearly has her own style, and they therefore believe that she composed the fables on her own:

Where Phaedrus and the other medieval fabulists might liken a strong beast to a strong person, Marie likens it to a strong social class, the rich, or the *Seigneur*. Where weak animals had been simply weak persons, in or out of society, Marie makes them peasants and servants, and uses medieval rather than antique terms with some frequency. (Henderson, *Animal*, 163)

According to A.C. Henderson, Marie de France is trying to integrate two different perspectives into the fables. On the one hand, she tries to stand outside the society that she describes, as is most common in traditional fables, and on the other hand, she stands completely in the middle of these same societies that she mentions. This means that she tries to portray different classes of society impartially; however, at the same time she belongs to the upper class and is therefore not always able to write of lower classes without being biased.

Another well known fabulist is Odo of Cheriton. Odo lived during the first half of the thirteenth century and was a Roman Catholic preacher, as well as a fabulist and writer. He wrote fables which were used during sermons in church, as well as fables which were clearly for the teaching of lessons about life or just for entertainment.

As stated above, the fable already became very well known in Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth century. However, it became even more popular between the fifteenth and seventeenth century. Several writers started to write their own fables or translated some of the Aesopic fables into their own languages. One of these writers was the Englishman William Caxton (1415/1422-1492). He was not only a writer but a merchant and printer as well. He was the first retailer of books in England. He is well known for printing the books of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Caxton is associated with the genre of the fable through one of the most famous beast fables, *The History of Reynard the Fox*. Caxton translated this text from Dutch into English.

The Scottish schoolmaster Robert Henryson (1425-1500) also became a widely known fabulist. He produced a few English fables "that are nonetheless the brilliant culmination of

trends toward more vivid dialogue and characterization and toward more explicit social commentary” (Henderson, *Animal*, 168). Henryson’s fables were considered different from others because he included Scottish elements: “A lamb stands for not merely the weak [...] or the poor [...] but tenant farmers – a variety of the poor highly visible in Henryson’s Scotland” (Henderson, *Animal*, 168). The fact that most of the pictures that he included in his fables were not satirical at all is another aspect which distinguishes them from others.

And last but not least is Jean de La Fontaine (1621-1695). La Fontaine was a very popular French poet and fabulist. Most of his fables were beast fables. It is said that he took his inspiration mainly from Aesop. He wrote a lot of his fables for the reigning king of France at the time, Louis XIII. His first fables resemble the Aesopic ones very closely, but as time passed he allowed himself more liberties concerning the genre. La Fontaine began to use his fables more and more for political purposes, and he also enhanced the amount of satire within his tales.

The function of fables

As already stated above, it is not absolutely sure when and by whom exactly the genre of the fable was created. We do not know if Aesop used other sources for his fables or if they were his own inventions. Due to the lack of information about the origin of the fable, we will assume that Aesop was the father of this genre and we can therefore say that the fable was founded in Greece, in the sixth century B.C. At the time of Aesop and his contemporaries, the fable of course had more functions than just being mere entertainment. Its major function was to teach its listeners, and afterwards its readers, a valuable lesson about life or a lesson about right and wrong. This lesson usually came at the end of each fable when the moral was introduced. Most of the fables were satirical and almost always meant to criticise something or someone. However, in the classical fables, the critique was more general and ethical. In the classical period, the entertainment was of great significance, and it was probably as important

as, or even more important than, the critique and the moral lesson. This changed during the Middle Ages. According to H.J. Blackham, “it can be said that the embryo of the fable of which Aesop was one parent was fully formed in classical culture by the end of the second century A.D., to be developed down the centuries in different cultural contexts by different applications and uses, to become a vehicle of literary expression with special resources” (XI).

In the medieval period the focus of the (beast) fable was on the critique, and it became more and more bound to specific societies: “by the late twelfth century certain authors chose to leave fable’s one pole, generality, for the other, for specific social criticism. [...] the previously generalized fable collection took on [...] more concreteness in social application” (Henderson, *Animal*, 161). Some of the authors that changed the generality of the (beast) fable and turned it into specificity were, for example, Marie de France and Odo of Cheriton. They took this opportunity to criticise the immense differences between the rich and the poor, or, the corruption that was present within the church. What makes the genre of the fable so important is that entertainment is combined with social criticism, and this is done in such a way that it is hardly possible to judge an author for his work. Since the criticised societies or people are not mentioned by name but simply by allegorical means, it is almost impossible to say with certainty who and what is criticised:

The first freedom of the fabulists is the freedom to shift a moral to a new specific application, often social, within a broad area suggested by the plot’s inherent pattern. If a strong beast harms a weak one in the plot, then the moralization may provide a lesson about strength in general or else about the power of some specific social group – the rich, the bishops, the lords. (Henderson *Medieval*, 40)

Therefore the (beast) fable was very suitable during the classical period, the Middle Ages, and nowadays as well. Throughout the centuries people have always had to deal with oppression, the differences between rich and poor, and all sorts of problems within society. These issues are not bound to one specific generation or period. Therefore the fable was and is a common

and clever tool to express one's opinion about either certain people or aspects of society.

Howard Needler states that in genres such as the beast fable and the epic, animals always have symbolical meanings. However, in the epic, animals are usually friends or enemies of humans, whereas in beast fables, a dramatic situation in the lives of the animals usually represents some event or situation in human society:

In fable, where the politics of action seems consistently to dominate the morality of choice, the multiple applicability of these forms is particularly well adapted to the generation of multiple meanings, sometimes with the deeply ironic effects. But even when it is not employing the language of feudal obligation or ethical values, fable typically achieves its most telling effects from the intersection or parallelism of contrasting dramatic lines. (Needler, 428)

The fact that animals play the roles of humans in these stories makes them very accessible for their use as a form of critique on people or on society. What made it so easy to give one's opinion or to criticise certain societies is, of course, the fact that in beast fables humans play no role. Everything is played by animals that have human characteristics and do represent actual persons, but it cannot be established beyond a reasonable doubt, which animal represents which human being:

To caricature enemies or oppressors as animals is a relatively safe form of humor, since often the targets of such mockery will refuse to make themselves ridiculous by acknowledging that any resemblance exists. [...] Partly for this reason, the related practices of humanizing animals and animalizing human beings have long been the mainstay of many adult insults and jokes, especially ones concerned with class and ethnic struggles. (Ziolkowski, 7)

Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that not all fables were written with the purpose to criticise or condemn other social classes or evil oppressors. Some were written as pure

entertainment, and some just wanted its listeners/readers to be taught a certain moral lesson about life.

Chapter 2

In order to corroborate the similarities and differences between the beast fable and the beast tale that were mentioned in the previous chapter, four different tales that are usually labelled as beast fables, but that are actually beast tales, will be analyzed. Attention will be paid to features and characteristics of the beast fable and the beast tale, such as length, the animal protagonists, the number of subplots, the significance of the roles that humans play (if they even play a role at all), and the presence of a moral lesson.

The tales are *The Fox and the Wolf*, the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, and two tales from *Historye of Reynart the Foxe*. All these tales are said to derive from the text of *Le Roman de Renart*. *Le Roman de Renart* is a “conglomeration of Old French poems” which was written during the late twelfth century”, according to Jan Ziolkowski. (3) The framework was written by Pierre de Saint Cloud. This conglomeration consists of several branches of texts, which were not all written by the same author: “The *Roman de Renart* is a collection of over twenty ‘branches’, composed (for the most part) in the north of France by various poets of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. From there, the stories traveled around the world. Each branch tells a story or a connected group of stories” (Chaucer, *NPT*, xvi).

It is not clear who the other authors of the separate branches exactly were. Therefore Pierre de Saint Cloud is usually mentioned as the author of the text. However, not all scholars agree on its origin. Kenneth Varty, for example, has argued that the *Roman de Renart* originated in Flanders around 1149, because it is said to be based on a Latin poem called *Ysengrimus*, which was written by the Flemish poet Nivardus of Ghent in 1148. In this poem a story can be found about Reynard the fox and a cock. This is the first encounter that the world had with the character of Reynard the fox. Still, the problem of the exact origin of the *Roman de Renart* is still unsolved.

The Fox and the Wolf

The first tale that will be discussed here is *The Fox and the Wolf*, which can be found in the Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 86 manuscript. This manuscript was compiled in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, and consisted of several French, Latin, and English texts. *The Fox and the Wolf* is said to be the earliest English version of a Reynard the Fox story in English. The author of this tale is unknown, and it therefore remains difficult to say when it was exactly written. It is thought to have been written during the second half of the 13th century because the text suggests that the author knew and used the stories of the *Roman de Renart*, which means that it was written after the end of the twelfth century. Certain dialectal features in the text, furthermore, are seen as evidence that this text was written after the *Roman de Renart* and before Chaucer's time. According to Dennis Freeborn, this assumption is based on the fact that in *The Fox and the Wolf* there is evidence of language changes which can be traced back to the twelfth century: "for example, the rounding of OE [ɑ:] to [ɔ:], in words like go, wo and loþ, which had developed from OE gan, wa and lap" (127). *The Fox and the Wolf* is seen as "the sole representative in English before the time of Chaucer of the tales of the Roman de Renard." (Bercovitch, 287) However, since the author is not known, the data remains a subject of speculation. The tale of *The Fox and the Wolf* seems to be a combination of two stories from the Reynard cycle, namely that of the Fox and the Cock from branch II and that of the Fox and the Wolf from branch IV. This will become clearer when these stories are discussed in greater detail later on in this section.

The tale of *The Fox and the Wolf* starts with a fox, Reynard, who enters the garden of a friary, where five hens and a cock live. The fox eats two of the hens, but the cock has spotted the fox on time and flies up into a tree. The fox tries to persuade the cock to come down by saying that he will not harm him. He says that he only tried to cure the hens by blood letting:

‘Sire Chauntecleer,

Pou fle adoun, and com me ner.
 nabbe don her note bote goed:
 I have leten þine hennen blod;
 Hy weren seke ounder þe ribe,
 Þat hy ne mi3tte non lengour libe,
 Bote here heddre were itake,
 Pou havest þat ilke ounder þe spleen,
 You nestes daies ten:
 For þine lifdayes beþ al ago,
 Bote þou bi mine rede do.
 I do þe lete blod ounder þe brest,
 Oper sone axe after þe prest.’ (Treharne, ll.37-52)¹

However, the cock is not stupid and cannot be persuaded. He answers that the fox has already done enough harm to his family and that he wants him to go. After a while, the fox does leave because he is very thirsty. He comes to a well and jumps into one of the buckets in order to get down to the water to drink. But then he discovers his mistake. As he descends into the well with one bucket, the second bucket rises to the surface, trapping him down in the well. The fox starts to lament his bad luck, and at that point the wolf, Sigrim, is close by and recognizes the fox’s voice. He asks Reynard what he is doing down in the well, and Reynard answers that he has found Paradise, together with all the food and drink that one can ask for. The wolf is very hungry and wants to go down the well immediately. However, the fox convinces the wolf that if he wants to join him in Paradise, he needs to confess all his sins. To gain absolution, the wolf asks forgiveness for the sins that he has committed in his life, as well as for his resentment towards the fox for having slept with his wife:

‘Sone,’ quod þe wolf, ‘wel ifaie!

¹ All references to the text of *The Fox and the Wolf* are taken from the edition by Elaine Treharne.

Ich hadde ben qued al min lif-daie:
 Ich hadde widewe kors,
 Þerfore Ich fare þe wors.
 A þousent shep Ich hadde abiten,
 And mo 3ef hy weren i writen,
 Ac hit me ofþinkeþ sore.[...]
 Ich hadde ofte sehid qued bi þe.
 Men seide þat þou on þine live
 Misferdest mid mine wive:
 Ich þe aperseivede one stounde,
 And in bedde togedere ou founde.
 Ich wes ofte ou ful ney,
 And bedde togedere ou sey.
 Ich wende, also oþre doþ,
 Þat Ihr iseie were soþ,
 And þerfore þou were me loþ.
 Gode gossip, ne be þou nohut wroþ.' (199-220)

The wolf apologizes to the fox and forgives him for sleeping with his wife. After his confession, Sigrim is absolved and jumps into the second bucket, which causes him to descend into the well, and at the same time, the fox to rise from it. At first, the wolf does not understand that he has been tricked by the fox and asks him where he is going. The fox thanks him for his stupidity and says that he, Reynard, can now go wherever he wants to go. The wolf is left behind, and after a while, the friars from the friary find him in it. They think that the devil has entered the well. So, whereas Sigrim sees the well as a representation of Paradise, the friars see it as hell on earth: "much as Sigrim had taken the well to be the entrance to heavenly paradise, so the friars superstitiously mistake it for the exit of hell."

(Tigges, 93) They pull the wolf up and start to beat him with sticks and stones, although they do not kill him. In the end, the wolf is severely beaten and is left with nothing to eat.

The tale of *The Fox and the Wolf* is a very humorous one, with animals acting at times in a very naive and stupid manner. However, there is a deeper meaning behind this story than is thought at first. As in many beast tales and fables, the animals are used to express an opinion or criticise certain events or people. In the case of this tale, it is the church that is being ridiculed. More specifically, the author mocks confessors and sinners, by letting a fox make the wolf confess all of his sins, as well as letting the fox be forgiven for the adultery that he has committed with the wolf's wife without having done any penance for it. According to Professor Wim Tigges, it is highly ironic that the fox assigns himself the role of a priest. Priests were supposed to care about the souls of their people, but Reynard only cares about himself. He wants to get out of the well, and therefore takes on the role of a priest to be able to trick Sigrim. He has become the "fox priest, symbol of the widespread condemnation of clerical hypocrisy" (Bercovitch, 288). Bercovitch states that the Middle English combated against the three evils, which are "vaynglorie", "ypocresy" and "presumpcion", but that Reynard is able to get away with it by pretending to being a priest: "unmistakably, Reneuard embraces [...] all three types of evil, and yet – under cover of the Church itself – he succeeds without 'sorinesse,' to continue in his deceptions." (Bercovitch, 293-294) At the same time, the wolf's confession is not sincere, because it is already made clear that he himself is not a Christian. He says to the fox: "Hertou Cristine oper er mi fere?" (120), which indicates that he cannot be friends with a Christian, let alone be one himself. Furthermore, the confession done by the wolf cannot be valid because he confesses in order to gain something by it: "The sheep and goats remind the wolf, not of these Christian allusions to virtue and vice, good and evil, but of his own insatiable hunger. He is now morally blinded and ready to follow any instructions the fox may give." (Tigges, 91) This is not the kind of attitude that Christians

were supposed to have when they were asking for absolution, nor would it have helped them to enter heaven instead of being sent to hell.

Apart from the sinners and confessors, there is a third group that the author satirizes in the story, namely the friars. The author depicts them as being very stupid, superstitious and also very cruel. When they find the wolf in the well, they do not wait and see who he really is, but they immediately assume the worst and start beating him very violently. Furthermore, the friar Ailmer should be attending matins at the same moment that he is arriving at the well:

þo þat hit com to þe time,
þat hoe shulden arisen ine
For to suggen here houssong,
O frere þer wes among,
Of here slep hem shulde awecche,
Wen hoe shulden þidere recche. (263-268)

Obviously his business at the well is more important than his spiritual concerns. Of course, the big difference is that the roles of the sinner and the confessor are played by a wolf and a fox, whereas the friars represent themselves.

The tale of *The Fox and the Wolf* is also ascribed to the genre of the beast fable by many scholars: “It is the only pre-Chaucerian beast fable to have survived” (Treharne, 332). However, to ascribe this tale to this genre is not correct. To have animals play the roles of the protagonists, for example, is characteristic for a beast fable. The animal protagonists in a beast fable always act as humans and not as the beasts that they are, whereas, in the case of *The Fox and the Wolf*, the animals behave sometimes as humans, and sometimes behave as mere animals. Secondly, the tale is too long, although in comparison to the other two tales that are discussed here, it seems relatively short with only 295 lines. Still, for a fable even this is much too long. There is not a standard amount of lines that a (beast) fable should have, but according to Howard Needler, the length of fables usually varied from fifteen to thirty-five

verses. The longest of Marie de France's fables, *De Lupo Regnante*, contains no more than 124 lines. Thirdly, this tale consists of two separate actions, which is not normal for a (beast) fable which contains only one action. There is the conversation between Reynard and Chauntecleer, and there is of course the encounter between the fox and the wolf at the well. Fourthly, a fable always ends with a moral lesson for the audience to learn. The tale of *The Fox and the Wolf* simply does not have a moral. And the fifth and final reason why this tale should be called a beast tale is the presence of humans. Human beings can be present but do not play significant roles in a beast fable. In *The Fox and the Wolf*, the friars' presence is an important element. The last 34 lines of the tale are about them and what they do to the wolf after they find him in the well. Furthermore, they are also used as a means to criticise friars in general. Based on these five characteristics, it is correct to label the poem of *The Fox and the Wolf* as a beast tale, and not as a beast fable.

The Nun's Priest's Tale

The second example of a story that is often mistaken for a beast fable, whereas in fact it is actually a beast tale, is Geoffrey Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*. The *Nun's Priest's Tale* is part of a collection of several tales, namely Geoffrey Chaucer's most famous work, the *Canterbury Tales*, which he wrote in the late 14th century. All the stories are told by different pilgrims who are traveling together on a pilgrimage from Southwark to Canterbury.

The *Nun's Priest's Tale* is a story about a cock, a hen, and a fox. The protagonist of the tale is a very proud rooster named Chauntecleer. Chauntecleer has a dream which predicts his death brought about by a fox. He shares this dream with one of his seven wives, the hen Pertelote, the only hen he really loves. Chauntecleer is convinced that the dream must have some prophetic meaning. When he tells Pertelote about the dream, she does not support his opinion and is even disappointed in Chauntecleer. She believes it to be a sign of weakness to believe in dreams and fortune telling. She says to him:

'Avoy!' quod she, 'fy on yow, hertelees!
 Allas,' quod she, 'for, by that God above!
 Now han ye lost myn herte and al my love.
 I kan nat love a coward, by my feith!
 For certes, whatso any womman seith,
 We alle desiren, if it myghte bee,
 To han housbondes hardy, wise, and free,
 And secree, and no nygard, ne no fool,
 Ne hym that is agast of every tool,
 Ne noon avauntour: -- by that God above!
 How dorste ye seyn, for shame, unto youre love
 That any thyng myghte make yow aferd?
 Have ye no mannes herte, and han a berd?
 Allas! And konne ye been agast of swevenys?
 Nothyng, God woot! but vanitee in sweven is.
 Swevenes engendren of replecciouns,
 And ofte of fume and of complecciouns,
 Whan humours been to habundant in a wight. (Chaucer, *NPT*, ll. 142-159)²

Pertelote reprimands Chauntecleer for even having dreams, because they are an act of vanity. The dream can be seen as a warning about the future, which, according to Pertelote, can only be known by God and not by man or animal in this case. In order to persuade Pertelote that he is correct, Chauntecleer begins to talk about examples which, according to him, are proof that dreams do sometimes have a prophetic meaning. He refers to prophets who foresaw their own death, as well as to other dreams that came true. However, in the end he is persuaded by Pertelote that the dream is not significant. Chauntecleer puts his thoughts about his dream

² All references to the text of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* are taken from the edition *The Nun's Priest's Tale* by Kenneth Sisam.

aside and is ready to greet a new day, but the reader soon discovers that the cock was right about his fortune. During the discussion between Chauntecleer and Pertelote, a fox called Daun Russell is already watching the cock and is ready to seize him. Eventually Daun Russell moves closer towards Chauntecleer, but the rooster has seen him and does not let the fox catch him so easily. Still, because Chauntecleer has let himself be persuaded by Pertelote, he is not paying as much attention to his surroundings as he should be. Although the fox's first attempt failed, he is able to trick Chauntecleer. The fox says that he is a friend instead of an enemy. He claims to have known Chauntecleer's father and states that he does not believe that Chauntecleer is able to sing as his father did, with his eyes closed and his neck stretched out:

But for men speke of synyng, I wol seye,
So moote I brouke wel myne eyen tweye!
Save yow, I herde nevere man so synge
As dide youre fader in the morwenyng.
Certes it was of herte al that he song!
And for to make his voys the moore strong
He wolde so peyne hym that with bothe hise eyen
He moste wynke, so loude he wolde cryen,
And he stonden on his tiptoon therwithal,
And strecche forth his nekke, long and small [...]
Now syngeth, sire, for seinte charitee!
Lat se konne ye youre fader counterfete. (533-555)

Chauntecleer is so flattered by every word that he forgets about his fears and begins to sing, with his eyes closed and his neck stretched out. The fox seizes the opportunity, grabs him by the neck and makes a run for the forest. Chauntecleer's owner and some other people chase after the fox, and that allows Chauntecleer to trick him. He persuades the fox to shout at the pursuers that he has the cock and that they will not be able to catch him. However, when the

fox opens his mouth to say these words, Chauntecleer flies into a high tree and is saved. So the trickster is tricked in the end. The story ends with a moral:

Lo, swich it is for to be recchelees
And necligent, and truste on falterye!
But ye that holden this tale a folye
As of a fox, or of a cock and a hen,
Taketh the moralité, goode men;
For seint Poul seith that al that written is
To oure doctrine it is y-write, ywis:
Taketh the fruyt and lat the chaf be stille.
Now goode God, if that it be thy wille,
As seith my lord, so make us alle goode men,
And brynge us to his heighe bliss. Amen. (670-680)

The *Nun's Priest's Tale* is, as already mentioned above, almost always characterized as a beast fable. R.T. Lenaghan, for instance, states that "the Nun's Priest's Tale can be clearly related to a well-established literary type, the fable. The tale is a much elaborated version of a fable of a fox and a cock." (301) And Doron Narkiss calls it "Chaucer's 'fox fable'" (47). This identification of Chaucer's tale as a fable is not entirely unfounded. As already explained in the previous chapter, the most significant feature that these two literary forms have in common is the presence of animals. In both genres, animals play the roles of the protagonist, and in many cases, they try to fulfill roles that would normally have been played by human beings. The presence of the animals is a way in which the author is able to describe certain events or people in a satirical and sometimes even judgmental manner, and be able to get away with it. In the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, different analyses are possible. In one analysis, women are made fun of. And in another analysis, preachers are judged in terms of their role as

protectors of their flock against heretics and the devil. However, these analyses will be discussed in more detail later on.

Another shared feature of the fable and tale can be the presence of a moral. A beast tale does not have to contain a moral, but it is possible. The *Nun's Priest's Tale* has one, yet it is quite different from one in a beast fable. It does not relate to the whole tale, but is restricted to one part of the tale, namely the interaction between Chauntecleer and Daun Russell. In fact, the limited scope of the moral is the first feature that distinguishes Chaucer's tale from the beast fable. The length of the tale is another such feature:

Chaucer turns a fable into what one may call a "fabular tale" in the *Canterbury Tales*, and this seemingly innocuous move raises various theoretical problems. One of these is the fundamental problem of length. What happens to a form traditionally still defined by its brevity, and, we may assume, even more intimately linked with pithiness in Chaucer's time, when it is extended, as here, to several hundred lines? It seems certain that it can no longer have the same rhetorical impact and intention as the extremely functional and referentially limited Aesopic fable. (Narkiss, 46-47)

The *Nun's Priest's Tale* consists of 448 lines and is thus too long for a beast fable. In addition, the *Nun's Priest's Tale* consists of three separate actions: the discussion between Chauntecleer and Pertelote about dreams, the monologue of Chauntecleer about the significance of dreams, and, most importantly, the discussion between the fox and Chauntecleer and the chase which ends with the moral. A beast fable would only have mentioned the discussion between the cock and the fox and its consequences. Doron Narkiss states that "in the *Nun's Priest's Tale* fable is combined with and greatly extended by characterization and action" (60). The reader gets very much information about the several characters, and from these extensive character descriptions different actions (not just one as in the beast fable) derive.

The final difference between the beast fable and the beast tale which can be found in the tale of the nun's priest is the presence of humans. As already explained in the discussion of the tale of *The Fox and the Wolf*, humans can play a significant role only in beast tales, and this is the case in the tale of the nun's priest. Their presence is, in the end, the reason why Chauntecleer is able to trick the fox in opening his mouth and to escape from his own death. On the whole, the *Nun's Priest's Tale* shares some significant similarities with the beast fable, yet the length, the multiple actions in the tale, and the significance of the presence of humans make this tale a beast tale, and not a beast fable.

As in many beast tales, and beast fables as well for that matter, the protagonists in the *Nun's Priest's Tale* are animals, not because the author thought that his audience wanted to read about them, but because of what they can represent. Every animal has certain significant characteristics, or is given specific characteristics, which makes it possible for the author to criticise certain people or events. This is also the case with the tale of the nun's priest, although not all scholars agree on the event or people that Chaucer tried to ridicule. One of these following two analyses is probably consistent with the point that Chaucer wanted to make by writing this tale.

In the first analysis, Chauntecleer and Pertelote are seen as a representation of Adam and Eve. After Chauntecleer's and Pertelote's discussion about the importance and meaning of the dream, Chauntecleer says to Pertelote:

Madame Pertelote, so have I blis!
Of o thing God hath sent me large grace,
For whan I se the beautee of youre face,
Ye been so scarlet-reed aboute youre eyen,
It maketh al my drede for to dyen.
For, al so siker as *In principio*,
Mulier est hominis confusio:

Madame, the sentence of this Latyn is,

“Womman is mannes joye and al his blis.” (15)

Chauntecleer pretends to honor women with his speech, whereas in reality he is condemning them, since the Latin phrase means “woman is man’s ruin” instead of “woman is man’s delight and all his bliss”. The real translation of the Latin phrase reminds us of the Fall of Man from the book of Genesis. In the case of Pertelote and Chauntecleer, “woman is both the source of man’s joy and also the cause of his fall. That is, Pertelote is Eve and Chauntecleer, against his own learned judgment, will take her advice and ignore his dream, which will, as in the case of Adam, lead to his fall.” (Finlayson, 502) Because Chauntecleer listens to Pertelote, he forgets about his dream and is less cautious when he encounters the fox, which almost causes him to die. In this case, it is probably safe to say that the nun’s priest was making fun of Pertelote, and therefore women, but also of Chauntecleer and men in general. Geoffrey Chaucer would have known the exact translation of the Latin phrase, but mistranslated it on purpose. Perhaps Chaucer wanted women (in general) to think that they were man’s joy and bliss, whereas in fact the author’s opinion is the exact opposite. However, at the same time Chauntecleer is ridiculed because he knows that women can be a bad influence, but still he lets himself be persuaded by Pertelote in a similar manner as Adam did by Eve.

The second analysis focuses on a different part of the story, namely the debate that takes place between Chauntecleer and Daun Russell. In the analysis, the cock represents a preacher or at least a clergyman, whereas the fox can be seen as a heretic, or maybe even the devil. The cock is a sort of watchman, someone who is very alert and thus able to warn the people surrounding him if something (bad) is about to happen. According to Mortimer Donovan, this is also one of the meanings of the word ‘cock’: “The Oxford Dictionary, in fact, preserves this meaning of *cock* [...]: ‘One who arouses slumberers, a watchman of the night: applied to ministers of religion.’ The cock thus described as a symbol of alertness” (Donovan, 502). This, in the case of this story, would have meant that if Chauntecleer had

paid more attention to his dream, he would have been more alert, would not have been caught by the fox, and could also have warned his flock against the danger of the approaching fox.

Daun Russell is also said to represent the devil in this tale: “he is the *col-fox*, ‘coal fox,’ recalling the Prince of Darkness. Like the devil he is *ful of sly iniquitee*; [...] As the fox stalks his prey just as slyly as the devil [...] From this point to the end of the sermon Daun Russell’s two roles are completely fused. He is devil and heretic in his temptation speech, to which Chauntecleer listens.” (Donovan, 504) Daun Russell tries to lead Chauntecleer astray by deliberately deceiving him; he also tries to make the cock trust him by flattery which leads Chauntecleer to thoughts of vanity about himself, which is seen as a sin against God. By deliberately trying to trick the cock into sin, it is clear that Daun Russell represents either a heretic or the Devil, maybe even both at the same time.

In conclusion, the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* allows many different interpretations. Only two different analyses have been given here, since they are important to this discussion. Interpretations of the aspects of this very complex tale, such as the role of free will, dream interpretation, etc., have been ignored. Still, it remains difficult to say with absolute certainty what Chaucer was trying to make clear to his audience. Maybe he meant to make a story in which women were made fun of by representing Pertelote as Eve, as well as ridiculing men by letting Chauntecleer make the same mistake Adam did. Or maybe he wanted to criticise clergymen for the power that they had over their flock and what their negligence could mean for their people. In my opinion, the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* is a combination of these two analyses. This tale does not either ridicule men and women, or condemn preachers; I believe that Geoffrey Chaucer wanted to do both in this tale.

Historye of Reynart the Foxe

The third and final tale that will be discussed is the *Historye of Reynart the Foxe*. Reynard the Fox is also known as Reynart, Renard, Renart, Reinard, Reinecke, Reinhardus, Reynardt, and

Reynaerde. All these different names are derived from the many translations that have been made of this story all around the world.

As already stated above, not all scholars agree on the origin of the Reynard stories. According to Professor Kenneth Varty, the character of Reynard the Fox first came to life in Flanders in 1149. From there it made its way to France in the 1190's, and after that spread to the rest of the world. However, many scholars believe that the framework of the cycle originated in France, by the author Pierre de Saint Cloud, and not in Flanders. However this may be, it is a fact that during the 15th century, the stories could already be found in Flanders and the Netherlands. One of these Dutch translations was discovered by the English William Caxton around 1481. Caxton, who was a writer, printer, and merchant, took the text with him to England, translated it into English, and printed it several times. It is this English translation that will be the focus of the following discussion.

Historye of Reynart the Foxe is a cycle of more than forty different tales. Since a discussion of all these tales would be a whole different dissertation, the complete story will be only outlined.

The lion, king Noble, bids all his subjects, the animals, to come to court and attend him during Pentecost. Only Reynard fails to obey the summons, because he is afraid to be punished for his many misdeeds. His fears are not unjustified, for Isegrim the Wolf, Curtis the Little Hound, and Chantecleer the Cock all make serious complaints against him when they arrive in front of the king. The king sends out messengers to find Reynard and bring him to court, but the two emissaries are not successful in their mission. Reynard is finally persuaded by his cousin Grimbart the Brock to appear before the king. Once he arrives, he is overwhelmed by an outcry of angry complainants about the crimes that he has committed, and is judged by the king to be hanged for these misdeeds. However, once he is on the scaffold, Reynard is able to free himself of the charges by pretending to King Noble that he has discovered a plot against his life. He even says that he can show the king where a rich treasure

lies hidden. Of course, this is yet another trick, but it works. Reynard is at once set free and is even taken into high royal favor. The king soon discovers that he has been tricked by the fox. There is no treasure because Reynard made the whole thing up. He also shows a total disregard for the law. Reynard once more appears at court, denies all accusations that are made against him and once again wins his freedom, this time by pretending that he has some remarkable gifts to present to the king. When hearing this, Isegrim gets so angry that he challenges Reynard to fight against him. A terrible fight takes place, which Reynard in the end wins with unfair tricks and tactics against Isegrim. The king forgives and forgets all the accusations that were made against Reynard, and he appoints him as one of the most honoured subjects in the kingdom.

There are two tales in this cycle that are of great importance in relation to the tales of *The Fox and the Wolf* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale*. The first one is called *Howe the cocke complayned on Reynart*. In this tale, the cock Chauntecleer appears before the king and complains about the bad behaviour that Reynard has shown towards himself, his hens, and also his children. The cock says that for a long time the garden where he and his family lived was very safe because of six dogs that protected them from all danger, especially against predators such as Reynard. However, at some point Reynard entered the garden with a letter in his hand from the king, and he stated

that the kynge had made pees over al in his royaume, and that alle maner beestis and fowles shold doo none harme ner scathe to ony other; yet, sayd he to me more, that he was a cloysterer, or a closyd recluse becomen, and that he wolde receyve grete penance for his synnes, he shewd me his slavyne, and pylche, nad an heren scherte ther under, and thenne sayd he, syr Chaunteclere, after thys tyme be no more aferd of me, ne take no hede, for I now wil ete no more flessche, I am forthon so olde, that I wolde fayn remembre my sowle; I will now go forth, for I have yete to saye my sexte, none, and my evensonge, to God I bytake yow. (Caxton, *Historye*, 9)

After hearing this, the cock and his family trusted Reynard and believed him to be sincere. Naturally, the whole speech turned out to be false and he ate several of Chauntecleer's children.

It is obvious that this tale does not tell the same story as *The Fox and the Wolf* and *Nun's Priest's Tale* do. Nevertheless, in this tale the same technique is used by the fox to mislead the cock. In all three tales, Reynard is able to persuade the cock that he is changed and that he can be trusted now. And in all tales, the cock is so naïve that he trusts the fox, which in both cases turns out to be a terrible mistake. The difference is that in Chaucer's tale, the cock is able to outsmart Reynard before the end, whereas in *The Fox and the Wolf* as well as in Caxton's tale, several of the hens from Chauntecleer's flock are killed. So even though the tales are not completely alike, it seems obvious that both the anonymous author and Chaucer were familiar with the tales of the Reynard cycle, and that both authors used them as sources for inspiration for some of their own stories.

The other tale that is of interest for this discussion is *How Ysegrim the wulf complayned agayn on the foxe*. This tale tells the story of Isegrim, who goes, together with his wife, to the king and starts to complain about the horrible things Reynard has done to them. Isegrim and his wife relate how Reynard pretended to be a helpful friend to Isegrim's wife once. He told her how she could use her tail to catch fish from a frozen pond. However, due to his instructions, she got stuck to the ice with her tail, and at that point, Reynard took advantage of the situation and forced himself on her. Reynard, in turn, denies everything that Isegrim has told the king and his court. He says that he can prove that it is all false and that they should ask Isegrim's wife, Erswind, for she knows the truth. Erswind calls him a liar and continues to tell of another misdeed that Reynard did to her. She relates that she once came to a well after hearing someone moaning and sighing there. When she found Reynard in a bucket at the bottom, he told her that he made those sounds because his belly was completely full with all the fish that he had eaten from the well. He also asked her to join him in order to get

some fish as well. She was foolish enough to jump into the other bucket, and as she was going down into the well, Reynard came up and was free. Reynard said to her “Thus fareth the world, that one goth up, and another goth down.” (Caxton, *Historye*, 135) Reynard went on his way after this, and Erswind stayed at the bottom of the well for a whole day and was afterwards beaten for it. At the end of this tale, Reynard confirms this story that Erswind has told and even says that he is glad that she got the beating instead of him.

This tale resembles the tale of *The Fox and the Wolf* almost in its entirety. The first part on Reynard’s abuse of Erswind is commented on very briefly in *The Fox and the Wolf*. However, the last portion of this tale told by Erswind is almost completely the same. The only differences between these two tales are that it is not Isegrim that is tricked but his wife, that she is tricked with food and not with the prospect of Paradise filled with food, and that Reynard does not act as a confessor towards Erswind, as he does towards Isegrim. Apart from these minor differences, all tales are exactly alike. It is evident that the poem of *The Fox and the Wolf* is based on branches II and IV of the Reynard cycle, as already explained at the beginning of this chapter.

The two tales from the *Historye of Reynart the Foxe* discussed here can be labelled as beast tales. However, like *The Fox and the Wolf* and the *Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, they are often categorized as beast fables, since the main protagonists are animals who talk like humans. Furthermore, humans are not present in these tales, an absence so characteristic of a (beast) fable, as mentioned in the first chapter. *Howe the cocke complayned on Reynart* is also a rather short tale and consists of only one action. Still, although both these features can be found in (beast) fables, they do not rule out the possibility of categorizing this story as a beast tale. Beast tales can also be very short and they can consist of only one action. The main feature that defines a (beast) fable is the presence of a moral; this feature is lacking here and therefore makes the story without a doubt a beast tale.

The tale of *How Ysegrim the wulf complayned agayn on the foxe* does not have features that are characteristic for a (beast) fable, except for animals that play the roles of the protagonists. The tale is longer than the general (beast) fable. It is also composed of two actions instead of one: first Isegrim tells about how Reynard tricked his wife into getting her tail frozen onto the ice with all its consequences, and then Erswind relates how she was tricked by Reynard into the well. And the most important reason why this tale should be labelled as a beast tale is, again, the lack of a moral.

Whereas the tales of *The Fox and the Wolf* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale* have a deeper meaning, this does not seem to be the case with the two stories in Caxton's *Historye of Reynart the Foxe*. In *The Fox and the Wolf*, it is clear that the church is ridiculed, because the fox takes the wolf's confession, which is not sincere at all. The *Nun's Priest's Tale* can be interpreted in several different ways: Chauntecleer and Pertelote could be seen as representations of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis, or Chauntecleer and the fox may represent a clergyman and the devil. The tale also contains a moral lesson for its readers. The two tales from Caxton seem to me to be just entertainment not meant to teach its audience such lesson. However, I believe that the whole Reynard cycle must have a deeper meaning. Maybe it is to teach us that justice does not always prevail, or that being a good person does not necessarily mean that we will be treated in the same way or that we will have a good life. Tricksters do have a tendency to create a good life and environment for themselves at the expense of others.

In conclusion, it can be said that the four beast tales have a lot in common. It is clear that the authors of the tale of *The Fox and the Wolf* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale* were familiar with the tales of the Reynard cycle that already existed in France and the Netherlands before these two tales were written. Although there are some slight differences among the four tales, their stories are very similar overall. Also, all four tales are usually categorized as beast fables; I have illustrated, however, that in spite of some correspondences between the beast

tales and beast fables, such categorization is flawed. Finally, the four tales feature a fox as one of their protagonists. The significance of the roles that the fox plays, as well as their meaning in these and other tales written during the Middle Ages, will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

In the Middle Ages, animals played a very important role in people's lives. In those days, animals were used a lot more to make people's lives easier. Animals played probably even bigger roles then, than they do now. Nowadays, a lot of people have animals as pets, and, of course, some still use them for agricultural purposes and the raising of livestock. However, during the Middle Ages, a large number of families depended on the animals to help them with their agricultural production since modern machinery was not available yet. So in order to get certain jobs, such as ploughing, done, they used the strength of horses or other animals to help them. Also, the hides of a lot of animals were used for clothes and other useful products: "There were animals that were essential as labor, that provided hides and food, that served as hunting partners. Interaction with these animals dominated humans' experiences." (Salisbury, *Animals*, 49) It would be logical for these same animals to have a great influence in literature as well; however, according to Joyce Salisbury, these real animals were not the ones with the most influence on literature, but

after the twelfth century, animals of the imagination strongly affected people's views of themselves and the animal world. Literature that portrayed animals as offering examples for human behavior became increasingly popular in monasteries and courts and spread, via preachers' sermons, to the unlettered masses. (*Animals*, 49)

These beast fables and tales at first give the impression that they are going to tell about the animals that they are about, but this is not the case. As already mentioned in the first chapter, we learn very little about the animals themselves in these stories. Rather, we learn about what the animals represent or stand for, such as certain people or societies. Every animal has certain features that are used to portray these people or societies: "each animal is matched with a specific virtue or vice." (Amer, 9) However, what were these features exactly and what kind of animals were used for which roles? And more specifically, what exactly was the role

that the fox usually played in the beast tales and beast fables? The answers to these questions will be given in this chapter.

Almost all animals were at one point or another used in beast fables or tales, such as lions, wolves, cats, bears, lambs, foxes, dogs, hares, hens, cocks, etc. The animals either belonged to the group of predators or to the group of hunted animals. The distinction between the two groups was so important because they represented the stronger people belonging to the higher social classes (predators) and the weaker, lower-class people (hunted animals):

In medieval society it was noble to be a predator. After all, war – the predatory occupation – was the privilege of the noble class; it was their reason for existence. [...] A society with rulers who were strong and counsellors who were wise is not complete. The tales, like society itself, were populated with the meek, the poor, the victims. The proportion of the rich to the poor in the medieval fable literature, however, never matched that in real society. Medieval fabulists were much more interested in the activities of the powerful. The victims or domesticated animals were there to provide opportunity for the powerful to exert their power. (Salisbury, *Animals*, 52-54)

The importance of the stronger animals explains why animals such as the lion, the wolf, and the fox were much more popular than others. Not only were these animals used more often in beast fables and beast tales, but also the roles that they played were usually bigger or more important than that of the weaker animals, such as the hen, cock, and lamb. This is also the case in the Reynard cycle. In this cycle, the lion, the wolf and the fox appear in several of the stories, and their roles are much more significant than the roles of, for instance, the cock, and the hens.

The Fox and Medieval Literature

The animal that has played an important role in many beast fables, and beast tales as well, is the fox. One of the reasons for the animal's popularity can be traced back to the role that the

fox plays in the *Roman de Renart*. This cycle of texts, which all feature the fox Reynard, was so immensely popular that they were translated into many different languages. And, as already mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the stories were a great source of information and inspiration for many poets and writers of beast fables and beast tales. In addition, the fox belongs to the predators, which, as already explained above, were used a lot more in beast fables and tales. The most popular animal was, in fact, the lion. The lion has always been portrayed as a noble animal, and in some stories, such as the *Roman de Renart*, even as a king. Usually lions were represented as the ‘good guys,’ to whom good and noble human qualities and characteristics were ascribed: “Animals that were portrayed as models for ideal human behavior (like lions) became more valued and respected.” (Salisbury, *Animals*, 49) The fox can be found in third place, just behind the wolf: “The next most popular animal in medieval animal exemplar literature as a whole was the fox. [...] The fox, as a predator, represented someone of high social status, though not as powerful as lions or wolves.” (Salisbury, *Animals*, 53-54) There are several other reasons why the fox was such a popular animal in literature. Most of these reasons can probably be traced back to the animal’s habits in real life. Foxes are not known to be social animals; they mostly live alone or in very small groups. It is said that they are very opportunistic animals that feed on almost anything. They look for the weaknesses in their prey and attack accordingly. They generally do not rely on their own strength and speed, but use their opponents’ disadvantages against them. For example, they are able to blend into their natural surroundings, which means that they can stay completely still so that their prey cannot hear or see them before the attack. Finally, their hearing is extremely good: foxes hear their prey long before they are noticed. All these aspects give foxes a great advantage in the hunting game. This kind of behaviour is probably the most logical explanation why the fox is generally described as being sly, deceitful, and somewhat cunning in most beast fables and tales.

The roles that the fox usually plays in literature are either that of a demonic being or that of a deceiver, as will be discussed in more detail later on. The characteristics that go with these roles are overall much the same. He is usually associated with negative human characteristics, such as lying and deceitfulness. The fox is mostly described as “the incarnation of cunning, slyness, perfidy, and even wickedness.” (Uther, 133) This image was already used in Biblical times as well. In Luke 13.32, Christ says: “Go ye, and tell, that fox, Behold, I cast out devils” (Holy Bible). The word “fox” here is used for Herod I, king of Judea. Herod was a very evil person who was responsible for the Massacre of the Innocents. This is also a reason why the fox so often plays the role of the devil in literature, as well as that of a heretic, which is a role that in a Christian country such as England was almost just as bad. According to Mortimer J. Donovan, “the fox is the devil and heretic whenever he stands for man intentionally deceiving another, as Herod deceived Christ.” (500) However, if this definition is applied, the fox represents the devil in almost all animal tales, because the fox almost always deceives another animal in one way or another.

Other roles that are sometimes ascribed to the fox are those of a preacher or priest. The fox in the role of a preacher or a priest can be found in the tale of *The Fox and the Wolf*. Of course, the fox is portrayed in the role of a preacher/priest when he convinces the wolf that he can descend to Paradise after confessing all of his sins to him. However, the fox takes on the role of a preacher even before the wolf comes into the story. Sacvan Bercovitch states that Reynard acts like a preacher when he discovers his mistake at the bottom of the well:

This ‘swikele ginne’ (l. 86) in which he now finds himself, Reneuard penitentially acknowledges, comes as divine reprisal for his sinfulness: ‘Wo worpe,’ quap þe vox, ‘lust and wille, / Þat he can meþe to his mete!’ Medieval preachers frequently illustrate their instruction with instances of their own former errors [...] with the arrival of the wolf the religious allusions develop and multiply, but, in a brilliant satiric *tour de*

force, they now illuminate the discrepancy between clerical rhetoric and the evil intentions of the fox-priest. (290)

It seems as though foxes were always portrayed as bad characters, but this is not the case. There are also tales in which the fox is portrayed as a good animal, who cares for others and does not lie and cheat. An example of the fox in such a role is Marie de France's *Recueil*. In this beast fable, the fox is portrayed as a victim instead of a victimizer: "Marie simply replaces the negative symbolism of the fox by its opposite, and instead of following the tradition of the cunning fox, merely builds up another representation, that of the victimized fox." (Amer, 12) However, the beast fables and beast tales which portray the fox in a positive manner are very scarce in comparison to those that portray him in a negative way.

Although the fox is usually associated with cunning and deceit, he is usually treated with respect in literature, because he generally manages to come across as being smart and resourceful, which are characteristics to admire. Of course, these features can also be found in a real fox when he goes hunting. He uses his brain instead of his strength and speed, and discovers his prey's weakness in order to use that against him: "Foxes in fact and fable were known for their cunning. When they were hunted, foxes could outwit many dogs" (Salisbury *Animals*, 54). In reality, a fox is a really clever animal, because he will double back on his own trace, or he will try and fuse into his surroundings in order to confuse his enemy as well as his preys. A fox is maybe a reminder for human beings to be creative when they have set their minds to something, because when the fox knows that he cannot rely on his speed or strength to catch his prey, he uses other resources like his excellent hearing or his ability to blend into his natural surroundings to get what he wants. So, on the one hand, the fox is condemned in literature for his slyness and deceitfulness, but at the same time, he is admired for these same aspects. However, there are aspects ascribed to the fox, which in my opinion do not correspond with reality. I cannot think of a logical explanation for attributing

characteristics, such as being conniving, to an animal such as the fox, or to any other animal for that matter.

Condemnation and admiration can also be found in the beast tales that were discussed in previous sections of this dissertation. No matter what the fox has done, he still gets away with it. Of course, he is condemned by the other animals in the tales, yet not one author of these tales lets him get caught, or even punished for the crimes that he has committed. In Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*, Daun Russell is not able to eat Chauntecleer as he had intended, but he is also not caught for his actions. Similarly, in *The Fox and the Wolf*, Reynard tricks Sigrim into the well, for which the wolf is badly beaten in the end, whereas the fox can just go on his way without even getting so much as a scratch on him. However, the best example of this can be found in Caxton's *Historye of Reynart the Foxe*. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the whole court of king Noble, at one point, knows what foul deeds Reynard has done to others. But every time they want to punish him, he comes up with another trick and they buy into it. In the end, he is even rewarded for killing the wolf, and gets appointed as one of the most honoured subjects of the court. And also, in all these tales, the fox is portrayed as being very smart and resourceful. He uses logical thinking in order to think of tricks and speeches by which the other animals will be deceived and by which they are made gullible into believing and trusting him. The only tale in which he comes across as being stupid in the end is, again, Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*. Chauntecleer is able to trick him in opening his mouth which gives the cock the opportunity to get away. So in all these tales, on the one hand, the fox is hated and feared for his slyness and deceitfulness by his fellow characters, but on the other hand, in all these tales he is admired as well, because all the different authors let him get away with all the foul deeds that he has done to others.

The Fox and Modern Literature

The fox was widely used in literature during the Middle Ages. And this popularity has not changed very much since then. Even in our modern times, the fox is a favoured character in literature and animated movies. One of the most popular stories that portrays the fox as being a cunning and deceitful creature is *The Gingerbread Man* (the author is unknown), in which the gingerbread man is able to outrun and outsmart everyone who wants to eat him. Only the fox is able to trick the gingerbread man into trusting him and finally eats him. Another tale involving a cunning and conniving fox is *Chicken Licken* (also from an unknown author). In this tale, Chicken Licken wants to go into the forest but decides against it after an acorn falls onto his head. He warns everyone that he meets not to go in, and everybody believes him and joins him on his journey towards the king until they meet the fox. The fox convinces them all that the forest is safe and they follow him. He leads them into his lair, where they are all eaten by him and his cubs.

The fox also made an appearance in animated films. One of the popular ones is *Robin Hood*, from Walt Disney Classics. In this film, the role of Robin Hood is played by a fox. Robin Hood is, of course, the ‘good guy’, who defends the poor and weak and even steals for them from the rich. Even so, he still displays the generally acknowledged characteristics of a fox from the Middle Ages. He does not hesitate to lie, cheat, and deceive King John, represented by a female lion in the film and the ultimate ‘bad guy’ here. The difference is that the fox does not benefit from his trickery, which nevertheless comes in very handy in this film. Evidently the characteristics that were ascribed to the fox during the Middle Ages are not so negative, as long as they are put to good use.

I believe that smart thinking and resourcefulness that characterized the fox during the Middle Ages are still popular today because they are very admirable qualities in a person when they are used for good causes. In medieval literature, the fox exploits his resourcefulness for egotistical purposes and thus often hurts others. In the case of the *Robin*

Hood film, on the other hand, the same characteristics ascribed to the same animal are perceived as being good because other people benefit from them.

To conclude this section, we can say that the fox played a very important role in beast fables and beast tales, not only during the Middle Ages but also in our modern times.

Although the fox is occasionally a positive character, most stories present him as a sly, lying and deceitful character who is able to trick (almost) everybody.

Conclusion

Animals are important in the lives of human beings, not just nowadays mostly as our pets, but also during the Middle Ages when animals were used a lot more for labour, for their hides, and as suppliers of food. Although animals are different from human beings, they are thought to have certain characteristics in common with us. This is one of the reasons why animals are used a lot in literature, especially in the genres of the beast fable and beast tale. In these stories the animals are given human characteristics, such as the ability to speak. Furthermore, most of the time the beast fables and beast tales are used to satirize or judge certain people or societies. By using animal protagonists, authors could write what they wanted and still escape censure. A very good example of this is given in the analysis of the tale of *The Fox and the Wolf*. It seems to be a simple story about a fox and a wolf, but if looked at closely, it is a judgemental and satirical tale in which the church, confessors, sinners, and even friars are criticised.

Beast fables and tales are often mistaken for one another, mainly because in both types of texts animals play the roles of the protagonists. Furthermore, it is possible that both texts contain a moral lesson for their audience to learn. However, this last aspect is not compulsory for the genre of the beast tale, whereas it is a necessity for a beast fable. In fact, the beast tale is not as strictly bound to certain features as the beast fable is. A beast tale can be much longer than a beast fable, it can contain multiple actions whereas only one can occur in a beast fable, and humans can play more significant roles in beast tales than in beast fables. I discussed these different characteristics in four beast tales that are generally labelled as beast fables, namely *The Fox and the Wolf*, Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* and two tales from Caxton's *Historye of Reynart the Foxe*. All these tales have animal protagonists, while *The Fox and the Wolf* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale* also contain a moral. At the same time, both *The Fox and the Wolf* and Chaucer's tale are far too long to be beast fables, they present several actions, and humans play a significant part in the end. Likewise, *Howe the cocke complayned*

on *Reynart* and *How Ysegrim the wulf complayned agayn on the foxe*, the two tales from the *Historye of Reynart the Foxe*, are relatively short, relate one action and do not feature humans. Nevertheless, both tales lack a moral, which is a necessity for a beast fable and should therefore be classified as beast tales rather than beast fables.

It is not a specific sort of animal that appears in literature. Almost all animals have played a part, one time or another. This is very obvious in the Reynard cycle, where all sorts of animals play a role, such as the lion, wolf, fox, cat, hen, cock, hare, bear, etc. However, animals belonging to the group of predators are more commonly used than those belonging to the group of hunted animals. One of these popular animals in literature is the fox. In the Middle Ages this animal was already portrayed as cunning, sly, lying and a deceitful trickster. And this image has not exactly changed in modern times. Stories such as *Chicken Licken*, and *The Gingerbread Man* portray the fox in similar terms. Even in the Disney version of *Robin Hood*, where the fox plays the role of good guy Robin, the characteristics are much the same. However, it remains difficult to establish where this image originates. It is probably based on the fox's hunting techniques, as well his ability to escape his enemies.

Stories such as *The Fox and the Wolf* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale* can be seen as a tool for their authors as well as for their audience because they were used to express criticism. Nowadays, countries are ruled more democratically, which means that people are allowed to express their opinions openly via other sources than literature per se. Therefore beast tales and fables have lost some of their power. Still, there is no doubt that these genres still play important roles today. Some of us have heard them as orally told folktales, read them in books, or have seen them in the form of animated films, such as Disney's *Robin Hood*. Even though the manner in which people come into contact with these stories is insignificant, the large number of tales in which animals play a role makes it very obvious that they were, and still are, important in people's lives.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

- Caxton, William. *Historye of Reynart the Foxe*. Ed. William J. Thoms. London, 1481.
<<http://books.google.nl/>>
- . *The History of Reynard the Fox*. Ed. D.B. Sands. Cambridge: Havard University Press, 1960.
- . *The History of Reynard the Fox*. Ed. N.F. Blake. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. Trans. Nevill Coghill. London, Penguin Books Ltd., 1951.
- . *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. Ed. Kenneth Sisam. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927.
- Pearsall, Derek. ed., *Chaucer to Spenser: An Anthology of Writings in English 1375-1575*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999.
- Robin Hood*. Dir. Walt Disney Home Entertainment. DVD. Disney Enterprises, Inc., 2002
- The Fox and the Wolf*. Treharne 332-337.
- Treharne, Elaine. ed., *Old and Middle English c.890 – c.1400: An Anthology*, 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2004.

Secondary Sources:

- Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7th edn. Orlando: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1985.
- Amer, Sahar. *A Fox Is Not Always a Fox! Or How Not to Be a Renart in Marie de France's "Fables"*. *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 51.1 (1997): 9-20
<<http://links.jstor.org/>>
- Bercovitch, Sacvan. *Clerical Satire in þe Vox and þe Wolf*. *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 65 (1966): 287-294.
- Bishop, Ian. *The Nun's Priest's Tale and the Liberal Arts*. *The Review of English Studies* 30.119 (1979): 257-267 <<http://links.jstor.org/>>
- Blackham, H.J. *The Fable as Literature*. London: The Athlone Press Ltd., 1985.
- Blake, Norman Francis. *William Caxton's Reynard the Fox and his Dutch Original*. Manchester: The John Rylands Library, 1964.
- Blockmans, Wim and Peter Hoppenbrouwers. *Eeuwen des Onderscheids: Een Geschiedenis van Middeleeuws Europa*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2006.

- Bryan, W.F. and Germaine Dempster. ed., *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941.
- Donovan, Mortimer J. *The Moralite of the Nun's Priest's Tale*. *Germanic Philology* 55 (1953): 498-508.
- Dutton, Richard. *Volpone and Beast Fable: Early Modern Analogic Reading*. *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 67.3 (2004): 347-370. <<http://links.jstor.org/>>
- Finlayson, John. *Reading Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale: Mixed Genres and Multi-Layered Worlds of Illusion*. *English Studies* 86.6 (2005): 493-511.
- Freeborn, Dennis. *From Old English to Standard English*, 2nd edn. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1998.
- Henderson, Arnold Clayton. *Medieval Beasts and Modern Cages: The Making of Meaning in Fables and Bestiaries*. *PMLA* 97.1 (1982): 40-49 <<http://links.jstor.org/>>
- . *Animal Fables as Vehicles of Social Protest and Satire: Twelfth Century to Henryson. Third International Beast Epic, Fable and Fabliau Colloquium*. Ed. Jan Goossens and Timothy Sodmann. Münster: Böhlau Verlag Köln Wien, 1979. 160- 173.
- Holy Bible. Authorized King James Version. With notes and introduction by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Hornby, A.S. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. 6th edn. Ed. Sally Wehmeier. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Jacobs, Joseph. *Aesop's Fable*. Trans. George Fyler Townsend. New York: Burt Franklin, 1889. <<http://classiclitt.about.com/library/bl-etexts/gtowntsend/bl-gtowntsend-aesopfab-preface.htm>>
- Jusserand, J.J. *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages*. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1889.
- Lenaghan, R.T. *The Nun's Priest's Fable*. *PMLA* 78. 4 (1963): 300-307.
- Levy, Brian and Paul Wackers. *Reinardus: The Fox and Other Animals*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1993.
- McKnight, G.H. *The Middle English Vox and Wolf*. *PMLA* 23.3 (1908): 497-509 <<http://links.jstor.org/>>
- Mish, Charles C. *Reynard the Fox in the Seventeenth Century*. *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 17. 4 (1954): 327-344 <http://links.jstor.org/>
- Muscantine, Charles. *The Old French Fablieux*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Needler, Howard. *The Animal Fable Among Other Medieval Literary Genres*. *New Literary History* 22.2 (1991): 423-439 <<http://links.jstor.org/>>

- Narkiss, Doron. *The Fox, the Cock, and the Priest: Chaucer's Escape from Fable*. *Chaucer Review* 32.1 (1997): 46-63.
- Oerlemans, Onno. *The Seriousness of the Nun's Priest's Tale*. *The Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism* 26.3 (1992): 317-328.
- Patterson, Annabel. *Fables of Power: Aesopian Writing and Political History*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.
- Perry, B.E. *Fable. Studium Generale: Zeitschrift für die Einheit der Wissenschaft im Zusammenhang ihrer Begriffsbildungen und Forschungsmethoden* 12 (1959): 17-37.
- Rosenwein, Barbara H. *A Short History of the Middle Ages*. 2nd edn. Ontario: Broadview Press, 2005.
- Rowland, Beryl. *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1973.
- Salisbury, Joyce E. *Human Animals of Medieval Fables. Animals in the Middle Ages*. Ed. Nona C. Flores. New York : Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996. 49-65.
- . *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Shallers, A. Paul. *The "Nun's Priest's Tale": An Ironic Exemplum*. *English Literary History* 42.3 (1975): 319-337 <<http://links.jstor.org/>>
- Sisam, Kenneth. Ed., *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921.
- Thompson, Stith. *The Folktale*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.
- Tigges, Wim. *The Fox and the Wolf: A Study in Medieval Irony*. Companion To Early Middle English Literature. Ed. N.H.G.E. Veldhoen and H. Aertsen. Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1988.
- Trevelyan, George Macaulay. *England in the Age of Wycliffe*. London: The Ballantyne Press, 1909.
- Varty, Kenneth. *The Fox and the Wolf in the Well: The Metamorphoses of a Comic Motif. Reynard the Fox: Social Engagement and Cultural Metamorphoses in the Beast Epic from the Middle Ages to the Present*. Ed. Kenneth Varty. Oxford: Berhahn Books, 2000. 245-256.
- . *Reynard, Renart, Reinaert and Other Foxes in Medieval England: The Iconographic Evidence*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999.
- . *The Roman de Renart: A Guide to Scholarly Work*. London: The Scarecrow Press Inc., 1998.

Uther, Hans-Jörg. *The Fox in World Literature: Reflections on a 'Fictional Animal'*. *Asian Folklore Studies* 65 (2006): 133-160. <<http://www.nanzan-u.ac.jp/SHUBUNKEN/publications/afs/pdf/a1573.pdf>>

Watson, Charles S. *The Relationship of the "Monk's Tale" and the "Nun's Priest's Tale"*. *Studies in Short Fiction*. 1.4 (1964): 277-288.

Wheatley, Edward. *Mastering Aesop: Medieval Education, Chaucer, and his Followers*. Gainesville: University Press, 2000.

Ziolkowski, Jan M. *Talking Animals: Medieval Latin Beast Poetry, 750-1150*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.

