

# REINARDUS

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ANNUAIRE DE LA SOCIÉTÉ INTERNATIONALE RENARDIENNE

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## Twenty Years On: The International Reynard Society, 1975–1995

It was in the mid 1950s that my interest in the Roman de Renart began to quicken, chiefly through my first encounters with some fourteenth- and fifteenth-century English sculptures depicting mischievous foxes. These led me to question literary-historical assertions about the failure of Renart to cross the Channel before Caxton, and to the discovery that when Caxton did bring him over, Renart came from Flanders, not France. In those years when I began to think more carefully about the migrations of Mr Fox, the many different cultures in which his Epic was known and celebrated, the far-flung folklore cousins, the distant fable ancestors, and so on... in those years I was much involved in the International Arthurian Society whose multi-cultured activities filled me with admiration (but whose hierarchical pattern and sectional quarrels irritated me). Suddenly it dawned on me that there was just as varied and perhaps as rich a literary world with a fable-fabliau-animal-epic axis as there was an Arthurian one. Then, by a happy coincidence, just as I was making enquiries about the possibility of forming a society of scholars with Renart and Renart-related interests, I received an invitation to read a paper at the Third International Colloquium organised by the Instituut voor Middeleeuwse Studies at Leuven under the title 'Aspects of the Medieval Animal Epic' (15–17 May, 1972). This turned out to be one of the most interesting of colloquia I have ever attended, and a very successful one: witness the Proceedings published by E. Rombauts and A. Welkenhuysen.<sup>1</sup>

I pursued my enquiries about founding a medieval fox-hunting society there, in Leuven, but encountered quite a lot of scepticism. The turning point came three months later, in Nantes, where I met Nico Van Den Boogaard at the Tenth Triennial Congress of the International Arthurian Society. There, on the lawns of a great mansion during a grand reception,

<sup>1</sup> *Aspects of the Medieval Animal Epic*, ed. E. Rombauts & A. Welkenhuysen (Leuven: University Press; The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975).

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I talked to Nico about my project. He was immensely supportive. On condition that we made space for fabliau specialists alongside Renardians, he would do his best to bring along a group of scholars from the Netherlands, and perhaps from further afield. I should organise the first meeting in my university (Glasgow), and he would follow this up with another in his university (Amsterdam). We agreed that, if our project should be realised, our Society should be as informal and non-hierarchical as possible (contrary to the one whose congress we were then attending!). There should be no membership fees, no rules, no regulations. Anticipating that our membership was likely to be small, we agreed that all our meetings should consist of plenary sessions; that we should avoid concurrent, sectional meetings if we possibly could. But if ever pressure of time and numbers made sectional meetings necessary, every effort would be made to avoid 'unfair' competition, in particular where relative new-comers to our camp were concerned: these should not be asked to speak at the same time as well-established, well-known scholars. We would draw on as many cultures as possible, and allow as many languages to be used as seemed sensible to speaker and audience. Above all, we should act as one body, and avoid national sections and committees. We would meet in as many different countries as we could, depending chiefly on the good will of potential local organisers, preferably in picturesque and/or culturally lively places where good food and drink were plentiful!

I like to think that, at our first colloquia, all these aims and aspirations were achieved. But some compromises have had to be made as attendance at our meetings grew – about 50 at Glasgow in 1975, 100 in Amsterdam in 1977, and in Münster in 1979. Then over 150 in Paris-Evreux in 1981. We were fewer in Turin-St.-Vincent (1983), as we were at Spa (1985), so all our papers at these two colloquia were pleniaries. This was true for most of them in Durham (1987), and for a large number in Lausanne (1989), but less so in Groningen (1991). In Orléans (1993) we were largely able to return to our preferred formula, and there felt very much one informal body of friends. I hope the success of our colloquia will continue to be measured not by large numbers of participants, but by the quality of the papers, the relaxed ambience, and the liveliness of friendly discussion. The meetings in Amsterdam (in the pleasant building of the French and Romanian Department), in Spa (in a woodland hotel), and in Orléans (in a Natural History Museum), were all most comfortably housed, well fed and watered under one roof. To encourage contact and the easy exchange of views, Nico Van Den Boogaard and I insisted that our meetings should be called and really be Colloquia, and tried to encourage participants to leave time for discussion at the end of their papers, and organisers to leave time between sessions for tea/coffee breaks where questions could be asked

in small groups or even tête-à-tête. We also, at the meetings we organised in our universities, arranged for lunch to be taken together, an example splendidly followed in Spa and in Orléans. Sometimes we have been helped in this way by outside bodies; for example, in Glasgow and in Amsterdam, the local French Institute provided a reception and a meal; in Paris, it was the Institut Britannique which provided hospitality.

Nico and I agreed that we would do our best, right from the beginning, to publish every paper read at our colloquia. To ensure this, we accepted offers to organise colloquia only from colleagues who promised to find a way of publishing the Proceedings. In realising this ambition, we sometimes got help from unexpected quarters. For example, Jacques De Caluwé managed to arrange for the publication of the Amsterdam Proceedings through a special number of *Marche Romane*; Jan Goossens the Münster Proceedings through a special number of *Niederdeutsche Studien*; Gabriel Bianciotto and Michel Salvat the Paris-Evreux Proceedings as numbers 2 and 3 in the *Cahiers d'Etudes Médiévales* of the Publications de l'Université de Rouen.<sup>2</sup> However, I had to rely on two French Department secretaries to produce about 200 stereotyped copies of the Glasgow Proceedings; whilst Alessandro Vitale-Brovarone and Gianni Mombello had a special volume printed by Edizioni dell'Orso of the Turin-St.-Vincent Proceedings.<sup>3</sup> By the time of the Spa meeting (1985), it had become evident that the burden of publishing so many papers in a relatively short time was terribly onerous and, indeed, excessive for the local organiser(s). Thirteen papers and just over 130 pages for Glasgow; fifty-one papers and just over 720 pages for Evreux. . . It was therefore at Spa that I launched the idea that the Society should publish its own Review, its Yearbook, to include a selection (but, hopefully, most) of the papers read at its colloquia. Once in place, this Yearbook would almost guarantee publication of selected papers within one or two years after being read – that is, if we continued to meet once every two years, and published every year a volume of between 200 and 250 pages. My proposals were met with considerable scepticism, but the enthusiasm of two colleagues in particular, Brian Levy and Paul Wackers (and much subsequent hard work by them) ensured success. *Reinardus* 1 saw the first half of the Durham meet-

<sup>2</sup>*Épopée animale, fable et fabliau*, éd. N. van den Boogaard & J. de Caluwé = *Marche Romane* 28, 3–4 (1978). *Third International Beast Epic, Fable and Fabliau Colloquium. Münster 1979. Proceedings*, ed. J. Goossens & T. Sodmann, *Niederdeutsche Studien* 30 (Köln-Wien: Böhlau: 1981). *Épopée animale, fable, fabliau. Actes du IV<sup>e</sup> Colloque de la Société Internationale Renardienne. Evreux, 7–11 septembre 1981*, éd. G. Bianciotto & M. Salvat, *Cahiers d'études médiévales* 2–3 (Paris: PUF, 1984).

<sup>3</sup>*Beast Epic, Fable and Fabliau Colloquium. Proceedings*, ed. K. Varty (Glasgow: French Department, University of Glasgow, 1976). *Atti del V Colloquio della International Beast Epic, Fable and Fabliau Society. Torino-St.-Vincent, 5–9 settembre 1983*, a cura di A. Vitale-Brovarone & G. Mombello (Alessandria: Edizione dell'Orso, 1987).

ing's papers published, and now we have reached *Reinardus* 8, completing the publication (after close scrutiny by a panel of Readers, and often after modification by the author) of most of the papers read at Durham, Lausanne, Groningen and Orléans. The Spa colloquium should have produced the final single volume of Proceedings before *Reinardus* took over, but this ironically ran into just those local publishing problems that had led us to take the decision to start our Yearbook. Fortunately, a good selection of papers from Spa were 'rescued' and appeared in 1993 in a Special Number of *Reinardus*.<sup>4</sup>

The first two issues of *Reinardus* were published in the Netherlands by Alfa of Grave. Following the retirement of this publisher in 1989, all subsequent issues of our Yearbook have appeared under the imprint of the academic publishing-house of John Benjamins of Amsterdam and Philadelphia, for whose expertise and professional interest both Society and Editors are extremely grateful.

Looking back, we have had some very enjoyable journeys together, usually (because our numbers have mostly been modest) in one bus. From Glasgow we went in a mini-bus to the Border Abbeys; from Evreux, in two buses to visit Rouen and some lovely Norman churches; from St.-Vincent to Aosta and its rich heritage of ancient buildings; from Durham, along Hadrian's Wall, to Hexham and to picturesque Richmond; from Groningen, to some ancient churches, mostly in brick, all with wonderful old organs which were played for us; from Orléans, to some of the châteaux de la Loire. There have been notable parties and entertainments, too. These began in a modest way, the first in my home when all the overseas visitors to the Glasgow meeting came for a meal, thus starting what was to be (inevitably) a short-lived tradition; for, in Amsterdam, Nico Van Den Boogaard had most members of that colloquium to dinner at his spacious home; and in Evreux, in spite of the great numbers, Gabriel Bianciotto had almost everyone to dinner in his country home on three successive evenings. (The debt to wives was, in those early days, enormous.) We have dined and wine-d together in the Great Hall of Durham Castle; in elegant dining rooms of the University of Lausanne; in a mountainside restaurant in the Alps above Aosta (where we all drank from a communal multi-spouted leather drinking vessel); in the comfortable restaurant of the Spa hotel (where a life-sized edible fox occupied centre stage...).

Our first three colloquia were relatively brief, spread over part or all of three days, and held in either September or October. Our fourth spread over four days, our fifth and sixth over five days; and that, by and large, is

how things have remained, through our last meeting spread over six days. This lengthening of our colloquia is resulting in more members coming for just one or two days and is, in my view, an unfortunate development. The pack of hunters is less homogeneous! Our meetings continued to be held in the early autumn until Durham (1987) when, as an experiment, and to make it easier for American scholars to join us, we met in July. We have continued to meet since then in this month, but by meeting in early July in 1993 we unintentionally excluded our Japanese members, which was most unfortunate for they have long since been some of our most faithful and distinguished members, long led by the late Professor Shimmura (always accompanied by Mme Shimmura), Professor Matsubara, and that brilliant team of editors, Professors Fukumoto, Harano and Suzuki. Perhaps we must reconsider the time of the year when we meet, and the number of days over which our meetings spread, over which days (weekdays or weekends) in order not to exclude any group of members. It may be that we should limit the number of papers at each colloquium in order to reduce the period of meetings, and the potential burden on the Editors of *Reinardus*.

The International Reynard Society (we began to label ourselves like this only from Amsterdam onwards) has always been one of the most democratic of academic societies except for the fact that, until the Durham meeting, I presided over the Society alone, advised by a small band of dedicated friends. The main responsibility for each meeting was vested in the colleague(s) who volunteered to organise each biennial meeting. At Durham, as I approached my sixtieth birthday, I decided the time had come for a slightly more formal organisation, and there I invited Professor Gabriel Bianciotto, to take over the Presidency with the Professors Keith Busby and Gianni Mombello as Vice-presidents, and Dr Brian Levy and Dr Paul Wackers as Secretary-Treasurers. Thus, while retaining its essential informality, the International Reynard Society is served by a proper complement of officers and committee members. At the same time, the affairs of *Reinardus* became regulated by a Chairman of the Board of Editors (myself), the Joint Editors (Dr Levy and Dr Wackers), two Assistant Editors (Professor Busby and Professor Mann) and an Advisory Board consisting of Professors J. Dufournet, K. Düwel, R. Eichmann, N. Fukumoto, J. Goossens, K. Grubmüller, N. Harano, P. Ménard, G. Mombello, J. Subrenat, and J. Ziolkowski.

Where to from here? When I first envisaged the creation of the Society, I thought of it as a small group of scholars specialising primarily in the medieval Beast Epic and its most closely-related genres, the medieval fable and the fabliau. Sources and influences, antecedents, distant parallels and modern descendants would have their place. Also bestiaries and encyclopaedias, exempla, folklore and every form of their visual representation,

<sup>4</sup>*The Fox and Other Animals = Reinardus*, Special Volume, Numéro special, ed. B. Levy & P. Wackers (Amsterdam-Philadelphia: Benjamins, 1993).

their iconographies. All this has, by and large, been realised, but I think that more (and much more) could be done on the medieval fable, on later medieval French Renardian literature (*Renart le Nouvel*, *Le Couronnement de Renart*, and *Renart le Contrefait*) and on folklore. But I hope we shall stick to our original and continuing aims, as laid out in the first paragraph on the back cover of *Reinardus*, for there is still so much to be done here. So many facsimiles of manuscripts, so many critical editions, so many translations into so many languages of basic texts have yet to appear, as well as so much more critical analysis of and commentary on the texts available to us, each a work of art in its own right, reflecting the qualities of mind and the characteristics of the society which created it, moulded it, and passed it on.

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