

Thomas Hinton

Rewriting *Renart*: Medieval obscenity for modern children

The *Roman de Renart*, a twelfth- and thirteenth-century collection of short narratives featuring the tricks and exploits of Renart the fox, has a substantial legacy in modern culture, with its titular hero having become part of the canon of children's literature in French.¹ The material's co-option into the institution of *patrimoine* is signalled by its inclusion on the French educational curriculum at various levels from CP (six years old) up to 5^{ème} (twelve years old). Similarly, a 2003 CD recording of seventeen Renart tales narrated by the actor Jean Rochefort advertises itself as “recommandé par toute la presse pédagogique” [recommended by educational publishers], with one reviewer describing the *Renart* as “cet incontournable oeuvre destinée à la jeunesse” [that essential work written for children].² Yet this privileged position within the sphere of educational literature sits rather awkwardly for any medievalist familiar with the original narratives. The medieval *Renart* is a transgressive, dangerous beast of a text, which revels in the immorality of its anti-hero. It portrays a world where superior intelligence allows characters to manipulate and exploit others, and where good intentions seldom go unpunished. A number of the narratives (known individually as *branches*) revolve around the rape by Renart of the wolf Hersent, wife of his uncle, recurring antagonist and favourite victim Ysengrin. One branch narrates the event itself, whilst others stage trial scenes in which Ysengrin, the king (a lion named Noble) and others attempt to bring Renart to justice. The incorporation of the *Roman de Renart* into the heart of the French cultural establishment can therefore feel a little like one more of the fox's tricks.

The misfit between the medieval and modern Renart made it imperative to reshape the literary material if it were to serve as children's literature. This article focuses on what might be considered the founding act of this process of adaptation, a translation of the text into modern French by the medievalist Paulin Paris

1 All quotations of the *Renart* are taken from the partial and accessible edition by Dufournet and Méline (1985, 2 vols) unless specified otherwise, and formulated as branch number (in Roman) followed by line numbers (in Arabic). References to branch numbers and titles use the terminology of Varty (1988–1991, I, ll. 7–12).

2 Review from *L'Enseignement*, cited at <https://www.fremeaux.com/index.php?page=shop.product_details&category_id=10&flypage=shop.flypage&product_id=666&option=com_virtuemart>.

in 1861. It is worth noting that this first popularization for modern audiences of *Renart* is also part of the early story of the establishment of Medieval Studies as a legitimate academic discipline: Paulin Paris was appointed the inaugural professor of medieval literature at the Collège de France in 1853, and his publication record embraces editions of and scholarship on original texts alongside modernizations like his *Renart*. There is thus, at the inception of Medieval Studies as a discipline, a to-ing and fro-ing between the amateur and the professional, the popular and the institutional (Amoss 1993; Biu 2007). Indeed, Paris's *Renart* expresses this duality; the full title gives a sense of the work's mixed scope and purpose: *Les Aventures de maître Renart et d'Ysengrin son compère, mises en nouveau langage, racontées dans un nouvel ordre et suivies de nouvelles recherches sur le roman de Renart* (Paris 1861) [*The Adventures of master Renart and of his companion Ysengrin, put into new language, told in a new order, and followed by new research on the Roman de Renart*]. The main body of the book is a linguistic and structural reworking of the original, followed by "new research", a contribution to mid-nineteenth-century scholarship on the medieval material.

For the reasons outlined above, the modern transmission of the *Renart* represents an attractive case study for tracing the workings of adaptation at multiple, simultaneous levels. As a borderline case, whose content would not on the face of it appear ideally suited for institutionalization, it confronts adapters and readers with questions about what may be gained and lost in the process, and what values we might attach to the sometimes-conflicting dynamics involved. This study therefore takes up questions germane to those influentially explored by Jane Taylor in a series of illuminating analyses on the early modern rewriting of medieval Arthurian romance (notably Taylor 2014). Specifically, I argue that adaptation leaves behind a remainder, an unruly element that refuses co-option and whose latent potential to disrupt can never be eradicated fully. My use of the term "remainder" here is inspired by Jean-Jacques Lecercle's (1990) conception of grammar in *The Violence of Language*. Lecercle contends that "rules of grammar are comparable not to the laws of physics, but rather to frontiers [...] There is no chaos out there, only parts of language that are no longer or not yet acceptable – but that are potentially acceptable" (28). The remainder is that language which is excluded by the rules of linguistic correctness; like the barbarians at the gates, it has the potential to burst into discourse and destabilize the distinctions between "relevant" and "irrelevant" language through which grammar is constituted. Lecercle views this remainder as potentially the most creative part of language use, suggesting that it "emerges in nonsensical and poetic texts, in the illuminations of mystics and the delirium of logophiliacs or mental patients" (6).

Numerous scholars of the *Renart* have noted its delirious or subversive attitude to the authority of institutions, anchored in questions of language mastery.

Thus, in the phrasing of James Simpson (1996, 14), “Where one strand in the ‘official culture’ of the Middle Ages built cathedrals as an expression of a divine order, the *Renart* piled up a tower of Babel.” What makes the *Renart* especially interesting with regard to these questions is that its modern legacy places it at the meeting-point between at least three simultaneous forms of institutionalization, each with its own parameters and counter-currents. The medieval narratives themselves appeared in the context of a general coming-into-being of French as a legitimate language of culture in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. As Keith Busby (2002, I: 226) notes, “the *matière de Renart* has popular-oral as well as learned-written origins”, and the narratives frequently display an acute awareness of their mixed vernacular and learned inheritance, as well as revelling in the vexed relationship between their scurrilous subject-matter and the inherent respectability which medieval writing could command.

The primary material thus already bears a conflicted relationship to cultural authority. Its mediation into modernity then stages a repeat performance – along different lines – of the same struggle to define a legitimate place at the table of culture. Paris’s publication strategy, as exemplified in his *Aventures de maître Renart*, speaks of a desire both to make the literature of the past available to an educated general public and to establish its legitimacy as an object of scholarly endeavour. On this second point, his very appointment as the first Professor of Medieval Literature at the Collège de France demonstrates changing conceptions of what counts as an academic discipline; the literature of Europe’s past was beginning to storm the bastion of academia, an advance party for the intellectual legitimisation of literature in general. The second process of institutionalization involved in the transmission of the *Renart* material, then, is the incorporation of past cultural materials into the cultural present. That this is not a straightforward teleological narrative is indicated by the ongoing culture wars today around what constitutes worthwhile study, with Medieval Studies often finding itself cast as the archetypal form of “useless knowledge”, a luxury indulgence needing to be sacrificed in times of famine.³

The third type of institutionalization that I will consider here concerns less the *Renart* material in itself than its intended use: as a stepping-stone in the enculturation of children. Whilst the *Renart* has been integrated into French children’s literature, the originals were written for adult consumption, with themes and storylines (most notably the rape of Hersent) that it is hard to see as a good fit for a didactic goal. Successive adaptors of the material for children

³ See for instance Dinshaw (1999, 173–182) on perceptions of Medieval Studies in the sphere of US politics.

have therefore had to decide how to deal with this aspect of the medieval narratives. As Lecercle suggests, suppression of the remainder can never be absolute, all the more so when working with an original text whose hero's exploits invite the reader to "side with chaos against order" (Sunderland 2010, 174 n. 123). Moreover, there is reason to think that adaptations destined for children may generate an especially potent remainder, in that element that the adaptor cannot control: the child's own response. Reviewing Lecercle's book, linguists Richard Ely and Jean Berko Gleason (1992, 404) suggest that "children's use of language comes closer to Lecercle's notion of the 'remainder' than some might wish. Children have a disposition to treat language as a playground on which a variety of sometimes pleasant, sometimes terrifying, experiences unfold." Children's literature can choose to call on either side of this "unspoken struggle" between "language proper" and the disruptive remainder. In examining adaptations that treat the *Renart* as an "*oeuvre de jeunesse*", we therefore find ourselves having to account for a conflict between two institutionalizing aims: the taming of the disruptive source material into something that accords with conventional ideas of children's literature is likely to come into conflict with ideals of authentic transmission which legitimate the adaptation as part of a recognized textual tradition.

The three processes I have outlined above can be usefully brought together under the heading of translation: interlingual translation of the medieval material from Latin to French, along with cultural translation of popular tales into written culture; translation of the past into the present; and translation of adult themes into the language of children's literature. The benefit of bringing the different strands of analysis together like this is to underline their commonalities and interactions. It also allows the *Renart* tradition to stand as a case study for broader considerations about the work of translation, adaptation and cultural communication in general – its mechanisms, limitations, and compromises.

Translatio reinardi

A logical place to start when considering the *Renart* tradition from a translational perspective is what the medieval narratives themselves have to say about their own conception. Textual repetition, or *réécriture* as Jean Scheidegger (1989, esp. 63–116) terms it, is the lifeblood of the corpus, so we might expect some discussion of the process of adaptation. And yet on the matter of origins, the tales confront us with a palpable silence: given a cultural context in which translation claims often operated as a means of authorial self-affirmation, it is striking that the French texts refuse to acknowledge their own Latin antecedents.

Indeed, despite the clear genealogy linking the *Renart* to a pre-existing tradition of Latin beast poetry (with the *Ysengrimus* in particular providing the names of the two main protagonists) it is notable that none of the branches deign to avail themselves of the “translated source” motif found so widely in twelfth- and thirteenth-century literature. They prefer instead to open *in medias res* with Renart slinking through the landscape, or by insisting on oral performance (“Se or vos voliez taisir, / Seignor, ja poriez oïr”, IX, ll. 1–2 [If you will be quiet, lords, you will hear]) or oral provenance (“Celui oï conter le conte / Qui tos les conteors sormonte / Qui soient de ci jusqu’en Puille”, X, ll. 9–11 [I heard the tale told by he who surpasses all other storytellers from here to Puglia]). If, as Jan Ziolkowski (1993, 6) posits with reference to its Latin representatives, medieval beast narrative is informed at once by a literate tradition of schoolroom exercises and a vernacular tradition of oral storytelling whose imbrication is too subtle to disentangle, these narratorial interventions appear designed to foreground the oral component at the expense of any mention of writing.⁴ Significantly, even the Biblical tale of Balaam’s donkey (Numbers 22: 20–35) is staged as a fiction of orality:

Car ce content nostre voisin
 Que une anesse parla ja
 Que .I. prophete chevaucha.
 Balaam l’oï apeler,
 Por ce le sai ici nomer. (Bianciotto 2005, episode 1, ll. 168–172)

[Our neighbours tell that a donkey ridden by a prophet once spoke. I heard him called Balaam; this is why I know how to name him here.]

This aspect of the *Roman de Renart* is rather paradoxical: that a text with so much to say about writing – about the precarious authority of the sacred Word – should have so little to say about writing. The speaking body acts, I would suggest, as a proxy, a scapegoat for text-based authority; and the many mutilated animal bodies found in the *Renart* tales function as a kind of translation of the inability of written authority to impose its discipline fully upon autonomous subjects. As Simpson (1996, 204) argues:

⁴ The one exception is the mention of a manuscript, identified as “Aucupre”, as the source for the account of Renart’s creation by Eve in branch XXIV. The fact that this alternative account of Genesis is apocryphal in both sacred and secular senses leaves this mention of the written “letre” reading more like a subversion of than an appeal to the authority of writing. On this branch, see Levy (2010–2011).

The *Renart* [...] takes the despised body and places it centre-stage as an object of uncertainty that can no longer be confidently used to ground any sort of representational or political system: one cannot speak from the body about a hierarchy of the non-bodily over the bodily.

The diegetic world of the *Renart* is one without an authoritative ground, one in which “wisdom and folly are frequently indistinguishable” (Simpson 1996, 204). Emblematic of this instability – which the text’s kaleidoscope of discourses suggests can be brought out in any utterance – is the frequent appearance in these narratives of the proverb, a figure of speech that, like the animal tales themselves, is found in both learned and lay moral traditions. The proverb thus bridges the divide between these two categories, even as it is partly constitutive of the category of learned culture which relies on a range of rhetorical strategies to define and valorize itself against its abjected Other (*illiteratus*). The potential to short-circuit such a crucial classificatory division becomes a part of the proverb’s functional charge, one which exceeds its strategic deployment in the production of cultural norms. The proverb belongs strictly to neither learned nor lay camp, and thus in its indeterminacy forms a natural association with Renart, the fox whose creation (as recounted in branch XXIV, the “Naissance”) is entirely surplus to the requirements of the domestic/wild animal binary embodied in that tale by the dog (brought into being by Adam) and the wolf (created by Eve).⁵

The narrator of “Le Puits” exploits the ambivalence of proverbial wisdom in a glorious piece of circular reasoning that exemplifies the thorough-going hermeneutic suspicion of the text: “Si me selt em por fol tenir, / Mes j’ai oï dire en escole: / De fol ome sage parole” (IV, ll. 14–16) [I have often been considered foolish, but I have heard tell in school that wise words come from foolish men]. The legitimacy of formal education derives in large part from the recognition of its professional status, in opposition to other ways of learning that bypass the institutional; amongst other things, the power to control the distinction between “fol” and “sage” would appear crucial to any such project. The “wisdom of fools” trope thus always has the potential to threaten the stability of educational discipline, by its introduction of the possibility that knowledge might be attained through unconventional, unprescribed (heretical?) means. In this prologue, the

5 My argument here is indebted to Simpson’s (1996, 28) reading of this episode: “*La Création* argues that woman creates trouble and so must be controlled, but then there is the fox, an apparition that confounds and dissolves the attempt to create a narrative taxonomy organised around the binary oppositions of wild and tame, masculine and feminine. In spite of itself, the branch reveals how the unfixated element, having at its disposal a multitude of positional strategies, can trouble the system of natural oppositions.”

content of the narrator's appeal to the lesson overheard in "escole" (from a teacher or from a pupil?) – that supposed fools can speak wisdom – undermines its structural grounding in the authority of institutional education.

There are striking points of contact between the Renardian destabilizing of the authoritative grounding of the utterance and recent attempts in translation theory to challenge the primacy generally accorded to the "original", with the translational act viewed as a secondary mediation. Emily Apter (2005, 160), examining the phenomenon of so-called "pseudotranslation" (self-avowed "translations" that correspond to no specific source text), asks: "if a translation is not a form of textual predicate, indexically pointing to a primary text, then what is it?" This question is already a familiar one to medievalists accustomed to dealing with prologues that refer to a book from which the author claims to have *translaté* his text. Recent decades have seen a move away from attempts at source identification towards a recognition of the translation-claim's strategic and rhetorical function, regardless of its truth-value. To Apter's question, a medievalist might be inclined to answer that translation is a mode of lending authority to the act of composition. But pushing further through the *Renart*'s cynical take on textual authority, an additional answer might be that translation is the experience that meaning is produced through an active engagement with another speaking instance; that the meaning of an utterance (and, *a fortiori*, of a text) thus produced is only ever provisionally stable, always threatened by the return of those elements discarded in the process of meaning-construction; that "every choice to speak one way is a choice not to speak otherwise; every utterance is not only dialogized internally but haunted by its other" (Stein 2007, 189). In translation, the wisdom of sages can sound like folly; in the mouth of a fox, the *bestise* of *courtoisie* bares its teeth.

Paulin, Paula, and Maître Renart

Paulin Paris, one of the first translators of the *Roman de Renart* into modern French, has a better claim than most to be called a founding father of Medieval Studies. He was the first incumbent of a chair in Medieval Literature at the Collège de France (from 1853), an office in which he was later succeeded by his son Gaston. Paulin Paris's professional trajectory mirrors the accession of Medieval Studies to the inner circle of higher learning: whilst studying law, he published articles on Byron and medieval art in his spare time and translated Byron's complete works. He then worked his way up from a clerkship in the manuscript department of the Bibliothèque Royale to a position from which he could pursue the private study on medieval literature that was to lead to the mutual consecra-

tion of the subject as worthy of investigation and of his talents as a teacher and researcher. Paris's career thus led him from a Romantically-tinged amateur medievalism to a professional post and professorial chair.

Paris's translation of the *Renart* was published in 1861. It thus appeared at a time when the study of medieval French texts was just beginning to assert itself as a respectable professional endeavour. One is all the more tempted to speak of a coming-of-age when one glances at the opening pages of Paris's text. Via an untitled preface, the author addresses his grand-daughter Paula, reminding her of a conversation they had had two years previously, when she was five. Ignoring Paulin's repeated requests for her to respect the sanctity of the study into which she has burst ("laisse-moi" is repeated three times), Paula asks him to make her a book: "un livre à moi, comme *Lydie de Gersin*, les *Contes de fées*, les *Fables de la Fontaine*" (Paris 1861, iv) [a book of my own, like *Lydie de Gersin*, the *Fairy Tales*, La Fontaine's *Fables*]. It is worth pausing to consider what kind of horizon of expectation Paris is implicitly suggesting for his *Renart* reader. The immediately obvious connection is with La Fontaine. Indeed, the assimilation of *Renart* to a generic domain of animal fables dominated by the moralizing fables of La Fontaine is a key mechanism for their domestication into a form acceptable for approved transmission as *patrimoine*. Paula herself conflates the two traditions into one: "Maître Renart? oh! je le connois aussi celui-là. C'est lui qui a mangé le fromage au Corbeau; qui invita à dîner commère la Cigogne [...] Mais Ysengrin [...] je ne sais pas." (Paris 1861, iv) [Master Renart? Oh, I know him too! He's the one who ate the Crow's cheese, and who invited Dame Stork to dinner [...] But I don't know Ysengrin]. This reaction to Paulin's offer to initiate her into *Renart*'s escapades sets them up as a "safe" continuation of a morally improving textual tradition. Perrault's fairy tales, like the medieval texts edited in this period, had recently gained a measure of respectability as an academic topic through the work of the Grimm brothers, who had identified thematic and structural parallels with Greek and Latin fables (see Sudre 1974 [1893], 11). *Lydie de Gersin*, finally, is a pedagogical narrative first published in 1789 that was apparently still an automatic selection for a young girl's bookshelf in the second half of the nineteenth century. Like Paris's text, it opens with a young girl whose early experiences with books prompt the desire to read new books; thus the nineteenth-century reader might be able to agree with modern *Renart* scholars that textual engagement (whether through reading or writing) leads to its own inexhaustible proliferation. The rest of the narrative recounts how Lydie's mother harnesses this bibliophilia to perfect the behaviour of her daughter: her good and bad actions are written into a book at the end of each day and read aloud to the entire family the following lunchtime (*Lydie de Gersin* 1803 [1789]). The general tenor of Paris's selection (to which Paula adds her "grammaire") is

strongly educational, with a striking intermarriage of linguistic and moral education. The efforts of repetition and memorization required to master grammar (“j’apprends mes verbes” [I am learning my verbs], says Paula (Paris 1861, v)) echo the reiteration inherent in the daily exhibition of Lydie’s moral errors. Such repetition is presented as the stuff of human improvement, and the perfect adequation of the two is found in the rote learning of La Fontaine’s fables: “Tu sais par coeur maître Corbeau” (Paris 1861, iv) [You know the fable of Master Crow by heart], Paulin reminds his granddaughter.

In a similar manner, Théophile Gautier claimed to have learned to read with *Lydie de Gersin*; but here, an ambiguity creeps in, a sign of the potential for the receiver to resist or re-encode the textual message:

un jour de l’an le chevalier de Port de Guy [...] me fit cadeau d’un livre fort proprement relié et doré sur tranche, et me dit: “Garde-le pour l’année prochaine, puisque tu ne sais pas encore lire. – Je sais lire,” répondis-je, pâle de colère et bouffi d’orgueil. J’emportai rageusement le volume dans un coin, et je fis de tels efforts de volonté et d’intelligence que je le déchiffrai d’un bout à l’autre et que je racontai le sujet au chevalier à sa première visite. Ce livre, c’était *Lydie de Gersin*. Le sceau mystérieux qui fermait pour moi les bibliothèques était rompu. (Gautier 1874, 3)

[One New Year’s Day the knight of Port de Guy [...] presented me with a book beautifully bound with gilded edges, and told me: “Keep it for next year, since you don’t know how to read yet.” “I know how to read,” I replied, pale with anger and puffed up with pride. I angrily took the volume off to a corner, and I made such efforts of will and intelligence that I eventually deciphered it from start to finish, and was able to retell the story to the knight on his next visit. That book was *Lydie de Gersin*. The seal of mystery that had kept libraries from me had been broken.]

In Gautier’s account, we learn nothing of what *he* learned of the book’s content; he speaks only of its beauty, and of the effort of will that allowed him to exceed his adult interlocutor’s expectations. How he went about using the book to teach himself to read remains shrouded in mystery. Did *Lydie de Gersin* make young Théophile into the perfect son? Apparently not. On the contrary, the mention of mysterious and broken seals presents this feat of learning as an act of transgression, a different kind of coming-of-age: the library as Tree of Knowledge. Even *Lydie de Gersin* can generate a remainder, to the right kind of reader. Gautier goes on to suggest that children are precisely that kind of reader: “Deux choses m’ont toujours épouvanté, c’est qu’un enfant apprit à parler et à lire; avec ces deux clefs qui ouvrent tout, le reste n’est rien” (3) [Two things have always terrified me: that a child should learn to speak and to read. With these two keys that open everything, nothing else matters]. Books, for Lydie’s mother, are the tools with which to mould her daughter’s character; for Gautier, they are the child’s means of escape from the control of parents and society.

What kind of book will Paulin Paris offer to his granddaughter, then? The one we are reading, of course – full of stories of Renart the fox and Ysengrin the wolf, that entertained the children of the distant past:

[des histoires] qui ont amusé, il y a longtemps longtemps, des enfans, je ne dis pas plus sages, mais plus grands que toi.

– Pourquoi qu’elles ne les amusent plus maintenant?

– Oh! parce que celui qui a fait le livre ne parloit pas comme on parle aujourd’hui, et qu’on n’entendrait plus ce qu’il disoit. Mais vois-tu, mon enfant, je comprends un peu ce qu’il a voulu dire, et, pour te faire plaisir, je changerai les anciens mots qu’il écrivoit, pour en faire des histoires nouvelles que tout le monde pourra lire. (Paris 1861, iv–v)

[stories that were enjoyed long, long ago by children – I won’t say better behaved, but older than you are now.

– Why don’t children enjoy them anymore?

– Oh, because the person who made the book did not speak as we do today, so no one would be able to understand what he said. But you see, my child, I have some understanding of what he meant, and in order to please you I will change the ancient words that he used, in order to make new stories that everyone will be able to read.]

Paris perceives the need to translate the medieval text to make it fit for the purposes of a nineteenth-century author and his audience; and he proposes himself as the mediator who will accomplish this task, one who “comprend un peu ce qu’il [the medieval author] a voulu dire” [understands a little what the author meant]. Paris’s definition of translation (changing “les anciens mots [...] pour en faire des histoires nouvelles” [the old words to make new stories of them]) predictably produces a text with significant divergences from the medieval material.

Indeed, the avowed intention to “faire des histoires nouvelles” is well accomplished: the often-rambling accumulation of events found in many *Renart* branches is here regularized into a series of “Aventures”, each concerning a single confrontation or deception. Episodes involving the same characters are arranged into mini sections: thus Tybert is Renart’s chief antagonist from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Adventure, presented as “les faits et gestes de maître Tybert le chat, héros digne de disputer à Renart le prix de la ruse et de la malice” (Paris 1861, 95) [the acts and deeds of Master Tybert the cat, a worthy challenger to Renart’s supremacy in cunning and malice]. A conviction that the judicial branches represented a later and more sophisticated development of the more fabular “trickster” adventure led Paris to organize his work into two “livres”: the first narrating tales that he saw as closely related to popular Aesopic tradition, the second entitled “Le Procès” and offering a window onto the medieval

court through the depiction of King Noble and his entourage.⁶ The adventures of Livre II are linked by characters' various attempts to have Renart answer for his crimes at the royal court. Paris's bipartite structure, which begins with a Prologue relating the divine creation of the fox and the wolf and ends with Renart's confession before execution (and eventual escape) shapes the material into a diegetic coherence not found in the medieval manuscripts.

Elsewhere, Paris appears to have worried that the repetitive nature of some of the material might not be to the taste of his contemporary readership. When he wishes to guide the reader's understanding of what she is about to read, Paris makes use of a mediatory voice he calls "Le Translateur", whom we encounter a number of times in the interstices of episodes. This voice's first appearance comes before the Third Adventure, to warn the reader that Renart's run-in with Noiret at the farm of Berton le Maire is strongly reminiscent of the story of Renart and Chantecler told in the Second Adventure:

C'est à mon avis, la même affaire différemment racontée, comme celà se voit toujours dès qu'il y a deux historiens plus ou moins oculaires. J'espère que la deuxième relation, apportée par Pierre de Saint-Cloud, vous amusera pour le moins autant que l'autre. Écoutez. (Paris 1861, 22)

[In my opinion these are the same events told differently, as one always sees when there are two different more-or-less eyewitness accounts. I hope that you will enjoy the second narration, supplied by Pierre de Saint-Cloud, at least as much as you did the first. Now listen.]

The same logic is used to justify the inclusion of two episodes featuring Renart, Tybert, and an *andouille* sausage (the Seventeenth and Nineteenth Adventures); again, these are presented by the Translateur as competing accounts of the same incident:

La justice nous oblige à déclarer que l'aventure de l'*Andouille partagée* n'est pas racontée par tous les historiens à l'avantage de Tybert [...] Je ne veux être ici que le rapporteur. Ceux donc qui nous représentent Tybert comme la victime de Renart racontent l'histoire de l'*Andouille* comme vous allez voir. (Paris 1861, 112–113)

[It is only fair to acknowledge that the 'shared *andouille*' adventure is not told to Tybert's advantage by all historians [...] I only wish to be the message-bearer. Those who claim that Tybert was Renart's victim tell the story of the *andouille* as follows.]

⁶ See Paris (1861, 177–181), for discussion of this at the start of Livre II: "*Le Procès de Renart va présenter un autre caractère que les aventures dont il devoit être l'expiation*" (177) [*The Trial of Renart* has a different feel to the adventures for which it is supposed to atone].

The Translateur intervenes again before the Tenth Adventure, to warn the reader that its representation of Primaut becoming a priest will recall Ysengrin's ordination as a monk in the Eighth Adventure; he also mentions a third iteration of this formula, with Tibert the character concerned, which he has decided to leave out of his text altogether: "Mais de [cette histoire] nous nous en tairons" (Paris 1861, 59) [but we will not speak of this story]. The selection of material to include, the order it is given, and the running commentary of the Translateur, allow Paris to adapt the medieval text to the norms of his readership, thereby becoming an "official interpreter" whose role is to "attempt when necessary to assimilate the sometimes perplexing otherness, the 'alterity', of [his source] into nicely comprehensible texts accessible to and reassuring for the readers of the [nineteenth century]".⁷

On the level of detail, one intriguing feature is the prominence afforded to proverbs, which are often italicized and flagged explicitly in the modern text:

Veez con est vert et floris!
 Ainsi m'aït Sains Esperis,
 Que moult volentiers m'i geüsse,
 Se je si grant besoing n'eüsse.
 Mais besoing fet vieille troter. (XVI, ll. 51–55)

[See how green it is and covered in flowers! By the Holy Spirit, I would have loved to lie there if I were not in such great need; but need makes the old wife trot.]

Mais les champs les plus verts, les fleurs les plus odorantes n'empêchent pas ce proverbe d'être vrai: *le besoin fait vieilles trotter*. (Paris 1861, 24)

[But the greenest fields, the sweetest-smelling flowers, cannot countermand the proverb: *need makes the old wife trot*.]

The explicit flagging of proverbs, combined with the breaking up of branches into episodes that each cover one single trick, works to bring out the parentage between the *Renart* material and the more expressly didactic *Fables de La Fontaine* that had been mooted in the translation's preface by Paula's conflation of the medieval hero with "Maître Renard" from the *Fables*.

Throughout, Paris's translation is guided by general unease with the obscenity and irreverence of the medieval text. A striking instance of this is provided in the episode of the "ordination" of the wolf Primaut. In the medieval *Renart*, Primaut finds himself in a church with our anti-hero, consuming the bread, meat

⁷ I borrow this formulation from Taylor (2014, 13), who uses it to describe the role of early modern rewriters of Arthurian romance like Pierre Sala. As Taylor notes, the term "official interpreter" derives from Certeau (2006).

and wine left there by the priest. Drunk on wine, Primaute expresses the desire to sing mass, and Renart convinces him that he must first be ordained priest; he pisses in a basin whilst the wolf is not looking and then pours this “water” over his head before tonsuring him. Paris’s Tenth Adventure follows this narrative up to the point when Primaute agrees to be ordained by Renart; at this point, Renart goes to fetch water from the baptismal font, and uses this to tonsure the wolf. The moral smoothing undertaken in such attenuation of the *Renart*’s obscenities is paralleled by the standardization of the language according to nineteenth-century standards; translation operates simultaneously at the level of language and of morality, to keep the text on the right side of acceptability.

It will come as no surprise, then, that a key episode of the Renart saga, the rape of Hersent, is treated by Paris with extreme caution. As we have seen, he organized the adventures into two livres, with the second focusing on the animals’ attempts to make Renart answer for his crimes, amongst which the rape occupies a much-narrated pride of place. The final adventure of “livre premier”, which Paris (1861, 168) titled “De la nouvelle infortune arrivée à dame Hersent, et de la résolution d’Ysengrin d’aller porter plainte à la cour du Roi” [Of the further misfortune suffered by Dame Hersent, and of Ysengrin’s decision to make a complaint at the king’s court], sets up the judicial conflicts of the second “livre” like the final lines of a chapter in a Victorian serialized novel. Meanwhile, an earlier episode in which Renart and Hersent commit adultery – and which is narrated immediately before the rape in most *Renart* manuscripts – is titled “De l’arrivée de Renart chez dame Hersent durant l’absence d’Ysengrin, et comment la guerre prit commencement entre les deux barons” (Paris 1861, 122) [Of Renart’s arrival at Dame Hersent’s house whilst Ysengrin was away, and how the war between the two barons began]. This title, presenting the Renart-Hersent relationship as the root of the ongoing conflict between the fox and his uncle, is modelled on the phrasing of the twelve-line prologue to the medieval text, which announces:

Mes onques n’oïstes la guerre,
 Qui tant fu dure de grant fin,
 Entre Renart et Ysengrin
 [...]
 Or oëz le commencement
 Et de la noise et du content,
 Par qoi et por quel mesestance
 Fu entr’eus deus la desfiance. (II, ll. 10–12; 19–22)

[But you have never heard about the long and hard-fought war between Renart and Ysengrin [...]. Now listen to the origin of their discord and dispute, and what mishap caused the conflict between them.]

Within the episode itself, the narrator warns us (of the “aventure” he is about to relate) that “par ce commença la noise / Par mal pechié et par dyable / Vers Ysengrin le connestable” (II, ll. 1034–1036) [this is how, through sin and evil, his discord with Ysengrin the Constable began].

Paris’s decision to maintain the sexual politics between Renart, Ysengrin, and Hersent as the structural key of a narrative supposedly aimed at children speaks of an impulse toward fidelity, which is balanced by a consistent attempt to mitigate or euphemize the material. The first encounter between Renart and Hersent is thus rewritten in a courtly register, and reoriented toward discursive rather than sexual intercourse:

Renars en demaine grant joie
Et vient avant, si l’a baisiee.
Hersens a la cuisse haussiee,
Qui moult plaisoit itel atour.
Puis s’est Renars mis ou retour
Qui crient que Ysengrins ne viengne. (II, ll. 1114–1119)

[Renart is overjoyed and comes forward to kiss her. Hersent opened her thighs, taking pleasure in the exchange. Then Renart set off home, fearing that Ysengrin might arrive.]

Il s’approcha de dame Hersent, la pressa dans ses bras, et les nouveaux amans firent échange des promesses les plus tendres. Mais les longs propos d’amour n’étoient pas au goût de damp Renart; il parla bientôt de séparation et de la nécessité de prévenir le retour d’Ysengrin. (Paris 1861, 124)

[He approached Dame Hersent, took her in his arms, and the new lovers exchanged tender promises. But lengthy pillow talk was not to Sir Renart’s tastes; soon after, he talked of leaving and the need to plan for Ysengrin’s return.]

Paris’s account of the rape is similarly revisionist. In both versions, having chased Renart back to his den, Hersent suffers the indignity of becoming stuck in the entrance and is subjected to the fox’s mockery. Her medieval avatar is then raped by Renart just as her husband arrives on the scene, with the fox’s final rhetorical flourish being to deny the reality of what Ysengrin is witnessing – he is, he protests, merely trying to help release Hersent from her situation. For the benefit of his modern audience, Paris’s narrator elects to accept Renart’s version of events, ultimately portraying him as a gallant gentleman:

La pauvre Hersent, plus confuse qu’on ne sauroit dire, répondit en priant le méchant roux d’avoir compassion d’elle et de la tirer du mauvais pas où elle se trouvoit; Ysengrin arriva comme Renart essayoit en effet de lui porter secours. Quelle ne fut pas alors sa rage! (Paris 1861, 170)

[Poor Hersent, more embarrassed than one could say, responded by begging the cruel red-head to take pity on her and free her from the trouble she found herself in; Ysengrin arrived just as Renart was indeed trying to help her. How angry he was!]

As in the earlier episode of Primaut's ordination, Paris finds that the simplest solution is to adopt as narrative truth the false version of reality peddled by Renart.

Livre I ends with Ysengrin vowing to take the matter to Noble's court to obtain satisfaction. As we have seen, Livre II is titled "Le Procès" [The Trial] and opens on Hersent and her husband making good on their vow and accusing Renart before the king. Indeed, the various judicial branches from which Paris builds a good percentage of Livre II (I, Va and VI) narrate the rape of Hersent several times, and at length, as Ysengrin returns repeatedly to court to seek justice. Paris appears to have viewed the *duel judiciaire* between Renart and Ysengrin as the logical culmination of these appeals, and accordingly makes it the final confrontation of his Livre II. Renart's defeat thus appears as God's ultimate verdict on all the suffering he has inflicted on others throughout the book, a climactic reckoning intimated by Paris's cliff-hanger chapter title: "Du grand et memorable combat de damp Renart et de messire Ysengrin; et comment le jugement de Dieu donna gain de cause à qui avoit le droit" (Paris 1861, 312) [Of the great and memorable combat between Sir Renart and Sir Ysengrin; and how God's judgment gave victory to the one who was in the right]. Following his defeat, Renart manages to escape execution by entering holy orders, and (perhaps inspired by the epic model of the *moniage* as conclusion to and remediation for a life of action) Paris ends his text here, offering the reader a choice of endings for his tale. According to some, he spent the rest of his days in the abbey, fooling his fellow monks into believing his outwardly pious behaviour; others, however, claim that he soon grew bored with monachal life and escaped back to Maupertuis. A shift into the conditional here underlines the narrator's affected scepticism about his sources ("C'est ainsi qu'il auroit repris le chemin de Maupertuis et qu'après une longue absence il seroit rentré dans ses domaines" (Paris 1861, 320) [Thus it is said that he headed back to Maupertuis, returning to his lands after a long absence], a move that we have already seen him make when framing repetitive material as competing testimonies recounted by "témoins plus ou moins oculaires" [more or less eyewitnesses]. In the medieval manuscripts, by contrast, the *duel judiciaire* never appears as one of the closing branches. Even in the gamma family manuscripts, which order the material as a kind of biographical cycle, and where this episode appears as branch 26 of 31, it is followed in branch 27 by an episode in which Renart and Ysengrin come together with other characters to plant a field, whilst in branch 30 Ysengrin and Hersent

nurse Renart back to health after he has been mauled by the dog Morhout. The medieval *moniage Renart* thus has none of the finality lent the episode by Paris's structure, serving rather to highlight the circularity we have seen is constitutive of the medieval experience of reading *Renart*: the fox is not for ending.⁸

Paris's challenge, then, is to stay faithful to the central place of Hersent's rape in his conception of the judicial material without indulging the verbal violence and sexual crudeness of its medieval re-narrations. The answer lies in the methods we have already seen him employ above. Adventure 31 picks up directly from the end of the first Livre, with the wolves arriving at the court and immediately registering their accusation before the king. Here, the medieval text offers Paris a helping hand, since it deliberately constructs the language of the protagonists within a formal register of legal and courtly expression. The appeals to royal authority in both texts are therefore almost identical:

Vos feïstes le ban roial
 Que ja mariage par mal
 N'osast en freindre ne brasier:
 Renars ne vos velt tant prisier
 N'onques ne tint por contredit
 Ne vostre ban ne vostre dit.
 Renars est cil qui toz mals seme,
 Que m'a honi de ma feme.
 Renars ne dote mariage
 Ne parenté ne cosinnage;
 Il est pire que ne puis dire.
 Ne cuidiez mie, baux doz sire,
 Que jel die por li reter
 Ne por blame sor li jeter!
 Rien que je die n'est mençoigne:
 Veis ci Hersent qui tot temoigne. (V, ll. 319–334)

[You issued a royal decree that no one should ever be sold bold as to break the bonds of marriage; Renart holds you in low regard and has never taken your decree or your words seriously. Renart, the sower of all ills, has shamed me with my wife. Renart respects neither marriage nor kinship ties; he is worse than I can put into words. Do not think, dear sire, that I say this out of spite or to soil his reputation! None of what I say is a lie – see Hersent here, who will bear witness to everything.]

Vous aviez fait publier à son de trompes que nul à l'avenir ne fût si hardi que de violer la loi de mariage; Renart n'a pris souci de vos vœux ni de vos ordres: Renart, origine de tous les discorts, assemblage de tous les genres de malice, sans respect pour les liens d'amitié et de

⁸ The gamma family of manuscripts are Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 1579 (C) and Turin, Biblioteca Reale, cod. varia 151 (M). See Sunderland (2010, Ch. 4) for a reading of this version of *Renart* as a biographical cycle.

compéragé, m'a deshonoré dans la personne de ma chère femme. Et ne croyez pas, sire, qu'une aveugle pensée de haine et de rancune me conduise auprès de vous: la clameur que je porte à votre cour n'est hélas! que trop juste, et dame Hersent va l'appuyer de son témoignage. (Paris 1861, 184)

[You had it decreed to the sound of trumpets that no one in future should be so bold as to break the law of marriage; Renart disregarded your orders and your wishes. Renart, source of all discord, sum of all types of malice, has shamed me in the person of my wife, without respect for the ties of friendship or kinship. And do not think, sire, that I am brought to you by a blind hatred or desire for vengeance: alas! the grievance that I bring to your court is all too true, as Dame Hersent will bear witness.]

However, the similarity between these passages masks their very different effects on the reader. In the medieval text, the branch opens with Ysengrin remembering the rape, some time after the incident, and charging off to find Hersent in a fit of rage; the idea of petitioning the king is her suggestion, which allows her to deflect his anger back onto Renart. The explicit language and physical violence with which Ysengrin targets his wife, full of “hatred and desire for vengeance”, flags up the subsequent high register of his speech to Noble as a public performance:

Maintenant la va lendenjant:
 Del pié la fiert con s'il fust ivre.
 “Haï, fait il, pute chaitive,
 Pute vix orde et chaude d'ovre,
 Bien ai veüe tote l'ovre,
 Bien me set Renars acopir.
 Jei le vis sor vos braz cropir:
 Ne vos en poëz escondire.” (V, ll. 258–263)

[Immediately, he goes off to curse her; he kicks her as if he were drunk. “Ha,” says he, “you wretched whore! I saw everything, you dirty old sex-crazed whore! Renart certainly knows how to cuckold me. I saw him bent over you: you cannot deny it.”]

Moreover, over the course of their address to the king, Ysengrin, and Hersent struggle to maintain the decorum with which the appeal began and to suppress the violence of language, here generated by the sexual assault at the heart of the accusation. Hersent begins by claiming that “‘puis cele ore qui fui pucele, / M'ama Renars et porsivi” (V, ll. 336–337) [“Renart has loved and pursued me since I was a maiden”], invoking the familiar model of the courtly suitor, but in recounting the incident her register is destabilized by more concrete, physical language:

“Des q’a l’autrer en une fosse,
 Que j’estoie et crasse et grosse.
 Tant qu’il me vit en cel pertuis,
 Il sailli fors tres parmi l’uis,
 Et vint derers, si me honi
 Tant que li jeus li enbeli.” (V, ll. 345–350)

[“Until the other day when I was stuck in a hole, big and fat as I am. When he saw me in that hole, he came right out of the door and went behind me, and shamed me for as long as it pleased him.”]

Ysengrin similarly struggles to maintain an abstract register when describing the rape, telling Noble that “je les surpris a la montee” (V, l. 378) [“I caught them at it”] and relating that Renart had humiliated his children by telling them “que cox estoit lor pere, / Qu’il avoit foutue lor mere” (V, ll. 369–370) [that their father was a cuckold since he had fucked their mother]. Unsurprisingly, none of these more explicit formulations make their way into Paris’s text. He avoids Ysengrin’s initial verbal assault of his wife by having the petition follow immediately after the rape itself: “Ysengrin n’avoit pas perdu de temps pour se rendre à la Cour, en compagnie de madame Hersent” (Paris 1861, 183) [Ysengrin had wasted no time in coming to court along with Dame Hersent]. Where the medieval Hersent describes herself as “et crasse et grosse”, Paris’s version laments “mon embonpoint [qui] m’ôtoit la liberté de me dégager” (Paris 1861, 185) [“my plumpness prevented me from freeing myself”] and describes how “damp Renart put me frapper, m’outrager et m’accabler des injures les moins méritées” (Paris 1861, 185) [“Sir Renart was able to hit, outrage and insult me in the most unfair way”]. Ysengrin similarly lambasts Renart for “son odieuse conduite” [his despicable behaviour] and accuses him of calling his children “bâtards” and “fils d’abandonnée” [sons of a tramp]. Where the high register of the petition in the medieval text clashes comically with the lapses into crudeness the wolves seem unable to avoid, their counterparts in the nineteenth-century text maintain an impeccable formality throughout, despite the delicate nature of their grievance. Subsequent recollections of the rape in the judicial material of the medieval *Renart* (of which there are many) are similarly attenuated, though Paris at times shows a surprising keenness to preserve as much as possible of what he is suppressing (as we have seen above in his treatment of narrative repetition, often preferring to reinterpret rather than eliminate similar episodes). In adventure 43, which corresponds to material from Branch I, Renart confesses his past sins to his cousin Grimbert the badger. The medieval Renart recalls “que voirement l’a je fotue. / Or m’en repent, Dex! moie cope! / Meinte fois li bati la crope” (I, ll. 1034–1036) [“indeed, I did fuck her; Lord, now I repent, *mea culpa!* I smacked her arse over and over”]. Paris’s equivalent scene has him confess:

“elle me fut toujours excellente amie, et je n’eus jamais à me plaindre de ses cruautés. [...] J’en bats ma coulpe; c’est ma très-grande faute.” (Paris 1861, 244) [“She was always an excellent friend to me, and I never had cause to complain of cruelty at her hands [...] I confess my guilt, *mea maxima culpa!*”]. In this final aside, the exclamation “j’en bats ma coulpe” in Renart’s outwardly virtuous words contains a clear echo of the Old French “battre [sa] crope” and the “cope/crope” rhyme. The remainder lurks on the phonic surface of the words written by Paris, retaining a faint echo of the explicit language of the original.

These acts of censorship may make us uncomfortable about how much has been lost in translation in the modern *Renart* tradition. Indeed, Paris’s willingness to sneak transgressive echoes into his text suggests that he himself was not entirely comfortable with the changes he was making. Nevertheless, the interventions in his adaptation appear to have cast a long shadow on the popular transmission of the tales, as well as on some strands of academic discourse (Schenck 2005). Simpson (1996, 2) refers darkly to “bowdlerised collections of children’s stories”, noting also “that serious scholarly treatments are [not] entirely free of this tendency towards well-intentioned but ill-judged intervention”. As these comments suggest, the expurgation of the sexual and linguistic violence of the tales has become the norm in their modern adaptations into children’s literature. In 2002, Hatier released a modern translation in their “Oeuvres & thèmes” series aimed at secondary-age children, with each tale followed by a series of questions for readers to ponder, turning the *Renart* into a series of pedagogical exercises. For this volume a different solution is found to the uncomfortable question of how to treat the rape of Hersent – it is simply excluded from the text, a decision no doubt facilitated by the slimness of the volume, which has the effect of further strengthening the impression of the *Renart* as a proto-*Fables de la Fontaine*. As a result, none of the trial material is included either, barring a passing reference used to tee up the tale in which he escapes the death penalty:

Après un long procès, Renart est cependant parvenu à échapper à la justice royale et s’est réfugié dans son château de Maupertuis. Mais, après six mois de siège, il a finalement été capturé par Tardif le limaçon. (Amon 2002, 60)

[After a long trial, Renart nevertheless managed to evade royal justice and took refuge in his castle of Maupertuis. But after a siege of six months, he was finally captured by Tardif the snail.]

The trial is glossed over, relegated to four words in the paratextual summary, whilst its cause is not even evoked. We have seen how Paulin Paris restructures the material to fit the contours of La Fontaine’s fox fables, and the Hatier version follows his lead in this regard. Each of its individual “textes” relates a single ep-

isode. Textes 1 and 2 are taken from Branche III of the medieval tradition, but the middle part of that branch, “Ysengrin fait moine”, is not retained; textes 4 to 6 are all excerpted from Branche II. Meanwhile, the connection with La Fontaine is strengthened in two ways. The pedagogical dossier at the end of the episode involving the crow Tiecelein invites readers to compare it with “Le Corbeau et le Renard” from the *Fables*, reproduced for this purpose (Paris 1861, 59). A selection of “fiction animale” reprinted at the end of the book (Paris 1861, 108–111), which includes La Fontaine’s “L’Âne et le Chien”, further suggests a generic continuity between the two collections.

Conclusion

Scheidegger (1989, 389) argues that repetition and fragmentation are “partie intégrante et structurante de la matière renardienne” [an essential structural element of the Renardian corpus], noting further that “l’idée du progrès lui est étrangère” [the idea of progress is foreign to it]. Sunderland (2010, 139) similarly describes the elaboration of the corpus as “an open-ended, rhizomatic process” and the world which Renart’s actions create as “one of repetition, destruction and excess”. Whilst the medieval corpus thus promotes repetition as a motor for wanton, unbridled narrative proliferation, we saw above that in other contexts it can play a disciplinary role, as in the rote learning of La Fontaine’s *Fables* and in Lydie de Gersin’s morally improving retellings of her daily actions. In the “Nouvelle étude” section of his adaptation, Paulin Paris (1861, 323) offers a third perspective on repetition, as Paris-the-scholar worries about his ability to break new ground in the wake of “les savantes, ingénieuses ou profondes recherches” [the learned, ingenious and rigorous research] of his predecessors, declaring “je ne veux pas m’exposer à mal redire ce qui a déjà été bien dit” [I do not wish to risk restating badly what has already been said well]. Within a scholarly context, repetition is a flaw to be avoided. Paris reassures himself with the observation that “le sujet n’est pas épuisé: les questions d’origine ne sont pas encore résolues” [the subject has not been exhausted; the question of origins has not yet been resolved]. Implicit in the word “encore” here (and in the “Nouvelle étude” overall) is the ideal of providing a final word, a definitive understanding of the text; on this account even a text as viscerally *incomplete* as the *Renart* can be caught, weighed and “resolved” by the voice of scholarly authority.⁹

⁹ A footnote to the “Nouvelle Étude” section title (Paris 1861, 323) highlights the scholarly credentials of the analysis, noting that it was “Lue à l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres,

Paulin Paris's translation allows little Paula to act as a disruptive presence in the liminal stages of the text, as she bursts into her grandfather's study and interrupts his work to demand a new story, but once the narrative proper is under way she disappears from the scene. The final episode ends on a playful note as the Translateur explains that:

dans notre France, on n'entend plus jamais parler de Renart [...] Si pourtant quelqu'un venoit à découvrir sa retraite, nous le prions très-instamment de nous en avertir, pour nous donner les moyens d'ajouter de nouvelles aventures à celles que nous venons de raconter. (Paris 1861, 322)

[In our country of France, one no longer hears people speak of Renart [...] However, if someone were to discover his hiding-place, we beseech them to alert us immediately, to allow us to add new adventures to those we have just related.]

Paris acknowledges the inexhaustible nature of Renart's narrative motor, which his own translation is likely to stimulate by reviving the character in the popular imaginary. However, in inviting readers to contact him with news so that he can write it up, the Translateur still affects to retain control over the dissemination of the Renardian narrative. In similar fashion, Paris's prefatory address to Paula ends by describing his text as an act of love for his granddaughter, casting her as the catalyst, but himself as the agent, of what he calls "ce livre des *Aventures de Maître Renart*, que j'aurais fait pour toi, et que, sans toi, chère petite Paula, je n'aurois jamais eu la pensée de faire" (Paris 1861, viii) [this book of the *Adventures of Master Renart*, which I will have written for you, and which I would never have thought to write without you, dear little Paula]. And as he warns Paula earlier in the same paragraph, whilst the *Aventures* are written for her and other children, the academic studies that follow on are intended as a child-free zone: "tu laisseras les dernières pages; parce qu'à l'âge de sept ans on ne s'amuse pas aux histoires de vieux livres" [you should ignore the final pages, because stories about old books are no fun for seven-year-olds]. There is, of course, no evidence of whether Paula obeyed this instruction or not, though Théophile Gautier's anecdote about learning to read with *Lydie de Gersin* – despite having been told to wait until he was old enough to do so – shows how productive childish transgression can be. Indeed, in the "Nouvelle Étude" section of his *Renart*, Paris himself offers a tentative origin story for the narratives

dans la séance du 25 novembre 1860". The precision over location and date lends the analysis a permanency and singularity in notable contrast to the repetitive and unstable nature of the medieval *Renart*.

which suggests powerfully how the repetition imposed on children for the purposes of study can be diverted to serve the creation of new narratives:

Les fables aëtopiques furent un des premiers, des plus faciles et des plus agréables exercices des maîtres qui enseignoient, et des écoliers qui apprennoient les secrets de la langue dite *grammaticale* [...] Ces exercices, on le pense bien, ne se bornoient pas à réduire les anciens apologues en mauvaise prose ou en vers plus méchants encore. On ajoutoit aux premiers récits des incidens particuliers, des réflexions, des moralités nouvelles: et quand le sujet s'y prêtoit, on le retournoit de cent façons, quelquefois au point de le rendre méconnoissable. (Paris 1861, 324–325)

[The Aesopic fables were one of the first, the simplest and the most enjoyable exercises of the masters who taught and the pupils who learned the secrets of *grammatica* [...] These exercises, one can well imagine, were not limited to traducing the ancient texts into bad prose, or even worse verse. The original tales would be enhanced with particular anecdotes, reflections, or new moral interpretations; and when the subject warranted it, it was rewritten a hundred different ways, sometimes rendering the original unrecognizable.]

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