

**REYNARD THE FOX. A  
BURLESQUE POEM FROM THE  
LOW-GERMAN ORIGINAL OF  
THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY**

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Reynard the Fox. A burlesque poem from the Low-German original of the fifteenth century by V. D.

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**V. D.**

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE Fable of the Fox is of a very ancient origin ; for it may be traced in several languages, particularly in the German and French, up to the thirteenth Century, and probably it existed even before that period. For it is reported that a certain Earl Reynard, or Reginard, a vassal of King Sventebold of Lorraine, who lived in the tenth Century of our Era, being outlawed and persecuted by his Sovereign, found means, by dint of his slyness, to elude all the persecutions of his King, insomuch that his name had become proverbial, as denoting a sly and cunning person ; and it is supposed by many, that the adventures of this Earl furnished the first materials for the fable.

The names of *Isegrim* and *Reynard*, applied to the Wolf and Fox by the German and French writers, being originally *German*, seem to indicate

that the fable first of all was composed by a German author, although we do not know at present of any production of that kind in German, of so early a date.

Towards the latter end of the fifteenth Century the fable of the Wolf and Fox became the vehicle of several poignant satires against the vices and corruptions of those times, and the following works of that tendency have been mentioned by Hearne, Flögel, Marchand and other philologists :

Reynard the Fox, printed for Wm. Caxton. Westminster 1481. Folio.

De Historie van Reynaert de Vos. Delft. 1485. Quarto.

Le Livre de Maistre Reynard & de sa femme Hersante. 1478. Quarto.

Last of all a Poem, written in the Low-German dialect, and entitled *Reyneke de Vos*, was published at *Lubeck* in the year 1498. Only a single Copy of this edition remains extant in the library of the Duke of Brunswick.

A second edition of this work was published at *Rostock* in 1515, and a third in 1517 at the same place. The former is lost, but of the latter a Copy



is said to exist in the library of the King of Saxony. The fourth edition, published by *Nicholas Bauman* and printed for *Ludwig Dietz* at *Rostock* in 1522, seems likewise to be lost; but a fifth edition was published in 1539 by the same bookseller at *Rostock*. A Copy of this edition—which is very rare—is deposited in the library of the city of *Hamburg*.

The Author of the Low-German Original, in his preface to the first edition of his Work, called himself *Hinrek van Alkmer*, tutor and preceptor to the Duke of *Lorraine*, and said that he translated it from the French and Walloon languages; but it has been long since the opinion of Philologists, that the name of *Hinrek van Alkmer* was only a fictitious one, assumed by the real author *Nicholas Bauman* for political reasons; for he lived at first as secretary with the Duke of *Juliers*; but having incurred the displeasure of the Duke, he entered as secretary into the service of *Magnus*, Duke of *Mecklenburg*, whose favorite he became, and in whose service he continued till his death, which happened at *Rostock* in 1526. All these circumstances have been also confirmed by the descendants of *Bauman*.

In fact no such name, as Hinrek van Alkmer is to be found upon record any where among the names of the *Literati* of the middle age; excepting the mention made of it in the preface to the first edition of *Reyneke de Vos* of 1498; and it is to be observed, that in the numerous subsequent editions, which have been published by Ludwig Dietz at Rostock, down to the year 1549, only the name of the editor Bauman is mentioned, and not a word said about Hinrek van Alkmer.

Moreover it is hardly to be conceived, that a work, which was at first published at Lubeck, and afterwards at Rostock, should have been composed by an author residing in Lorraine; or that an inhabitant of that Country should have wrote a poem in a dialect, which is peculiar to Low-Germany, and particularly to the province of East-Frisia, the native country of Bauman.

But be this as it may, it is certain at least, that whosoever was the author of *Reyneke de Vos*, he was a man of much wit, learning, humour and knowledge of mankind, and that his work is a valuable specimen of ancient Low-German poetry, full of poignant satire against the vices and abuses

of his time, and that it contributed no less, than the works of *Erasmus*, *Rabelais* and *Boccaccio*, to pave the way for the Reformation. It was one of the first works printed in Germany, and it was at that time very popular.

Like the *Don Quixote* of Cervantes, it has ever since preserved its popularity. From the fifteenth down to the end of the eighteenth Century no less than twenty two editions of the Original have been published, and at the same time it has been translated into almost every language of Europe, nay even into Latin verse by Herrman Schopper in 1567, and into Hebrew by Rabbi Barachias Ben Natronai in 1557. Goethe, the great German Poet, translated it into German Hexameters; and a second edition of the translation in German Doggerel-Rhymes (the same metre, in which the Original is written), has been published with success.

The Consanguinity of the languages has suggested the attempt at English Paraphrase, which is now offered to the Public.

Hypercritics may possibly find fault with some passages in the poem, which savor a little of the indelicate taste of the middle age. They could not