
INTRODUCTION

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The Beast Epic is not very well known in North America. The purpose of this publication is to enhance the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of this fascinating genre that served as a vehicle for satire of contemporary society, secular and ecclesiastical, and a parody of current literary genres in medieval Europe. The Beast Epic occurs in medieval Latin and vernacular literatures, is well represented in medieval art, draws on both learned and popular traditions, and provides an excellent case study for the origin of a literary form. Originating in the Southern Netherlands and Northern France, its popularity in medieval and later times was tremendous, with different versions appearing in virtually every European country and vernacular. This wide geographic distribution—reflected in the make-up of the list of contributors to the present volume—testifies to the genius of the genre and highlights the supra-national unity of medieval culture.

The papers contained in this study are mainly concerned with literary issues, in particular the nature, origin and significance of the genre and the individual works that belong to it. The relation between Latin and vernacular versions is a recurring theme. The first paper deals with the *Ecbasis Captivi*, the forerunner of the genre. Next, a number of papers examine the *Ysengrimus*, also in Latin, a difficult but intriguing work, whose significance is gradually beginning to be unravelled. Subsequently, the *Roman de Renart*, *Van Den Vos Reinaerde* and other vernacular version are analyzed *sui generis*, in relation to each other, and to their Latin predecessor, the *Ysengrimus*. The last two papers focus on the *fortuna* of the Reynardian material, culminating in a discussion of the nature and structure of Goethe's *Reineke Fuchs*.

One paper is tragically absent: "Le *Roman de Renart* et le répertoire des jongleurs", proposed by Nico van den Boogaard, Dean of the Faculty of Letters, University of Amsterdam. His unexpected death is a severe blow to Reynard studies.

The contributors' approaches to the subject are varied, ranging from comparative philology and the analysis of style, theme and narrative technique, to the history of printing and the study of attitudes towards the Middle Ages in modern times. As well, significant new methodologies are applied to both *Ysengrimus* and the *Roman de Renart*. We hope that the results will mark a significant contribution to the field.

Finally, we should like to acknowledge the help and encouragement of Kenneth Varty, President of the International Beast Epic, Fable and Fabliau Society, in preparing this volume.