

**REINEKE FUCHS:  
THE  
FIRST FIVE CANTOS**

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Reineke Fuchs: The First Five Cantos by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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**JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE**

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THE  
FIRST FIVE CANTOS**





„Nobel, der König, versammelt den Hof, und seine Vasallen.“

—Seite 1.

Goethes  
Reineke fuchs

*THE FIRST FIVE CANTOS*

*EDITED WITH NOTES*

BY

L. A. HOLMAN

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## INTRODUCTION.

### I.

#### THE REYNARD STORIES IN GENERAL.

GOETHE'S *Reineke Fuchs* is a noble representative of a dearly loved family which now lives in nearly every country on the globe. The ancestor whose popularity opened the way for the descendants to spread thus widely was a low-German poem called *Reinke de Vos* (*Reineke der Fuchs*), which became known in the last part of the fifteenth century. Who wrote it is by no means certain, although many attempts have been made to find out. The author did not originate the story, but the form he put it in "conquered the world." His version descended from a Flemish epic, *Reinaert de Voss*, which a certain Willem wrote about 1250. This poem narrates many of Reinhart's pranks and sins as we read them in Goethe, only at the end he is outlawed. In a fourteenth-century continuation of *Reinaert de Voss*, however, he becomes chancellor of the kingdom. Another famous rendering of the Reynard story, dating from the time of the Minnesingers and the *Nibelungenlied*, was a middle-high-German poem commonly called *Reinhart Fuchs*. It was written

about 1180, by Heinrich der Gltchezare, probably a wandering musician. Only a few fragments of it exist now, and our knowledge of it is gained chiefly from a later version. Both this and Willem's poem, judging from the family resemblance, were related to the collection of French tales known as the *Roman de Renart*, which grew up in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Besides all these there are several Latin animal poems written by monks.<sup>1</sup>

Connected with this whole family are manifold puzzles which have been the delight and despair of students ever since the days of Jacob Grimm.<sup>2</sup> Only bare mention can be made of them here.

One cause of a dispute, which patriotic considerations have rendered particularly heated, has been uncertainty as to whether Reynard is French or German. It is now admitted that the family most probably descended from a French progenitor of the twelfth century. As to the ancestry of the material used in the French original, which parts (if any) were invented by the author, which parts had grown up among the people as folk-tales, and which had a literary origin, opinions differ. A few years ago, before Grimm's theories were disproved, all the animal stories were thought to have been derived from an Indo-Germanic epic, which happened to have been preserved in Germany. Recent writers hold that most of them came to Germany and France from India and Greece, perhaps across Italy, and that largely through the clergy the

<sup>1</sup> Fuller information as to the different versions is given in the table on pp. viii-x.

<sup>2</sup> See Bibliographical Note, p. xvii.