

Cheating and Cheaters in German Romance and Epic, 1180- 1225

by

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Abstract

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An Alsatian poet named Heinrich, writing around 1180, composed a beast epic, based on French sources, about a trickster fox named Reinhart. Some sixty years later, a poet known to us only as *Der Stricker* composed a work of similar length and structure, about a trickster priest named Amis, and his diligent efforts to cheat various anonymous individuals out of their money. Other works by this poet bear out the Stricker's consistent emphasis on strategy over brute force, prudence and intelligence over unconsidered actions. These stories both illustrate that power, when not directed by intelligence, is useless or dangerous, even to the one who wields it.

Tricksters and cheating also appear in a surprising range of works contemporary to the Stricker's *Pfaffe Amis* and Heinrich's *Reinhart Fuchs*. Romances have their own trickster characters, conducting their cheats using methods and structures that recall those of these two *Schwank*-type epics. Cheaters like Amis, and Tristan's Isolde generate twin situations. One of them is true/hidden, and can influence the characters, and one is false/apparent, to which the victim characters are forced to respond. This artificial, apparent reality persists even after the cheater has left the scene, occasionally taking on a truth of its own.

Both Reinhart and Amis, whatever their motivations, work evil everywhere they go; and yet the audience is expected to treat them as sympathetic characters. Because the trickster universe functions to turn systems upside-down, it also rejects the concepts of good and evil, forming a universe in which all that matters is who wins and who loses. The place of the villain belongs

now to the fool; any character who becomes deceived deserves to be, and is treated with indignation by the narrator, just as the traditional villain might be.

1 Acknowledgements

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2 Chapter 1: The Cheat and Why it Works

Everyone loves a scoundrel. If he or she is entertaining enough, a fictional character can transgress boundaries ordinarily considered inviolable, without sacrificing audience sympathy; in fact, it may be the transgression itself that makes the character attractive. The story of one such scoundrel, *Reinhart Fuchs*, was written in about 1180 by an Alsatian poet named Heinrich.

Reinhart concerns a trickster fox who uses his animal cunning and anthromorphic intelligence to outwit and control his animal counterparts. *Pfaffe Amis*, written about sixty years later, depicts a trickster priest who uses many of the same methods, but with more logical, deliberate schemes and motivations than Reinhart's reactive passions and desires. The poet, known only as *der Stricker*, also emphasizes strategy and planning over brute force and impulsive action in his many other works.

Contemporary works including cheaters appear in a range of genres, including romances like *Tristan*, but these tricksters show different characteristics: unlike the knight, they perform evil acts everywhere they go, but the audience is expected to sympathize with them, rather than with their victims, an easy proposition in a universe where good and evil are superceded by victory and failure. The villain is not the character who does evil, but the character who loses the game. Amis ruins two merchants' livelihoods, and Reinhart Fuchs commits murder, regicide, and rape. The victims, on the other hand, are sometimes quite innocent, or often not guilty enough to justify what is done to them.

Their crime, though, is being victimized in the first place. The ways in which they are deceived – not the ways in which the trickster deceives them, but the thought processes that they carry out to become deceived – are portrayed as absurd and mechanical. The cheater remains sympathetic and interesting, while the victims have their humanity removed, becoming examples of individual logical fallacies, crimes or errors that a person might commit. For example, before her humiliation, the wolf Hersant becomes enraged and attempts to kill Reinhart for a comparatively minor insult, and becomes a flurry of unthinking, murderous teeth and claws. Amis also humiliates a dishonest, greedy king who hopes to gain back fiefs that he has legally handed over to his vassals. Those victims' flaws, which could be interesting additions to any complete character, become defining characteristics for the victim characters in the cheater stories. The

mistreatment of the cheating victim, then, is presented as educational, a beneficial story that may portray evil, but which serves a good purpose in real life.

We shall see, though, that this educational nature is often as thin a veneer as the cheater's disguise. The idea that the victim is the criminal, and thus that victims and criminals ought to be laughed at for the benefit of society, is not necessarily borne out by the cheating stories, and is occasionally disputed by them.

2.1 Pfaffe Amis and Reinhart Fuchs: an Overview

These two cheating epics consist of short, comic tales, episodic in structure but grouped together more or less loosely. In most cases, episodes could reasonably be moved around without injuring the plot structure, but they do form a continuous thematic whole. The content of the cheat stories favours small over large, weak over strong, clever over stupid, and less serious content over demonstrations of good manners. The conflicts are not usually serious; where the heroic epic will involve kidnapping, treason and war, cheaters are normally motivated by money and other resources, or opportunities to play their pranks. One can learn from them, but there is no dominant 'moral of the story' for the audience to take home; the resolution depends more on comedic value than teaching value.

Writing on Rabelais and his predecessors, Hayes discovers similar features in the late-medieval farce. While he criticizes Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory, he, too, credits Rabelais with the innovation of subversive content in medieval drama. Before Rabelais, Hayes writes, comic literature is essentially conservative, and does not deal with important matters at all. The setting retains this theme in which smallness is privileged, favouring localized, personal settings over important, public ones¹. Within this domestic setting, and also in the *Schwank*'s largely petty environments, the parties to the central conflict tend to be mismatched in terms of power, and the underdog always wins. Strassner, who examined a wide range of *Schwank* for his book of the

¹ "The setting of farce is primarily a domestic one, with disputes between spouses and other characters such as imbecilic servants and lascivious monks." (Hayes, 18)

same title, reviews the categories that tend to get pitted against each other and reveals a similar picture to the one that Hayes found in the theatrical farce of a later period:

Sie finden sich im Zwischenmenschlichen, in der Unzulänglichkeit des Zusammenlebens, den Differenzen zwischen Liebenden, Ehepaaren, Herrschern und Dienern, Bevorrechteten und Benachteiligten, außerdem in den festen Geboten von Sitte, Brauch, Gesetz und dem Tabubereich. Die Provokation wird ausgelöst durch Anordnungen, Befehle, Vorenthaltungen, Verweigerungen, Täuschung und Betrug. Der Konflikt vollzieht sich jedoch vor dem Hintergrund der Ordnung, der sozialen und soziologischen Grenzziehung, die seit Altertum und Mittelalter besteht, der präzisen Trennung zwischen Gebildeten und Ungebildeten, Stadt- und Landbewohnern. (Strassner, 87)

The prevalence of such patterns reveals that even the topsy-turvy, face-pulling *Schwank*, like any other genre, has its rules. The underpowered opponent is also the cleverer one, and will prevail in the end.

While it does also have its own sort of ethics, to be explored below, the ethics of the farce, and of the *Schwank*, are not Christian ones, and can occasionally appear as anti-Christian. Coxon finds that the very principles of comic stories are un-Christian in nature: “Dass man andere nicht böseartig verspotten sollte, dürfte dennoch im christlichen Mittelalter in erster Linie angesichts der Passionsgeschichte Christi deutlich geworden sein, wo der leidende Gottessohn durch den Spott mehrerer feindlich Gesinnter erbarmungslos erniedrigt und angegriffen wird.” (Coxon, *wol gefallen*, 53) And Seeber agrees; a Christian was not, ideally, to laugh at anything: “Eigentlich darf ein Christ, der auf sein Seelenheil bedacht ist, nicht lachen, zumal, da von Jesus ebenfalls kein Lachen überliefert ist, und ihm soll der Mensch nacheifern.” (Seeber, 1) Laughter, Coxon asserts, was a lower function of the body, in contrast to higher functions of the spirit. Monks were particularly forbidden to laugh², or allowed to do so only under various restrictions.³

² “Just as this world was utterly inferior to the kingdom of heaven, so man’s physical body was to be denied in favour of his soul’ thus, to any true judge of humanity, man’s ability to joke and

“For a number of the early Church Fathers, in both East and West, man’s ability to joke and laugh was not to be denied entirely, but rather to be held in check: man may be an animal who can laugh, argued Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215), but he should no more laugh at everything than a horse should always be neighing. Others, including Ambrose (d. 397) and Chrysostom, expressly repudiated laughter and joking for monks alone, or when in church.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 3)

Outside of the cloister, though, laughter attains different connotations; rather than a flaw, a sign of brokenness, laughter is a demonstration of wholeness. Where there is laughter, the court society is healthy and at peace.

“In spite of these guidelines and the continued mediation of Christian ideals of self-restraining in vernacular literature aimed at the nobility, in reality the functional range of joking and laughter in medieval courtly society should not be underestimated. As historiographical accounts of political life in the Middle Ages

laugh belonged to the lower part of this nature, and the practical implications of this damning verdict (of Augustine’s) came to be enshrined in various Rules.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 2)

³ “The *Formulae vitae honestae* by bishop Martin of Braga (d. 57) is a good example of the former, with its precepts for laymen being organized around four cardinal virtues (‘prudentia’; ‘fortitude’; ‘temperantia’; ‘iustitia’) and its discussion of laughter coming under the rubric of temperance: ‘Sales tui sine dente sint, ioci sine vilitate, risus sine cachinno’ (4, 32-33, [May your uips be without teeth, your jokes without baseness, and your laughter not uproarious]). These sentiments are repeated almost word for word five centuries later in bishop Hildebert’s *Libellus de quattuor virtutibus vitae honestae*. Evidently such qualifications of laughter form part of a social ethics that again places the utmost emphasis on bodily discipline, whilst this time accepting the need for entertainment, joviality and hilarity, providing these are not detrimental to personal and collective honour.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 4)

consistently reveal, joking, laughter and smiling played a crucial role, within broader patterns of demonstrative behavior at court, in fostering conviviality, expressing peaceful intentions and avoiding conflict, or winning arguments in debates and negotiations without recourse to force.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 5)

Hayes writes that “the genre does not adhere to any conventional Christian ethics or morality: sex, primarily in its illicit varieties, permeates the genre, and lying and cheating are essential to a character's survival in a dramatic world populated with conmen and hucksters. In farce, naïveté is very much a punishable offense, with no pity shown towards the gullible and the credulous.” (Hayes, 26) And indeed no pity is needed; far from the Christ-endorsed abstention from judgment and support of those who suffer, comic genres are merciless in their persecution of characters who make foolish decisions. On the other hand, while foolish people are punishable in the same way as people who have committed crimes, the farce and the *Schwank* retain a large category of ordinarily forbidden activities that they treat as acceptable, and occasionally the two can even overlap. Though they are ultimately punished for it, characters are entertaining specifically because some of them commit wrong or foolish acts. This “ethos that combines lightheartedness with a pessimistic view of human nature” (Hayes, 64) provides a cheerful story for the farce's audience but, in the *Schwank*, can preclude the traditional happy ending. In the Stricker's short comic *maeren* and in *Reinhart Fuchs*, we are frequently treated to bad news about the end of a character's life, rather than a happy and improved future. Nor has the cheater reformed: *Amis* contains possible implications that the priest's eventual repentance and retreat to a monastery is simply an effort to continue cheating elsewhere. *Reinhart* in particular all but promises that things will become even more dishonest and chaotic. Hayes also locates the same phenomenon in English farces, and his comments might just as well be applied to the cheater epics examined here, with their unresolved disequilibrium at the end of each segment of the episodic whole. “Farce, by the very extreme, abrupt nature of its concluding resolutions, seems to suggest that the next deceptive plot is always waiting to be hatched and that the schemers will never stop scheming.” (Hayes, 29)

2.1.1 Medieval Comic Tales

The German Medieval *Schwankmaere* is situated somewhat later in time than the French *Fabliaux* and Renart's predecessors⁴. Characteristics of short comic tales, in which the weaker but cleverer party defeats the stronger, stupider one, with a preference for subject matter revolving around bodily functions and the private sphere, appear in several larger works, particularly those that will be examined here⁵. The laughter in these stories is directed against those who violate well-known social norms.

“comic tales may ... be seen to anticipate or provoke conflicting types of recipient laughter, including (but not restricted to) scornful mirth in support of the humiliation and punishment of deviance, and a festive laughter of extreme licence that is temporarily free from everyday social constraints. In many cases these implied laughters are played off against one another, as transgressions, disorder and chaos often occupy centre-stage in the comic narrative world, only to be reined back in or revealed as ‘controlled anarchy’, an *ex negativo* expression of belief in the validity of the established order.” (Coxon, Comic Tales, 16)

The comic tales often take the form of moral ones, even when they seem to congratulate characters for behavior that would not be considered acceptable for real people in real life. Depiction of real injury or harm adds shock or sadness to the equation, generating an element of tragedy that one might think should spoil the fun. The audience certainly knew the difference:

⁴ “What marks out the German tales, however, is that their period of pre-eminence comes after the cessation of the fabliaux-tradition (c. 1340) and lasts until the early sixteenth century: a quite remarkable longevity, helped to no small extent by the inclusion of ‘Schwankmären’ in large collective manuscripts of short verse-couplet poetry that were compiled and transmitted throughout the later Middle Ages.” (Coxon, Comic Tales, 12)

⁵ “Strictly speaking, none of the formal characteristics listed above are exclusive to short comic tales, and it is clear that they also occurred, to a less concentrated degree, in other literary forms, constituting one particular narrative (or lyric) mode of expression among others in more extensive works” (Coxon, Comic Tales, 12)

“Comic triggers laughter, or at least a smile, a chuckle, or a giggle, whereas the tragic causes sorrow, shock, horror, and profound sadness, subsequently expressed in tears and perhaps even screams.” (Classen, 5). In contrast, medieval comic literature, never presented as even remotely tragic, frequently depends on the audience’s *Schadenfreude*, merrily depicting intense misery in its characters and expecting the audience members to glory in it. Humour is subjective, and does not remain the same across cultures, but, as Gordon writes, “representations of these types of laughs hints at what medieval audiences thought was funny” (Gordon, 497). This comic pain is frequently viewed by critics as punishment for transgressing some standard with which the audience might presumably have sympathized; the idea that humour can support an ideal, usually an existing social condition, is popular today. Classen holds that “Laughter signals what the standards and norms might have been, insofar as the one who becomes the butt of the joke has voluntarily or involuntarily crossed some boundaries.” (Classen, 4). He proceeds to emphasize, though, that the harm that the cheater causes is not serious: “An audience, or an individual, is invited to laugh because the transgression has not caused serious damage to the norms in ethical, religious, social, aesthetic, or sensitive terms.” (Classen, 5).

While humour may express support for a purpose, Classen and others also interpret it as serving a purpose through its very presence. Its foremost purpose was the obvious one: refreshing and rejuvenating the mind through entertainment. “Laughter was commonly identified as a very important therapeutic instrument, justifying the performance of music, literature (narration), and drama.” (Classen, 3). This use of comic texts in everyday life is well-documented in later Medieval literature. Classen finds examples in a range of texts including the *Heptameron*, where the rationale for the long storytelling effort is obvious: “As Marguerite has her storytellers say repeatedly, when conditions have become too dark and desperate, comic relief is a necessity; hence laughter counterbalances, at least in the author’s mind, the doom and gloom of life turned sour, insofar as it can be curative and transformative” (Classen, 120). As a restorative for the weariness and suffering of everyday life, the comic tale draws its purpose from pain, so a thread of suffering runs through the genre, along with a cheerful acceptance of its unavoidable presence in everyday life.

Along with this acceptance, though, humour also represents, and presents, an alternative to grimness. By the cheerful way in which it punishes (some of) the wicked as the butt of the joke, it encourages a good and noble activity that will not cause pain. “Laughter certainly exposes

wrongful behavior, silly words and actions, stumbling and odd appearance, but it does not linger on those minuscule, irrelevant, and jarring shortcomings in people's lives. Instead, it opens a window toward the ethical beauty of joy as one of the central values of good, courtly manners, underscoring the dialectics of human existence." (Classen, 120). Humour makes the serious into the lighthearted. Medieval comic literature may incorporate evil and suffering, but so does reality, and one must deal with these components somehow. These comic tales accept evil but also minimize it, making a detrimental part of life into a challenge to overcome. "Laughter, as much as it might hurt some groups or people at times, has always had a great value in making possible the understanding that no one and nothing can be that serious or that important that we could not laugh about a person, and object, a situation, or an idea." (Classen, 139).

Classen examines varieties of depicted laughter: "the range of meanings implied with laughter seem almost infinite.... We might want to go so far as to specify laughter as one of the fundamental manners to communicate, in private and in public." (Classen, 30). Classen lists opposing meanings discovered in literary laughter, such as desperation, joy, power or defeat⁶. Gordon, on the other hand, examines various types of laughter that may be elicited from the audience, rather than the characters: "In humor theory, at least three bases for laughter exist: laughter based on incongruity, laughter aimed at demonstrating superiority over others, and laughter as relief." (Gordon, 487). Among Gordon's examples, besides humorous laughter, that which arises in response to jokes⁷, are situations that encourage what Gordon calls social laughter, a somewhat more performative statement: "laughter that serves to integrate an individual or individuals into a given group and to exclude others" (Gordon, 487). This is the laughter of the court, uniting the laughers as members of the same social group and affirming their status as powerful enough to elude misfortune, simultaneously excluding those who are not laughing. It encourages another category. "Ignorance laughter: this is akin to laughing to hide that we did not 'get' the joke." (Gordon, 487-8). Exclusionary laughter is related to what Gordon

⁶ "There is laughter out of desperation, and laughter as an expression of simple joy; then there is laughter as a signal of power, or as a signal of defeat." (Classen, 30).

⁷ "Humorous laughter: this is the most common type, laughing at a verbal joke or visual incongruity, etc" (Gordon, 487).

calls derision laughter, which functions primarily not to unite a specific group as superior to all general outsiders, but to exclude a specific outsider or outsiders as inferior. This laughter is then linked to Aristotle's theories⁸, and to Hobbes's "sudden glory" at the realization of one's own superiority. It is a species of humour related to the modern comic articles cited above, to Homer Simpson, Peter Griffin, or even (Medieval comic literature, featuring such unsophisticated titles as *Meier Betz*, should never be regarded as universally high-brow) Beavis and Butthead; the audience reacts with delighted disbelief at just how stupid these characters can be. This is not to say that the object of mockery has no redeeming qualities: like the characters listed above, they can attract the audience's sympathy at the same time as derision.

One prominent example of this type of comic literature appears in miracle plays that involve non-Christian characters who, before they convert, behave foolishly and transgressively, becoming objects of mockery, but who then gain entrance into the Christian fold and become objects of joy and sympathy.

Comic texts served an important societal purpose and, indeed, were expected to serve a purpose⁹. Tragedy and comedy represented two closely-related opposites; a tragic hero gains nobility and sympathy through suffering, and represents a praiseworthy individual, whereas sufferers in a comic story like *Reinhart Fuchs* or *Pfaffe Amis* gain only contempt. Other opposing features linked the two, rather than making them incompatible for comparison:

“Different writers during the Middle Ages, many with unique viewpoints, repeated the commonplaces that comedies adhered to certain stylistic traits diametrically opposed to those found in tragedies: comedies were fictive stories

⁸ “One definition of Aristotelian laughter is essentially derisive in nature and has for a purpose demonstrating superiority.” (Gordon, 488)

⁹ “The conceptual opposition of tragedy (praise) to comedy (blame) did not remain limited to Averroistic thought but rather became pervasive throughout the centuries that followed.” (Alfie, 370).

dealing with low-born individuals, written in a low or middling style, and with a plot structure that begins in chaos but resolves with the establishment of order.” (Alfie, 369).

This chaos, and the way in which it is made harmless or temporary, is another essential feature of the trickster genre and the *Fabliaux*. Though they are shorter and treat different subject matter than the trickster epics, the *Fabliaux* were created by Old French authors, and share many similarities with their later counterparts discussed here. By no means the first genre to exhibit any of these features, the *Fabliaux* do assemble several themes that also characterize the trickster/cheater stories: a sympathetic protagonist deceives less-sympathetic victims in a non-serious setting that (often grossly) violates contemporary ethical norms for the sake of humour. Jost connects the *Fabliaux* to other styles through their reversal of the initial status quo, which is, temporarily, turned on its head. “Despite their ‘indefinability’ and resistance to taxonomic designations, comic counter-normative rebellion is painted into this hybrid mix – across their narratives and even styles, distinguishing them from other types and unifying them to each other.” (Jost, 431). The sense of ridiculousness, particularly when applied to human activities, is also common in the late Middle Ages: animals are enlisted elsewhere in the realm of art to illustrate the worst of human nature.

“The appearance of foolishly acting animals imitating human activities in many late-medieval churches and manuscripts was almost a commonplace, inviting the spectator to grasp the ridiculousness of our existence here on earth. To bring home this message, the artists tended to add gross images implying derision and obscenity, at times even scatology, all of which underscored the vanity of our material existence, while the ensuing laughter underscored the pretentiousness of all people as to their universal value within God’s plan.” (Classen, 112).

The grossness of these images brings us to another theme, one that is normally absent from the heroic epic, but does appear in the trickster epic: that of vulgarity. The emphasis on vulgarity and lowness corresponds to the aforementioned emphasis on bodies and physical life; earthly features are low in comparison to spiritual ones, and therefore appropriate to comic texts such as the

*Fabliau*¹⁰ or, by extension, to our texts to be discussed here. It is not only appetites for sex and lewdness that dominate the genres. In *Reinhart Fuchs* especially, most of the adventures are based on food and eating¹¹. Explicit and often inappropriate feelings, as naked as the sexually explicit bodies of the *Fabliau*, are also expressed in the trickster epic without censorship or consideration of propriety¹².

Double meanings are also essential to the logic of the cheat, producing misunderstanding on the part of the receiver, but still allowing the cheater to claim innocence of any falsehood. In the *Fabliau* too, double meanings can produce more complex phenomena than mere misunderstandings. Percy explores the significance of words and phrases with double meanings, and the ways in which characters can relate to them. These double meanings can be as simple as synonyms or figurative phrases that produce different meanings when used literally. In *La Damoiselle qui n'ot parler de foutre*, a young girl cannot stand to hear sexual language, so the young man who seduces her uses alternative terms for the various body parts involved in the process. Both parties understand what is happening, but we shall observe a similar phenomenon in Amis's church-dedication adventure, where his co-operative dupes are not dupes at all, but eager to play the part he has laid out for them. In a sense, that which is not spoken of is, in some respect, not really happening. Characters are protected from the consequence of these masked actions.

Logic in the cheat is similarly dependent on winking acceptance of fallacious thought. Gordon describes a "black humor and seemingly bizarre logic" (Gordon, 482) in the *Fabliaux*, in which

¹⁰ "Another salient feature of the genre is corporeality, with bodily functions and bodily appetites common in *fabliaux* imagery and description." (Gordon, 485).

¹¹ "Many of the *fabliaux* center on food objects as part of the plot. Eating is one of the two most frequently described physical activities. Eating also draws attention to the mouth, speech, and laughter. Several *fabliaux* are set in culinary spaces such as kitchens, food cellars, dining tables, or marketplaces. Moreover, much of the humor is food related." (Gordon, 484)

¹² "Physical expressions of grief, disappointment, suffering, disgust, and joy or pleasure are common in the *fabliaux*." (Gordon, 485).

the cheater's exploits tend to be successful even when highly implausible. A similar pattern can be observed in *Reinhart Fuchs*. For example, Reinhart anoints and shaves Primaute the wolf using urine, instead of water, and the wolf suspects nothing. Similarly, a community of monks mistakes Ysengrin for a penitent Christian because his *schwanz* has been cut; this possible comic allusion to circumcision (or worse!) links him to the faith, but through language alone. Any information or environmental factor that does not support the cheat is frequently ignored, producing a series of events similar in operation to one of Rube Goldberg's machines. This high level of editorial convenience inspires Jost to attribute to the impossibly credulous victims "a distinct flatness" and "a distancing unhumanness." (Jost, 438). The universe is similarly flat. As in the masked erotic speech above, but made concrete, all that matters is what is explicitly stated; the *Fabliaux* and cheater epics behave almost as if self-consciously fictional, with very little quarter given to plausibility or convincing character. The *Fabliau*, and arguably the cheater epic, is constructed not to appear real, but only to be described: "A feature of the literary genre of the *Fabliaux* is that it accepts, encourages, and relies upon symbolism as a truth, as a legitimate way of reading." (Jost, 453). Jost interprets this violation of contemporary logic as not only characteristic of the genre, but as representative of its transgressive nature:

the genre can be called disreputable not for its transgressively blatant use of the sexual and scatological in word and actions, but for its quality of representation, not 'being' but 'indicating' other levels of meanings, not offering a one-to-one correspondence with reality, a single concrete meaning. This mobility of language signs is thus part of its transgression, its disreputableness, as is true of virtually all poetry and methods of displaying poetic wares: simile, metaphor, imagery, allegory. (Jost, 453).

Pearcy links contemporary understanding of logical fallacy to the logic of the *Fabliaux*, associating particular well-documented fallacies with various aspects of the cheats¹³. This theory

¹³ "Any of the various treatments of fallacies might in certain respects be regarded as a kind of blueprint for the *fabliaux*." (Pearcy, 99)

is supported by the probability that many *Fabliaux* authors were educated in logic¹⁴. Besides this probability, Percy cites evidence found in the *Fabliaux* themselves, pointing out logical errors that various cheaters encourage in their victims, and relating them to fallacies commonly discussed by contemporary academics, with one significant difference:

between the treatment of fallacies in the logical handbooks, or in the serious didactic literature of the Middle Ages, and their appearance in the fabliaux there is one fundamental and extremely significant difference. In the former, fallacies are identified and examined for the sole purpose of purging logical discourse of their pernicious influence, so that the search for truth through the exercise of right reason might not be subverted. In the fabliaux, by contrast, fallacies are deliberately introduced into discourse by duplicitous characters with the intent to confuse and deceive, and as a means to ends which are at best mundane and appetitive and at worst flagrantly base and immoral. (Percy, 99)

Characters in the *Amis* and *Reinhart Fuchs* exhibit similar tendencies toward logical fallacies, such as the courtiers in the *Amis*'s invisible-pictures episode, who assume that a clearly false statement is true because everyone else appears to believe it, or the churchgoers who accept unwarranted evidence in the church dedication episode. *Reinhart*'s capital trial features a legal argument that dismisses a witness's testimony based on her credibility as a witness; the event that she reports is thus called into question, in spite of its having been witnessed in person by several of the judges. The fictional universe of the cheater, then, is ruled not only by amoral laws, but by anti-logical ones. Cheaters exploit a logical fallacy in the victim's thought, taking advantage of their superior, non-fallacious, understanding of the situation:

when characters in the fabliaux consistently and successfully exploit fallacies for the achievement of ends which challenge the moral presuppositions of their time, one recognizes that considered *in toto* the genre acquires significant intellectual

¹⁴ "All those who attended the universities of the area for however brief a period, and there is good reason to suppose that numerous authors of fabliaux may have been included in this group, could hardly have escaped some exposure to the influence of the sophistic." (Percy, 99)

implication, and opens a vista on a subverted, anarchic, comedic world where expediency is the only virtue and gullibility the only vice. (Pearcy, 100)

By proving so successful and dangerous in the fictional universe, these fictional fallacies serve as warnings to the audience not to fall for such cheap tricks themselves, and also provides the more educated members of the audience with a second layer of humour to enjoy, an allusion to subjects with which they are familiar. Rather than becoming horrified by a transgression, the audience members are delighted that the fallacy has been used, and that the cheat has succeeded. Falsehood, immorality and amorality within the cheat universe provide value to the real audience; cheaters serve the public by transgressing its rules¹⁵.

The containment of this transgression within the fictional realm, though, is disputed. Not all interpretations, or, better, not all texts, depict humour as educating the public by condemning sinful behaviour, or as re-inforcing an existing status quo by providing an outlet for socially unacceptable feelings. It can also be interpreted as actively resisting existing social order: “Laughter rang throughout the Middle Ages and far beyond, and it continues to undermine power structures and hierarchies, which makes the investigation of this topic so topical and relevant even today. Laughter also challenges traditions, norms, and standards, and surreptitiously questions assumptions, belief systems, ideologies, and values.” (Classen, 81). Humour does upset social norms, and the trickster scenario places the weak in a position of power over the strong, in a universe of transgressive behavior.

Insofar as the social framework in these verse narratives often reflects radical reversals in the usual social conditions, which the sardonic laughter, evoked by the plot development, subtly approves and affirms, we may assume that the authors intended to provide new perspectives for their audiences, though they

¹⁵ “Those protagonists who create the relevant scenarios which then allow the audience to laugh about typically transgress taboos and undermine social ideals and values, but insofar as they display, at the same time, unusual witticism and intellect, their transgression is easily accepted because it serves, like in all good jokes, for the public entertainment, and retribution against an unjust power system.” (Classen, 107).

masked these by way of sexual and satirical allusions and innuendoes. (Classen, 106).

This challenge to tradition and authority is more reasonably interpreted as not necessarily anti-normative, rather revealing inappropriate behavior in the higher-ranking members of society – that is, situations in which they step out of their allotted roles – than disputing the appropriateness of these roles altogether.

2.2 Sympathy for Cheater and Victim

Unsurprisingly in the case of a dramatic upset, an antagonistic relationship exists between cheater and victim¹⁶. What may be more interesting is the way in which the audience relates to this antagonism. But how different was their interpretation, and how can we know? We can know a few things, for example that the *Fabliaux* audience at least did, or was at least led to, align itself against the victim.

“It is an axiom of the genre that audience sympathy in the fabliaux is always solicited for the duper figure... so that all fabliaux, in the very restricted sense implied by the foregoing discussion, end “happily,” and impart something of the comic enjoyment of witnessing the triumph over adversity of a favored, sympathetic figure, whose “goodness” however is also narrowly and uniquely defined by the literary context and may seem ambiguous or even perverse by conventional Christian-moral standards.” (Percy, 84)

Though difficult to determine, the response of the audience is essential; literature as a cultural object consists not only of a message, but of its interpretation – “any meaning – including parody – depends on audiences reacting within interpretive communities; that is, meaning is social and transactional, and can therefore change according to context, venue, and audience.” (Symons,

¹⁶ “some sense of conflict, and an adversary relationship between individuals for whom we may appropriate the traditional designations *duper* and *dupe*.” (Percy, 83)

108). The medieval audience probably did not respond to *Reinhart Fuchs* with intense literary study. It did not mean the same to them as it does to us, and that difference matters.

While they can have sympathy for a redeemed character, and thus themselves take part in the redemption, the audience seeks to maintain a distance from the unsympathetic victim.

“In the context of comic performance, the audience’s applause is likely to have been reserved for those who take advantage of the foolish. In other words, by laughing at the ‘right’ places listeners could distance themselves from the inferior characters in the story and, if they so wanted, seek identification with the superior ones.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 42)

Literature would quickly become unsatisfying if the joke were always on the audience. It is far more fun to be on the side of the winning party, so sympathy with the cheater was strongly encouraged, either directly or indirectly. As for the victim, clearly “neither pity nor moral outrage are the expected reactions, whereas the *Fabliaux* are commonly predicated on the delight about sadism and the stupid victims’ suffering.” (Classen, 107). Here we have returned to the theme of the amoral universe, but with audience participation. Value is added simply because the audience may, malevolently, watch somebody suffer. Like the upset of social status and order, though, this enjoyment of *Schadenfreude* is rendered harmless and acceptable by its containment within a fictional universe. After all, nobody is really made to suffer. One may safely say, at the end of *Reinhart Fuchs*, that no animals were harmed in the making of this epic.

2.3 Parallel Study of *Reinhart Fuchs* and the *Amis*

In these two epics, a charismatic cheater dupes others or is himself duped, in a series of shorter adventures that have been compiled into a logical sequence. They are appropriate for parallel study because they are very close (sixty years apart) in date of publication, approximately equal in length (if we do not consider the probably-apocryphal credulous provost episode, *Reinhart* is shorter than the *Amis* by only twenty-two lines), and both very popular. In both of these stories, other characters besides the cheater appear in more than one episode, particularly in *Reinhart Fuchs*, which uses such characters as the wolf Ysengrin and his wife Hersant again and again.

The works take a form closer to novels than to collections of short stories, although it was on a collection of short stories that *Reinhart Fuchs* was based.

Reinhart Fuchs, according to Strassner's general definition, is representative of the *Fabel*, but also of *Schwank*: "Wird die Handlung so angelegt, daß in ihr durch die Klugheit oder die List eines handelnden einem anderen Schaden erwächst, so geht die Fabel in den Schwank über." (Strassner, 16) Reinhart is dedicated to causing damage to others, often gaining nothing else through his efforts, whereas Amis is motivated by money and will exert no energy on any venture that will not lead to material gain.

Reinhart is also similar to other genres. The famous court scenes in *Reinhart Fuchs* also demonstrate the pessimistic views of society we have seen in Hayes's examination of the farce; the judge is corrupt, the royal advisors are all either incompetent or ineffective, and the guilty scoundrel wins easily. Hayes examines a French cheater character, the lawyer Maître Pathelin, from a work of the same name. Two of the cheats in this story occur in a court of law, and the view of this court is just as negative: the scoundrel wins and justice is not served until another cheater comes along and turns the tables against him, not by seeking justice in a law-confirming, law-abiding manner, but by using the ineffective court system to cheat Pathelin as Pathelin has cheated a merchant. Though its judge is well-meaning and honest, this court, under the cheater's control, is no more effective than that of Noble/Frevel from *Reinhart Fuchs*. What Hayes writes on *Pathelin* is applicable to *Reinhart*, and other courtroom comedies as well: "Court is clearly not seen as a realm where justice is served, but rather a place where the judge is callous or incompetent and winning depends solely on wit and cunning." (Hayes, 60) This pessimistic assumption is accurate in the case of *Reinhart Fuchs*, in which a rape and murder trial is derailed by a cheater's prowess and the king's selfishness.

Significant differences also exist between the works, for example, the difference between *Fabel* and *Versroman*. *Pfaffe Amis* is representative of the early *Versroman*:

Der Stricker, der in der 1. Hälfte des 13. Jhs mit seinem >>Pfaffen Amis<< den ersten deutschen „Schwankroman" (Fischer) schafft, bindet zwölf Wanderstreiche an die gestalt eines englischen Geistlichen. Bekannte Motive, von denen mehrere im >>Eulenspiegel-Volksbuch<< wiederkehren, finden Verwendung: Amis löst Rätselfragen; er lehrt einen Esel das Lesen; malt Bilder,

die nur ehelich Geborene sehen können; heilt Kranke, indem er erklärt, der Siechste müsse sterben; kann als ‚Laie‘ plötzlich die Messe lesen; läßt einen als Bischof verkleideten Maurer zum Pfand und betrügt einen Juwelier um dessen Habe, indem er ihn als tobsüchtigen einem Arzt vorführt usw. (Strassner, 54)

Strassner describes the *Amis* as the first *Schwankroman* because, in spite of its episodic structure, it takes the form of a continuous, self-contained whole. Although, like *Reinhart*, it is constructed from several smaller stories, they are arranged in a logical order to gradually escalate to a criminal climax and a redemptive conclusion.

Amis's victims, and the experiences he has with them, are also described as following themes, making the short stories hang together as a whole. “Fehlt auch einzelnen Episoden die Ausgewogenheit, so erweist sich der >>Pfaffe Amîs<< doch als planvoll gefügtes Erzählgefüge. Neben der Einheit des Helden sind weitere Formkriterien: Typenmäßige Einheitlichkeit der Gegenspieler; Einheitlichkeit des Stofftypus; und zwar sind alle Streiche ausgerichtet auf listig-trügerischen Besitzerwerb” (Strassner, 54-5) The cheats themselves progress in a similar fashion, typical of the *Amis* but not necessarily of other works: *Amis's* always-anonymous victims never offer much resistance, and the priest carries out his perfectly-planned cheats as smoothly in each episode as in the one before it.

Amis's perfect planning and smooth progress represent only one of the many differences between the two cheaters. With two significant exceptions, *Amis* always manages to flee the scene and, therefore, the consequences of his cheating, whereas *Reinhart* tends to be held accountable for his crimes and acquires a reputation that contrasts sharply with the priest’s perpetual anonymity abroad. The concept of ‘abroad’ is noticeably absent from the German *Reinhart*, even though it appears in its predecessors; *Amis* can move about, while *Reinhart* is forced to remain within the forest where everyone knows him and remembers what he has done. *Amis* is described at the end of his epic as being granted eternal salvation, whereas *Reinhart* is clearly evil; his demonic traits appear again and again.

Both tricksters do redeem themselves to some extent at the end, though, as *Amis* (at least technically) joins a monastery and retires from public life, while *Reinhart* does overthrow a bad king, though not for altruistic or progressive aims. When these cheaters do evil, moreover, the comic value of the evil that they do is sufficient to gain acceptance of their actions.

The way in which this comic value exculpates their crimes is worthy of examination, as it demonstrates the extent to which concepts and principles similar to those in medieval texts remain in use today. Crane explores several theories of humour pertinent to medieval works.

One, the superiority theory, is directed at the victim: the audience laughs in triumphant derision at mistakes that they, themselves, would never make, and they glory in their perceived superiority over the character involved.

The oldest statements of comic theory fall primarily under ... 'superiority theory'. Superiority theorists argue that people laugh in response to some form of perceived inferiority in others or superiority in themselves. Plato's, Aristotle's, and to some extent Cicero's views of humour fall into this category, but Thomas Hobbes is usually credited with the earliest and best known superiority theory identified as such. (Crane, 37)

This theory is by no means the only one, and cannot possibly account for every attempt at humour, in these two works or elsewhere. Crane points out: "Nearly all humour theorists recognize this Hobbesian sense of superiority as one type of humour (e.g. ethnic jokes and other aggressive humour), but many accuse it of failing to account for much other humour containing no apparent criticism or producing no conscious feelings of superiority in the speaker or the audience." (Crane, 37)

He then moves on to explain the incongruity theory, in which a familiar situation induces the audience to anticipate a particular object or event, but then surprises them with the substitution of something else. "Incongruity theories argue that humour consists of a perceived or felt gap – an incongruity – between expectation and actuality." (Crane, 37) One example of incongruity occurs when, in the *Amis*, the bishop asks the priest questions that he cannot possibly be expected to answer. Amusingly, he is able to answer them readily, not with the correct answers, but with flip responses that anyone could have come up with, and these are sufficient; he had never agreed to prove that his answers were correct.

This situation could also be applied to the relief theory. This theory, introduced by Francis Hutcheson and elaborated by Immanuel Kant, is that audiences find comic value in the sudden thwarting of pessimistic expectations. What one expected to be disastrous is revealed to be

completely harmless, and the audience laughs with relief¹⁷. Discovering that Reinhart's favourite enemy, Ysengrin the wolf, is not, in fact, particularly dangerous could be considered another example of relief laughter. As a wolf, Ysengrin should be expected to be the terrifying predator in the equation, but he appears instead as ineffectual and defenseless against the cheater.

Crane goes on to describe a theory of mechanical behaviour, for which he credits Bergson. Besides being Crane's obvious favourite, this theory penetrates to the heart of the cheaters' techniques. "Bergson argues in his famous definition that the essence of comedy is 'something mechanical encrusted on the living'." (Crane, 38) The source of humour is the unexpected perception of inanimate characteristics in living subjects, or vice versa. A human being who behaves mechanically, for example responding logically to aparent stimuli, but clearly disregarding the hidden situation, may be producing comic content, as may a non-living object that imitates life, for example in comic sketches where a human being kicks a malfunctioning machine and the machine kicks back. Crane attributes comic potential to rigid social customs that preclude thought, as the rules are followed without intelligent consideration. These rigid social customs, in which a character ought to know better but still performs an action because it is socially expected, appear frequently in the *Amis* and in *Reinhart*. Dupes in these epics are easily controlled by cheaters because cheaters are adept at manipulating the rule sets their dupes follow. This theory also covers non-thinking responses to physical stimuli that reflect an individual's animal nature, while bypassing human intelligence¹⁸. Human beings were

¹⁷ "Laughter, Francis Hutcheson first argued in 1750, is the response to that perception. Kant is most famous, however, for furthering the theory by adding to it the idea that laughter arises from perception of 'something absurd (something in which, therefore, the understanding can of itself find no delight)' which produces 'a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing'. For Kant, the tension between expectation and reality is resolved as one realizes there is nothing to fear, that the incongruity is harmless." (Crane, 37-8)

¹⁸ "Bergson expands his basic notion of tension between the living and the mechanical to include the relationship between the soul and the body of a person, identifying as comic any incident that 'calls our attention to the physical in a person, when it is the moral side that is concerned'. This

distinguished by their capacity for logic and reflection, so a human being who behaves like an animal, but not as a thinking animal, is no less incongruous than a human being who behaves like an inanimate object. The cheaters are able to make their victims behave without intelligence. Without the use of intelligence, which is the exclusive province of the cheater, and when no social custom is available to keep them in line through automatic responses, they are ruled by their passions, physical and animalistic desires that function as rules for any character foolish enough to abandon logic. The means by which the cheater gets them under control makes them into humans turned animals, or living things turned mechanical.

2.4 The Function of Cheater Epics

Writing about Middle-English sermons, Crane explores a contemporary perception that life takes the form of literature. Life does not imitate art, but is in fact art, a large and vivid allegory for biblical teachings: “a medieval preacher and his audience understood life and history as allegorical, as very exempla of spiritual truth.” (Crane, 32) If life has the same structure as literature in its possession of a moral, then literature, from this Middle-English perspective, is endowed with a moral by definition. Audiences can expect to take something away from any text, no matter how insignificant or even antisocial it may turn out to be. What they took away from such morally dubious material as the cheater/trickster story is a contentious topic. Naturally, the concept has evolved over time. Writing in 1914 on English satire from the late Middle Ages, Campbell demonstrates one older theory about medieval satire, that it was a subversive attempt to reform evils in society.

She argues that morality is essential to humour, which is “pervaded by a great moral earnestness” (Campbell, 13) largely dedicated to reforming a corrupt system that would never permit open

element of the comic proves useful in understanding some of the comedy of the Middle Ages.” (Crane, 38)

dissent, and includes real efforts to change the way in which the audience behaves¹⁹. Campbell finds in satire a protest not against personal sin, but against a corrupt society, in which the general public views existing institutions as faulty. Writing on English theatre between 1450 and 1500, Campbell ambitiously writes: “the church was corrupt, the government was corrupt and the people knew it and resented it. Keen witted men were tired of false pilgrimages, penances, and worship of images; tired of the hypocrisy of avaricious churchmen who sold benefices and held plural livings; and disgusted with the ignorance and immorality of the clergy.” (Campbell, 14) In this view, then, contemporary theatre was explicitly anti-Church, all the time. When not directly aimed at seeking reform, Campbell writes, these works still remain hostile. She interprets jokes at the expense of the Church and corrupt churchmen as attacks on the church in general, but does not attempt to delineate all comic texts as reform-oriented.

Early English Drama, especially in the moralities where it enlivens the direct didacticism of these dull old plays with virile attacks upon the church and society; and thus teaches in an indirect manner what should be by attempting to abolish what should not be. The reformatory idea, however, was not always present. The authors at times merely gave expression to that common satirical spirit by virtue of which men delight in ridiculing the follies of others. (Campbell, 114)

Theories such as Campbell's sound strange in a modern context, where guessing at the author's motivation counts as risky business, but perhaps she describes effects, rather than intentions. Wertz argues that the comic text has a very different effect. Rather than producing a moral, this variety of literature acts to preserve the status quo by providing desired experiences that cannot be obtained in a socially acceptable way. This effect, commonly known as catharsis, allows safe release of tendencies that are ordinarily repressed for the good of the community. "In successful

¹⁹ “If we contrast formal and informal satire, we find that in the main qualities they are alike. Both must have humor, must show in their authors a sense of superiority, a sense of the ludicrous, the power to exaggerate either consciously or unconsciously, and at the final analysis a reformatory purpose.” (Campbell, 9)

dramatic catharsis the audience participates vicariously in forbidden acts portrayed on the stage, acts presumably in accord with some of their own asocial desires. The actor, however, does not succeed in his antisocial behaviour, for he undergoes punishment on the stage, atoning vicariously for the desires of the audience" (Wertz, 444) Cathartic sympathy with suffering characters provides the added benefit of allowing the audience to step (again safely and acceptably) out of their boundaries. Wertz finds in both medieval and ancient drama a valuable opportunity to experience pity for, and thus a form of superiority over, people who are traditionally dominant. "By pitying a stately figure of high social position reduced to meager circumstances by tragic fate, the man of low social status elevates himself, and his pity becomes pride. Much of ancient tragedy provides catharsis of social envy by humbling the proud man of high status, thus neutralizing the inherent resentment of the lower classes against the upper." (Wertz, 444)

Humour, then, ultimately supports the status quo by keeping the little people from resenting the big people, a concept that was already ancient when medieval writers put pen to parchment. Hayes takes this argument even further in his examination of medieval texts before Rabelais. This argument also suggests that humour does not ultimately induce audiences to fight or deride the powers-that-be, but instead supports the status quo by rewarding emotional experiences that support the community. Rather than safely releasing antisocial sentiments, Hayes' medieval comedies encourage socially conservative ones²⁰. While he accepts that reform may be demanded by Rabelais, he asserts that his predecessors' works have no such insubordinate content. He disputes Bakhtin's theory of medieval humour in general, including the presence of socially levelling, carnivalesque qualities, and providing evidence that comic texts instead supported existing social institutions²¹ by channelling derision toward those who stepped outside

²⁰ "the belief system and ethos expressed in farce is essentially conservative." (Hayes, 57)

²¹ In contrast, Hayes attributes revolutionary qualities to Rabelais' works, arguing not that medieval theatre was never oriented against powerful institutions, but rather that Rabelais was the first playwright to do so: "an author like Rabelais, who was actively engaged in an ideological struggle, recognized farce's potential to be transformed into a political weapon to be

of their traditionally-defined social roles. "Spectators are shown through negative examples the dangers of violating social norms and encouraged to resign themselves to their lot in life." (Hayes, 64) Characters who behave abnormally come to a humiliating end, suffering for their crimes, which always take the form of refusal to conform to society's expectations of them. Writing about the same time period, Hayes contradicts Campbell's argument entirely, but preserves one factor: the humiliating reversal in which someone who used to be powerful becomes the butt of the joke. In his interpretation, though, this reversal restores the existing order, rather than upsetting it:

Above all else, all actions and dialogue in the farce have one goal: the humiliating reversal that comes at the end of the play, which is often coarse and obscene. Typically, the character being tricked is guilty of some form of excessiveness or exaggerated appetite. The *volte-face* that is central to the genre represents a restoration of the status quo, as someone who has stepped beyond certain societal limits is put back in his place. (Hayes, 13)

Hayes argues that, at least in the dramatic farce, there are no exceptions to this rule. Though the cheating victim or foolish character can be a high-ranking community member, there are no pre-Marxist swings at the real system; while high-ranking characters or institutions are just as subject to rules as anyone else, attempts to move up in the world are punished as resulting from a lack of *mâze*, or *démesure*.

used against entrenched institutions. It is within the space created by this 'spillover into everyday 'serious' life' that Rabelais, who was very much attuned to this type of theater and its satirical possibilities, could alter an essentially conservative genre and produce radical, subversive farce-like performances in his writing. As the present study will show, it is only within the context of an ideological battle being waged by an elite group of reform-minded humanists, a group with which Rabelais readily identified, that popular forms such as farce were radicalized and thus used as vehicles for social and religious change." (Hayes, 6-7)

Even at the moment when farce is directly parodying traditional justice, it is no more than the 'nose thumbing and table turning' previously discussed. Farce does not present the revolt of a nascent proletariat, but rather laughs sarcastically at the way things are. It does not propose change and in fact punishes those who attempt to alter their situation by some act of *démésure*. (Hayes, 61)

Specific powerful people do not come under attack. Farcical characters, like those in the Stricker's *Schwänke*, tend to be nameless or lacking in descriptive features beyond common stereotypes that identify them as "a farmer" or "a nobleman." Hayes considers the underrepresentation of very high-ranked characters, in comparison to the heroic epic for example, a sign that the real-life status quo is also not threatened by activities within the story²². The above-mentioned domestic sphere of the farce is here interpreted as a guarantee that criticism will also be limited to this small area.

It should be mentioned that Hayes is not writing specifically about stories with cheaters, and the time period examined is quite different; although the farce tends to have cheating characters behind most of the plot, it would be dangerous to apply Hayes' theory indiscriminately to the high medieval German *Schwank*. The moral of the cheater story is unlikely to reflect idealistic and modernizing concepts like those we see reflected in Campbell's essay, but whether they are always conservative is also doubtful; it would be difficult to fit a large and diverse category of literature into such a rigid mold. What is certain, and apparent in the criticism of all three writers, is that the comedy, the farce, and the *Schwank* are not inherently Christian in nature. The Stricker supports this hypothesis with an oddly un-Christian angel in the "three wishes" *Schwank*, and Amis and Reinhart are most definitely no saints. Reinhart appears to reflect infernal tendencies, and the redeeming qualities of the scoundrel Amis, such as education, wit and the practice of *milte*, are all quite secular. In this respect, at least, the farce and the *Schwank* are reasonably comparable. Hayes goes so far as to describe the farce not as unchristian, but as anti-Christian,

²² "Not only does farce avoid using characters that represent the larger social institutions of the nobility and the clergy, but also the characters found in farce are essentially anonymous individuals." (Hayes, 15)

not ignoring, but directly violating, Christian values²³. This discrepancy should come as no surprise. The idealism of Christianity is anathema to the cheater story, in which every character is expected either to cheat or to behave very foolishly. There are no saints in the farce, or in *Schwank*, which inevitably provide a pessimistic view of human nature in general.

The pessimistic attitude of the farce is reflected and occasionally amplified in the *Schwank*. In both of these genres, characters frequently learn nothing from their penalties and, if they do, there will surely be a fair supply of dupes to take their place. “While in the plays, all of those guilty of excessive desires or ambition are scorned, there is a tacit recognition that such people will always exist; that despite efforts to warn them, they will continue to provide abundant subject material for these comedies.” (Hayes, 63)

The most pessimistically-depicted characters are probably the women, but women do not tend to be punished in *Schwank*, certainly not as frequently as men. In the *Amis* it is the women who are complicit in the priest's church-dedication cheat, gaining along with the cheater. This phenomenon also appears in Hayes's farces. Hayes writes that female characters can navigate the cheating universe well because of their portrayal as inherently dishonest and in tune with animal cunning, a negative feature that nonetheless serves a character well. “Domestic farces are categorically misogynistic in their characterizations of the sexes; trying to uncover traces of female empowerment in the plays requires great effort and imagination.” (Hayes, 30) These characters are more often placed in the position of the cheater than the victim, not because they tend not to step out of bounds, as he describes the victims as doing, but because, within their natural tendencies, they are innately skilled at doing so. Their natural boundaries, and thus any reasonable interpretation of their social boundaries, include lying and cheating: “Women are typically portrayed as naturally deceptive, and are therefore much less prone to be caught in the trap of a farce.” (Hayes, 30) Though successful, this exceptional skill at deceit is by no means complimentary. The frequent victories of females are not a power upset, but a pessimistic view of a status quo in which women, endowed as they are with more animal cunning than human

²³ “While the plays always move towards the reestablishment of equilibrium, a shift that is ultimately conservative, this farce serves as an explicit reminder that the values privileged in the genre of farce, while traditional, also violate normative Christian codes of conduct.” (Hayes, 43)

intelligence, always win by trickery. “Women are simply too skilled at deception to fall prey to it in their turn.” (Hayes, 13)

The women who help Amis to cheat in the church-dedication ceremony are not necessarily condemnable, however. A cuckolded husband was in a shameful position, but an adulteress may simply have been pushed beyond reasonable limits of patience. The farce, Hayes writes, defends adulteresses at the expense of their husbands; adultery is unavoidable, and emphasis is placed on secrecy, rather than maintaining fidelity²⁴. The farce also assumes that the husband has been somehow remiss in fulfilling his half of the marriage contract, specifically that he must not be satisfying his wife sexually. The works examined by Hayes depict aged husbands who have arrogantly married women who were significantly younger than they were, a violation of those ideals promoted in the farce. The husband “has transgressed societal norms by taking a younger wife whom he is incapable of satisfying.” (Hayes, 32) To do so is to remove from circulation a woman who might have otherwise have bargained for a better deal, becoming sexually available to some other community member who would meet her needs and desires.

Neither Amis nor Reinhart takes a (willing) lover, but Amis does provide opportunities for adulteresses to keep their affairs private. Similarly, Frevel, mistaking Ysengrin's report of his wife's rape for an overblown complaint that she is conducting an extramarital affair, smiles on the relationship between the two young lovers and gives a short speech in favour of tolerating a reasonable amount of adulterous liaisons.

Could there be a moral in this attitude? There may not be. Strassner, writing on the *Schwank* specifically, posits that the primary purpose of the *Schwank* is to amuse, not to accomplish some worldly aim like conveying a moral. “Die Funktion allen komischen Erzählguts besteht in erster Linie darin, Gelächter oder zumindest Heiterkeit zu erregen.” (Strassner, 11) This statement is certainly safer, if less exciting, than Campbell's seething proletariat, or Wertz's ancient cathartic function, but it is also far more likely. In my opinion, the probability that a medieval minstrel

²⁴ “Cheating on one's spouse is not condemnable in farce; it is both acceptable and inevitable, and the only important rule emphasized in the plays is the need to keep adulterous liaisons a secret.” (Hayes, 30)

would have been interested in maintaining moral order, or inciting unrest, in the towns or courts he visited, is slimmer than the probability that a writer of farces would be interested in making his audience laugh.

2.5 The Functioning Victim Character

The presentation of the victim in the comic narrative is always, to some extent, negative. The victims analyzed by Hayes are to be punished because they have disrupted the social order, and must be put back in place through pedagogically-oriented pain. This pain takes the form of a joke, on them, making the victim a key element in audience laughter²⁵. Pain and punishment are necessary because the victim is not simply someone who fails to measure up, but is guilty of a real wrongdoing based on lack of *mâze*, or, in Hayes' terms, of *démeseure*. The farce, Hayes asserts, still retains its own ethics that must not be violated: “within these plays full of mayhem and turbulence, there is an underlying ethical system that governs the raucous action. Rather than being unprovoked and unwarranted, the punishments in comic texts constitute a form of popular justice. Any character in farce that is guilty of any form of *démeseure* is punished and ridiculed.” (Hayes, 59) Naughty as it may be in terms of popular rules, the farce, or the *Schwank*, still follows its own. For example, no victim can be punished without a reason, making the victim more than a sounding-board for the cheat. The victim is an essential functioning element of the plot; the victim is as important as the cheater to the cheat's success. For the cheat to work, the victim must supply an action vicious enough to simultaneously warrant punishment, and foolish enough to make that punishment possible. The cheater does not work alone, but in tandem with a co-operative victim. Hayes writes that cheats in the farce “highlight less the cunning prowess of the victorious trickster than the errors of the person being tricked.” (Hayes, 59) We will see in the chapter on *Reinhart Fuchs* that this is true for our epics, as well. Reinhart and Amis are not unstoppable forces, but strategists who know when and where they can have an effect. It is the

²⁵ “The laughter of farce is always evoked at the expense of the character being punished” (Hayes, 15)

victim who gives the cheater a chance to cheat, and the victim is intimately involved in the cheat's workings and success.

The penalties suffered by this essential element are not normally serious. Violators must be humiliated and derided, not made to suffer horribly or die. Unlike the characters in the Stricker's *maeren*, most comic victims, such as those in the farce, have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes, brush off their misfortune and proceed to the happy ending, but even this re-education is not the point. Hayes argues that these punishments are not there for the purpose of *Schadenfreude*, but for more sophisticated narrative purposes, to restore balance to the play's universe. "the punishments meted out are not meant to be cruel, nor is their punitive quality meant as a moral corrective, beyond the obvious restoration of the status quo at the end of the plays." (Hayes, 16). No executions are allowed in farce justice, though; punishments that do not allow the punished party to reform and become acceptable have no use, and this functionality is ordinarily preserved in the farces that Hayes analyzes²⁶. In the epics, however, and in the Stricker's *maeren* and in *Daniel*, a grave misfortune for the victim most certainly is an option, and one that is used frequently.

As we shall see in Haug's analysis of the Stricker's anomalous *maeren*, a terrible fate for any of the characters simply would not be funny. Real injury spoils a joke; it may not be a fair world that the cheater and victim inhabit, but it is a lighthearted one. A character who believes she is going to die, but obviously is not, and should know better, is far more entertaining than one who really might. "One laughs at the distraught wife trapped in the washtub in the *Farce du cuvier* in part because there is in fact no danger of her actually drowning, despite her hyperbolic exclamations to the contrary." (Hayes, 58) As a result, the punishments that take place in Hayes's farces tend to be oriented far more toward humour than toward injury to the punished party. The punishments inflicted are nothing like real ones: "Farce clearly stands in stark contrast to traditional justice, where judges wear solemn robes and sit on raised benches to assert their authority and where punishments are very serious, at times capital" (Hayes, 60). In the *Schwank*, though, things do get more serious: the she-wolf Hersant is raped, and Frevel's courtiers flayed

²⁶ "There is nothing grave or deadly about the typical punishments of farce." (Hayes, 60)

alive (though they appear to survive the experience with more evidence of humiliation than injury; neither the reports that they are in pain, nor the reports that the skin grows back, are carried over from the French originals). The Stricker's *maeren* tend to kill off or completely ruin their victims, but the Stricker can never be accused of slavish adherence to the customs of any existing genre. Unfortunately, the only consistent concept that one discovers about comic victims is that they are a contentious subject.

The basic villain prototype, as Hayes describes it, and as we usually find in our two works to be examined, is a character who suffers because of passion, vice or extreme foolishness: "Victims in farce invariably demonstrate some sort of exaggerated appetite, often base appetites such as avidity, gluttony, concupiscence, or the condemnable vice of pride." (Hayes, 25-6) But Hayes's analysis may go too far for us to translate his criticism of late-Medieval farce to our exploration of the high-medieval *Schwank*. While he writes that "All attacks in farce are the result of the victim's excessive behavior or unwillingness to conform to expected standards, thus transgressing social norms" (Hayes, 26), this statement can be applied to *Reinhart* or the *Amis* only if one allows the occasional unreasonable standard. Many victims of both tricksters, such as Frevel's courtiers or Amis's jeweller, are simply ordinary, rather than particularly flawed, and find themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time. In contrast, Hayes' analysis emphasizes a tendency of victims to take the form of villains.

It is still possible to find such a victim in our epics, though. The most villainous victim is one who abuses his or her power over others, giving less and taking more than he or she could reasonably expect. The wife who demands that her husband undergo a trial by fire to prove his fidelity, and the liege-lord who searches for excuses to take back a fief, transgress social customs instituted to protect the community. Not only can such an injurious individual be cheated with impunity, but he or she must be cheated to avert a depressing and unsatisfactory story.

Naturally the ability to be villainous increases for characters higher up on the social ladder. A powerful character can do more damage, but the character with power over others will tend to be used as the villain, and thus the cheating victim. "Those who are in higher social positions are often portrayed as greedy and willing to take advantage of any unsuspecting individual, and they often become the final victims in farce. There exists a sort of social justice where those who have

little to lose and much to gain are usually the ones found triumphing over those who are better off.” (Hayes, 26)

Unlike the de-villainized adulteress (Heinrich has scrubbed out Hersant's lasciviousness), these villain-victims do appear quite prominently in both works. Hayes's examples of physically humiliating punishment, such as exposure of (or physical injury to) the buttocks or other private parts, mirrors the physical mutilations and humiliation present in *Reinhart's* court scene and the *Amis's* jeweller episode. These indignities decrease the victim's esteem: he or she is revealed to be less, as a person, than he or she seemed before the punishment took place.

The nature of the punishment, by means of this humiliation, makes the victim all the more villainous, or at least less respectable:

Their primary purpose is to humiliate and degrade the victim. The fact that the punishments are habitually inflicted on the 'bodily lower stratum' serves to emphasize the baseness of the actions of the individual being punished. The punishments act as equalizers, returning their victims to their proper state. They often lead the person punished to admit his or her wrongdoing and to pledge to do better. This is the main reason why it is difficult to see punishments in farce as gratuitous. They invariably serve a useful and decisive purpose. (Hayes, 58-9)

This diminished respectability does more than make the victim laughable, though. It associates him or her with a long line of evil characters traditionally made to look ridiculous by similar means. Crane's analysis of the Harrowing of Hell plays and other moral presentations sees devils, demons and egregious sinners placed in the same victim/villain positions.

Mocking evil has its own value: “These devils, whom the audience may be tempted to fear or blame in everyday life as they wrestle with temptation, guilt, and suffering, are depicted as impotent, silly, and utterly defeated by the power of the Lord. Laughing at them strengthens the audience's faith emotionally in the didactic message that Christ is more powerful than the devil and demonstrates that they are on God's side.” (Crane, 45) But one play that receives particular attention from Crane is the Middle English morality play *Mankynde*, which directs humiliation and derision at both the demons and the protagonist they torment, and all to teach virtue to the audience. The play humiliates both parties, but on the whole, the play's thesis remains the same:

“the rhetorical aim of this humour is to deride evil and exalt good, thereby encouraging in the audience a love for goodness and good behaviour.” (Crane, 40)

Crane is here responding to an article by Diller, who emphasizes that the victim is constructed in such a way that it is difficult for the audience to sympathize with his or her suffering. Diller warns us, though, that a medieval comic text will not be intuitively understood by the modern reader because the varieties of humour that it uses have evolved and changed over time, and some have even been ruled unacceptable, particularly in the area of humiliating victims:

Most of us like to laugh, but our acculturation also tells us that in many situations we must not laugh. Laughter about obscene, racist, or sexist jokes is disapproved of in a culture of educated people. Laughter about somebody else's misfortunes - that which in German and many other languages is called *Schadenfreude* - is also objectionable. (Diller, 2)

This is not the case for medieval texts, particularly when the sufferer is assigned an evil alignment. Audience members can feel that their joy at the character's suffering is really a joy at the thwarting of evil, and *Schadenfreude* becomes acceptable once more. According to Diller, this attitude was very pervasive; the suffering of the damned, for example, was supposed to elicit joy, rather than horror or sadness. "The religious literature of the Middle Ages especially is full of the terrible fate that awaits the damned but which apparently is not meant to call forth sympathy; on the contrary, *Schadenfreude*, even triumphant derision, seems to be the intended reaction." (Diller, 3) This pattern can be observed in the characters within the stories as well:

“Derision rather than sympathy is also the response that a cuckolded husband receives as he returns to his bedchamber one night, having been severely beaten by his own servant. Laughter in such cases gives a more or less restrained expression to a sense of ‘Schadenfreude’, confirming the (comically) diminished status of the derided character.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 68)

Some of the victims are simply not particularly villainous, and some of the pranks pulled by the tricksters, including rape and the loss of two victims' entire livelihoods, are vastly out of proportion to the victims' actual or supposed transgressions. The victims' placement in the category of cheat victims, and thus non-sympathetic vicious people, fools and criminals, is

occasionally all that defines them as punishable. The tradition of punishing vicious characters produces audience expectations: because they are being punished, they are members of the victim group, and thus outsiders and potential villains.

While the physical debasement of the victim helps to legitimize this association between victim and villain, the association becomes somewhat more diverse when the cheater becomes victimized, too, and the audience readily turns on him: the role of the villain or victim or cheater is not permanent or static. In those situations where the farcical trickster is tricked, Hayes observes the same physical humiliation as we will observe with Reinhart, again emphasizing the character's animal characteristics over human ones, associating the cheater with the same dehumanizing/outsider theme. This debasement is effective even in the case of the most savvy characters, so it is no surprise that it is applied to the trickster character itself. Audiences can support a cheater who is, from a moral perspective, and by the rules of the cheating universe, clearly no better than the victims.

According to Bakhtin's analysis of the carnivalesque tradition, though, the laughing audience does not assert superiority, or even dehumanize or villainize the victims, but rather recognizes its own ugliness in them. Bakhtin's theory is borne out by repeated audience support of a character who is as morally flawed as the victims. Even Hayes, who disagrees with Bakhtin on most points, still argues that the cheater frequently lacks any moral high ground to justify audience support: "The peculiar nature of the victim's punishment is that it comes from a character who, given the chance, will commit the same crimes as the character being punished." (Hayes, 29) By choosing one evil character over another, the audience becomes vicariously complicit in the crimes committed by this favourite. In fact, in the *Mankynde* plays, Crane observes a literal complicity, in which the demons take up a collection from the audience in order to continue tormenting the protagonist:

After further efforts to turn Mankynde away from his faith have failed and Mankynde has defeated the villains with his spade as described above, they decide to summon the devil Titivillus to help them successfully tempt Mankynde. The voice of the devil is heard from off stage, and the tricksters tell the audience members that in order to see this devil, they must put money in a collection plate that is passed around. The contribution is, of course, to pay the actors for their

entertainment. However, in the world of the play of which they have become a part, the audience is financing the effort to ruin Mankynde's soul. (Crane, 55)

Crane reads in this feature an example of Bakhtin's carnivalesque, in which the audience actually joins in the action²⁷. But the action that they join is on the demons' side. The audience, far from mocking evil, frequently find themselves laughing with the devils out of pure *Schadenfreude* at the suffering of Mankynde; they become part of the cast of evil characters "The audience becomes complicit in the moral fall of the hero, who so clearly represents themselves." (Crane, 55) While this decision to side with evil may serve particular moral aims²⁸, it also makes sense of the demonic qualities of Reinhart Fuchs; it is sometimes acceptable for the audience to cheer on the side of the character that they know is in the wrong.

²⁷ "the play's strategy operates less directly in many cases, actually involving the audience in the action of the play, in true carnivalesque fashion, breaking through the division between the world of the play and the world of the audience." (Crane, 55)

²⁸ "Including the audience in the action of the play and inducing their laughter *with* the joking of the villains ultimately serves the stated orthodox Christian aims of the play. While Mankynde is in his pious state, the audience is drawn through the carnivalesque humour of the villains to support, albeit inadvertently, the temptation. Once Mankynde begins to struggle, the rhetoric shifts to sympathetic comedy until Mankynde has exhausted the pleasures of the world and, despairing of his own life, desires death (800-810). At this point, the comedy invites *Schadenfreude*: Mercy appears, and the three villains and Mischeff comically flee much like the devils Jesus defeats in the Harrowing of Hell plays. Just as they are about to hang Mankynde by a rope, they see Mercy enter with a scourge. New Gyse becomes entangled by the rope: 'Qweke, qweke, qweke! Alass, my thrott I beschrew yow, mary!' (808). Unlike the earlier humour, these final comic moments do not invite audience members to laugh sympathetically in collusion with the villains; spectators are simply to laugh derisively at the wicked tempters' misfortune. The goal of the play is no longer to draw the audience into the evil. The rhetorical objective has shifted to that of moving the audience to identify with Mankynde's repentance and restoration." (Crane, 56-7)

Evil can therefore be charismatic, and the audience can be made to identify with the victim without necessarily desiring an end to his or her suffering. The less-than-evil victim, a carnivalesque element in its universal and sympathetic nature, is a character who may have some slight moral failing but is certainly no more guilty than most. Audience members can see themselves in this character, and laugh in sympathy²⁹. Sympathetic victims, while obviously flawed, and the butt of the joke, are not made less sympathetic through their placement in this category, but more so; the audience of the moral plays recognizes the victim's flaws as its own, and viewers accept themselves as warranting the same derision.

An endearing victim, Crane writes, has high educational potential³⁰, but such characters do not appear to exist in *Reinhart Fuchs* or *Pfaffe Amis*. What does appear is another sympathetic character who is also the cheating victim: the cheater himself. Reinhart is thwarted many times in his efforts to do evil, and falls into one obvious trap that cannot ensnare even his most foolish victim without a great deal of coaxing. The victim does not need to be villainous or undefeatable, and being punished is, in a carnivalesque atmosphere, not necessarily a misfortune. Bakhtin writes that humiliation destroys a character's esteem, either verbally or physically, but this

²⁹ “A second and more complex major comic pattern invites laughter at good characters in whom hearers or readers see themselves. Rather than inviting derisive laughter, this comedy invites the audience to laugh at themselves in their own human weaknesses by seeing those weaknesses in others. It is a laughter of familiarity, of identification, of shared humanity, and it connects the audience to the characters who serve as the example to follow.” (Crane, 46)

³⁰ “The pattern of sympathetic comedy applies to characters who themselves are the exempla, the models for the audience to imitate. Their dilemmas, often presented comically, inspire laughter at the familiarity of the dilemma, at the audience members' own weakness, reinforcing their need for the message and making them more ready to appropriate it.” (Crane, 54)

destruction leads to rebirth, a re-creation of something better³¹. The victim character is tortured not to be punished, but to be redeemed.

A cheater who is no better than other characters has no particular distinguishing features to preclude failure. While punishments may mark out villainy, this ignominy means little in a universe where nearly everyone is foolish, evil or both. In the farce, “the trickster can quickly become the victim and roles are essentially interchangeable. This interchangeability helps elucidate why farces, while they can seem cruel, are actually intended to be lighthearted.” (Hayes, 16) The farcical, and the *Schwank*, universes are after all full of comic reversals; turning the cheater into the victim is as complete a reversal as any other.

2.6 Cheating Methods

Cheaters do not all have the same *modus operandi*. A cheater may deceive the victim by means of an intentionally deceptive truth, for example, a non-speech situation that looks misleading, or an outright lie. When Amis disguises himself as a doctor, he tells the king not to pay him until his sick courtiers announce to him that they are well. He allows the king to assume that they will actually be well when they do so, but Amis promises no such thing; he only offers to induce the courtiers to tell him so, and this he does. Hayes refers to this form of speech as “the language of confusion.” The language of confusion is a statement that is literally true, but deliberately

³¹ "It is characteristic for the familiar speech of the marketplace to use abusive language, insulting words or expressions, some of them quite lengthy and complex. The abuse is grammatically and semantically isolated from context and is regarded as a complete unit, something like a proverb. This is why we can speak of abusive language as of a special genre of billingsgate. Abusive expressions are not homogeneous in origin; they had various functions in primitive communication and had in most cases the character of magic and incantations. But we are especially interested in the language which mocks and insults the deity and which was part of the ancient comic cults. These abuses were ambivalent: while humiliating and mortifying they at the same time revived and renewed." (Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 203)

misleading, like the old joke, 'I cannot recommend this candidate enough.' Whether the speaker has insufficient faith in the candidate to make a recommendation, or simply believes that the candidate is too qualified for mere words to express, is left undefined, and an effective cheater character can manufacture a situation that inclines the victim toward the incorrect interpretation of such an ambivalent statement. These statements are not lies, but a specific variety of obfuscating language, or "language used to confuse rather than to communicate" (Hayes, 68). The language of confusion is produced in the same way as the cheat itself: there are two situations, one hidden and one apparent. In normal life the discrepancy between these two is, ideally, very small, but the cheater widens this divide to ensure that the victim reacts to the apparent situation, rather than the real one. By controlling the apparent situation, the cheater can control the victim's actions.

The "language of confusion" thus works in the same way as the cheat itself: the cheater produces two situations, one apparent and one hidden. Similarly, the language of confusion produces a statement that, like the cheat, has one apparent meaning and one hidden one³². Without having cured them, Amis intimidates the courtiers into fulfilling his promise. They are not well but, because the king has not considered another meaning for Amis's statement, he assumes that they are.

Hayes's "language of seduction," on the other hand, is an utterance that tells recipients what they want to hear. For example, in *Reinhart Fuchs*, Reinhart directs the cat Dipreht to a blind hole leading into a human house, telling him that many mice are stored inside. The previously-savvy cat is glad to believe this lie, and dives in after them – in contrast to the source material, Dipreht, in his eagerness, makes no attempt to verify the claim. In *Pfaffe Amis*, the priest uses the language of seduction twice in the same episode. He first finds a poor mason and tells him that he will make him a bishop if he follows his instructions for three days. At first sceptical, the mason agrees, willing to believe the lie simply because it is pleasant to do so. In the same episode, the two men enter a fabric shop and Amis tells the dealer that the bishop will purchase

³² "For a *farceur* to succeed in his ruse, he must manipulate language to a point where there is a separation between linguistic signifier and referent, between words and meaning, creating ironic distance between expression and intention which his victim must not recognize." (Hayes, 65)

the entire stock, and asks him to name his price. The dealer, like the mason, and Reinhart's cat, is happy to believe that the situation, the bishop, and the intention to pay, are genuine. He allows Amis to depart with the goods, keeping the "bishop" as surety. Amis uses this same tactic again when he lures a jewel merchant into his house with the promise that he will purchase all of his goods and add a gratuity; Hayes cites similar examples from *Maître Pathelin* in which the lawyer uses flattering language to entice a merchant into trusting him to leave with expensive goods and promise to pay later³³.

The *Schwank* characters, then, are acting like real people in this tendency toward wishful thinking. How far does this similarity go? Strange as it may seem to discuss the psychology of medieval characters, they do reflect a surprisingly accurate adherence to modern psychological principles, according to an article by Pratt. Pratt writes about psychological concepts present in Medieval literature, some of which can also be observed in the *Amis* and *Reinhart*. Though psychology as we know it did not exist, with introspection as a key element of Christianity, medieval writers were interested in the workings of the mind³⁴. Pratt finds several common phenomena in Medieval texts that appear to predict future advances in psychology, for example,

³³ "When Guillaume rejects the idea of credit, Pathelin's tactic changes and the trickster appeals to the draper's greed. He agrees that the exorbitant price the merchant is asking is in fact a fair offer, and talks about payment in the medieval formulation of 'cold hard cash': 'escus d'or' (v. 299). With an agreement reached concerning payment, Pathelin heads home with the fabric and hatches his next ruse with his wife: when the merchant arrives for payment, Pathelin first fakes delirium, then impending death. Guillaume's questions are met with a variety of dialects he fails to understand, and in the end, the greedy businessman is repaid with words: one dialect for each 'aune' of fabric, plus Latin for good measure." (Hayes, 44)

³⁴ "there is a frequent stress upon self-knowledge in medieval writing." (Pratt, 499)

the avoidance of cognitive dissonance. He lists this, compensation, rationalization and projection as factors that are commonly found in Medieval characters³⁵.

This phenomenon might help Amis's victims to stay happy long after he departs, or allow Reinhart's victims to believe his flattering stories after he has cheated them in the past, but Pratt's text is particularly interesting in reference to training animals. He cites several examples of animals who are conditioned to behave in a certain way, such as one example from a thirteenth-century sermon by James of Vitry, in which a man trains a horse to respond to a phrase. Significantly, though, human characters are never trained in this manner. A human, who is viewed to have free will and reason, cannot be conditioned: "Thomas Aquinas had the idea of animal conditioning but not the word with our charged meaning. As to conditioning in human beings, he was perfectly willing to talk at length about human habit. However, his concept of free will coupled with his vast epistemological confidence in human reason properly trained stopped him this side of that notion." (Pratt, 497) This view of human beings may be more optimistic than the one taken by the *Schwank*, though. Amis's false-bishop episode features a *murer* who mechanically parrots one unthinking phrase for three days, an action that at least hints at such conditioning and associates him with machines or animals. By the mechanical theory of comedy, then, this 'training' is comical. Significantly, characters in Reinhart never appear to have been 'trained.' Although they actually are animals, they are clearly depicted as more intelligent and reasonable than the humans in the same story. Described with names and personal lives, and clearly in possession of the intellectual resources that moderate the physical, animal, passions, the animals in *Reinhart* are much deeper characters, and far more human, than Amis's many victims.

³⁵ Those elusive actions of the human nervous system which try to adjust to thwarting circumstances are not only now, but have been in the past among the most common of psychological events. Compensation, rationalization, and projection were recognized in essence, and were commented on in a stream of description by writers in the Middle Ages. (Pratt, 497).

The fabric merchant in *Pfaffe Amis* maintains the deluded opinion that the ‘bishop’ in his house, obviously an idiot and a fake, is real, simply to avoid having to admit that he was wrong. He continues to assume that the servant will therefore return with payment for his wares, regardless of how the situation looks. Considering himself a savvy businessman, he finds it literally inconceivable that he could fall for such a trick.

In the case of Amis’s invisible-pictures victims, a group of courtiers have been told that a room is painted with frescoes, and they are made to pay to view it. Through means that are not revealed, though, they have learned Amis’s false story, that the frescoes are invisible to persons of illegitimate birth. When they enter the room and discover that they cannot see the paintings, they resist this evidence and instead prefer to continue believing the original story. They are emotionally invested in preserving the cheat, as they have paid to see Amis’s pictures and invested faith in their king, whom they hope to trust. Though the concept of cognitive dissonance would remain unknown until the twentieth century, we see actions in both these episodes that imply that its symptoms had at least been observed in everyday life. Victims in medieval texts do justify their own actions, resist information that demonstrates that they are wrong, and lie to themselves to feel satisfied with their situation.

2.7 The Trickster in Other Genres

We have seen above countless similarities and connections between the High-Medieval German *Schwank* and other contemporary and later works. The tricksters and cheaters of medieval culture are not isolated incidents in literature, but symptomatic of cultural phenomena that have persisted since ancient times. Regardless of the centuries between them, Reinhart Fuchs shares characteristics with Bugs Bunny and other modern cheater characters, and the *Amis* reflects psychological concepts such as xenophobia and the compulsion to punish incompetence as a crime, both of which persist today. Bakhtin’s theory also emphasizes the continuity of carnivalesque, comic themes from well before the Middle Ages.

During this long life it underwent, of course, considerable transformation, the Latin compositions being altered least. A variety of genres and styles were elaborated. But in spite of all these variations this literature remained more or less

the expression of the popular carnival spirit, using the latter's forms and symbols.
(Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 201-2)

This continuity was already being expressed earlier, for example in an article by David Saville Muzzey, writing in 1906. His observations retain only historical value over a hundred years after the time of writing, but his rationale is still compelling today.

That heavy black line separating medieval from modern, which men of few generations ago drew so confidently through the date 1492 or 1517 is being gradually effaced. The ages are blending insensibly into each other, and 'medieval' is coming rightly to mean not a fixed period of time but certain set of ideas, forms, institutions which resulted from the blending of Roman, Teutonic, and Christian influences and animated the life of Europe through several centuries. When we speak of the Middle Ages, then, we should not think of a chronology, but of a structure of society (Muzzey, 33)

By this principle, we are still, to some extent, living in the Middle Ages. The medieval continues today; for example we still make use of many comic principles, such as the ridiculous victim or the fool who deserves to be punished, similar to those used by medieval authors who needed to justify unconscionable acts by their cheaters. Medieval writers occasionally seem to have been enlightened by modern psychology, and we should not be surprised: modern psychology did not appear spontaneously, but, like all other concepts, had to evolve over time, in this case from medieval introspection. As Muzzey writes, "History is continuous: it has no beginning, middle, or end." (Muzzey, 33) It is impossible to disconnect the medieval from the modern; it once was the modern, and has not disappeared, but simply progressed into how we view the world today, an outlook that, in eight hundred years, may also appear foreign but still strikingly familiar.

3 The Adeptness of the Victim: Reinhart Fuchs as a Moralized Tale

The Middle High German beast epic *Reinhart Fuchs* was written by a twelfth-century poet named Heinrich. Heinrich based the work on several tales from a multiauthored series called, collectively, the *Roman de Renart*. Like its predecessors, *Reinhart Fuchs* is a series of semi-episodic tales set in an unnamed forest populated by varyingly anthromorphic animals displaying now-human, now-animal characteristics. They all speak, and the same language at that, allowing them to communicate and comment on events around them. The trickster, who appears in every one of these tales, is a fox. As an animal, he cheats and connives to catch prey – without himself becoming prey – but as an anthromorphic creature in an anthromorphic society, he must also connive to avoid falling afoul of the law – there is a law in the forest, instituted by a king and enforced by officers that he appoints. Paradoxically, *Reinhart Fuchs* takes place during a period of enforced peace, so the animals are forbidden to kill or eat one another. The combination of animalistic predator/prey dynamic with humanized law-ruled environment produces a deliberately vague moral atmosphere and ensures that, as a rule, the rules will be broken.

Existing somewhat outside the law through his trickster status, Reinhart the fox is at the forefront of the rule-breaking. While he can occasionally win by means of tooth and claw, he augments these features with his inexhaustible capacity for new cheats. Frequently smaller than his opponent, or at some other disadvantage, he tends to use manipulation rather than violence, or at least before violence, to facilitate it. The other animals will, as a rule, obey the law of the forest. These laws place Reinhart at an advantage, as the fox has legal rights that must be upheld, even while he violates the rights of others. Those characters who do not observe the law often have some other strong motivation that restricts their actions just as effectively. Reinhart's extemporized dramatic performances produce apparent situations that encourage whatever behaviours the fox requires. For example, the animals are bound by human-like kinship obligations, such as owing an equally-ranked noble a welcoming kiss even when that noble is a natural predator. While his victims respond to the apparent situation he has generated, Reinhart himself responds to the hidden situation, gaining a significant advantage over them.

Reinhart depends on his lightning-fast responses; the situation around him is usually hostile, and he must frequently escape life-threatening situations generated by others. The real situation is produced by others, often those overpowered idiots, the humans, but because Reinhart responds to them more deftly than the other characters, he remains in control.

These two factors are not always enough, though. Despite the retribution that the fox attracts from all directions, *Reinhart's* cheats are thematic; so thematic, in fact, that the cheater himself can fall for cheats with the same mechanics as those that he has just himself perpetrated. Though usually smarter, this cheater is not consummately superior to those around him, and failure is possible. Reinhart is often overpowered, tricked, or at least surprised by the actions of others. This damage-control situation actually benefits Reinhart's cheating as a whole: the repercussions following his many crimes produce new dangers that must be cleverly escaped or even redirected, giving him further opportunities to use his cheats. Far from being punished and learning from his misfortunes to obey the law, he is inspired or even forced to break it more.

Citations for the primary text are taken from Georg Baesecker and Ingeborg Schröbler's edition, which primarily makes use of a fourteenth-century manuscript at the University of Heidelberg, Ms. P, supplemented when possible by older fragments from the Kassel library, or Ms S. The text of Ms. P contains a note that the text has been slightly altered, with minor additions (2258, P) or omissions *da der worte was zu vil* (2261). In his foreword to the second edition Karl-Heinz Göttert describes S as more faithful to the original, although fortunately very little difference appears to exist between the two³⁶ where both are available. I have used this supplementary material where it was provided, and designated in parentheses for each individual quotation

³⁶ “Das mittelhochdeutsche Gedicht vom Fuchs Reinhart ist uns (fast) vollständig nur in einer späten Bearbeitung überliefert, die durch zwei Handschriften des 14. Jahrhunderts (Cod. pal. germ. 341 der Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg [Sigle P] und Cod. 1 der Metropolitanbibliothek im ungarischen Kalocza [Sigle K] repräsentiert wird. Die Auffindung dem Original offenbar sehr nahestehender Fragmente (MS pot. 8° 1 der Landesbibliothek Kassel [Sigle S] hat ergeben, daß die jüngere Fassung, wie es im Text selbst heißt (vgl. die Verse 2249 ff.), im wesentlichen eine sprachliche Glättung vorgenommen, im ganzen aber die ursprüngliche Dichtung erhalten hat.”

which source material had been used. *Renart* citations are taken from Fukumoto, Harano and Suzuki's 1983 compilation.

3.1 Reinhart's Selfless Malevolence

In “Das Lachen der Troubadours: Zur performativen Kraft satirischer Dichtung im mittelalterlichen Occitanien,” Bernhard Teuber describes how laughter has a corrective force in a contemporary context, being used to delineate and punish aberrant behaviour.

Da das Mechanische von Natur aus komisch ist, löst es beim Betrachter Gelächter aus, und dieses Gelächter steht im Dienst eines gesellschaftlichen Nutzens. Durch das Lachen werden nämlich alle Erscheinungen, vor allem aber: alle Personen, die sich dem Lebensprinzip widersetzen, verspottet und gewissermaßen zu einer Besserung angehalten. Das Gelächter funktioniert als eine *brimade sociale*, als eine Maßregelung im Dienste der Gesellschaft. (Teuber, 174)

Different medieval authors have approached Reinhart's greater societal role in different ways; in some the character is only a trickster, Thomas W. Best writes in *Reynard the Fox*, and in others it makes a significant social statement. In *Branche 2*, he writes, Renart is part of the society he ridicules, not fundamentally different from, and certainly no better than, his victims, but in other branches, he has been used to condemn society itself:

He graduates from being primarily a tormentor of wolves to the status of a subversive at war with the whole establishment, and satire on society again becomes important, as it was in II-Va. There, however, the fox was very much a part of the system being ridiculed – he shared in those faults to which Pierre objected – whereas in *Branche I* he is outside society and the unidentified author's censure of it. (Best, 59).

Gerd Althoff also examines the greater societal role of the trickster in his article, “Vom Lächeln zum Verlachen.” By making them ridiculous, the trickster fox dehumanizes his enemies (so to speak), and those they may represent, to a point where their experience is irrelevant and they

may acceptably be trampled on at will. By keeping the laughter on his side, the trickster becomes the only character with rights.

Es geht um die Technik, in einer Situation der Entscheidungsfindung, in der durchaus unterschiedliche Meinungen und Interessen im Raum stehen und aufeinanderprallen, durch eine gelungene ironische oder scherzhafte Formulierung das Problem so auf den Punkt zu bringen, dass man ‚die Lacher auf seiner Seite hatte‘ und potentielle Gegner dadurch ausmanövriert, ‚mundtot‘ gemacht wurden. (Althoff, Verlassen, 5).

Reinhart's victims, as victims, become irrelevant; in fact, it is better that they should suffer, as this suffering facilitates the comic purpose of the work itself. If we keep in mind the close association of humiliation with criminality: “Man denke etwa an die spöttische Teilnahme der spätmittelalterlichen Stadtbevölkerung an der öffentlichen Strafpraxis, die vor allem bei den so genannten Ehrenstrafen vorausgesetzt wurde: einer Situation also, wo die Lizenzen durch die ›bewiesene‹ Schuld des Delinquenten grundsätzlich gegeben wurden” (Coxon, wol gevallen, 54-5), humiliation becomes a sign of guilt, and thus a sign that the victim deserves humiliation. A universally malevolent trickster, then, punishes only the guilty, simply by virtue of his having humiliated them.

Best may observe a chink in the fox's ordinarily impenetrable social irresponsibility in *Si comme Renart volt mangier son confessor*, in which he confesses his many sins: “the author does not end XIV at this point but appends another five lines (1084-88), stating no fewer than three times that Renart repents of his wrongdoing” (Best, 59)

As Renart goes on to eat his confessor³⁷ and the narrative refers to him as a *mal pecheor* (13407), Best interprets the fox's preceding confession as false in spirit, “perhaps to amuse

³⁷ *Li huans tret a lui recevoir,
Et Renart trait a lui deçoivre;
Li huans le bec li estent
Et Renart le gorpil le prent,
Si l'ot ançois tot devouré*

himself with a recollection of his fondest capers but surely not to save his soul as he claims,” (Best, 65), and condemns as uncharacteristic any stirring of noble feelings in the fox, citing the confession as reinforcing his criminality, rather than alleviating it:

Remorse is an asinine tail pinned onto the poem, it nevertheless determines how his conduct toward Primaut should be interpreted. It implies that he has persecuted the wolf not because the wolf endangers him, as Ysengrimus menaces Reinardus, but only because he himself is a spiteful prankster, whose behavior is unjustified. (Best, 59)

The author, he writes, does not sell Reinhart's contrition as the genuine article. “Stressing his contrition through mere reiteration (rather than presenting it elaborately, as in the first 164 lines of *Branche VIII*) is a lame attempt at persuading us to accept what is markedly out of character. The author appears to have felt that we might be scandalized at a sinner who was never sorry, whereas an apology to God would permit Renart to have devil’s-food cake, so to speak, and eat it, too.” (Best, 59) Not only can Reinhart only be evil, but no author could realistically presume to force such a character into the role of a so-called good character.

Reinhart is not an innocent children's story, and the fox is not equipped to be a pleasant or lovable character, but nor is it an immoral tale. Heinrich's moralizations add a mitigating attitude to the anti-moral atmosphere of the beast epic, but these moralizations do more to exonerate the author for including objectionable events than they do to encourage good or bad behaviour on the part of the audience. When Reinhart rapes Hersant, for example, the narrative points out that this action is inappropriate, using a moralizing tone that the unapologetic French *branches* do not

Que il eüst son pié tourné. (Fukumoto et al, “Si conme Renart volt mangier son confessor,” 13401-6)

have³⁸. The narrative expresses unequivocal disapproval, in fact, but Reinhart still receives the last word, in which he gleefully taunts his powerless victims. While *Reinhart Fuchs* constantly affirms the moral law that would have been embraced by the German audience, Heinrich produces little correlation between characters' suffering and culpability, and while he makes several suggestions for the audience to take home, they correspond with the events in the story in only the most pessimistic way.

Victims do tend to be demonized, though; many of Reinhart's victims are made vulnerable specifically by their own criminality. The wolf is not vulnerable because he is a fool (although he most certainly is), but because he is a greedy fool. He can be easily manipulated into nearly anything through the promise of a good meal, and, provided with the resources, eats and drinks himself into trouble with no further meddling from Reinhart. The forest itself appears to have it coming, so to speak. Equipped with that popular literary trope, the bad king, *Reinhart's* society conducts its affairs according to a highly questionable set of laws. If the king, Vrevel, sets the standard for all of his subjects, then the social structure of the forest is deeply flawed, indeed doomed.

While they do not necessarily deserve their fate, then, Reinhart's victims do all possess features that make their demoralization easier for Heinrich's audience to swallow. His counterparts also take advantage of these mitigating features, as Best argues: “Renart is a rogue, as the author repeatedly recognizes, but he is still heroic, like all the great villains, while his victims are gullible (Brun and Tibert), effete (Couart and the chickens), cuckolded (Ysengrin), or derelict (Noble), thus becoming contemptible.” (Best, 69)

38 “Au lieu de cela la tendance moralisante est renforcée. Comme dans la plupart des épisodes de '*Reinhart Fuchs*' Heinrich accuse le goupil expressément de tromperie criminelle (v. 226/28).” (Knapp, 95)

3.2 The Chaotic *Reinhart* Universe and its Influence on the Cheats

Outside of the victims' fatal flaws, chaos reigns in *Reinhart Fuchs*, and even the trickster is unable to predict whether his cheats will work out. Laws are made and broken. Plans fail. Luck becomes a more important factor than strength or intelligence, on more than one occasion. Reinhart does not just exist in chaos; he radiates it.

Perhaps it is because they are animals that these characters are so animalistic. Animals possess passions, desires and needs. They can experience pain and happiness, but works in which they are attributed the advanced intellectual discernment and self-control that are more customarily viewed in human characters, they tend to interact in an anthromorphic manner. In “Mutorum Animalium Conloquium, or, Why do animals speak?” Paul Wackers explores the implications of the beast epic per se, defining humanity as a creature with an added thread of reasonable intelligence paired with an ever-present set of animal needs and passions: “while animals are characterized by being prompted exclusively by passions, man on the other hand is elevated by reason but brutalized by desires. It is particularly the grey area between man and animal, the realm of desire, that is the domain of the beast epic.” (Wackers, 86) This instinctual, and therefore automatic, behaviour, makes them perfect counterparts for trickster characters, but we have seen that Reinhart displays it just as effectively. While this *Schwank* lacks moral implications, every character is, to some extent, a warning against such automatic behaviour. The narrative implies that automatic behaviour is no better than that of animals, so making characters into animals applies a pessimistic attitude to the whole. “Human behaviour should be regulated by reason, as opposed to animal behaviour, which is governed by instinct. When people do not use their reason but instead are led by their desires, they renounce their humanity.” (Wackers, 86)

The human beings, it should be noted, are not much better off for their added thread of intelligence, which can easily be diverted to the more effective fulfilment of base desires – or abandoned entirely, to the added discredit of the character. In “Those Beastly People: A Study of Human Beings in Animal Epics,” Sharon Short Robinson writes that the human characters are

nearly as passion-ruled as their animal counterparts, arguably a sober and conservative estimation of their savagery:

The human beings portrayed in animal epics play a secondary role in the larger satire of the conflict between espoused values and the power struggle at a medieval court, yet they too make significant contributions, as is apparent from the differences in emphasis in the three fox epics. Greedy, gullible, and often vicious, the humans add variety to the narrative. Like their animal counterparts who become more or less human to suit the author's purpose, the humans in animal epics fluctuate between a marginally human state and an almost sub-human instinctiveness, so that the boundary separating man from the lower creatures is reduced to a fine, at times invisible line. (Short Robinson, 68)

In “The speech of Animals in the Ysengrimus and the Subversion of a Christian Hierarchy of Discourse,” Haijo J. Westra examines another contemporary concept, gleaned from Saint Basil in *Hom. in Hexaem* that it is their very lack of rational intelligence that gains for animals their superior cunning, strength, speed or senses – an alternative added thread that humans lack.

God compensated for the deficiency of rational powers in (land) animals through the superiority of their instinct and senses: from among the multitude of the flock, the lamb is able to distinguish the voice of its mother, and vice versa. The same holds true, presumably, for birds. (Westra, 197)

Animals display an alternative type of intelligence that, while formidable, is forbidden to humans: “Basil supplies some remarkable examples of a special kind of intelligence they – and other animals – possess, which he calls *epínoia* or trickiness. Its methods he considers reprehensible when practised by humans; such men are like wolves or serpents” (Westra, 197) As an anthromorphic animal, Reinhart possesses the most serviceable qualities of both parties, and his methods diverge from Amis’s at the point where Reinhart’s *epinoia* comes in. It is not his perfect planning and lack of failures that makes Reinhart a superior cheater to his animal counterparts. The skilled reactive approach with which which he responds to failures produces a quick and effective cheat; he becomes angered, but maintains a calm public demeanour, both inspiring and supporting the success of later, retaliatory cheats. We can observe animal cunning in the actions of the forest creatures, despite their capacity for speech and reason, but is it this

animalistic intelligence? Or is it, coming as it does from anthromorphized animal characters, the forbidden perversion thereof, practiced by humans? Perhaps it is all right for an animal to commit Reinhart's crimes because he does not know better – but the fox can speak.

3.3 The Rooster Hunt (13-40)

The *Reinhart* cheats are thematic; they are arranged according to type, without any necessarily logical connection in which one leads to the other. The extent to which thematic cheats are thematic can best be observed in the rooster hunt, which Heinrich selects for the first episode, avoiding a rich selection of adventures available from the *Renart* texts. *Reinhart Fuchs* is heavily pared down compared to the available source material, so any inclusion should be viewed as deliberate and meaningful. The outcome of this episode is made more significant by its primary placement: not only can Reinhart fall for his own trick, but he does so in the first episode.

Reinhart goes chicken-hunting on a local farm where a new fence has made the rooster, Scantecler, complacent. Reinhart easily sneaks onto the property through a hole in this fence and confronts the rooster; he surprises him by greeting him warmly, insisting that their two fathers were close friends, and that they therefore share friendship ties. Claiming that the rooster's father never hesitated to give the the fox's father a warm and enthusiastic welcome, Reinhart manipulates the reckless and credulous creature into flying down from his perch and crowing the greeting that his father had taught him. When he does so, the fox races off with the rooster in his teeth.

Immediately, the rooster attempts the same trick, goading Reinhart's pride to make him give up an advantage. When the nearby humans give chase and shout after them, Scantecler suggests that he should not simply run away and allow himself to be maligned, but that he should give the humans a taste of their own vitriol. Reinhart responds just as readily as the bird has; failing to see through the ruse he has just used himself, he drops the bird to berate his pursuers, and the rooster flies out of reach.

We find a smarter fox in Nivardus's *Ysengrimus*, where the bird, named Sprotinus, must first promise not to try to escape before the fox is willing to drop him. Reinhart takes no such

precautions and the pair end the scene by discussing the danger of acting rashly, a discussion similar to one found in the corresponding scene in *Si conme Renart prist Chantecler le coc*: “Like his counterpart in several of the fables... he curses the mouth which opens when it should be shut, while a wiser Chantecler curses the eye which shuts when it should be open.” (Best, 36)³⁹

We have seen both characters behaving foolishly, in the same manner, with the same resulting misfortune, within a sequential series of events. Both Reinhart and Scantecler verbally and explicitly blame their misfortunes on themselves, but the narrative offers some consolation: *N'est si sage qui ne foloit*. (Fukumoto et al, “Si conme Renart prist Chantecler le coc,” 405) no-one is clever enough to go through life without ever being caught off guard.

Ysengrimus also shows this effect, to a lesser degree. Sprotinus does not blame himself for being caught, and gives Reinardus a slightly less foolish motivation for shouting back, that of defending his honour from humans who call him a thief, by insisting that he gained the bird by legitimate means. Nivardus also describes a second attempt by Reinardus to lure the bird down from his high perch; significantly less has been learned. Heinrich, as always in this short work, avoids such repetition.

One small section that appears in *Renart* and *Ysengrimus* (Reinhart places this commentary exclusively in Scantecler's beak) is the narrators' explanatory comments about the near-universality of foolishness: one cannot simply breeze through life without making any mistakes. The fox is an example: a seasoned trickster he may be, but he still finds himself thwarted many

³⁹ <<La bouche, dist il, soit honnie,

Que s'entremet de noise fere

A l'eure qu'il se devoit tere.>>

Fait Chantecler: <<Et je le voil,

La male goutte li criet l'ueil

Qui s'entremet de sommeillier

A l'eure que il doit veillier. (Fukumoto et al, “Si conme Renart prist Chantecler le coc,” 424-30).

times. What defines him as the consummate trickster is the adeptness with which he responds to thwarting:

At the outset of Book V Nivardus comments on the fox, making three points: (1) hardly anyone is always wise; (2) Reinardus blundered in defending his honor; and (3) a wise deceiver, deceived, publicly concealing his chagrin, does not give up. Though he acted nonchalant with Sprotinus, the fox raged in private, viciously biting an old shoe and cursing his teeth for not having treated the rooster in the same way. (Best, 17)

The *Reinhart* characters finally learn from mistakes they have made in the past, but have repeated rather obvious errors of others. Falling for the same trick as the one he has just used, Reinhart exhibits the same tunnel vision as do his victims, selectively directing his attention to that factor that serves to deceive him, and ignoring all other information. This lack of learning allows Reinhart to pick up the theme of complacency begun by Chantecler: where the rooster, confident in the new fence, becomes complacent about potential danger from predation, the fox becomes similarly complacent once he has the rooster firmly lodged in his jaws. The same flaws that the trickster exploits can also be present in the trickster, then, undermining any mistaken expectations of the trickster's intellectual superiority.

3.4 The Titmouse (177-219)

Reinhart seems to be related to almost everyone he encounters in the forest, and frequently claims kinship with creatures who could not possibly be related to him. If they themselves are not cousins, then their fathers were good friends, and this friendship ought to persist between their children, and so on. Coming up with a family relationship creates more than social obligations; a family relation was also a legal one, with implications that were enforced by law⁴⁰. When he comes across a titmouse, perched above him in a tree, he lures her closer to himself by insisting that, as a fellow high-born animal, he deserves a welcoming kiss.

⁴⁰ “une relation de parenté est également au moyen âge une relation juridique” (Krause, 139)

Reinhart knows that others will observe social conventions, so he creates an artificial situation in which these conventions require the actions that he needs them to carry out. The required action, the welcoming kiss, must take place. Her politeness and thus her social rank could otherwise be called into question. She must at least appear to trust Reinhart if she is to maintain her own social standing. Scantecler was under pressure to come down and sing for Reinhart because his father did, and when the fox claims kinship with the titmouse and requests a welcoming kiss, she elects to give it to him.

The bird has been placed in an awkward situation. She must engage in a dangerous action in order to maintain her social standing. Calling the fox on his bluff would not be socially acceptable, but, cleverer than Scantecler, this victim remains uncooperative. She convinces Reinhart that he has fooled her and agrees to fly down and kiss him, but asks the fox to close his eyes: because of his bad reputation, the sight of his predatory visage makes her tremble.

Reinhart assumes, as always, that his victim believes his lie and is not lying herself. He closes his eyes and leans in for the kiss, and she drops a large piece of excrement on his nose. He snaps at it and swallows it whole while she slips away.

C'est le desputement de la mesange et de Renart adds two more attempts, in which the titmouse remains after Renart has snapped at her. The fox insists that he was only joking and cajoles her into trying again. Here, and in *Ysengrimus*, it is the fox who leaves, driven off by approaching humans.

Unlike these more-persistent foxes, Reinhart does not see the titmouse again, and merely grumbles about having been outwitted by such an insignificant creature. This regret is characteristic of the sort of participatory victimhood we have already seen and will see again. The German fox, like the German Scantecler, agrees immediately to close his eyes. Here, Reinhart has manufactured a cheat against himself. The lie that he has told generates a hidden truth to which he does not have access: does the bird know that he is lying? Is she lying in response? Reinhart assumes that she is not, and is willing to take risks based on that assumption. Now the cheat is on him. The trickster has depended entirely on the success of his cheat, again becoming complacent in his assumption that, like Chantecler, the titmouse is between his jaws.

3.5 Dizelin's Cheese (220-312)

Much like the Aesopian fox, Reinhart encounters a raven eating a cheese. He asks to hear the raven sing, claiming kinship with him. In a stance more appropriate to the beast epic than the fable, Dizelin here holds the cheese under his foot, rather than in his mouth. He can speak to Reinhart and even sing to him without dropping it. Reinhart uses flattery, and manipulation similar to that which he uses on Scantecler, and in spite of this advantageous positioning Dizelin throws more and more of his body into the performance, and the cheese finally falls.

Here, the fox deviates from Aesop's formula, rejecting the cheese in hopes of catching the bird. He claims to have been injured that morning and, invoking their presumed kinship, asks Dizelin to come down and take the cheese away again, as strong smells are unhealthy for convalescents. The raven obeys and the fox attacks, but fails to trap him. He is ultimately chased off by the approach of hunters, whom Dizelin helps to locate him⁴¹. Reinhart loses both prizes, as Heinrich takes care to mention, because of his greed.

Like the others, this episode is shorter than its predecessors. In "Quelques Procédés du Comique dans l'Epopée animale du Moyen Âge," Fritz-Peter Knapp examines the significance of this pared-down structure, which he describes as skeletal⁴². Heinrich does not tell us, for example, how Dizelin got his cheese: "L'auteur allemand a abandonné la composition en deux parties propres au conte plaisant d'animaux (tout au contraire de la fable) pour retrouver la brièveté du genre antique. Il ne raconte pas le vol du fromage. Toute la scène est de nouveau réduite aux accessoires de l'apologue." (Knapp, 95) This elimination removes an incriminating action by the raven, altering the perceived dynamic between the bird and Reinhart. In fact, after Reinhart loses the cheese, the narrator tells us that it will go to the raven, to whom it rightfully belongs: *den inbiz mvst er da lan, / sin neve svlt in von rechte han* (291-2, P)!

Even within the scene itself, the audience is left to fill in a few blanks: "De quelle manière est-ce que le corbeau perd le fromage? L'auteur le passe sous silence: do vergaz er uf dem rise / des

⁴¹ "der rabe ovch die wile niht ensliet, / er wisete die hvnde vf sinen zagel." (302-3, P)

⁴² "Dans le Reinhart Fuchs il ne restait, ... d'habitude, que le squelette de la scène." (Knapp, 97)

keses, do er erhôb daz liet (v. 284/9: 'comme il commençait la chanson, il oublia le fromage sur la branche'). C'est moins que la fable dit." (Knapp, 95) Knapp emphasizes that Heinrich consistently tells us less than his French predecessors, opting to join episodes in causal sequences rather than thematic events disconnected in time.

Though it followed the French work chronologically, *Reinhart* still makes a compact *Katz und Maus* to *Renard's* rambling *Blechtrommel*; it is a strong contrast to the loose collection of works that conglomerates to form *Renart*. Yet he takes the time at the end of this episode to include a parenthetical 'moral of the story' that does not appear in *De Renart si conne il concia le Corbel du fromage*. That he should take the time to squeeze in a lengthy moral lesson shows the priority he places on *Reinhart's* potential as a moral tale, vis-a-vis faithfulness to the original; all of his previous alterations have contributed to *Reinhart's* brevity.

Dizelin appears at first to know better: when Reinhart approaches him the raven does not trust him. Why is Dizelin unable to use the information that he has, that Reinhart is a cheater, and avoid exposing himself to his jaws? Like the other animals in the forest, Dizelin follows a set of social rules dictating behaviour, fetching back the cheese out of enforced loyalty⁴³. Dizelin may be unwilling or even unable to accept the idea that Reinhart might attack him, as he has already claimed kinship, and violence does not appropriately take place between kin. When it does, his indignation is boundless. At the end of the tale, as he flies overhead directing the dogs to Reinhart, he simultaneously administers a stern lecture to his "neve."

With the cheese theft edited out of Heinrich's adaptation, we no longer have a crime to attribute to Dizelin, so why is he being punished? Dictated behaviour is automatic behaviour, the hallmark of the cheated victim. Dizelin does not choose to trust Reinhart; he is simply unable to see the world in any other way, and even after he has been attacked he searches for a reasonable justification for the hostility: *sin trewe, ern weste niht, was er an im rach*: (281, P). The raven finally responds to the offence with a level of indignation second only to Ysengrin's.

⁴³ "er wolde im helfen von der not / dvrch trewe, daz was nach sin tot." (273-4, P)

3.6 Diepreht's Trap (313-84)

Narrowly escaping the botched attempt on Dizelin's life, Reinhart happens upon the tomcat, Diepreht. The Renart of *Si conme Renart prist Chantecler le coc*, having just lost a battle of wits with Chantecler, is initially annoyed to see anyone so cheerful, and approaches him with open hostility. Then, realizing that he would be unwise to abuse a formidable creature like Tibert, he greets the cat warmly and claims a familiar relationship with him. The fox knows better than to abuse such an intelligent and well-armed creature. He can, however, patch up the offence through a kinship bond because hostility between kin would be inappropriate, as it was with Scantecler and Dizelin. Family members had to protect one another⁴⁴, so Reinhart's declared kin would also feel legal pressure not to retaliate when he injured them. It is possible that Reinhart also considers this same strategy, but the audience does not hear about it. He runs directly to the cat with open arms. Diepreht is placed in a situation similar to that of the titmouse, when Reinhart claims that she owes him a welcoming kiss; social convention requires that he treat an enemy, whom he knows to be dangerous, as if he were not.

Reinhart addresses Diepreht as his *neve* (315, P), a nephew or other relative. The fox works to stabilize the familial bond between them, striking up a friendly conversation and asking the cat for a demonstration of his swift running ability. *Renart*, as usual, includes a much longer conversation between Tibert and Renart, complete with details and additional background story⁴⁵, in which the cat requires a great deal more convincing. Anthromorphically, Renart asks Tibert to display a sample of his equitation, although, as animals, both travel on foot. This ironic

⁴⁴ “Chacun des membres de ces communautés juridiques avait droit à protection et devoir de protéger les autres et de prendre pour eux fait et cause.” (Krause, 139)

⁴⁵ <<Tybert,fet il, je ai emprise

Guerre mout durement amere

Envers Ysengrin, mon compere.

S'ai retenu maint soudoier,

Et vos en voil je mout proier. (Fukumoto et al, “Si conme Renart prist Chantecler le coc,” 1690-94).

implication that characters are mounted will appear as a comic theme in the French *Branches*. The cat agrees to the demonstration, and Reinhart/Renart leads him to a nearby field.

The artificial bond is renewed upon Reinhart's request that Diepreht run. Reinhart's reminder strengthens the request, making it awkward for his *neve* to refuse it. Both animals know that the humans have hidden a trap in that field (in contrast to *Chantecler le coc*, in which Tibert discovers the trap in the nick of time), from which either one would be unlikely to escape alive. Reinhart, for obvious reasons, does not reveal his knowledge to Diepreht. The cat is horrified at this attempt on his life, but also reveals no knowledge. He makes a short prayer for protection from Reinhart's *vbelen dingen* (332-3, P) and dashes quickly back and forth through the field, subtly leaping over the trap and avoiding it. Next Reinhart offers to demonstrate a method of jumping high to avoid predators, and Diepreht again agrees, contingent on his dear friend's willingness to follow after him. Diepreht dashes straight for the trap, leaps over it again, and stops. Reinhart has nowhere to go but into the trap, and it closes on him, with the narrator's approval: *deiswar, daz war niht vnbillich*; (354, P) and the cat flees.

Reinhart has again produced information to which he does not have access: is Diepreht unaware of the trap in the field? Diepreht, like the titmouse, pretends to fall for the ruse and thus keeps his true intentions concealed, hiding from Reinhart information crucial to the success of his cheat. The cat makes an uncooperative victim, and becomes a trickster himself: *sie wolden beide ein ander betrigen*. (348, P). Once again, resistance to Reinhart's cheat causes it to fail.

But Reinhart shines brightest in a dark situation. Adversity, such as finding himself caught in the trap, inspires him to display that same resilience that Nivardus had defined as the real sign of wisdom, his characteristic *kundicheit / von notlicher arbeit* (825-6, S). He uses himself as bait to escape the trap. After the cat disappears, and a trapper arrives to kill him, Reinhart repositions his head, placing his neck over a crucial failure point in the trap mechanism.

Like a good victim, the trapper responds automatically, losing track of the property he already has, the trap itself, in his frenzy to acquire new property, the dead fox. His careless swing breaks open the trap as Reinhart moves out of the way. This is not the only time that the raw power that emanates from humans, in the form of unattended goods or, here, carelessly-exerted physical strength, is diverted to serve the trickster's ends. In fact, Reinhart has already tried to co-opt this

force in the same episode: the trap was initially set to capture him, and he redirected the threat toward Diepreht.

Besides their power, the humans in *Reinhart Fuchs* have few enviable endowments. They prove the fox's clear inferiors in intelligence with regard to animal cunning, but also, in this case, with human intelligence and familiarity with technology. Reinhart understands the trap well enough to know where to direct the human's axe, so he has not only grasped their technology but learned to manipulate it more skilfully than they do. A trap makes an ideal embodiment of the intense, but stupid and poorly directed, power of humans: being caught in a trap is an agonizing, terrifying and cruel fate, and the trap, though intended for Reinhart, is placed where any animal could be captured in it. The idea of intent is made laughably meaningless, leaving the threat floating undirected, ready to destroy any individual that passes its way. This dissociation of intent from actions and their consequences will appear time and again, when Reinhart, Amis and other tricksters will fool victims into series of actions that destroy them, or benefit the cheater, or both. These actions are based quite soundly on productive intentions, and anticipation of particular results – intentions and anticipation that are so far removed from the reality of the stories that they become worthless and meaningless. Whatever the victim, or in this case the trapper, set out to accomplish, trickster stories demonstrate that it is only the actions that count. Intentions and expectations have no value in the face of what is actually going on: ignorance of the facts is no excuse.

But Reinhart is, for a time, caught in the trap that was set for him. As with the titmouse, he does not know until too late whether his presumed victim has indeed fallen for his ruse, and, disastrously, assumes that he has. But Reinhart does not intend to eat Diepreht, the way he did with his previous intended victims. In fact, Diepreht is the first character to represent any kind of physical threat to Reinhart. Yet, as is typical in trickster stories, Diepreht does not emerge victorious because he has overpowered the fox. Like Chantecler, the weak and in fact already-captured rooster, Diepreht uses on Reinhart the same trick that Reinhart has just attempted to use on him. Even though he could overpower Reinhart, Diepreht elects instead to use duplicity, not power; as we have seen above, it is duplicity, not power, that gets things done in a trickster setting. In this case, and when Reinhart escapes the trap, even a weak, improvised ruse is more effective than brute strength.

3.7 Ysengrin and the Ham (499-551)

Early in the story, the fox and the wolf make a pact: henceforth, they will work together for their mutual benefit. Reinhart then notices a human passing by with a huge ham slung over his shoulder. The fox limps past in front of him, pretending to be lame. The human drops the cumbersome ham and follows the lame animal into the woods. Having escaped him, Reinhart returns to his partner, only to find that Ysengrin and his family have eaten the entire ham themselves and left none for him. This scene leads into and motivates the next, and provides Reinhart with a strong motivation to injure Ysengrin. At this point, though, he has already made advances on the wolf's wife, Hersant, in his absence, so it seems unlikely that the two have ever been particularly close.

In either case, Ysengrin has clearly won due to his superior size and opportunity, so one should not mistake Ysengrin's success with the stolen ham for a cheat. Ysengrin does not outsmart Reinhart or deceive him, but merely breaks a contract. Furthermore, he does not act out of reasoned intention, but out of unrestrained greed. This victory reflects only badly on him, and it will not be the last time that his dishonesty makes even Reinhart look good.

Reinhart will have his revenge almost immediately, but he need not take drastic measures that might make his vengeful intentions public, and openly violate the legal agreement between them. He simply leads Ysengrin to the source of trouble and the wolf punishes himself. Having eaten the ham, he complains that he is thirsty. Reinhart offers to show the wolves where they can find all the wine that they can drink. For these undisciplined gluttons, the blessing proves a curse. In the French *Renard*, the wolf must be tricked into drinking too much; Heinrich's Ysengrin is even more foolish, becoming drunk one line after Reinhart delivers the goods: *zv der kvfen vurte si Reinhart, / Ysengrin da trvnken wart.* (509-10, P) Without prompting, Ysengrin drinks all that he can and becomes so drunk that he begins howling loud enough to attract all the local humans. The family is easily caught and severely beaten. Reinhart has already fled. He knows that Ysengrin's actions are dangerous and impossible to retract, and that the situation will soon become dangerous entirely through the wolves' agency.

Here Ysengrin demonstrates his extreme adeptness at being the fool; the cheater need not injure him, but merely take him to an opportunity to injure himself. Notice that Reinhart has not placed him in peril, as he will in the well episode, nor is the wolf in a neutral situation, as Reinhart is when he later passes the dangerous well. Ysengrin is placed in a positive situation, an opportunity that would, for most characters, be beneficial. As Sigrid Krause writes in “Le Reinhart Fuchs, satire de la justice et du droit.”, Ysengrin's base desires will repeatedly guide him back for more of Reinhart's abuse. “Bien que dupé et malmené, le loup renouvelle son alliance avec le renard et toujours pour motif de gloutonnerie.” (Krause, 141) The simplicity and predictability of his motivation makes this character an arch-victim, ideal to stand in opposition to the fox.

Reinhart is no longer the arch-cheater when, if he had not conducted the cheat, someone else surely would have. If the various crimes that Reinhart commits against his victims would have happened eventually, anyway, because the victims are so self-destructively foolish, then Reinhart's cheats are inevitable, driven more by the victims than by the cheater. These victims are victimized not because they have been tricked by a bad trickster, but because this is the sort of thing that victims do. No character is more representative of this phenomenon than Ysengrin.

Any character who attempts to harm Reinhart eventually gets punished severely. The fox will later display an especial malice for Ysengrin, possibly motivated by the stolen ham. On the other hand, perhaps Reinhart led the wolves to the monastery simply because he wanted wine, and their howling spoiled the raid, although that scenario is unlikely in the light of the other *Branches*. One should not assume that the particular hatred for Ysengrin stems exclusively from this betrayal, either, because, as mentioned above, by the time Ysengrin steals the ham, Reinhart has already attempted to seduce his wife.

Reinhart does not hoard his malice, but distributes it generously to everyone; It appears that he has never been particularly loyal to the wolf in the first place. Similarly, he exhibits no change in external behaviour to correspond with this betrayal; because of the fox's concealment of his hostility, their official relations have not degraded after the stolen ham. Through his careful production of an external, friendly self to conceal the internal, vengeful one, Reinhart makes himself inaccessible to us as audience, but also to the wolf, regaining his trust. If the betrayal is a pivotal turning-point in their relationship, he keeps that information to himself. The French foxes

often rage in private against other enemies who have crossed them, while expressing solidarity with them in public, but Reinhart's activity may not be motivated by Ysengrin's betrayal so much as inspired by it. Reinhart produces situations less often than he responds to them. This episode has also given us an example of the human menace: their raw, undirected power manifests itself here twice in the form of poorly-guarded wealth. The fox and wolf easily acquire both the ham and the wine without expending much effort. Just as the trap is very powerful, what the humans have is very valuable, but they have little control over it. Again the humans have demonstrated power, but, like the typical victim, a lack of mastery over it.

3.8 Ice-Fishing (640-822)

Reinhart begins the next episode dining on eels. The wolf happens past the burrow as he finishes his meal, and the tempting smell of roasted eels wafts out into the winter air. The wolf accosts Reinhart in a friendly attitude, hoping to get some of the meal. The fox shuts him out: the monastery, he says, is closed, and he will have no further interaction with the outside world. He does throw Ysengrin two leftover eels; the wolf snaps them up instantly, and, upon hearing that eels are the everyday fare of this monastery, he wishes to join the order and be made the cook. *Si conme Renart fist Ysangrin moine* describes Ysengrin as half-starved at this point, having caught nothing all day, but Heinrich's Ysengrin is portrayed only as hungry; Ysengrin is greedy enough for the trick to work without intense physical distress.

Reinhart agrees, on the condition that the wolf be tonsured in an initiation ceremony. He scalds the wolf's head with hot water, burning off the flesh rather than shaving the skin. What is more, there are no more eels left. Reinhart tells the initiate, after this tonsure has been completed, that they can easily find more fish in a particular pond nearby, and extols its uncommon fecundity.

The brothers set out, the narrator tells us, to catch fish. By referring to Reinhart as a brother monk, the narrator appears to treat the event with the same thought process as the victim would, accepting that which is seen as true without considering other evidence. The narrative not only treats Reinhart as the fellow monk that he claims to be, but comments on his inappropriate lack of loyalty to a monastic brother.

Reinhart has Ysengrin use his tail to suspend a bucket under the water and then waits while the tail becomes frozen into the ice. The wolf observes suspicious sensations when the water freezes, but avoids concluding that his tail is caught in ice by assuming that the bucket is simply becoming heavier. This creative interpretation is characteristic of the victims, particularly the master-fool Ysengrin. The wolf's objection is credulous and Reinhart's reply not meant to be tested.

*,dirre eimir swerit', sprach Isingrin.
 ,da han ich gezellit drin
 drizic ale', sprach Reinhart,
 ,diz wirt ein nuzze vart;
 kunnint ir stille gestan,
 zehinzic wellint drin gan.'* (755-60, S)

The questions that Ysengrin asks during the ice-fishing episode seem designed not to test the veracity of Reinhart's claim, but to reconcile the available facts with it. When Ysengrin does receive an answer, he does not test it, either. He is immediately satisfied once he has information that can explain away the mismatched facts.

Reinhart finally asks Ysengrin whether he can lift the bucket. Finding that he cannot, Reinhart tells him that he must seek assistance from the other monks. Confident that Ysengrin cannot follow him, Reinhart excuses himself and goes home. Ysengrin patiently waits for assistance. Not long afterward, a hunter, named Herr Birtin, approaches with his dogs. He first approaches with his sword, but, slipping on the ice, must crawl to the wolf on his knees. Herr Birtin's awkward footing causes him to miss the death blow and cut off Ysengrin's tail, instead. With his tail gone, the wolf escapes.

Ysengrin has suffered two mutilations in this episode, the lost tail and the burnt flesh on his head, and they will appear in later episodes. These are the first of many deliberate mutilations of Reinhart's victims. When Reinhart 'tonsures' the wolf, he invites him to insert his head, thus also jaws and teeth, into his home, then pours boiling water on him, a move bound to upset anyone. He has nothing to gain from it. The tonsure does not make his story more plausible, so this particular feature of the cheat does not contribute to its success. In fact, it actually threatens the plausibility of Reinhart's artificial monastery, as Ysengrin asks his first incredulous question in

response to it. Reinhart appears to be motivated by the sheer pleasure of torturing and humiliating his enemy.

Furthermore, this mutilation will later save Ysengrin's life in the well episode⁴⁶. When the monks later pull him out of the well, they are about to kill him, surely more injurious than a lost tail or tonsured head, but the prior notices the tonsure and cut tail, and, deciding that Ysengrin is undergoing penance⁴⁷ of some kind, has the monks release the wolf. Reinhart cannot have known that the tail would be cut, or that the tonsure would prove beneficial, but his malice has proved expensive, and the results of his petty meanness is favoured over maximum devastation.

This episode still maintains Reinhart's theme of selfless malevolence. Reinhart gives several eels to Isengrin and leaves his house for the freezing night, all to get the wolf's tail caught in the ice. The trickster's motivation is illogical: Reinhart desires the suffering of others, a goal from which he gains nothing. Illogical as they are, the fox's actions are not at all random. Reinhart, who can usually predict his victim's reactions, himself follows a predictable pattern. He will perform whatever action attracts the most enmity to himself and maximizes the humiliation that he causes the other characters. He is therefore willing to act exclusively for the detriment of others, even at his own expense.

What has Reinhart's malicious alteration of Ysengrin's external features done to his identity? This change in appearance adds complexity to the character. As far as Nivardus was concerned, Best interprets Ysengrimus's status as a monk as a commentary on monastic life: "He made his protagonist a monk because he objected to avarice most in those who ought to be least tainted by it but were not." (Best, 31) Greed is treated as an especially heinous sin, and the monkish features are paramount, but for other authors, other sins are more offensive, and the wolf's identity is altered accordingly. Best writes that, in the nobility-centred *Branche 2*, "Nivardus's unfrocked monk has been promoted to high officialdom.... Pierre has no use for a mindless embodiment of clerical rapacity, and he wanted the fox's foe to be politically powerful" (Best,

⁴⁶ *hette Ysengrin dan zagel niht verlorn / noch die blatten geschorn, / in hette erhenget daz gotes her.* (1021-3, P)

⁴⁷ *owe, hette wir [] vermiten / dise slege, wan ze ware, / er was ein revwere!*" (1014-16, P)

40). Also in *Branche 2*, the victim is as much a vessel of social malady as the cheater. On Noble's court, for example, Best writes that: "Pierre must have included them not just to introduce the fox... but to caricature various types of unworthy knights – complacent ones, like Chantecler; thieving ones, like the crow; and deceitful, vicious ones, like Renart, who did not even scruple to scheme against allies and ladies." (Best, 40) The victims have distinct names and personalities, but in individuating them, these personalities associate them with negatively stereotyped tropes such as the greedy tonsured monk and the corrupt king.

By injuring a representative for the entire group, the beast epic marks out these groups as villainous and deserving of injury or mutilation, but the stereotyping is not necessarily offensive. On the contrary, the added adjectives make the stereotypes acceptable: the *bad* king, the *cowardly* knight, the *greedy* cleric; the king, the knight, and the cleric can still enjoy these tales while assuming that the victims are based on somebody else. Perhaps they serve as a warning to specific groups to avoid specific sins, rather than implying that such sins are rampant in these groups. The victim's suffering is thus safely diverted into cautionary tales, which can be directed at audience members who belong to these groups and may otherwise have become offended. The religious audience can then justify the tale, thinking, 'Ysengrin is hated not because he resembles a religious person, but because he is greedy. It is therefore important for me, as such a person, not to be greedy.' It would be difficult to argue with such a conclusion, much less become offended by it. As warnings to the audience, even Reinhart's cruellest cheats against the stereotyped characters are also acceptable as good actions.

The humans, on the other hand, take the form of inevitable forces, not concepts of character that audience members can apply to their own lives. They are not treated as thinking characters with good or bad actions. Humans appear in the epic early and stay almost to the end as a powerful, constant force, but not an intelligent one like the animals. Reinhart's most constant predators, they normally feature as peripheral, and certainly no better than the animals. Short Robinson analyzes this relationship between animal and human characters in several of the fox epics:

The author ... surrounds the animals with ridiculous human beings from various classes who provide unanticipated intensification of the basic satire. Both the peasant Lanzelin and the priest in the Dieprecht episode are henpecked, and the priest is doubly remiss in his observance of the vow of celibacy, as he has both

a wife and a mistress, an augmentation of the situation in the *Roman de Renart*, in which the priest has a wife and son. The hunter Birtin presents a laughable parody of heroic combat (RF 806-822), slipping on the ice, approaching helpless Isengrin on his knees, and slipping again to miss an easy death blow and sever the wolf's tail.... In similar fashion the priest inadvertently frees the cat Dieprecht from a trap and is soundly beaten by his wife ⁴⁸

In the ham episode, Reinhart was instantly able to lure a human away from a prize that he already possessed, through the possibility of further gain. Demonstrating a deficiency in the very quality that should elevate him above Reinhart, the human lacks the judgment or self-control to be satisfied with his ham, and chases after more with such haste that the ham is abandoned. When he discovers that it is gone, he falls to his knees and wails loudly in lamentation ⁴⁹, but the human's suffering is not equipped with a useful moral, as is Reinhart's loss of the cheese; the human is not a teachable creature.

What does this omission say about us? The animal form taken by the characters is no external façade, but influences their behaviour. As animals, the characters in the beast-epic are not above killing one another for the meat, and doing so would not be particularly shocking. Though Short Robinson insists that the humans are not quite so bad as the animal characters: "Fumbling, greedy, capricious and gullible, Heinrich's animals surpass their human counterparts in their imperfection" (Short Robinson, 392), it is still the humans who are the most universally dangerous. They will try to kill any of the larger animals like Reinhart, Diepreht or Ysengrin, unless he appears to be dead already. They are Reinhart's most dedicated predators. When animals are not thoughtless or ridiculous enough, and real savagery is required, one must bring in the humans.

⁴⁸ "Those Beastly People: A Study of Human Beings in Animal Epics," Short Robinson, 391-2.

⁴⁹ *nv viel er nider vf daz gras, / vil vaste klait er den bachten.* (482-3, P)

3.9 The Well (823-1061)

More raw human power, the deep, watery shaft of an abbey well, will cause Reinhart further trouble, and provide further opportunities for cheating. The narrator treats the event as miraculously unlikely⁵⁰, and yet the well episode demonstrates the extent of Reinhart's capacity for failure. While passing through a farmyard that he intends to plunder, the fox happens upon a well. He glances at the water inside and is surprised and confused by his own reflection. He believes that he sees his beloved wife, in the other *branches* named Hermeline, in the water. Overjoyed to meet her, the fox leaps inside, as Heinrich says, out of pure love for his wife: “*des wister ime michelin danch: / vor liebe er in den sot spranch.*” (848-9, S).

Si conme Renart fist avaler Ysangrin dedenz le puis gives us a much more vivid description, identifying the abbey as *Une abaie de blans moines* (66), filling the barn with tasty chickens, and describing Renart's caution and intense hunger as he proceeds through the farm yard, complete with comic allusions to chivalry and riding. He even makes two kills before he reaches the scene of the action, which, in *Reinhart Fuchs*, takes place just outside, and before he can enter. Renart descends into the well in a bucket, or, in Reinhart's case, a single, ill-considered leap. One Best reports that *Renart*, in Manuscript H, features a unique alternate motivation: this fox is simply ravenously thirsty after his large meal. Best finds this added detail particularly unsatisfying:

The author of the variant in Manuscript H... must also have been unhappy with the fox's romantic delusion. He eliminated it, sending Renart into the depths only because the fox needs a drink after eating. Unfortunately, this simplification is also infelicitous, for it necessitates an ignorance of buckets on a pulley that is unlikely in a chicken thief accustomed to farms. (Best, 52)

Reinhart and his counterparts have intense emotions. The well episode outlines how these emotions can motivate his behaviour and override cleverness: he passionately throws himself in after the image, and finds that he has deceived himself, and cannot escape unassisted. The fox's sudden distress results not from another creature's conniving, but an unplanned chance event, the

⁵⁰ *ein michel wunder nu gesach, / daz der ergouchete hie, / der mit listen wunders vil begie.* (836-8, S)

sort of thing that was never designed to trick anybody, and one that he ought to have been able to see through. The passion that blinds the fox in this scene is the same phenomenon that makes others vulnerable to his cheats: an unconsidered, automatic reaction directed more by immediate outside stimuli than by reasoning.

In this scene, Reinhart does not behave as the controlled trickster that we see in later scenes, conducting his own actions according to a plan; on the contrary, he is compelled to leap into the well by his primal urges. *Si conme Renart fist avaler Ysangrin dedenz le puis* treats the deception as a wonder⁵¹, but here, as it does in his conversation with Scantecler, *Reinhart Fuchs* demonstrates how even the trickster character can become the fool, and how important the fool is to the cheat: in the absence of a cheater, he can simply cheat himself.

Fortunately for Reinhart, the wolf Isengrin soon happens by. The wolf still has a disfigured appearance, with no hair on the top of his head, but he is still deceived by his own reflection and even mistakes it for his wife, Hersant. *Le puis* has him initially jealous to see his wife tucked into an underground hideaway with another man⁵², but he accepts the fox's explanation as easily as in *Reinhart*. Guided by the fox, who claims that both he and Hersant are in heaven, Ysengrin climbs into the bucket at his friend's prompting to "weigh his soul" for its readiness to join them there. The fox adds detail for plausibility, describing heaven as full of unattended sheep and other questionable blessings, and suggesting that Ysengrin beg God for forgiveness before his soul is weighed.

Is Ysengrin really so especially stupid to fall for Reinhart's trick? Or is Reinhart's deception really so masterful? At this juncture Heinrich tells us not that Reinhart is planning something terrible, or that Ysengrin is a staggering dunce, but simply that the wolf is in a dangerous position; the well is full of trickery: "*der sot was lechirheite vol, / daz wart vil sciene schin.*" (882-3, S) It is Reinhart's stupidest victim, Ysengrin, who shares the arch-trickster's fate – and

⁵¹ *Seignors, or escoutez merveilles* ("Si conme Renart fist avaler Ysangrin dedenz le puis," Fukumoto et al, 155)

⁵² *Que penses tu, putain provee, / Quant o Renart t'ai ci trovee?* ("le puis, Fukumoto et al, 243-4)

who even requires extra prompting to make the same mistake. If both (clever) Reinhart and (stupid) Ysengrin can “fall” for the well scene, anyone can, and the shame of being tricked is somewhat mitigated. The impressiveness of the trickster is mitigated, too, though; if victims can fool themselves, the trickster's sole agency for the deceit is undermined.

In the absence of the trickster agent, the victim takes over. Ysengrin demonstrates impressive adeptness at avoiding information that might detract from the cheat. He must do more than merely fail to make obvious logical connections. Ysengrin's reflection has a quite obvious 'tell' that Reinhart's reflection lacks: the charred, tonsured head. This adept victim goes so far to protect the cheat as to request an explanation for it. “*,nv sage mir, geuaterer gvot / wie ist sie umbe daz huobet so verbrovi?*” (907-8, S) and to accept without question Reinhart's explanation that Hersant is temporarily injured by the fires of purgatory.

Ysengrin does not think along the path of least resistance to accept Reinhart's elaborate story that the well is a miraculous window to Heaven. He does not engage in wishful thinking, but instead accepts the story that his beloved wife is dead. Ysengrin and other characters who occupy fools' roles are not simply stupid. They have selective perceptions, and perform impressive mental gymnastics in order to ignore all information but that which could deceive them. Like Reinhart, he fails to notice that the well is full of ordinary water, reflecting an image of him, that the face reflected is his own, and that the image's movements mirror his own. All of these obvious, and, in some cases, explicitly noted, features are ignored in favour of the one image of a fox at the bottom of the well.

Ysengrin's adeptness at being fooled minimizes Reinhart's agency, allowing the fox to conduct his cheats with only minimal interference. When he asks the wolf to perform the somewhat implausible feat of using the bucket to “weigh” his soul, Reinhart need provide no explanation of why it would work. The “real,” hidden situation is simple: the bucket is attached to a second one that rests in the water in the well. When the top bucket descends, the bottom bucket will ascend. Isengrin is apparently, or temporarily, unfamiliar with this construction: *daz kam von vnwizzen. / in den eimer gienc er sizzen.* (939-40, S) Co-operation by the victims is required in nearly all of the *Reinhart* tales to make the often implausible cheats possible, and, although we have no indication that they are conscious of it, Reinhart, Isengrin, and other dupes will exert effort in

order to allow a threatened cheat to continue, as we have seen with Ysengrin's ingenuous question about Hersant's head

Fortunately for Reinhart, characters never need be incurable fools. The narrator scolds Ysengrin for his compliance, asking where his *gedanc* is, “*daz ist war, wa was sin gedanc, / daz er sich so dicke triegen lie?*” (990-1, P) that he should be duped so easily. If the narrator can ask where his reason is, then it must exist somewhere. That the wolf should be scolded for behaving so foolishly shows that the narrator expects a higher standard from him.

Seated in the bucket at the other end of the pulley, Reinhart is much lighter than the wolf, and is raised to freedom while the wolf plummets to the bottom. In both *le puis* and Reinhart, the fox takes the trouble to turn back and taunt the wolf on his way up, telling him that he is on his way to hell, not heaven, an assertion that gives the fox a demonic cast and continues his theme of acting for the detriment of others, rather than his own benefit. He gains nothing from this insult, as far as we can see, except the satisfaction of causing Ysengrin to suffer even more.

Reinhart's behavior here is uncharacteristic: although he is as subject to passions as any other character, he does not usually convert his passion to action, as he does here with disastrous results. The theme of the trickster's lack of superiority over the victim is revisited here, but again Reinhart is not alone: Ysengrin joins him in his fallibility.

3.10 Reinhart's Oath (1098-1153)

Reinhart has offended many animals, but in particular, Ysengrin has learned something unsettling about Reinhart and his own wife, from a character known only as Kuonin: *si enhat sich niht so wol behvt, / als ich dich iezv hore iehen. / ich han zwischen iren beinen gesehn / Reinhart hat si gevriet* (584-7, P). She denies this accusation, but Ysengrin wishes to discover the truth, or possibly remove his enemy entirely.

The mounting hostility between Ysengrin and Reinhart brings out the worst in the wolf, making him attempt to destroy the fox through dishonest measures, but without improving his cheating ability. Given an opportunity to rid himself of his mortal enemy through legal means, Ysengrin agrees to accept Reinhart's oath on a holy relic, but, unwilling to leave the verdict to the

established legal procedure, the large animals attempt to rig this trial to ensure that Reinhart is found guilty. Rather than producing the promised holy relic, they lay out a large dog, very much alive, and call him the preserved body of a saint.

Ysengrin and his co-conspirators here take their stand on such abominable ground that Reinhart looks good whatever his position⁵³ The larger animals claim that they wish to remove a dangerous element, Reinhart, from the community⁵⁴, but their actions are directed by hatred instead. Like the success with the ham episode, it does not make Ysengrin a cheater, as it is only an abuse of power. One need not bend the rules when one can invent them. This sort of rule-stacking involves none of the sympathetic characteristics attributed to a cheater, either. There is no cleverness or originality in this trap, and Reinhart need not be tricked into springing it, as his participation is mandatory; their many physically imposing enforcers ensure that he will behave as they wish. Ysengrin and the big animals merely perpetuate the wolf's theme of unworthiness, and commit a crime against the legal system by undermining the validity of its practices.

Reinhart, on the other hand, also displays a certain amount of trustworthiness simply by being permitted to clear himself with an oath.

Vickie Ziegler explores the phenomenon of the ordeal in *Trial by Fire and Battle in Medieval German Literature*, where she explains that a court resorted to oaths or ordeals, requirements that the accused perform certain feats, when unable to determine a ruling in any other way. The oath was viewed as reliable evidence, and when the defendant was incapable of swearing an oath that he or she was innocent, the ordeal was used instead. These circumstances did not necessarily

⁵³ “Les mesures prises par le loup sont toutefois condamnées par l'auteur, car elles ne correspondent pas aux habitudes de la guerre privée. Le comportement d'Isengrin est jugé sournois, déloyal et viole le droit. Au lieu de déclarer franchement la guerre, il guette perfidement Reinhart en embuscade (25)” (Krause, 142)

⁵⁴ “Isengrin mésuse une procédure légitime de réconciliation pour satisfaire son désir de vengeance et montre qu'il tient plus à la poursuite de ses propres intérêts qu'à la paix de la communauté.” (Krause, 143)

imply that the defendant was a miscreant, but they did mean that the court had no compelling reason to believe that he or she spoke the truth:

Oathworthiness depended to a large degree on status and reputation. If an individual were known to be untrustworthy, he could not clear himself with an oath. People convicted of serious crimes, such as theft and perjury, were not considered oathworthy. Another group that could not clear itself through oaths comprised individuals who either by birth or circumstance, through no fault of their own, were not oathworthy. This group had two main categories: foreigners and slaves. (Ziegler, 5)

Reinhart obviously belongs in the group of untrustworthy defendants. Other, more sympathetic characters such as *Tristan's* Isolde do not receive this level of respectability, and must undergo ordeals rather than swear oaths. Imported to Mark's court from Ireland, and therefore a foreigner with no local family, Isolde knows no-one with the legal right to act as her oath-helper and verify her honesty. Why may a known rascal like Reinhart swear an oath, where a queen must undergo an ordeal? Perhaps the attribution of such a respectable position to the fox is representative of the *Schwank's* avoidance of serious implications; if the aggressive lack of moral force is characteristic of the genre then the decision to give Reinhart legal rights that he obviously does not warrant re-inforces the impression that the characters take the events far more seriously than the audience should. This misplaced seriousness contributes to an impression of smallness and unimportance through the same reverse implication as the treatment of the fox and the other animals like members of the nobility; a dog is only a dog, but a dog in a jacket and tie is ridiculous. Similarly, a fox who has been subjected to litigation and must be legally convicted before the other animals can proceed with the allotted penalty gives the audience the impression that less is at stake than the characters believe.

The rape scene has not yet taken place, and the unproved, comic, but reasonable charge that Reinhart may have sexually harassed Hersant contrasts sharply with Queen Isolde's true, serious, and unsympathetic accusation of adultery, in which a great deal more is at stake. Because she is a queen, her adultery amounts to treason, as it threatens the legitimacy of any royal offspring. In spite of the apparently irreconcilable differences between them, both Reinhart and Isolde hold the moral advantage. Isolde must win because God is on her side. Reinhart must win because the

audience is on his side, and because his enemies attempt to cheat. Because he is himself such a formidable cheater, Reinhart's enemies are forced to cheat shamelessly at his trial. They violate the legal system and the concept of a holy relic, enlarging the implications of this oath beyond what Reinhart has done. The law must be violated to protect the moral order of the universe. Though any oath he would have to swear may indeed be false, they are more guilty than he is, and the ordeal, no matter how unfairly it is stacked, plays out in his favour.

Two common ordeals were the trial by fire, in which the defendant swears an oath, then carries a hot object a specified distance, and the trial by water, in which the defendant was lowered under controlled conditions into water. The defendant in the trial by fire would have her burns examined later for infection, which was interpreted as God's condemnation of her guilt⁵⁵. The defendant in a trial by water would be exonerated if he sank, and guilty if he floated, as a pure element like water was expected to reject a guilty person and refuse to swallow him up. Though they were frequently viewed with cynicism, ordeals such as these, and the trial by battle, were already ancient customs in Heinrich's time, and an essential fact of life⁵⁶.

Even the most questionable legal procedure was not to be abused in the way that the large animals do Reinhart's oath. We have already used the example of *Tristan*: Ziegler writes that Gottfried attacked the institution mercilessly, but also condemned its abuse within the same

⁵⁵ "In reality, those who underwent the ordeal of the hot iron were always burned. The bandages were taken off in a few days to judge whether or not the wound had healed: if the burns had subsided, they were acquitted; if the wound had festered, they were guilty. The decision as to what degree of healing constituted innocence was ambiguous. Since equality before the law is a modern ideal, to which exceptions are still frequently made, it should not be surprising that such standards were rather elastic in the time period under consideration." (Ziegler, 7)

⁵⁶ "the ordeal functioned in early and high medieval society as a means of resolving otherwise intractable and unsolvable questions of guilt or innocence. Cases in which there were no witnesses or no credible witnesses still had to be settled; in such cases, God was called as a witness." (Ziegler, 1-2)

argument. He avoids passing direct judgment on either, but describes Isolde's misleading oath, true in form but not in spirit, with a loaded term:

Gottfried's own attitude toward the *Tristan* material seems to be expressed not only in the content of his famous critique but also in his use of the infrequent medieval German word *gelüppeter* (15748), which had both literal and figurative meanings – “poison” and “deception,” respectively – to describe Isolde's oath. Gottfried used the word earlier in *Tristan* to describe Morolt's poisoned sword in the judicial duel with Tristan (1.6943). This word has no positive qualities.” (Ziegler, 129)

His narration of the holy miracle that vindicates Isolde is decidedly tongue-in-cheek, describing Christ as so merciful that he will bend to anyone's purposes. Isolde, Ziegler argues, is meant to be compared to beloved ordeal-saints such as Kunigunde, who is innocent, and who deliberately selects an ordeal that requires a real miracle to be survivable at all. While Ziegler observes that Gottfried's real-life expectations of the ordeal's accuracy were rather dubious⁵⁷, some accuracy was definitely expected; she reports that abuses of the oath were considered serious enough to warrant heated debates⁵⁸. Characters in literature can manipulate the oath and the ordeal, and

⁵⁷ “Trying to force God to do our will presupposes a conception of God that fits our own designs. The ordeal by fire and the subsequent commentary lead one to the conclusion that since the concept lying behind this ordeal was in reality anti-Christian, in that it forced God to react when people wanted him to, giving him less than absolute freedom, then God must, indeed, be ‘as supple as a wind-blown sleeve,’ ready to do our bidding and not minding too much if the intent is false or true.” (Ziegler, 130)

⁵⁸ “The use of false oaths that were literally true posed a major legal and ethical problem during the entire Middle Ages. There were two sets of opinions on the matter of such oaths: according to one view, if the wording of the oath literally covered the facts, the oath was true. It was not important if the others present understood what was going on, because the oath functioned independently of bystanders. The Church rejected such an understanding: if the swearer gave his

relatively reliable indicators of who is in the right, often, as in Isolde's case, at the same time.

Oaths in the fictional realm normally work, to some extent⁵⁹. Isolde's attempt to cheat at her oath, and her miraculous success, Heinrich accepts with sarcasm; as good and sympathetic as she may be, she has still abused a system that society needs in order to function effectively.

Reinhart's crimes may violate the law of the forest, but they do not yet threaten it. The actions of the other animals do. Regardless of the defendant, or how unfairly it has been arranged, an oath is an oath; the use of an artificial holy relic degrades the veracity of real ones. Fortunately for the legal system, Reinhart is destined to survive.

The badger, Crimel, notices that the hound is not dead, and warns Reinhart against participating in the ordeal:

*Crimel sach, wa Reize lac,
er sprach: ,Reinhart, vernim mir:
gewerliche sag ich dir,
dv endarft mirs niht verwizen,
Reize wil dich erbizen: (1130-4, P)*

oath a meaning that no one else could be expected to comprehend, then onlookers could not take it into account in answering their subjective questions about the matter at hand.” (Ziegler, 4)

⁵⁹ “In medieval legal life a witness made a fact true by his willingness to put his life on the line, which was how swearing an oath was viewed. The fear of the awful consequences to one’s person as surety; he could, therefore, expect divine retribution on his person if he did not tell the truth. Our literary sources, both legendary and secular, frequently bear out this belief.” (Ziegler, 3)

In *Si comme Ysengrin s'ala plaindre de Renart a la cort le roi*, the fox himself realizes that the so-called corpse is breathing⁶⁰, and wisely makes his escape with the badger's assistance. In both cases, though, he escapes to safety.

Throughout the many supposed alliances that Reinhart makes, only two are real: his alliance his beloved wife, whom Heinrich has all but eliminated from his adaptation, and that with the badger, Crimel. Normally any encounter with Reinhart is injurious, but Crimel appears to gain from their relationship. He has put his wisdom at the fox's disposal deliberately, out of friendship, whereas any cheated dupes who might provide Reinhart with value remain motivated by their own gain. The victims are useful to Reinhart because they do not think, whereas, as we can see here, Crimel is useful to him because he does.

The larger animals have here attempted to play the part of the trickster, but have failed. As Ysengrin did, they depended on their power over the prospective victim, rather than their own cunning. Reinhart is certainly guilty, but they hope to circumvent a court process through which the fox will certainly have himself acquitted through his own cheating. They are not, however, fighting fire with fire; their cheat requires no skill, and depends on their power, which is generally associated with failure in the cheat. Their failure is fortunate for the forest, however; while Reinhart may habitually break the law, their method would threaten the law itself. It would be very unusual for a cheat to alter the permanent social fabric of its environment.

3.11 The Rape (1154-1238)

An event, or rather a non-event, has taken place before the ham episode: having entered Ysengrin's house, Reinhart waited until the wolf was out, accosted his wife, Hersant, and was angrily rebuffed. He has later been described, by a fragmentary character known only as Kounin, as having been seen between Hersant's legs, but for the audience the information remains second-hand; what we do know is that some of the *Reinhart* material is missing, and that

⁶⁰ *Bien aparçut qu'il ert gaitiez / Et que Rooniax ert haitiez / Au flanc qu'il debat et demainne, / Quant Brichemer voit qu'il s'esloigne.* (Fukumoto et al, 879-83)

Reinhart is later referred to as *irn travt* (1158), or her lover, and she as *siner amien* (1162). In light of the narrative's ironic referral to Reinhart and Ysengrin as monastic brothers, though, it remains risky to make assumptions based on these terms. Many events have been omitted in Heinrich's text, such as the theft of the cheese. That omission cannot be interpreted as an event that Heinrich did not bother to mention, but rather a deliberate omission, as the cheese is later treated as Dizelin's rightful property. This event is not simply skipped over, but specifically treated as not having happened. There may easily be other such omissions in *Reinhart*, and the other *Branches*, which disagree on the subject, can provide us with little help.

The French *branches* do contain much more plot information than this one. At first angrily rebuffed, Renart of *Les enfances Renart* successfully manipulates the she-wolf through pride and anger into agreeing to sleep with him. He then ransacks the house, consuming or destroying food and property, and finally insults the cubs and sprinkles them with urine. He escapes, with the enraged she-wolf in hot pursuit. As a wolf, she is somewhat larger than the fox, and she becomes wedged into the narrow entrance to his burrow, unable to extricate herself. The fox slips out an alternate entrance and rapes his defenceless pursuer from behind. By this time Ysengrin and some of the other larger animals are approaching, and the wolf witnesses the rape, beginning the feud between Reinhart and Ysengrin. This feud appears in *Reinhart Fuchs* as well, with a similar motivation; as Reinhart flees his ordeal, Hersant outpaces the group. Reinhart disappears down a badger hole, which she reaches before any of the other pursuers. Frantic to save her reputation, Hersant wedges herself into one of the tunnels, just as her French counterpart does, and the rape scene proceeds as before.

It is unsurprising that the controversial rape scene should be the most diversely treated episode in the trickster-fox tradition; the rape scene also plays out differently in *Ysengrimus*.

Anthromorphic nature aside, animals do kill and eat one another, so Reinhart's attempted thefts and murders are easy enough to take in stride. His more serious crimes, though, such as rape and treason, are what one might call a harder 'sell.' Best writes that Pierre de Saint-Cloud avoids premeditation, as Renart enters Ysengrin's house before he knows what it is, or whom he will find inside. When he meets Hersent, she makes advances on him, and Ysengrin has already accused the (presumably) still-innocent fox of having designs on his wife. As Best writes, "She makes her spouse's jealousy the grounds for a real affair, since unlike her equivalent in Nivardus's epic she is too lascivious to be faithful" (Best, 41). Renart is one of many sexual

partners, and the adulterous embrace that ensues contains allusions to courtly love, further mitigating the unlawfulness of Renart's actions while shifting some of the blame onto Hersent. This accusation does not appear again in later *branches*.

Nivardus, on the other hand, does not include the initial adultery, with the two sex events occurring together. Reinardus enters, urinates and defecates on the cubs, and leaves. So far, no sex has taken place. The she-wolf attempts to trick him into remaining, hoping to bite his head off, but she makes an unsuccessful trickster, and the fox uses this additional conversation as an opportunity to taunt her and throw things at her. While a later adaptation will tell us that Reinhart's actions have blinded some of the cubs, this injury does not appear here, though the cubs are significantly aggrieved by their treatment, and Nivardus goes so far as to criticize her response. She becomes trapped, Nivardus writes, because her anger is out of proportion with Reinardus's crime, and anyway even a wolf cub will ultimately grow up to be a greedy, murderous wolf like Ysengrimus, and therefore deserves such treatment. The she-wolf's rage, rather than being intensified by the violation, instead dissipates: Nivardus's she-wolf is lascivious enough to enjoy it, making the victim into a bizarrely willing, if initially reluctant, participant. She then defends Reinardus from her husband's rage.

Reinhart shows as selfless a hatred for Hersant as he does for her husband, Ysengrin. He claims to love the she-wolf when he seduces her, but his ensuing actions imply extreme hatred, attempting as he does to demolish her reputation and relish the suffering he causes for the whole family. Is the attempt at seduction merely a prelude to this mischief? Reinhart later declares to her husband and other shocked onlookers that the rape was consensual sex, whereas in the *enfances* the fox claims that he is simply trying to help her out of the burrow, and not engaging in intercourse at all⁶¹. As it accuses Hersant of inappropriate behaviour, the *Reinhart* explanation is far more insulting to both wolves, and more injurious to Hersant's reputation and self-respect.

⁶¹ *Hersent est prise en ceste fosse, / Qui mout est voir espesse et grosse* (Fukumoto et al, "Les enfances Renart," 621-2)

Reinhart's public gloating after the rape gains him no more than does his fishing trip with Ysengrin, but it is perfectly engineered to harm her as much as possible⁶²: Ysengrin's trust for his wife is undermined, the paternity of the cubs is now in doubt, and Hersant's reputation is damaged. Coxon finds many examples of the phenomenon of malicious laughter in later comic verse stories. "By the same token, laughter could be deployed aggressively to provoke and antagonize, the jokes here going beyond banter (at which no offence may be taken) to insult and deliberately diminish the status of the other." (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 5) The audience can be expected to sanction such actions, which would likely inspire offense in real life. As Coxon states, the trickster is permitted a broader range of actions through his status as a comic character. The audience has the ability to laugh at fictional events which, if real, would horrify them: "Recipients are also on the occasion encouraged to laugh in partnership with protagonists such as the thief or vagabond, in other words, to tolerate and even identify with representatives of social types that in everyday life, we must presume, they would detest, vigorously exclude or shun." (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 164)

Besides causing suffering for the wolves, the rape fires Reinhart's enemies against him and makes him even more unpopular. By causing maximum damage, Reinhart has also attracted maximum trouble, producing a feud, and thus grounds for more stories. Reinhart's hatefulness, then, perpetuates the existence of his universe.

The existence of comic rape scenes should not be interpreted as a sign of contemporary callousness toward such an act. Ziegler cites a "general realization among the nobility that brutality toward women was uncourtly" (Ziegler, 124), and a character who forces himself on a woman is not generally sympathetic. For every Moriz von Craun there are many more dwarves or giants, or simply defective knights, besieging the terrified maiden in her castle to force her into intercourse or marriage, and these characters exist for the titular hero like Daniel, Iwein or Parzival to arrive and defeat. In the real world, too, the subject of rape would have been taken seriously by Heinrich's audience. It is no co-incidence that Heinrich mentions rather frequently that his cheater's behaviour is inappropriate, frequently cheering on others like Diepreht who

⁶² "Mittels Spott zielt der Spötter auf eine scherzende oder scharf-verletzende Herabsetzung des verspotteten Objekts." (Plotke, 23)

injure him, and inserting a moralizing tone that does not appear in the French *branches*. We therefore have reason to believe that Heinrich's inclusion of Hersant's rape does not result from some socially irresponsible caprice, or slavish adherence to narrative convention, but that it represents a deliberate artistic decision consistent with the rest of the work. The fox is not alone in engaging in activities of which his audience would never approve in real life. Coxon observes this phenomenon over a broad range of literature: "for the duration of the narrative (or performance) audiences could be expected to laugh at circumstances and events which in their everyday lives would perhaps call forth a quite different response." (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 35) Yet we have no reason to assume that the inclusion of this scene in a comic work means that it was even meant to be funny. Predicting audience reactions is dangerous territory; Jacques Ribard writes in "Et si les fabliaux n'étaient pas des "contes à rire?"", that seven centuries is too great a gap for us to predict audience reactions,

Quand on sait d'ailleurs le caractère extraordinairement subjectif de tout ce qui touche au domaine de l'expression des sentiments, comment serait-on assuré à quelque sept siècles de distance, de ce qui pouvait faire rire ... ou pleurer nos ancêtres des bonnes villes et des châteaux? (Ribard, 135)

We must instead judge the scene within the context of the work.

In the initial Rooster-hunt episode, Reinhart and Scantecler end the tale with a slightly implausible discussion about the wisdom of keeping one's mouth shut, and the folly of listening to flattery. In a later episode with the Aesopian crow who drops a cheese, Heinrich halts the scene to point out the incongruity between the crow Dizelin's kindness to the fox and the fox's coming treachery - even at the expense of giving away the surprise ending. The pared-down scene is lengthened to allow the narrator to point out that Reinhart's greed has injured him, and to express pleasure that justice has been served. This moralizing theme makes Reinhart's decision to violate Hersant, arguably the least morally defensible of the entire epic, and probably the second most illegal, especially intriguing.

Rape was a serious crime, as we see in the works of Rufinus, writing around 1160. He reports approvingly that rape is punished with the death penalty in civil law. Civil law maintained the death penalty throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and, as late as 1335, a convicted rapist might be publicly flogged or even denied a Christian burial.

How does *Reinhart* sell the rape scene? This scene is closer to the French than the Latin, with a real rape and an offended victim, but the events preceding it are apparently more like Nivardus's version, with no 'on-screen' sex taking place. In both Pierre's and Heinrich's epics, the wolf becomes trapped and the fox rapes her while she attacks the rocks in the burrow with helpless rage. Heinrich emphasizes Hersant's rage and makes much of her *schande* (1170, 1181), or degradation, but avoids mentioning more painful personal responses or other emotional trauma; in fact, it is Ysengrin who breaks into tears as she is pulled out of the hole (1193), and she does not cry until a feud has been formally declared and they enter into public lamentation together (1226-7). Any sort of pain on her part is restricted to damage to her honour, and the above-mentioned lupine wrath. Besides this careful avoidance of humanizing the sufferer, the narration does not make any jokes during this scene. Reinhart does, when he taunts Ysengrin and Hersant afterward⁶³, but he makes those jokes himself, and nobody else is laughing. Is it possible to make rape funny, to a demographic that valued adapted French literature for its illustration of ideal courtly culture? Possibly, but Heinrich avoids making light of the situation with jokes, and minimizes any potentially unsettling accounts of the victim's suffering. He may use this scene only to motivate Ysengrin's deadly hatred of Reinhart, rather than for any comic value of its own.

In "Wer lacht im Märe – und wozu?" Klaus Grubmüller argues that laughter by characters in a fictional work does not necessarily correspond to the amusement of the audience; like any other gesture, it is performed on a stage, and need not be treated as a suggestion that the audience respond in the same way to the depicted events⁶⁴. Furthermore, Althoff describes the contemporary social climate as one in which Reinhart's offensive joking would not necessarily be viewed as sincere.

⁶³*so svlt ir mine gevateren hi lan. / di sol von rechte hie wirtinne sin.* (1236-7, P)

⁶⁴ "Lachen in Texten ist immer erzähltes Lachen, entweder als ‚Figurenlachen‘, ebenso perspektivisch gebunden wie die ‚Figurenrede‘, oder auch als ‚Erzählerlachen‘, Teil des Textes und als solcher etwa der Charakterisierung des Erzählers diestbar gemacht. Auch der Erzähler kann – aus der Perspektive eines Rezipienten – unangemessen lachen und sich damit als unverständlich oder liederlich entlarven, und erst recht können es die Figuren." (Grubmüller, 111)

Ich möchte vielmehr zunächst am Beispiel verschiedener Formen des Lachens zeigen, dass die zitierten Einschätzungen der Zivilisationstheorie den mittelalterlichen Gebrauch emotionaler Äußerungen gründlich missverstehen. Auch Formen des Lächelns, Lachens und Verlachens wurden in den unterschiedlichsten Situationen als Codes benutzt, die bestimmte Botschaften transportierten und mit emotionalen Äußerungen authentischen Charakters wenig gemein hatten. (Althoff, Verlachen, 4)

One observes insincere laughter in children, in their more savage moments: Ha ha. You lose. Such laughter or mockery is not based in amusement, but a more primitive assertion of dominance. Interpreting Thomas Hobbes in "Principles of Laughter in Medieval France," Stephen Nichols examines the concept of laughter as a hostile declaration of personal superiority:

Remember that Hobbes called laughter „a passion that hath no name” but whose sign is laughter which „is always joy.” Now the reason for that joy, Hobbes argues, lies in a sudden intuition that we are human, and human in a particular way. He calls that shock of recognition of our particular quality of humanness „sudden glory;” well and good, but the sudden glory that fills us has something rather cruel about it. It resides in the fact of our recognizing our superiority over the person(s) we are laughing at (Nichols, 206).

Perhaps Reinhart's joking is a further attack on Hersant, rather than part of Heinrich's efforts at being amusing. Hans Rudolf Velten writes in "Text und Lachgemeinschaft: Zur Funktion des Gruppenlachens bei Hofe in der Schwankliteratur" that laughter can be used as a subtle, socially-acceptable weapon. "In den Repräsentationskulturen des Mittelalters war öffentliches Lachen durchaus nicht immer gemeinschafts- und freudestiftend, sondern auch ein Mittel zur Provokation, vor allem wenn es mit einer Schädigung des Verlachten einherging." (Velten, 131). As it directly precedes the birth of feud between Reinhart and the wolves, this concept of laughter as a "means of provocation" is particularly appropriate here.

So the scene serves a structural purpose. In "La Structure temporelle dans le Reinhart Fuchs" Sigrid Krause divides the work into three primary sections, with the rape as the final division⁶⁵. She also points out that the rape marks a change in focus in Heinrich's cohesive work, where it could not in the scattered French *branches*.

La tentative de conciliation échoue, et le nombre de crimes imputés à Reinhart s'accroît jusqu'à la scène du viol de la louve lancée à sa poursuite (vv. 1156 sqq.). C'est alors que Heinrich, à partir du vers 1239 – à peu près à la moitié de l'œuvre –, introduit la nouvelle branche du récit qui semble à première vue sans rapport avec ce qui précède. Heinrich y relate le comportement tyrannique du lion Vrevel dans la destruction de la fourmilière (vv. 1251 sqq) et comment ce dernier se décide, accablé par la vengeance du prince des fourmis, à convoquer la cour et le tribunal et proclame au même moment une trêve générale. (Krause, Structure, 87)

So the evil worked by Reinhart progresses from a small scale to a grand crescendo, leading to a climax at the end: "La violation du droit, illustrée dans la première partie du RF au niveau de la famille et du lignage, et dans la seconde au niveau de contrats conclus entre personnes, atteint son plus haut point dans la dernière partie de l'oeuvre." (Krause, Satire, 146) We have now come from the petty disputes between Reinhart and the animals to a grander scale of evil, and the rape is the turning point at which things become serious.

Previously-discussed themes still remain at this point. Reinhart rapes Hersant, but is unlikely to gain any sexual gratification from it. His actions demonstrate his selfless malice, escalating the theme from the eel-fishing episode, in which Reinhart gains nothing, but also loses nothing. Here, he gains nothing and even attracts trouble to himself. He has, however caused far greater

⁶⁵ "Le RF se divise en gros en trois parties constituées chacune de nombreuses aventures. Outre un prologue (V. 1-11), une première partie met en scène le renard et les petits animaux, la seconde le renard et le loup (V. 385-1238), la troisième enfin le renard et le lion, lequel représentent les grands animaux (v. 1239-2248), le tout suivi d'un épilogue (v. 2249-2266)" (Krause, 139)

suffering for others, which serves as sufficient motivation for his actions, for which no explicit reason is given.

3.12 The Trial (1239-1872)

Reinhart's capital trial begins when the king, Vrevel the lion, notices an ant nest. This scene, telegraphed back to the beginning, is the first scene in the poem chronologically, but related after the rape. Considering himself king of all the creatures in the forest and eager to assert this superiority, Vrevel demands that the ants swear fealty and deliver tribute. The ants have never heard of him and are predictably unimpressed; his world is not theirs.

In “Morals, Justice and Geopolitics in the *Reinhart Fuchs* of the Alsatian Heinrich der Glichezaere.” Jean-Marc Pastré also describes Vrevel's attempt as misguided. Evidence appears elsewhere that the ants are not part of his kingdom, as, when he calls court into session, they do not appear, here or in the case of Reinhart's first trial⁶⁶. Vrevel cannot expect to rule the ants any more than a human king can expect obedience from the boars in his own woods, but he is foolish enough to be unaware of his own jurisdiction.

The ants refuse to recognize his authority, and he avenges the insult by crushing the nest and most of the ants. But the ants already have a king, and, grieved by the suffering of his people, he climbs into Vrevel's ear and torments him, like his Aesopian counterpart. The ants, he continues, are acting in good faith when they defend themselves: “The master of the ants believes that he has every right to defend his sovereignty (lines 1,289 and 2,054), to resist Vrevel and to try to save his race” (Pastré, 39) This is no rebellion, but a justifiable defense of home and hearth. Vrevel's response to the ant king's revenge shows a dangerous contradiction for a king to exhibit: he will hold others accountable for offending him, but has no clear concept of his own accountability. “It is paradoxical to see how Vrevel, sure of his rights, is unable to perceive that the evil that befalls him is the result of his territorial aspirations. He declares that he was

⁶⁶ “This world, which is not directly subject to the lion, does not appear on the list of the animals who come to court in order to complain” (Pastré, 39)

punished by God for not having carried out justice (lines 1,319-20)” (Pastré, 43). Vrevel is unable to comprehend the cause-and-effect aspects of ruling, and every decision he makes seems to be wrong.

The ant king's vengeance produces “Une maladie, qu'il tient pour châtiment de Dieu” (Krause, *Satire*, 144). This so-called divine punishment provides Vrevel's only motivation to hold the court that ultimately tries Reinhart as a criminal, and inspires him to impose the enforced peace on the land, during which animals are not permitted to kill one another, and during which the events of *Reinhart Fuchs* take place.

Reinhart appears immediately afterward, or, rather, we learn afterward that he has been present all along; the trickster can make himself invisible even to us. The narrator tells us that he has found himself an ideal hiding place, which allows him to stay or go unobserved, while he himself still enjoys an unobstructed view of the events that have just unfolded.

Vrevel, or in the French *Branches* Noble, has assumed that his 'illness' is a divine punishment for failing to do his duty as king; he ought to hold court more often. He summons all the animals to such a court in hopes of a miraculous cure. Unwilling to interfere with the affair, though, Noble disregards Ysengrin and Hersant's complaint against Reinhart; if Hersant is having an affair, he says, who is he to interfere with the young lovers? He comforts Ysengrin that it is not unusual to be cuckolded these days. Unlike Vrevel, Noble is simply not interested in interfering in such affairs, and must be convinced to do so. His attitude changes, and Vrevel's is re-inforced, when another plaintiff appears: Scantecler and his wife Pinte enter the court carrying a dead chicken on a bier. This, they say, is their murdered daughter; Reinhart has killed her, and all the rest of Pinte's family. The king is enraged to a decidedly un-regal degree, and changes his opinion of the previous complaint. He decrees that the fox must die for the murder, and for the grievous rape of Hersant.

The French badger defends the fox, and in both epics, two legal experts, a camel and an elephant, also speak in his defence. They point out that he has a right to a fair trial, and must be summoned to court three times without responding before such an injunction can be made against him. Vrevel reluctantly cools his wrath and sends officers to arrest him.

When the camel and the elephant stand up for Reinhart's legal rights, they are not simply protecting the fox, but enforcing a real law: they can do nothing until they have fulfilled an exacting protocol.

Malgré les preuves accablantes, il est impossible de faire condamner Reinhart, cela pour des raisons de formalisme juridique, car par trois fois la demande de mis à ban est contestée: il faut en effet que l'accusé soit par trois fois cité (semoncé) et ce n'est qu'après la troisième défaillance aux assises que l'accusé peut être solennellement mis à ban (Krause, Satire, 145)

The theme of *Reinhart* as a legal statement surfaces here, as well: their actions are lawful, but ineffective. A rule intended to serve justice now serves injustice. Any system that enforces a rule even in situations where it is inappropriate leaves itself open to exploitation, particularly by the cheater; the law becomes automatic behaviour: “Heinrich s'attache ainsi à montrer qu'un strict et formel exercice de la justice est devenu l'injustice même.” (Krause Satire, 146). In this situation, the law is harmful to the community.

3.13 Brun: Innocent? (1511-1644)

The first emissary is Brun the bear, who is acting as legal representative for Ysengrin. In *Si conme Ranart conchia Brun li ours du miel*, this same scene between Reinhart and Brun has takes place earlier, and Brun presents it as evidence that Renart is a rascal, in order to re-inforce Ysengrin and Hersant's case⁶⁷. Heinrich's Brun has much less personal motivation at this point, but still wishes to see the fox destroyed.

⁶⁷ “In an effort to support the wolves, Brun relates in a 141-line digression how he himself was victimized not long ago, Renart having duped him into believing that he would find honey at Constant des Noes’s farm when in reality he only served to decoy both men and dogs, who nearly killed him, while the fox abducted a chicken unscathed.” (Best, 43).

Knapp treats the *Brun li ours* Brun as innocent, even a martyr. Knapp describes him as the noble counterpart to the human's baseness: “Brun, l'ours, ici représentant de la noblesse, roué de coups terribles a à peine la vie sauve. Mais les héros victorieux ne sont que couverts de mépris et raillerie” (Knapp, 97). Those who attack Brun are portrayed as evil, and inferior⁶⁸. Heinrich's Brun, though little different in himself, lacks such spectacular persecutors, and fares much worse. Krause expresses a surprisingly negative opinion of the *Reinhart* bear, describing him as “aussi maladroit que malhonnête” (Krause, Satire, 145).

He still cuts an innocent figure, compared to Reinhart. Brun has no glaring moral flaw to make him vulnerable. His excessive love of honey is not particularly sinful when compared to Ysengrin's wolfish gluttony. Despite frequent use of his victims' flaws, Reinhart is never an instrument of justice except by accident. While the flaws of the sinful make ideal weaknesses for him to attack, Reinhart does not discriminate with his victims. He may be motivated by external factors, as he will be during his initial escape from the bear's arrest, or by pure malice, as when he will bait the decimated bear in the woods, but, just as he will attack friend as readily as enemy, Reinhart will attack the virtuous as easily as the vicious, so the fact of Brun's misfortune need not imply anything about him; all he has to do to succeed is to manipulate them into some sort of foolish action, usually through vanity or greed and, no matter how minor the infraction that produces it, he has an opening.

Brun is sent to arrest Reinhart and bring him back to the court. The fox easily distracts him from his task by leading him to a “beehive” where he promises that they will find plenty of honey. He directs the bear to a log with a long vertical split, where he insists the beehive is hidden. Reinhart knows that the split is still under tension, though, and not stable, held open by a wedge that a human has driven into it earlier. Brun recklessly sticks his nose into the hole as instructed, and the fox removes the wedge to trap him there. The bear howls in agony. Before he escapes,

⁶⁸ “Une indication de provenance telle que de la Place qui ne signifie rien ou li cuens (le conte) de l'Anglee que est pure ironie ou des surnoms narquois tels que Trousseputain dénoncent ceux qui les portent comme des créatures de bas lignage, viles, ignobles, voire même animales, séparées fondamentalement de la noblesse.” (Knapp, 97)

Reinhart scolds him for becoming so upset, reminding him that he had known about the bees inside, so there is no sense in complaining about them now:

*Reinhart sprach: ,wie tuont ir so?
ich hate ivch wol gewarnot;
ivch duont die binen leider not. (1556-8, S)*

To escape the tree before the farmer and his companions arrive to kill him, Brun must push so hard against the log that he tears the skin from his head. Reinhart takes a further opportunity to cause Brun pain, goading him over his injuries, but Brun makes no further attempt to arrest him; the damage done to his skin seems to have incapacitated the bear entirely, and he returns to the court to complain about Reinhart's treachery.

3.14 Diepreht: Finally Reckless (1645-1759)

Diepreht and Reinhart are destined to face each other again, and this time Reinhart will emerge victorious. When Brun returns, battered, wounded and foxless, the court sends the cat to bring Reinhart to trial. Diepreht reluctantly approaches the house, where, also in *Si comme Renart conchi Brun li ours du miel*, an ominous shouted warning from a departing crow unnerves his counterpart, Tibert, further: “It is perhaps not for nothing that we are told he starts out “to the left,” and upon his arrival at Malpertuis in the evening he is treated to an ominous scene: *entre I. fresne et I. sapin, / A veü l’oiseil saint Martin / Assez si le hucha: <<A destre!>> / Et li oisiax vint a senestre. (753-6)*. Diepreht is comforted when he hears Reinhart's friendly greeting. The fox promises to follow him back to Vrevel immediately without making a fuss, and even, to his surprise, offers him a good meal. The authors warn us not to be put off guard by the fox's amicable attitude: talk costs nothing.

Reinhart mentions confidentially that he knows where to find a large stock of house mice in a particular hole only a short distance away. He claims that the house is empty, but in fact it is occupied by a priest whom Reinhart has tormented in the past. In this case, too, Diepreht takes the bait. They quickly arrive at the house in question, which can be entered only through a single blind hole. Heinrich diverges here from the French: unlike the more cautious Tibert, Diepreht is

so greedy for mice that he leaps straight through the hole with no questions asked, and no added pressure from the fox. Diepreht has finally acted automatically, without considering what evil scheme Reinhart might be hiding. This impulsive and unconsidered action leads Diepreht into a trap at the other end of the hole. Appropriately enough, it was set for Reinhart by an angry human.

Diepreht's unconsidered, automatic behaviour powers the cheat, finally allowing him to play the part of the fool successfully. He has not been suspicious, he has hidden no information from the cheater, and he has not sought evidence that might test the cheater's story. With the cat's cooperation, the cheat succeeds perfectly this time.

Tibert, Diepreht's counterpart, is beleaguered by the priest, his mistress and their son, who leap unclothed out of bed, panicked by the sudden noise. *Reinhart's* Diepreht encounters a slightly stranger scene, the priest and two women, referred to as *des geburis wip* and *daz kamirwip*, whom Sharon Short Robinson defines as his wife and mistress. The ensuing events are similar. Fortunately for Diepreht, the naked priest, who is armed only with household objects, is an easy target for a wild animal with teeth and claws. The already ribald scene in *Brun li ours* escalates when Tibert rips off one of the nameless priest's uncovered testicles, incapacitating the savage beast enough to escape. *Reinhart* tastefully leaves this detail out. The consternation of the family (the mistress is especially disappointed in *Brun li ours*, as she had no small stake in that particular member), allows them to make only desultory attempts to pursue the escaping wildcat.

Bleeding and humiliated, Diepreht hurries back to Vrevel's court with portions of the trap still wrapped around his neck. Vrevel is enraged. He sends a third arresting officer, Crimel the badger, who will also represent Reinhart in court.

3.15 Plausibility and Hersant's Testimony

Meanwhile, back at the palace, the court discusses Reinhart and what to do with him. The badger takes the opportunity to apply pressure to one of the plaintiffs, Hersant. Reinhart's loyal friend, Crimel the badger, advises her not to testify: she will only attract to herself a reputation as a loose woman, should she reveal that she has had intercourse with a man other than her own

husband. He hints to Ysengrin's two sons that their legitimacy will be called into question if their mother has had extramarital intercourse:

*ver Hersant, nv sait, wi
evch ewer man bringet ze mere?
daz mag evch wesen swere.
dar zv lastert er sine kint,
di schone ivngelinge sint, (1396-1400 P)*

Like his friend the fox, Crimel is the cheater here, and he has used social pressure to produce in his victim a motivation to hide the truth, in order to protect herself from community discredit. The badger's attempts to silence the plaintiffs have quite different counterparts in the *Roman de Renart* trial. Jean Subrenat points out in "Rape and Adultery: Reflected Facets of Feudal Justice in the *Roman de Renart*" that the shaming circumstances do work on Isengrin, who obstructs the justice that he himself desires, in order to protect his own reputation: "he is a victim of his own logic when he opposes her undergoing a test that would confirm her guilt and, in his view, expose him to disgrace as a husband." (Subrenat, 32).

This scene does not appear in Heinrich's *Reinhart*, and Hersant and Ysengrin do not reappear after their war with Reinhart until they arrive at Vrevel's court; indeed, nothing happens between the two events but a flashback to Vrevel's attack on the ant nest. Completely unimpeded by Ysengrin, who supports her complaint rather vehemently, Hersant intends to indict the fox for rape. She ignores Crimel's manipulative advice, insisting on bringing the truth to light and seeking justice.

Reinhart has easily gotten the better of Hersant, twice, by using her tendency toward immediate, unconsidered, emotional reactions, but here these unconsidered responses prove an impediment for Crimel. As Heinrich's Ysengrin gives no thought to preserving his reputation, particularly at the expense of avenging the wrongs committed against his family, this Crimel is left to work on the she-wolf alone. His tactic is unsuccessful. Unlike some of Reinhart's victims, such as Scantecler, Hersant also lacks the introspection required for his manipulative warning to work, and Crimel must change his strategy.

The badger takes up a new strategy and argues against the plausibility of the wolves' testimony. Rather than telling a lie, Crimel tells a half-truth that is designed to be misinterpreted. He says that it would be impossible for Reinhart to overpower the much-larger she-wolf. One must accept that this statement is generally true. Crimel's case is already more plausible than the plaintiffs': how could a small fox physically violate such a large and powerful wolf? Crimel has attacked not the truth of her testimony, but rather its less-defensible plausibility.

Crimel's smear campaign is particularly powerful in a court where the judgement depends on trusting the word of an eyewitness, as no hard evidence is available. True though the testimony may be, her character is in doubt and the testimony is therefore implausible. To maintain this implausibility, Crimel avoids discussing whether an inability to overpower Hersant necessarily translates to an inability to get the better of her by other means. Many of those present at court actually witnessed the crime, and could easily see that she had no way to defend herself against it, regardless of her superior size, but what the badger very selectively says is, technically, correct. If no other character speaks up, the defence testimony may be sufficient to convince the judges. A similar strategy is used regarding injuries to the two arresting officers that the fox has resisted, as they have been attacked not by Reinhart, but by that ever-present danger, the humans; of the murdered chicken he wisely makes no mention. The careful omission of facts is as effective here as it was for Diepreht when he demonstrated the quality of his locomotion, or for the titmouse when she was pressed for a kiss, and this she-wolf's testimony is somewhat depleted in the king's estimation.

Crimel is the only character, besides the fox's family, to receive a reward from Reinhart's own paws: when he manipulates Noble into having a strip of bacon cut from the hind's living flesh, Reinhart gives this morsel to Crimel, setting the badger apart from the camel and the elephant, whose rewards quickly change into punishments. Unlike the other courtiers, the badger is treated well: when he ultimately escapes from the trial, Reinhart must conceal his exit and move quickly, but he will take care not to abandon Crimel, to whom he explains everything. Crimel serves Reinhart's interests without being duped, or coerced through threats. He engages in no automatic behaviour, and is never victimized. Crimel has seen through a cheat that Reinhart has not, in the ordeal episode, so it may be impossible for Reinhart to cheat such a savvy character, even if he wanted to.

3.16 Doctor Reinhart (1873-2164)

In spite of his occasionally expensive dedication to harming others as much as possible, the fox remains a successful animal. While his crimes do ultimately get him indicted and tried, Reinhart's capital trial is, according to Pastré, the pinnacle of his victory: to win,

he transforms his part as the accused who has to appear before the court into a position of strength; he manages to isolate the monarch and at the same time to take his revenge on the little animals that he had not been able to deceive and who had accused him; and he manages to get rid of the big animals... under the cover of a show of treacherous gratitude. (Pastré, 49)

Besides being an effective lawyer, Crimel is also successful, where the other two court officers have failed. When he is sent out, he returns with the defendant. Reinhart arrives disguised as a doctor. He claims that he has been on the road, seeking a cure for the king's illness. According to Krause, Reinhart's claim that he was on the road for seven weeks to go to Salerno also implies that he was not present when the crimes of which he is accused took place.

Il prétend donc avoir été sept semaines durant sur les routes (v. 1894). Ce mensonge éhonté signifie dans l'économie générale du roman que Reinhart a été absent pendant les six semaines qui précédaient la cour du roi, que donc il n'a pu commettre les crimes perpétrés dans la première moitié de l'œuvre et dont on l'accuse. Selon cette version, les deux premiers messagers chargés par la cour de lui porter la semonce ne purent non plus le rencontrer. (Krause, Structure, 91-2)

Leaving aside the time paradox he has produced, by becoming a doctor, Reinhart alters his identity, and therefore the situation. Popular cartoon characters do it all the time: if Bugs Bunny dresses up as a drill sergeant, Elmer Fudd will salute. Vrevel's thinking, or rather lack of it, is similar. If a doctor is present, then perhaps Vrevel does not find himself at a trial, but rather a consultation – and, after all, Vrevel is holding court only to rid himself of his physical malady. The objective remains the same, so the means have become irrelevant.

Before leaving his house, Reinhart has donned a pilgrim's robe and arrayed himself like a doctor, and he fills a doctor's bag with medical supplies.. These items are relevant not as themselves, that is, as remedies, but as an augmentation of his disguise.

*vnde nam sein houegewant,
daz aller beste, daz er dar inne vant,
eine wallekappen linin,
vnde slof san dar in.
her nam eines arztes sack -
nieman evch gezelen mack
Reinhartes kvndikeit -,
er gienc, als der bvchsen treit,
beide nelikin vnde cynemin,
als er solde ein arzet sin.
er trvg mange wurtz vnerkant.
einen stab nam er an die hant, (1817-28, P)*

We need not view Vrevel as uniquely foolish to accept Reinhart as a medical man. Primaut believes that he is a member of a religious order because of his shaved head, and the monks who pull Ysengrin out of the well mistake him for a penitent for the same reason. Costumes and disguises are universally compelling in *Reinhart*, leading to a theme of external identity that will appear again with the mutilation of several court members' skin. The defendant's external visual features are important sources of information for the other characters in the courtroom, and here they override other, less tangible features, such as his past reputation, and even the spoken testimony of the plaintiffs. They can talk about things that they say happened, but then they would need to be taken at their word. Reinhart's outward appearance, though false, is there for all to observe.

He claims to have found a remedy for the king's illness. For this remedy, he finds that he can request any concession that he likes, so he ensures that the cost of the cure will literally come out of his enemies' hides: a strip of leather from one, a piece of bacon from another, a bear skin, a wolf skin, and so on. The selfish king immediately consents to each of these demands without once questioning their purpose, and one by one his advisors are eliminated, leaving him without

any wisdom at his disposal. Removing the courtiers, Krause writes, actually ends the trial, as they, not Vrevel, are the judges: “tous les animaux de même rang sont 'juges', ce qu'on appelait la 'cour des pairs' (Standesgleiche richten als Umstand) participant au tribunal, où le juge ne fait que présider l'assemblée.” (Krause, *Satire*, 145) Vrevel has effectively cancelled the court session.

One of the ingredients on the list is a cooked chicken, and Vrevel readily consents to having one of the plaintiffs seized, killed and cooked for the defendant. Vrevel proves content with any sacrifice, as long as it is not his own. Such an innately selfish king is dangerous, and his remaining nobles flee the court.

Reinhart now has an easy opportunity to eat Scantecler, whom he has failed to catch previously, but he chooses to kill Pinte, instead. Often unmotivated, Reinhart's dedication to injuring others is stronger than his other desires. Rather than eating Scantecler, whom he has in fact expressed a desire to eat, or even requesting two cooked chickens, Reinhart insists that it should be Scantecler's wife who dies. He insists on this choice even – or especially – when the cock begs to take her place. He is so dedicated to Scantecler's suffering that he keeps his most convincing accuser alive, so that he can see his wife killed and eaten before his eyes.

This is not the first scene in which Reinhart has made a sacrifice at the altar of sadism. When the monks release the 'penitent' wolf, Ysengrin has survived a potentially deadly situation because of one of Reinhart's cruel tricks. Reinhart has even paid Ysengrin two eels for the opportunity to tonsure him. He might have killed off one of his hated enemies, but lost that opportunity out of his compulsion to see him in pain. He walks into that sacrifice unknowingly, but in the case with Scantecler, the fox is fully aware of the results of his actions. His sadism has prevented him from gaining a prize that he once desired, and ridding himself of another enemy. Because dying in his wife's place is what Scantecler wants, it is unacceptable to the fox that he should do so. In both cases, Reinhart acts to cause the maximum suffering for nearly everyone he encounters.

Reinhart does, however, defeat the ant king by means of the chicken soup and two pelts. Aesop's ant is morally justified in his actions, so Reinhart adds a twist to the fable by thwarting its moral. The ant, who ought to win, is crushed and tossed aside without ceremony, and never mentioned again.

3.17 Regicide as Reform (2165-2248)

After using the pelts to cure Vrevel's "illness," by placing him in a hot bath and wrapping him in the skins to heat his head enough to force the ant king out, Reinhart remains the lion's caretaker. He prepares the lion a potion to drink, guaranteeing that it will cure him completely. The king drinks it, and Reinhart slips away, taking Crimel with him. No other courtiers are present. Vrevel discovers too late that the potion was a deadly poison, and dies regretting the trust he placed in the fox. His tongue and skin break into several pieces on the spot. The self-mutilation of the corpse places Vrevel in the same category as the other creatures that Reinhart has had mutilated, and marks Vrevel as an evil person. This particular treason, then, is forgivable. Because the law of this forest does not work, the cheater's law-damaging cheats are transmuted into social reform from which the community benefits. Reinhart murders Vrevel in order to protect himself, but the narration comments that this turn of events should not be regretted: *daz sol nimal clagen harte* (2175, P), and explains that the results of his cheat are actually beneficial: *swelch herre des volget ane not / vnde teten si deme den tot, / daz were gvte mere.* (2181-3, P). Such a king must be deposed, and thus the law grievously broken, for the good of all.

Vrevel's name change is worthy of note, if only for its addition of another unreliable term to the cheater's story. Krause writes that: "Dans les textes juridiques les plus anciens du moyen âge, le terme Frevel signifie certes 'méfait grave', mais les sens possibles de 'courage, audace, intrépidité' laissent penser que Heinrich a joué sur l'ambiguïté sémantique du terme." (Krause, *Satire*, 144) Vrevel's name is no bald-faced definition of the evil character, then, but a two-layered, like the situations in *Reinhart*, with two conflicting meanings. Vrevel's name is appropriately applied to a character who is externally worthy and superior, but actually the worst problem of his own society.

In contrast to the term's ambivalence, Krause still describes Vrevel as completely bad, "un roi qui est le contraire du rex iustus" (Krause, *Satire*, 145). Vrevel recalls the concept of power that is wielded without intelligence, observed in the Stricker's *maere* of the poor and rich kings, in which the rich king hopes to overthrow the poor king, but fails through the poor king's cleverness and his own prodigious incompetence. Vrevel displays little accountability for his own lands, and appears confused about which lands are in fact his own.

Vrevel behaves like a victim in all the standard ways, to a greater extent than even Ysengrin. Not only does he ignore evidence that might threaten the plausibility of Reinhart's lie, but he actually suppresses his own advisers, who have warned him against his foolish action, eliminating sources of such evidence; Crimel has demonstrated how useful advisers can be when he saves Reinhart from the false relic. Vrevel's Achilles heel, his thoughtless selfishness, is a passion as intense as Ysengrin's greed, Hersant's hatred or Reinhart's dedication to his wife; he seems to forget that court is in session as soon as Reinhart arrives with a potential cure. His only motivation was the cure, and not the fulfilment of his responsibilities.

The king is easily controlled by suggestion: when he arrives at the court, the fox is showered with legal accusations. Reinhart suggests that it is not quite respectable to keep such a noisy court, and the king agrees, demanding silence. Reinhart has drawn attention away from the content of his accuser's words and toward the (less-relevant) volume at which they are spoken, and Vrevel forgets that there ever was content behind them. Reinhart easily directs attention away from those objects that might allow Vrevel to perceive and respond to information that is out of Reinhart's control, so the king is a highly responsive player in the victim's role.

With the abortion of the trial, and his prior neglect of his duties in holding court, the king has failed to protect his subjects from a criminal. He cannot control his temper: when Scantecler and Pinte complain of the murders that Reinhart has committed, he flies into a rage and impulsively orders the fox killed without a trial. He changes his mind easily: the camel easily talks him out of this resolve to have Reinhart killed. He arrogantly assumes kingship over a realm that is far beyond his authority. He views his kingdom and subjects as personal property to be exploited for his own use, sacrificing his courtiers' lives and skins for Reinhart's cure. Even when he makes the right decision, like holding his court at last, he makes it for such selfish reasons that they eventually negate it. All of his behavior is inappropriate, and selfish enough to make him an ideal victim for Reinhart's tricks.

The presence of an evil victim should not be interpreted as evidence of a moral order; Vrevel may commit terrible crimes, but so do Reinhart and Crimel, who escape unscathed. What makes Vrevel in particular a victim of punishment, rather than simply misfortune, is not the quantity of crimes that he has committed, but the quality, the appropriateness of the punishments to the crimes. Vrevel suffers pain because of his arrogance regarding the ants, and Reinhart will

ultimately kill him by means of his mindless selfishness. A good king would have been much harder to defeat in either case.

Vrevel is more than foolish, and more than easily manipulated. He is also evil enough that he should be removed. By complying with Reinhart's requests, Vrevel is clearly behaving badly, and the closed system in which he exists ensures that all his actions will return to him as reactions. The king, who should be the source of justice and order, thwarts justice and order for his own sake, preventing them from defending them. Even as the protector of order, the king also requires order to maintain his rank and power. Without order and justice, there is nothing to protect the king, and Vrevel can be murdered.

Reinhart's victims, with few exceptions, are made vulnerable specifically by their own criminality. The wolf is not vulnerable because he is a fool (although he most certainly is), but because he is greedy. He is easily manipulated into foolish actions through the promise of a meal, and, given enough to eat and drink, will eat and drink himself into trouble on his own. Vrevel, too, endangers his own life not simply by foolishness, but by culpable foolishness.

This culpable foolishness produces a balanced mirror image of the cheats preceding the trial. Unlike its French sources, *Reinhart Fuchs* has a single author and clearly-defined structure. This structure produces meaning in the placement of the scene, so by placing the regicide at the end, the structure of the story makes it definitive for Reinhart's character. We have already seen how the rape scene heralds the transition from an environment full of little animals and Reinhart's feud with Ysengrin to one centred around Vrevel's tyrannical rule and treasonous murder; the order in which events occur does matter, especially here⁶⁹. This ordering allows the audience to depart with the image of Reinhart the reformer, rather than the petty criminal and thief, or, worse yet, murderer and opportunistic rapist; Pastré also points out that its placement at the end makes

⁶⁹ “Heinrich was the first to compose a clearly constructed work based on branches of the *Roman de Renart* with an introduction, clearly defined parts and a conclusion, all subject to a development which takes us from the fox's brush with the little animals to his confrontation with the wolf Ysengrin, and from there to the trial at which the assembled animals witness Reinhart's triumph over his peers and over the lion-king Vrevel” (Pastré, 37-8)

Noble's death seem like the point of the story, and protects Reinhart from an ignominious period of retaliation and hiding from the remaining nobles of Vrevel's court:

That is the outcome of Heinrich's work, the death of an unjust king who has made an alliance with treachery and thus brought about the misery of his kingdom. In order to understand the significance of the outcome, we must remember that Branch X of the *Roman de Renart* (*Renart Médecin*) offers a similar outcome and yet, at the same time, a very different one. King Noble himself offers Renart land as a reward as well as two good castles (lines 1,669-76), and promises him help in case Renart's enemies attack him in his castle. Renart, however remains in his den below ground for a long time in fear of retaliation from the animals that he had flayed alive (lines 1,701-04), just as Reinhart, his evil deed done, disappears in his den (line 2,218) whilst the animals pour out the direst threats against their King's assassin (lines 2,247-8). (Pastré, 49-50)

Despite the effectiveness of this change, or rather imposition, of structure, Renart could also have been viewed as a force for good.

Status as a criminal may be more useful than that of a law-abiding citizen. Krause writes that Reinhart's disobedience shields him from the corruptness inherent in the system. In an environment where the rules themselves are bad, Reinhart's criminality is useful, necessary, and even good. As a criminal, he is better-equipped to shake up the dysfunctional moral order than the virtuous characters who live in it:

Le renard, qui évolue en dehors de l'ordre établi, ne peut d'autre part pas être puni du fait que les articles trop rigides du droit et la forme peu souple d'un procès ne permettent pas de prendre contre lui de mesures efficaces. (Krause, Satire, 146)

He is immune to Vrevel's corrupt laws because he ignores them (not, significantly, because he is unaware of them; he can use them well enough to keep others under control), whereas the opponents repeatedly find that the system's rigidity thwarts their attempts at seeking justice.

Reinhart has gone beyond accidentally punishing the guilty. Now he perpetrates a good cheat, with, the narrative assures us, positive results. Reinhart flouts the social order as much as Renard, but this social order, obviously unacceptable, falls apart right where the 'happy ending' belongs. We know we are not to be on the side of a character named "Frevel," regardless of any humorous double meanings. This cheat ends the story, and produces a sort of redemption for the cheater. It appears as the happy, good ending to a tale full of evil, and makes its hero less of a scoundrel through the very characteristics that make him who he is.

3.18 Skin and Identity

Reinhart causes several courtiers to be skinned, among them Brun the bear. In this universe, such a misfortune is painful but not fatal, as pelts appear to grow back, so Reinhart and the skinless Brun meet again. The bear can do him no more damage in his compromised state, and Reinhart knows that he is safe enough to bait him. He jokes about his lost skin as if it were a stolen coat, simulating horror at the theft. Brun, we are told, growls, but must bear this torment in silence.

Reinhart has had Ysengrin skinned, as well, not to mention searing the scalp off of his head and contributing to the loss of his tail. Best cites these and other examples of mutilating enemies in other works such as *Ysengrimus*: "In the ice-fishing, surveyor, pilgrimage, monastery, kick, swallowing-Joseph, and perjury episodes the wolf's hide is damaged one way or another, besides being removed in the sick-lion and lion's-share incidents." (Best, 10) Reinhart also has the hart's skin mangled, demanding a strip of his hide for a thong, and the camel and elephant, as well as Diepreht, return from their adventures with damage to their own skins. Mutilating his enemies appears to be a favourite strategy. Coxon observes such external mutilation in other stories:

"a large number of texts describe 'mild' forms of assault which do not inflict permanent damage on the bodily integrity of the 'delinquent', and thus do not render the victim so wretched as to silence audience-laughter. The two principal body-parts evoked in this context are 'skin' and 'hair': a tendency which may well have been supported by knowledge of traditional and legally sanctioned

forms of corporal punishment (thrashing; cutting hair off) which were current throughout the Middle Ages.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 147)

But why should removal of the pelt put the humiliated courtiers into the same category as human victims of far less damage? Why do skinned animals not die, and, if they are not harmed, how does being skinned nonetheless incapacitate them for any sort of action against the fox? The French Brun is incapacitated by the pain of skinning, but Heinrich makes no mention of such a hindrance for his bear. This Brun might plausibly eat the fox when he taunts him after the trial, but does not. The physical mutilation of skinning appears to neutralize characters without destroying them; every victim of this mutilation leaves the court, and as a result they are no longer present to interfere with Reinhart and Vrevel's interaction. They do not disappear, though; Reinhart still feels that he must run away, and as none of them are described as having died from the experience, the process does not appear to be permanent.

Besides incapacitating Brun for fighting even when it takes place only on his head, when complete, total skin removal apparently makes *Reinhart's* Brun unable to appear at court. Without his fur, the bear is no longer respectable. Coxon writes: “a full head of hair – gender differences notwithstanding – signifies an honorable person in the prime of life, a shaven head exclusion from honest society.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 147) These characteristics are not necessarily blameworthy; the trickster may use the same signs to signal that he or she is not respectable, without losing the sympathy of the audience, but the mutilation does correspond with a destruction of identity. Physical mutilation is used to punish and mark the guilty. It undermines one's status in society. Both of the advisors bear skin mutilations when they flee from their so-called rewards; the camel's skin is wounded with the nuns' styluses⁷⁰ but the elephant, we are told, has not been seriously wounded⁷¹; because of his thick skin. The defacement of their visible bodies corresponds with the shameful manner in which they are run out of their 'fiefs.'

⁷⁰ *mit griffeln taten si ir groze not, / daz wart an ir hvete schin.* (2152-3, P)

⁷¹ *mochten si in getan han wunt, / ern wurdes nimmer mer gesvnt* (2115-6, P)

We have previously observed Ysengrin equated with a monk or a penitent simply because he has been tonsured. If external appearance generates identity, a skinned bear is no longer himself, and may be unable to conduct the actions that used to be characteristic. He has lost his social potency, and thus his ability to appear at court. Without his skin, Brun is powerless.

3.19 Satanic Themes in *Reinhart Fuchs*

If victims are made vulnerable through their own criminality, what can we conclude about Reinhart? A persistent theme through Heinrich's work, and indeed some of its predecessors, is that of the trickster-fox as the devil. When he deceives Ysengrin into jumping down the well, Reinhart's oddly inappropriate assertion that the wolf is destined for perdition becomes perfectly logical, if the fox can be compared with the devil, or at least a devil. He is red, as the narrative points out, he causes trouble, and he accosts passers-by from the bowels of the earth to trick them into joining him there. Wells, Best writes, were viewed in contemporary folklore as gateways to the underworld⁷², so his jibe rings true in two different ways: the well is viewed as a gateway to the devil's realm, or perhaps Reinhart simply predicts that Ysengrin is destined for perdition.

In either case, like the folkloric devil, Reinhart is motivated by his desire to hurt others, rather than to gain for himself, and he will invest significant effort (sharing or losing access to food, travelling long distances in the cold, or exposing himself to danger) for the opportunity to injure someone or shame someone publicly. When he escapes from Reinhart's trap, Diepreht literally commends the fox to Lucifer⁷³. Even animals who were innocent, with only the potential for sin, such as Brun, Diepreht and Scantecler, become guilty through Reinhart's adept machinations. The means by which the fox harms his enemies is another satanic feature: he tricks them into sinful thoughts and deeds, leading a wolf or bear to a rich food source (gluttony) or praising a

⁷² “According to folklore, wells are indeed entrances to the underworld, but the fox simply means that his foe is bound for bedevilment.” (Best, 53)

⁷³ *Dipreht do vrlovp nam / vnde bevalch in Lucifere.* (356-7, P)

bird for his song (pride), so that they can be injured in ways that correspond to their coaxed-out crimes.

Drawing out and punishing sin should not be mistaken for a pedagogical approach. Reinhart can be deeply evil in the way he carries out his strategies. Hersant's rape makes sense in this context. Reinhart may be eager to have sex with Hersant, but displays no actual sexual desire for her. On the other hand, if we ignore the pedagogical approach and attribute social evils to the work of the devil, then Reinhart's sudden, unmotivated and apparently psychopathic actions become perfectly ordinary. Through the rape, Reinhart then dishonors both Hersant and her cubs – an activity that cannot be pedagogical, as it punishes the innocent for someone else's crimes.

Rape is somewhat excessive for 'teaching her a lesson' for sexual offences, such as Hersant's possible adultery, but is not unheard-of in contemporary literature such as *Moriz von Craun*, in which a knight, spurned after extensive love service and promises of fulfillment, takes his former lover by force. Reinhart's actions, then, are not uniquely bad, but a blithe continuation of the same pessimistic view of how the world works. As a logical result of her indiscretion, then, even Hersant's rape need not be singled out as excessive for the lovable scoundrel; one certainly would not put it past the devil or a demon to violate someone sexually, and the devil is a popular character, too, tending to be depicted as quite charming.

It is particularly devilish that the murdered chicken can be brought into court on a bier. It is not unusual, of course, for a fox to kill chickens, but the presence of a corpse demonstrates that the chicken has not been consumed. The fox has caught a chicken, escaped with her, and killed her, but left her body uneaten. It is not the edible body of the animal that has value for Reinhart, but the death of that animal. Rather than an example of Reinhart's animalistic nature, then, the murder embodies a second example of Reinhart's selfless malevolence: he has gone to the trouble of catching and killing a chicken, but never bothered to collect the reward that literally lay in his jaws, and which he ought to need to survive.

The theme is continued in his treatment of his two defenders; Reinhart discusses rewarding them, and does in fact reward someone else, but when the king agrees to reward those who have helped Reinhart, at his own expense, the fox ensures that they are punished, instead.

Even the devil has a job to do. Hell is an essential part of the fabric of reality, containing all of the most dangerous spirits where they cannot interfere with the living. With this vital function in mind, we can recognize Reinhart's one good deed as a continuation of the devil theme. Vrevel's two-toned name that literally means "grievous sin" gains significance in this context. Reinhart takes the selfish, irresponsible actions of Vrevel, or "grievous sin," and manipulates him into grotesque exaggerations before obliterating the grievous sin with a dramatic, pseudo-supernatural self-mutilation of his corpse. The narrative goes on, explaining that Vrevel's removal benefits everyone. If they are the sort of people who can be defined by such a concept as grievous sin, particularly that which is hidden under a possibly illustrious external meaning, no amount of privilege can protect individuals from their own bedevilment.

Who thwarts Reinhart? The titmouse does, but then, she was never fooled, and Reinhart did not trick her into any sinful actions. Scantecler, though undeniably stupid, manages to survive, too, but ends his encounters somewhat worse off than before. Reinhart may kill Pinte, thus taking away the joy of Scantecler's life, but he does not touch the rooster again after he has repented of his foolishness. Diepreht is manipulated into pride and loses the cheese, but then thwarts Reinhart handily while he is acting out of duty to take it away again. Rather than blithely displaying his physical abilities like Scantecler and Dizelin do their singing, the cat exercises caution and weighs Reinhart's honeyed words carefully. He knows about the hidden trap behind the flattery, and prays for assistance with it. All of these strategies, a lack of sin, repentance of sin, wariness of temptation to sin, and finally seeking divine assistance, are traditional weapons against demonic forces. Besides, who is more of an arch-trickster than the devil himself?

3.20 Summary

Heinz Rupp theorizes in "Schwank und Schwankdichtung in der deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters" that the sort of comic misbehaviour that we find here is included not because it is or

should be common in life, but because it is not allowed; bad behaviour is funny⁷⁴. The stylized characters popular in the comic fables are not meant to be taken seriously, and need not reflect any sort of reality of contemporary life⁷⁵. So much the less with a beast epic, where the characters are not even human. It would indeed be ridiculous to try to impose human laws on a wild animal; when a fox cheats a chicken in order to eat it, only an insane person would suggest that the farmer, much less the hen, ought to sue the perpetrator. But Reinhart's behavior is dedicated not to self-preservation, or even selfish interests, but pure, selfless malevolence. This is true in Heinrich's universe and in its predecessors. The epic is popular, having been adapted into other languages and travelled large distances. Why did audiences enjoy Reinhart's cruelty, and what did they like about it? According to Bossuat, the popularity of at least the French foxes comes from the trouble that they cause, and the audience is always on the fox's side: "Chaque fois d'ailleurs que le goupil s'amuse aux dépens du loup, c'est de son côté que les rieurs se rangent." (Bossuat, 96). Is this true for Reinhart?

The German adaptation is no translation, but features a new approach to the beast epic: where previous audiences do not appear to have considered them strictly necessary, Heinrich inserts moralizing digressions to justify or condemn the events in the tales. Vrevel's two unhelpful advisors, for example, are upholding the law when they speak in Reinhart's favour, but they are

⁷⁴ "Das geile Weib, der lüsterne Mönch treten deshalb so oft auf, weil die Komik des Schwankes ja darauf beruht, daß er ein Geschehen darstellt, das nicht der Norm entspricht, aber trotzdem immer wieder und sehr oft geschieht. So gerät im Schwank das Normgerechte mit dem weniger oder nicht Normgerechten in Konflikt; der treuen Ehefrau steht der buhlerische Mann, dem biedereren Mann das geile Weib gegenüber. Der Kleriker erscheint als Buhler, weil er es nicht sein dürfte" (Rupp, 44)

⁷⁵ "Es sind Typen und typische Geschehnisse, menschliche Irrungen und Wirrungen, die hier gezeigt werden. Und wenn der Bauer als Tölpel, die Frau als Liebesdurstige, der Pfaffe als Ehebrecher oder hinters Licht geführter Liebhaber bevorzugte Typen dieser Schwänke sind, dann heißt das noch nicht, daß sich in dieser Dichtung der Zerfall der Ehe, die Sittenverderbnis des Klerus spiegelt." (Rupp, 44)

still punished. *Reinhart* interjects a comment that those who help evil will receive evil in return, making even a questionable misfortune into a moral lesson. In spite of the condensed length, these moralizations appear in nearly every tale in the collection, particularly the grand finale, Vrevel's treasonous death. As a single, self-contained unit, the *Reinhart* collection can have an ending, and thus structural emphasis. This ending makes the murderous, demonic rapist into a reformer, a good trickster who upsets an evil social order by deposing a bad king. In *Reinhart*, the *Roman de Renart* has been pressed into the mold of a moral tale, producing a combination of the external features of a moral tale, but with underlying features that threaten a morally prescriptive function.

Reinhart, a dedicated and successful sadist, is led by his dedication to automatic behaviour, that hallmark of the cheating victim; Reinhart routinely falls victim to others' cheats. The Reinhart universe is full of surprises, and Reinhart must react to each situation as it happens. He takes a reactive, rather than a proactive approach where a half-second's hesitation could mean the difference between life and death. This approach, along with the closed universe packed with hostility, feeds Reinhart's character. Unable to escape his reputation as a trickster, the fox attracts trouble to himself and is forced by this trouble to produce more adventures. To garner this universal hostility, Reinhart must be dedicated to the detriment of others, rather than his own benefit. In most of his interactions, even with those for whom he should bear no enmity, Reinhart engages in sadistic behavior that gains him nothing, and occasionally costs him; the fox gains sufficient value from the suffering of others to justify the expense.

Different characters who play the part of the fool use many of the same techniques, and can be so successful that occasionally no cheater is required. The cheater's agency is thus not the only force involved in the cheat: not only can a skilled cheater fail, but the cheat itself can be weak and still successful, if provided with a strong enough fool. The fool must ignore all information that does not support the cheat, make occasional logical leaps that support it, and behave in a manner that the cheater can predict and manipulate.

Even Reinhart can play the fool's role. When confronted with his reflection in a well, he assumes that he sees his wife, and leaps in after her, creating a cheat without agency. The ideal victim is ruled by passion, as Reinhart is here, or social regulations determining respectability (making Reinhart's constant claims of kinship with his victims effective), or pure selfishness, which turns

Vrevel's power into a weapon to be used against him. It is the victim, not the cheater, who is more instrumental to the cheat's success.

In spite of Vrevel's badness, some vestige of authority remains in the forest, and Reinhart can be held accountable for his crimes: Diepreht gets him caught in a trap, and the wolves and small animals take him to court. Instead of serving as deterrents, though, these repercussions lead to further cheats. His extemporized method, combined with the continued presence of "reasonable" animals who have already fallen victim to his deceptions, and the absence of the bad king who allows him to get away with his crimes, leaves Reinhart in the most productive kind of trouble. He has caused the collapse of a particular social order, but has not eliminated the existence of a social order *per se*. *Reinhart* all but predicts the beginning of a period of adventures like those that have just been related. Through the results of his cheats, Reinhart sets the stage for more.

4 *Pfaffe Amis: The Stricker and his Schwank*

The Stricker, as a person, reveals little about himself. Michael Schilling describes him as “aus fränkischem Gebiet”, (Schilling, 177) working primarily in Austrian areas, and that he never names a benefactor, leaving us with little information about the poet. This masterpiece of cheating, the *Pfaffe Amis*, appears to have been hugely popular, surviving in ten manuscripts, two fragments, and a print from the late fifteenth century. I used Michael Schilling's edition, which follows the Heidelberg manuscript from the early fourteenth century⁷⁶. This manuscript was chosen for the standard order in which the episodes are presented, but the “Credulous Provost” episode, appearing only in the one older manuscript, is also included in Schilling's edition, and will be discussed here like any other episode.

Despite the lack of definite information about the Stricker as a person, he has distinguishing features as an author. The Stricker⁷⁷ sets himself apart from the other still-popular writers of longer works in MHG through his reluctance to depend, as was often the case, on French originals. The Stricker was not a writer of adaptations, and he did not always adhere to the rules of his chosen genres – although he may well have had sources about which we can know nothing⁷⁸. The Stricker contributes to a wide variety of genres, with shorter rhymed pieces, a courtly epic and a series of comic tales⁷⁹ What little we know of him comes from his works,

⁷⁶ “Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. pal. germ. 341. - Pergament, um 1320-30 (Sammelhandschrift mit 213 Verserzählungen)” (Schilling, 181)

⁷⁷ “Der Name des Strickers ist gleichfalls ungeklärt: Er könnte auf einen ausgeübten Beruf aus Seiler hindeuten, ist aber seit dem Ende des 12. Jahrhunderts auch als Familienname bezeugt.” (Schilling, *Der Pfaffe Amis*, 178)

⁷⁸ “Die Urform ist ihrem Wesen nach unliterarisch, une über die Art der mündlichen Tradierung der Schwankstoffe ist nur wenig bekannt.” (Hufeland, 14)

⁷⁹ “Dieser >Schlüssselfigur der ganzen Frühperiode< von der Mitte des 13. Jh.s und erstem deutschem Märenautor ist die Literarisierung der Textsorte zuzuschreiben. Im Rahmen seiner

particularly his style and the value system that they convey. In contrast to Hartmann's or Wolfram's works, knighthood and chivalry take a back seat (if they ride along at all) to a sort of *Lebensklugheit*⁸⁰. What one needs in the Stricker's universe is clearly not credentials and reputation, but sufficient brains to profit from whatever station one occupies in life.

Obviously the Stricker was no common mendicant, and he served powerful patrons: “Der Stricker gilt heute in der Forschung als Literat niederer Abstammung mit hoher literarischer und theologischer Bildung. Aus dem südlichen Rheinfranken stammend, stand er *möglicherweise* im Dienste des bayrischen Herzogs Ludwig I. und danach bei Herzog Friedrich II. von Österreich.” (Köpf, 52), but he was probably not a member of the privileged noble classes. Köpf describes the author's position as a sort of tradesman, a weaver of tales, as his moniker suggests.

The theme of competence overcoming raw power is not the sole property of the Stricker, but also typical of the time in which the *Fabliaux* were written. The sentiment that personal value was inherent to only an elite class need not be fashionable everywhere, and the rise of a proto-middle-class meant that alternatives to the noble hero were gaining strength in literature. To Schenck, the *Fabliaux* were not simply continuations of some vulgar, low-brow culture, but timely products of the massive political change that was taking place throughout Medieval Europe:

the small villages and towns where the enriched peasants were counted among the privileged persons were a fulcrum for social change and a new mentality that glorified native wit coupled with ambition. Whereas Muscatine focuses on

literarischen Tätigkeit, die kleine Reimpaardichtungen, geistliche wie weltlich-didaktische Reden, geistliche Erzählungen, Bispels, Fabeln, zwei höfische Romane (>Karl der Große<, >Daniel vom blühenden Tal<), einen Schwankroman (>Pfaffe Amis<) sowie die >Frauenehre< umfaßt, stehen 16 meist schwankhafte oder exemplarische Mären.” (Köpf, 52)

⁸⁰ This was emphasized by Erhard Agricola in his criticism “Die Prudentia als Anliegen der strickerschen Schwänke: eine Untersuchung in Bedeutungsfeld des Verstandes.”

the hedonism and materialism of the fabliaux which he sees as a continuation of primitive (both pre-Christian and pre-courtly) and fundamental human behaviour irrespective of social classes, I would want to emphasize that their ethos springs from the very particular social circumstances of the towns and villages where living by one's wits and labor gave access to money and power. It seems to me that the fabliaux present comic depictions of the power of practical intelligence. (Schenck, 126)

A heroic nobleman with an impressive pedigree connecting him to Charlemagne was all very well, but the idea that the hero can be inherently superior by virtue of his parentage does not appear in the *Schwank*. Instead, the trickster enters with very little fanfare (similarly, Amis does not appear to have parents, let alone grandparents, and, unlike his predecessor's, Reinhart's parentage is not mentioned once) and proceeds to rack up a string of successes through sheer cleverness, rather than wealth, chivalry or strength. As we have observed above, this emphasis on personal competence extends so far as to treat incompetence as if it were a crime. Incompetent characters, whom one might consider the trickster's innocent victims, are allotted similar punishments to characters who have forced the trickster's hand through their evil, aggressive actions. The foolish person, rather than the villain, is placed in conflict with the sympathetic protagonist, celebrating cleverness like any other virtue and thus punishing foolishness as a vice: "All elements in these tales reflect a genuine enjoyment of cleverness and scorn for stupidity. A lesson is to be learned by negative example and the narrators admonish the audience to learn what is smart." (Schenck, 128) We find this theme in the Stricker's *maeren*, as well. The undisciplined couple, the pushover husband, and the easily deceived horse dealer are treated with the same catastrophic misfortunes – and narratorial hostility – as the belligerent wife and warmongering king carrying the genre over into the German tongue.

The Stricker's typically complex, innovative and archetype-challenging style is as evident here in this *Schwank* epic as it is in his *Maeren*. Unlike the trickster fox, Reinhart, Amis is never punished for his behaviour and he does not appear to gain any pleasure from the victim's suffering. In Amis, Reinhart's fiery passion has been extinguished and chilled to absolute zero; there is simply nothing going on inside of Amis's head. This trickster's motivation to play his tricks depends solely on the potential for material gain.

Like the fox, though, Amis is described by other characters as *karc*. This sort of intelligence carries a questionable moral force, and characterizes the morally questioned trickster, like Reinhart. At the end of one episode, the general opinion of Amis is that: “*Der pfaffe ist ein karger man, / daz er sus gut gewinnen kan*” (797-8). In another, the verdict is similar: “*Si sprachen alle, der pfaffe Ameis / wer mit kargen listen weis*” (923-4).

Though it borrows, like the Stricker's similarly deviant take on the Arthurian romance, *Daniel von dem blühenden Tal*, from existing works that were ancient even in the author's day, the Stricker's trademark originality is as evident in these varied tales as it is in the *Maeren*. Whether all of Amis's tales are, in fact, also the Stricker's tales will not be discussed here; suffice it to say that the uniquely limited transmission of *The Credulous Provost* casts doubts on its parentage. We are concerned here not with the Stricker, but with Amis as he is available to us today, and the *Amis* will be treated as a single unit for now. Pfaffe Amis begins the set of tales as a successful priest but, finding himself in a sudden financial embarrassment, must supplement his income beyond his priestly powers. He departs from his lawful identity to travel through a highly anonymous world, cheating similarly anonymous victims out of their funds. After a long and lucrative journey, he returns home, where he lives lavishly for thirty years, then joins a monastery and, as the narrative reports, gains eternal salvation. The primary focus of the tales is the structure of his various cheats, the internal reasoning of the victims regarding them, the quantity of the spoils and the damage that the priest causes. The priest's victims, named only by their occupations if at all, are diverse. They are noble, priest or layman, respected as *wis* or reputed to be fools, disciplined by rules or ruled by passion, virtuous or scoundrels – but always predictably so. Their only common feature is a tendency toward predictable, automatic responses to situations that Amis can create.

Amis himself is much more flexible about the roles that he plays. Though he remains intelligent and educated, and his motivation does not change, his outward identity and the behaviours associated with it can be altered as expedience dictates. By dressing up and acting the part, Amis produces two selves: a hidden side with abilities not perceived by the minds of others, and an apparent side with features and abilities that exist exclusively in the minds of others, where they remain effective enough for his purposes. The hidden abilities allow Amis to perform his

miracles, actions with no apparent cause, and to appear to have power over others, or to have murderous intentions, or to possess large sums of money to hand over, keeping hidden his lack of intention and resources.

Unlike Reinhart, Amis does not hate his victims; in fact, he expresses no opinion about anyone. Where Reinhart scarcely conceals a strong and often unmotivated hatred for nearly every other character he encounters, the priest does not judge, but only analyzes. He determines whatever weaknesses that they might have for him to exploit, and seems to understand everything about that weakness alone. Amis thus maintains complete and unbiased comprehension of every situation, without all those messy feelings to get in the way. In contrast with Reinhart who is rich in feelings, Amis reveals no emotion stronger than his satisfaction when a plan works out properly. Motivated only by personal financial gain, for the specific purpose of entertaining his guests in lavish style, Amis never goes the extra mile, as Reinhart does, to cause suffering for others. Altogether, Amis is the anti-animalistic counterpart to the beast trickster. He is introduced as educated, well-read and intelligent, and these features remain his primary characteristics throughout all of his assumed identities. But his universe is equally sterile: where Reinhart's world gets messy, and old crimes build up to influence new events, Amis consistently starts fresh. He never loses, nor does he suffer consequences for any of his evil deeds. Even the other characters in Amis's universe are superficial. In the Stricker's characteristic style, they have no names, and are identified only according to their societal role (eg: a bishop, a king, a lord, a tradesman, a farmer), or they may even be identified by the temporary identity that they have assumed for the duration of a cheat.

Amis will use various methods repeatedly throughout his cheats. Amis generates preconceptions before the situation becomes suspicious, so that his suggestions are more readily accepted; after the situation becomes suspicious, false situations would be much harder to sell, as victims would be on guard against falsehood. With these preconceptions he can seed their minds with information to control their perceptions later, as observed in the cognitive dissonance example above, dictating what evidence they will or will not observe, and how that evidence will be interpreted. Even evidence that something is amiss will be accepted as evidence that all is well, and that Amis speaks the truth. This elaborate, multi-step strategy requires Amis to plan his cheats well in advance, operating proactively, rather than reactively, as Reinhart does.

The cheat depends on two diverging situations: the apparent and the hidden. The apparent situation is that which appears to be true, through deceptive visible information, or by means of the aforementioned preconceptions. An apparent situation can also be one that characters pretend to believe, even when they know or can see that it is not the case. In either event, the apparent situation is the one that is accepted by the peer group to be true, but which is not. The hidden situation, in contrast, is the apparent situation's true, but less visible, counterpart. Like any social situation, it can be influenced and even significantly changed by commonly-held opinions, and thus even by the apparent situation itself. One need not look far for examples of this phenomenon, as they can be found almost anywhere a trickster character exists.

Its mechanics are deceptively simple: Tom Sawyer convinces his friends that whitewashing a fence is a pleasant activity, so they agree to do the work for him. His objective is now complete, as his work is now being done by someone else, but the cheat persists longer than his agency and the friends actually enjoy the task longer than necessary. There is no quantifiable unit of enjoyability; an activity's status as "enjoyable" is arrived at through common consensus, so the whitewashing has, in fact, become enjoyable. Amis alters the social fabric around him in similar ways; the hidden situation often picks up traces of the apparent one, and these traces can remain for long periods, or even permanently, after the cheat has ended. The *murer*, for example, in the fabric-merchant cheat, takes on a false identity, and has difficulty returning to his previous identity, both within his own consciousness and in the consciousness of others. Even though this previous state is the only one that is factually true, and indeed the apparent situation requires certain physical facts that are lacking (it is far easier to muster pleasure from whitewashing than it is to derive a bishop's fortune from the title of "bishop"), his artificial role persists long after this lack is made public.

In most cheats, Amis will place the victim in apparent control. One of the victims might be manipulated into uttering the lie which Amis would like to tell, through coercion or genuine belief. Doing so not only disconnects the lie from Amis, the individual with interest in spreading it, but makes it more plausible through its origination within the victims' own kinship group. Not only can the lie make use of the speaker's authority, but it is the speaker who will be held responsible when the discrepancy, between apparent and hidden, comes to light. This speaker is punished in Amis's place, making a fool or a criminal out of a respected community member. This effect is related to Amis's divide-and-conquer attack, in which he uses the community's

social flaws to pit its members against each other, weakening the group against him. Social rules and expectations are exposed as potentially harmful when they are used against the group, rather than to serve it, so Amis's cheats serve a useful purpose, pointing out flaws in the community structure. A flawed community structure makes conformity to the rules into a bad decision; while most of his victims are made vulnerable through their vices, many are also made vulnerable through misguided virtues in conforming to faulty rules. The rules inherent in social structures are as compelling to the victims in the *Amis* as they are in *Reinhart Fuchs*. Amis generates a situation in which these rules do not function as intended. Any inflexible rule, be it cleaving to a desired, illegitimate aim, or refusing to break some situationally-inappropriate code of honour, can become useful to a trickster. Any character, whether good or evil, who follows a rule without regard to whether it is applicable to the situation, behaves automatically. Amis, like Reinhart, manipulates this automatic behaviour in the same way as one would cogs in a machine, which the victims become.

Agricola views this thoughtless behaviour as the primary purpose for the *Amis* as a whole:

Die negative Gestalt des Betrügers wirkt damit über ihre literarische Existenz hinaus positiv in die Wirklichkeit. Âmîs warnt die Hörer vor sich und seinesgleichen und mahnt sie, klüger zu sein als die Übertölpelten. Das ist der Zweck seines Gestaltetseins, und dadurch erhält er für den Stricker die Berechtigung zum literarischen Leben. (Agricola, 305)

Agricola points out the Amis's practical implications for real life, including suggestions for the audience's behaviour. Amis's bad behaviour is good for you, and the *Amis* exists not to encourage evil deeds, but to warn audiences to practice the *Lebensklugheit*⁸¹ that would protect against them.

⁸¹ “Die Lebensklugheit ist also nicht nur Erfordernis des täglichen Lebens, sie ist die Voraussetzung des sittlich richtigen Handelns, und sie ist ebenso sehr ein Gebot der Religion. Erst durch die Verknüpfung mit dem christlichen glauben wird sie zur wahren Klugheit. Durch den Vortrag seiner Schwänke will der Stricker die Hörer zu einer Lebensklugheit erziehen, die

4.1 The Introduction

Amis enters the story with a description, the only time when his internal character is described in any detail, where we learn that he is highly intelligent, and learned in academic matters. Though they may be concealed deliberately, these two qualities are never dropped, and clever Amis never plays the part of the fool the way Reinhart does. From this description we proceed toward another constant: the extravagant household that will ultimately motivate his cheats. Amis is also blamed for all of the *liegen und triegen* in the world. Werner Röcke defines this *liegen und triegen* not as the lie itself, but as the discrepancy between the lie and the truth⁸². To the extent that it conflicts with the apparent, in fact, the truth remains essential to the success of his schemes.

Der Vorwurf des liegen und triegen (V 41) meint vor allem diese Trennung von Wesen und Erscheinung, damit aber auch den Verlust der Unmittelbarkeit des Verstehens und Erkennens. Denn die Wahrheit liegt nicht mehr im Wahrgenommenen Selbst, in den sprachlichen und affektiven Äußerung der Personen, sondern in der wachsenden Ambivalenz zwischen Sprache und Bedeutung, Gestik und eigentlicher meinung, Handeln und möglichem Sinn. (Röcke, 61)

It is in this discrepancy that the cheat resides. Amis produces a hidden situation, and an apparent situation, which relate to each other in a way that serves his own interests. The hidden situation need not be completely unknown; characters can be prevented from acknowledging it, a synthetic ignorance that is, again for practical purposes, as effective as if it actually existed. A

sie befähigt, das Gute vom Bösen zu unterscheiden, um auf ethischem und religiösem Gebiete zu ihrem Wohl das Gute tun zu können.” (Agricola, 311)

⁸² In *Die Freude am Bösen: Studien zu einer Poetik des deutschen Schwankromans im Spätmittelalter*. München: W. Fink, 1987.

character who is allowed to see through the apparent situation will often have interest in concealing it, having acquired that knowledge through socially unacceptable means or being compelled by self-interest or duty to keep the secret.

By blaming Amis, the story appears to be gearing up to take us from a *heile Welt* to a fallen one, and the character who carries the blame for it suffers no retribution for the transition, and is in fact celebrated. Justice and good do not automatically prevail in the *Amis* universe, but the audience is still satisfied. One can only guess at the reception by most of the Stricker's audience, but what we do have shows a literary public that resists unsatisfactory endings. Gottfried's *Tristan* could not be left "unfinished" when the author died, so it received continuations. Contemporary manuscripts package another, completed, work, the *Nibelungenlied*, with the continuation *Diu Klage* as if it were an integral part of the whole. Here the author's intentions have received a lower priority than the satisfaction of the public. Müller writes in *Spielregeln für den Untergang*, the definitive modern criticism of the *Nibelungenlied*:

Die leere Zeit nach dem absoluten Ende ist zu füllen, mit wortreichen Klagereden – wo Kriemhilt einfach schwieg – , mit ausufernden Begräbniszeremonien – wo das Epos die Figuren im Schmerz erstarren ließ – , mit banalen Fortsetzungen durch Figuren des zweiten Glieds – wo es keine Fortsetzung gibt, nachdem die Helden tot sind.... In keinem Fall wird der Untergang als Endpunkt akzeptiert. (Müller, 118)

The unsatisfactory course of events at the end of the *Nibelungenlied*, in which nothing but evil is done and even justice takes the form of questionable brutality, may be an extreme example, but we can also find apparently disturbing features in a lighter-toned Schwankroman like *Amis*, on a small scale with its less epic morality. The final episodes in Constantinople, Böhm writes, represent circumstances in which Amis has gone too far even for his own universe, causing too much suffering for his victim, and using for the first time methods that involve violence, undermining his status as a sympathetic character: "Die folgenden Episoden steigern Amis' Taten und das Verhalten der Gesellschaft ins Groteske, wodurch auch das Bild von Amis' als sympathetischem Schelm zunichte gemacht wird." (Böhm, 220) Yet the transmission has not resulted in injected moralization or sanitizing of scenes, any more than the rape in *Reinhart*

Fuchs is suppressed. Immoral acts are used for entertainment often enough, and the Schwank universe blurs the line dividing good from evil, giving all characters a share of the vice.

4.2 The Interrogation

In the beginning, Amis has already done well for himself. His financial success allows him to keep a large household and entertain in lavish style. This financial and social success is not overlooked by the bishop, who resents that his vassal is able to live more graciously than he does, a situation that violates the expectations of society. He approaches the priest and demands the surplus portion of this wealth; Amis refuses, insisting that he uses all of his wealth, and anyway has done his requisite duty to the bishop. The narrator does not dispute this argument, but the bishop remains unsatisfied, and seeks a way to disqualify his rival from the priesthood altogether. He announces that he will ask Amis a series of questions, and if he cannot answer them correctly, he will take away the *pfaffe's* church (and, by extension, his coveted wealth). Having stacked the rules, he then attempts unsuccessfully to cheat, asking such impossible questions that the answers are not known to anyone. But the bishop is designed to be a victim, not a cheater, and he stacks the rules badly.

As part of their bargain, Amis ensures that it is the bishop's responsibility to prove that his answers are false before the church can be taken away. Such responsibility is transferred easily when packaged with a promise that Amis will voluntarily forfeit his wealth if he loses. He requires "only" that the bishop disprove his statements:

*Auch heizet ir mich versuchen
mit Worten an den buchen.
Kunne ich min ampt also wol,
als ich zu reht kunnen sol,
des lat ouch geniezen mich. (91-95).*

The bishop accepts the bargain readily, expecting to rely on his higher rank, and leaving himself open to Amis's trickery. He had assumed that he would never find himself on the defensive because of his powerful position, but Amis's nonsensical answers now include an appended

requirement that the bishop disprove them. For example, when asked to locate the exact centre of the world, Amis arbitrarily marks his own church as the centre, and suggests that the bishop have his men measure the world to see for themselves:

*Die kirche, die ich von euch han,
die ist enmitten rechte.
Daz heizet ewer knehte
mezzen mit einem seile.
Und reichet ez an einem teile
eines halmes breit furbaz,
so nemet mir die kirche ane haz. (138-44)*

The bishop is left unsatisfied by this flippancy answer, but it is useless to appear suspicious now. He comments in his dialogues on the impossibility of disproving the answer:

*Der bisschof sprach: "Ir liget.
Swie hart ir mich betriget,
doch muz ichz gelouben e,
dan ich daz messen beste.
Ir seit ein wiser herre. (145-9).*

but does not change his strategy to one in which he could meet the challenge. Although he now knows that he must also offer an answer, he is either too outmatched or too set in his ways to abandon this tactic for a more legitimate line of questioning. In *Gattungserneuerung und Laienunterweisung in Texten des Strickers*, Hedda Ragotzky demonstrates that the bishop's clumsy excess in rule-stacking, though effective at preventing any correct answers, also prevents any incorrect answers. The burden of proof has remained with the bishop: "Der Bischof stellt Amis eine Reihe von Fragen, die so angelegt sind, daß sie sich jedem Versuch einer Beantwortung durch Sachwissen entziehen. Diese Unmöglichkeit, die Fragen zu beantworten, macht Amis zum Prinzip seines Antwortens. Als der Bischof das zu durchschauen beginnt, reagiert er wütend, er wirft Amis vor, zu *liegen* und zu *triegen* (vgl. 147f.)." (Ragotzky, 150). The bishop does not change his strategy, though, and continues to ask one unanswerable question after another. Either the bishop expects Amis to be able to answer real questions handily, and therefore cannot switch to questions with disprovable answers, or he is simply too automatic a

character to consider the switch. With characteristic cleverness, Amis has turned the bishop's misbehaviour into an advantage and the bishop is forced to withdraw.

The narrative has accused Amis of bringing lying and cheating into the world, but this first episode refutes the accusation: the bishop lies and cheats first. In *Die Freude am Bösen: Studien zu einer Poetik des deutschen Schwankromans im Spätmittelalter*, Werner Röcke re-interprets the assertion: Amis uses, rather than produces, evil, bringing existing evil to the surface, rather than making more: "Nicht darum also, daß Amis Lug und Trug in der Welt erst hervorgebracht habe, ist es dem Stricker zu tun, sondern um die Verkehrung von *zuht* in *untugent*, von *hochgemüete* in *truren* (VV 29ff.), die er allorts beobachten kann und die Amis lediglich für sich ausnutzt: Er verkörpert einen „Sündenfall“, bewirkt ihn aber nicht." (Röcke, 44) In his introduction to the *Pfaffe Amis* text, Michael Schilling agrees that Amis enters a corrupt world: "in deutlichem Widerspruch zu dieser Aitiologie des Betruges und Herleitung der schlechten Gegenwart steht die Beobachtung, daß der Pfaffe mit seinen betrügerischen Methoden keineswegs die Schlechtigkeit der Welt generiert, sondern bereits allenthalben auf einen *mundus perversus* trifft." (Schilling, 191)

He cites enough examples of pre-existing states of evil to cover almost all of Amis's victims. "Wohin Amis auch kommt, das Laster und die Dummheit sind schon da, seien es nun Ehebruch, königliches machtsstreben auf Kosten der Lehnsleute und mangelnde Opferbereitschaft bei den Kranken in Lothringen, oder seien es dumpfe Wundergläubigkeit in Stadt und Land, Zorn und Geiz eines Landadligen oder das betrügerische profitstreben der Kaufleute." (Schilling, 191) The bishop's greed, abuse of power and duplicity support this theory. Erhard Agricola's description of this so-called holy man shows how his evil tendencies are linked to his foolishness, and thus his cheatability: "Er erweist sich als ungenügend weitschauend. Er unterliegt, weil er seinem Widerpart geistig unebenbürtig ist. Er besitzt unzulängliche, tadelnswerte Eigenschaften, nämlich Neid, Habgier, Ungerechtigkeit und geistige Beschränktheit. Somit verkörpert er für den Hörer das Häßliche, das heißt das Regelwidrige. Âmis dagegen als der Angegriffene vertritt das Schöne und Normale." (Agricola, 296) The bishop does not appear as particularly sympathetic in this situation, and acts with motivations forbidden by his particular status as a churchman. Amis, on the other hand, has conducted no previous cheats and, so far, we have seen him do nothing wrong.

Although *Pfaffe Amis* may be an original work, in this scene the *Amis* perpetuates a theme from the French *Fabliaux*, in which the less-powerful character deceives the more powerful one, gaining at his expense. As Gabrielle Hutton tells us in “La Stratégie dans les fabliaux”, knowing things is always better than having things⁸³. Hutton explains how an imbalance of power necessitates and thus facilitates cheating, in the *Fabliaux* at least: “les deux groupes qui ont le plus de succès dans les fabliaux, les femmes et les clercs, n’ont presque pas de pouvoir concret sur lequel s’appuyer et, par conséquent, ils sont pratiquement obligés d’exercer leur *savoir*.” (Hutton, 115). *Amis* is placed below the corrupt bishop, and this exposure to a more powerful character necessitates deception and allows *Amis* to become a cheater in the first place.

One might conclude, then, that the bishop bears a portion of the blame for events in the *Amis*. Stephen L. Wailes also treats the bishop, rather than the priest, as inherently evil. If, in his opinion, the hospitable but non-noble *Amis* fails at genuine *milte* (the unrestrained generosity, attributed to virtuous heroes, that is necessarily reserved for the wealthy), the bishop succeeds with flying colours – at lacking it: “der Bischof handelt aus Habsucht, der Pfaffe aus Freigebigkeit, die Episode verkörpert den Gegensatz zwischen *erge* und *milte*, den der Stricker im Prolog erwähnt: *unt milte vür die erge gie* (Z. 24). Auch in der Vorgeschichte übertrifft die Tugend das Laster” (Wailes, 222). *Amis*’s victory is here representative of good defeating evil.

But what motivates the bishop to take *Amis*’s fortune in the first place? Röcke points out that there was a perfectly legitimate rule giving the bishop the right to any goods that *Amis* gains in surplus of his actual needs: “Billig kommt es dem in der feudalen Hierarchie Ranghöheren offenbar zu, sich vom Surplus (*überigez guot*) einen Teil anzueignen, und wenig ist einer geneigt, sich sein Gut als Surplus deklarieren zu lassen” (Köppe, 45) It may be for this reason that *Amis* takes care to assert that he uses all of his goods. But is his rate of consumption what lawmakers had in mind when they set the standard? The legal ground on which these two characters stand is not so firm as one might think upon first reading. Röcke explores other, equally legitimate reasons why the bishop might object to the priest’s practice of such elaborate

⁸³ “Aucune surprise à constater que, dans le monde des fabliaux, c’est le *savoir* qui réussit au dépend de l’*avoir*” (Hutton, 112)

hospitality, or *milte*, from his house, and why he would be offended by the priest's apparently reconciliatory invitations to dinner: the host is socially superior to the guest. "Doch warum erregt Amis gerade mit seiner Einladung des Bischofs Zorn? Die festliche Beköstigung der Gäste ist in der höfisch-feudalen Gesellschaft alles andere als frei von eigennützigen Absichten des scheinbar so selbstlosen Gebers. Seine *wirtschaft* dient vielmehr der Präsentation, aber auch der Ausübung von macht: Mit dem verzehr seiner Gaben ist der Empfänger dem Geber verpflichtet und ordnet sich ihm unter." (Röcke, 54) The priest is getting ahead of himself, and his behaviour really does threaten the bishop's social status.

As the first victim, the bishop is also the only character that Amis fools twice, and one of only two victims to force an interaction with Amis. It is also he, rather than Amis, who brings bad sportsmanship into play: as Köppe comments in "Ideologiekritische Aspekte im Werk des Stricker" on the interrogation for Amis's church, "hier geht es offensichtlich *nicht mehr* mit rechten Dingen zu" (Köppe, 46, italics added). Though partially justified, the bishop's attack is unprovoked and unexpected; if any of the victims is responsible for the damages incurred, it would be this character – typical of Amis's amoral universe, the bishop eventually escapes completely unpunished, and in fact pleased.

Kalkhofen paints a most unflattering picture of this bishop and his motivations. "Er ist eben nicht neidisch auf den guten Ruf seines Pfaffen, sondern haßt ihn, haßt den guten Ruf und seinen Träger, weil er dem Guten überhaupt Feind ist." (Kalkhofen, 166-7). The bishop is therefore motivated by sin to persecute Amis. What is more, according to Williams, this dichotomy has deeper implications for human behaviour: the semi-moral virtue of the courtly code appears positively angelic when pitted against the bishop's corrupt Christian one. "This is our first encounter with the conflict between courtly virtue and deadly sin, as the bishop's *invidia*, *superbia* and *avaritia* motivate him to attack Amis's *milte*." (Williams, Tricksters 64). We know that the bishop maintains a smaller household than the priest. Even this information does not bode well for him, because he risks showing stinginess, or *kerge*, the opposite of *milte* and a

quality often derided by travelling minstrels⁸⁴. The juxtaposition of the stingy, rich bishop with the generous, poorer priest follows a pattern that can be observed again and again in contemporary literature⁸⁵: the poor but generous person will defeat the rich but stingy one any day.

Though Amis may have motivated his actions, the bishop is the first to cheat: in contrast to Amis's claim to have been obedient to the bishop in all matters but his disputed *milte*, we observe the bishop as the first to stack the rules, the first to take unfair advantage of his social position, and the first to attempt to take someone else's property through verbal wrangling. Regardless of whether Amis oversteps the bounds appropriate to his social position, the bishop is the first character in the *Amis* to engage in *liegen und triegen*.

What does the bishop's evil nature tell us about Amis? Ragotzky sees the bishop's badness as a reaction to Amis's corresponding goodness: "Die Musterexistenz, die der Pfaffe Amis gemessen am Anspruch geistlicher wie weltlich-höfischer Lebensform führt, provoziert – gerade durch ihre Vorbildlichkeit – ihre Zerstörung. Amis' Lehnsherr, der Bischof, will nicht dulden, daß sein Lehnsman *græzern hof ze allen ziten* (vgl. 62f.) führt als er selbst." (Ragotzky, 149).

Association with Amis makes the bishop behave badly, but this bad behaviour still does not make Amis good. Through his association with the bishop, he has proved to be better than the other character, but he does nothing that could be called good, or evil, for that matter. The bishop's intentions may be evil enough to place anyone who opposes him, for any reason, squarely in the right, but so far Amis is right through no agency of his own.

⁸⁴ "Anhand vieler Strophen konnte gezeigt werden, daß die Sangspruchdichter den Geiz auf schärfste verurteilen und seine negativen Folgen eindringlich aufzeigen, um zur *milte* zu motivieren. Sie verfolgen konsequent das Prinzip, die *milten* zu loben und die *kargen* zu schelten." (B. Krause, 172-3)

⁸⁵ "Die Sangspruchdichter bekräftigen ihre Verdammung des Geizes in der Gegenüberstellung des *rîchen kargen* mit dem *milten armen*. Der Lobpreis des *milten armen* mit höfischer Gesinnung soll zu freigebiger Handlungsweise ermuntern, die Schelte des gewissenlosen geizigen Wohlhabenden soll dagegen abschrecken." (B. Krause, 173)

The nature of their dispute depends on whether Amis's larger household results from insubordination, or rather from greater courtly virtue. Amis is definitely more generous than his superior, and this surplus of worldly virtue clearly overflows to supplement his store of Christian virtue: "Amis erfüllt in vorbildlicher Weise das adelige Gebot der *milte*, er gibt so, wie es die ordogemäße Bestimmung dieses Akts verlangt, er gibt *durch ere und durch got* (vgl. 49)." (Ragotzky, 147), although whether this assertion, *durch ere und durch got*, is intended to be ironic can obviously be questioned by a reasonable audience.

In another Amis-justifying assertion that could reasonably be questioned, the bishop's death is attributed to providence; "*Nu erlost got der riche / den armen pfaffen von der not. / Der bisschof der lack tot / dar nach in einer kurzen zit.*" (304-7). If the narrator is to be believed, then, God is on the priest's side. The bishop's abuse of power delineates him as both an evil character and a foolish one. Like Vrevel, he does not consider that powerful positions, with all their privileges, have correspondingly heavy responsibilities associated with them. The privileges are meant for, and depend on, the fulfillment of these responsibilities, as does the association of a character's higher rank with moral superiority. As the provider of Amis's fief, for example, he is expected to give to Amis, not to take from him. Ragotzky explains why his position gives him more responsibility than privilege: the bishop is expected to give to Amis, not to take from him.

Der Bischof ist Amis' Lehnsherr; zu erwarten wäre also, daß er es ist, der sich seinem Lehnsman gegenüber *milte* erweist und auf diese Weise das Verhältnis wechselseitigen Angewiesenseins stabilisiert. Auch unter dieser Perspektive erscheint das Verhalten des Bischofs als Verkehrung der Norm: Mit der Macht seiner Lehnsherrenrolle versucht er, seine Forderung durchzusetzen, und pervertiert damit seine Schutzfunktion zur Gewaltandrohung. (Ragotzky, 150).

According to the bishop's worldview, the higher-ranking person must have more wealth than the lower-ranking person. He clings to that rule even when immoderate measures must be taken to preserve the relationship, and, as we shall see is typical of Amis's victims, he cannot adapt to a situation which he has decided is unacceptable. Rather than simply increasing his own practice of *milte*, the bishop is insisting that Amis reduce his, to give some of his wealth to him. In so doing, he reveals his that he lacks *mâze*.

Maze is more than just moderation. A character who possesses a good share of it will behave in a manner appropriate to the situation in which he finds himself, rather than to the situation that is desired or expected. Böhm connects *mâze*, as Ragotzky and Haug do *geviëgiu kündikeit*, to the ability to adapt to a situation according to its features, rather than one's own internal rule set. The bishop does not learn his lesson, and remains obviously greedy, literally to the end of his days. This lack of adaptability, combined with some fatal fixation, is observable in many of his victims: a too-strong motivation to accomplish any particular end makes the character blind to everything else, and therefore vulnerable. The bishop expends an immoderate portion of his energy in one area, acquiring and keeping wealth, and thus becomes deficient in others.

Any lack of *mâze* is punishable by the social pressure and the misfortune that inevitably arises from such unreasonable behaviour, making the interactions with Amis follow an inevitable pattern. As the villain, the bishop must lose, but, as in *Reinhart*, we will also see too-virtuous characters equally victimized through their mindless adhesion to their virtue, regardless of whether it is appropriate to the situation. Punishing virtue supports the theory that it is a lack of adaptability, not a lack of virtue, that degrades a character's humanity. If it is possible to cheat a character, then that character deserves to be cheated. Through this reversed formula, as the loser, the bishop must be the villain.

4.3 The Bishop's Automatic Reactions

Characters like the bishop, those who exhibit automatic responses because of their focus or dependence on one thing, are easy for the cheater to control. Once in place, they tend to stay there until the forces acting on them change: the victim enters the control of the cheater and reacts to all stimuli in a predictable manner. The bishop is a prime example of this vulnerable single-mindedness, as Williams points out: "The bishop's failure to reckon with the multiplicity of interpretations which language permits demonstrates his intellectual inflexibility. This is further emphasized by the number of questions he poses which are all based on the same premise.... Although he is outwitted by Amis's answer to his first question about the size of the sea, he does not learn from the experience." (Williams, *Tricksters*, 65). Williams even goes so far as to compare the bishop to the donkey that he demands that Amis teach how to read. "This Pavlovian conditioned reflex, with its emphasis on mechanical responses and the inability to

account reasonably for any changes to an established pattern, brings the bishop into an unflattering intellectual association with the donkey.” (Williams, *Tricksters*, 65). As a producer of automatic forces, the bishop can be manipulated like an object and his efforts harnessed like any other predictable force. He is a human component in the manipulator’s machine. This pattern will repeat itself in the other cheats, but Amis has several means of producing it.

Amis tends to seek a victim who is *rich und albere* (936), *einen gebouren, der het michel gut / und het einen alweren mut* (1071-2). This formula of rich financial and poor intellectual resources has always been unstable, so the victim’s defeats can be seen as inevitable events, particularly in the bishop’s case. Kalkhofen described the scene as stacked to showcase the bishop’s intellectual inferiority, rather than Amis’s especial cleverness: “Auch der Bischof bewährt sich als Nebenfigur durch eine ... unpsychologische Zeichnung. Zunächst ist er der durch und durch böswillige Angreifer. Diese Eigenschaft erlaubt es, die Überlegenheit des Helden zu demonstrieren, dem jener bei aller Macht und Bosheit dennoch nichts anheben kann (vv 147-149, 162f.)” (Kalkhofen, 173). Böhm extends this predestination to the entire society in which Amis lives, one in which lying and cheating are said not to have existed before⁸⁶.

This lack of adaptability characterizes Amis’s victims: “Nicht weil die Opfer zu dumm sind, ist Amis stets erfolgreich, sondern weil sie im Denken unflexibel sind, sich bestimmte soziale Regeln als Zwänge auferlegen lassen und dem äußerlichen Schein bis zur Selbstschädigung trauen.” (Böhm, 220).

4.4 The Donkey Episode

Amis has not yet begun cheating for money in his first “miracle,” the episode with the trained donkey. Rather than producing an elaborate setup before displaying the feat, he has his setup given to him as an externally-motivated assignment, which he then appears to fulfil. The bishop, unsatisfied with his untestable responses, insists on a second test: Amis must teach a donkey how to read. The priest agrees without hesitation, asking for thirty years to complete the task. He

⁸⁶ “Die Gesellschaft erweist sich als geradezu prädestiniert, betrogen zu werden, und Amis, der dies als Erster erkennt und ausnutzt, ist jedesmal erfolgreich” (Böhm, 220)

explains that educating a human takes nearly as long, and a donkey must first learn to speak. The bishop consents, but announces that he will return in one year, to check his progress. Provided with a donkey, Amis trains the animal in secret, inserting oats between the pages of a book and allowing him to find them there. The animal quickly learns to turn the pages eagerly, and performs well for the bishop when he arrives:

*Daz leit er fur in
und sehet im habern darin
zwischen ietslich blat
und liez in nie werden sat.
Ditz tet er allez umbe daz,
daz er die pleter dester baz
gelernt werfen ume. (233-9).*

Amis has inserted no oats in the book this time, so the bishop gets only one side of the story. The visual and audible appearance is that of the donkey eagerly turning the pages in the book. The bishop's own memory of his demand, that the donkey should be able to read, has already placed the necessary interpretation in his head, and he accepts it. The narrative proceeds by illustrating for us the donkey's thought process:

*Also danne der tumme
zwischen den pletern niht envant,
so warff er umb sazevant
ein ander plat und suchte da
und sucht iesa anderswa,
als da niht mer inne was. (240-5)*

This process is beyond the bishop's rather shallow grasp. As do all the other *affen* in the story, the bishop assumes that everything is exactly what it looks like, and a donkey who appears to read is quite enough for him. Amis does have to give an explanation to enhance the visible appearances; although they are compelling, they are not exactly as requested. Rather than repeating or reading aloud, the donkey produces unintelligible audible sounds. If the donkey is really reading the book, should he not produce words as he does it? Amis has a ready excuse:

*“Er hat die buchstab hersehen.
 Ich ler in daz a. b. c.
 Des enhat er niht me
 noch gelernet wan daz a.
 Der hat er vil gesehen da.
 Da von spricht ers dicke umb daz.
 daz ers behalt dester baz. (292-8).*

The visual situation has here been enhanced with a verbal additive, like a caption under a picture. Even the very visual bishop is willing to accept that visual information, on its own, may not be all one needs to understand a situation, and he accepts the caption readily. As Ysengrin does in the eel episode, he seeks explanations for information that might threaten the cheat. We shall see this pattern arise again, but with some important changes: in every case but this one, the explanation will be provided without being requested, before the event. Amis seldom works with only images, or without them, but he always loads them with preconceptions, so that victims will draw the conclusion that he needs. Schilling describes the policy of setting up the cheat in advance as the most pervasive strategy that Amis uses, and a prime characteristic of the Stricker's work on the whole: "In allen seinen Werken und gerade auch in seinem *Pfaffen Amis* führt der Stricker die Überlegenheit vorausschauenden Handelns und planender Rationalität vor." (Schilling, 195)

Because Amis is able to predict their reactions and priorities, he can manipulate them.

Dabei bedient er sich zum einen elementarer Wünsche und Gefühle wie Angst oder Begehrlichkeit. So steuert etwa die Angst vor Ehrverlust die Reaktionen der Ehefrauen und des Hofes im zweiten und dritten Schwank, und Geldgier bestimmt das Verhalten der Kaufleute in Konstantinopel. Zum anderen aber – und das ist der entscheidende Punkt seiner Erfolge – versteht er es, die mentalen Prädispositionen seiner Umwelt so zu nutzen, daß er Erwartungen weckt, scheinbar bestätigt und erfüllt und schließlich doch enttäuscht, wobei ein Teil der Betrogenen die Täuschung nicht einmal bemerkt, da die Erfüllung der hervorgerufenen Hoffnungen erst für eine ferne Zukunft versprochen wird. (Schilling, 197)

The bishop, by responding predictably, acts like a co-operative victim in much the same way as Ysengrin does, but for the most part, Amis's cheats are dissimilar to Reinhart's; unlike the fox, Amis prepares his cheats in advance, and his victims always fall for the ruse. The deception runs much more smoothly, with perfect victim co-operation and the priest's ability to dissociate himself from the fallout. Amis generates preconceptions in his victims far more extensively in his victims than Reinhart does, and he also manipulates the physical environment. The intensity and breadth of Amis's premeditation and preparation sets him apart from Reinhart; whereas Reinhart's cheating tends to be responsive and externally motivated, Amis's is premeditated and, for the rest of the story, motivated by Amis.

4.4.1 Cause and Effect in the *Amis*

Amis's first artificial miracle has taken place on his own home territory, but he never makes that mistake again. The effects will force him into defensive actions. The bishop departs from the scene well-pleased, and Amis has twenty-nine years to finish the animal's education. But the *pfaffe* is correct in his assumption that it would be impossible for all three of them to live for such a long time, and the bishop dies. Though Amis immediately gives up the training regimen, his success with the donkey's education is reported to the community, and he becomes famous for spectacular pedagogical activities, which, everyone assumes, would have come to miraculous fruition had the bishop remained alive. Amis is now an even more popular host, and his house is flooded with people who hope specifically to find out how he receives people (318) or because of the good reception they have received in the past. This sudden added expense punishes him for his virtue:

*Des wart der pfaffe geeret
und harte witen herkant.
Wer ditz mere bevant,
der rait dar oder giench,
wan er die leute wol enphiench. (314-8)*

He must continue to live up to the reputation he has produced. These efforts produce increased expense, which drives the quests: when he can get no more legitimate funds to cover expenses, the priest strikes out on a quest for illegitimate funds.

Kalkhofen depicts not Amis, but the bishop, as the root cause of the cheating odyssey; as the force behind the reading-donkey miracle, and thus Amis's fame, the bishop is the ultimate motivator for all the evil of the subsequent episodes, and indeed, having cheated first, as the true originator of *liegen und triegen*⁸⁷.

By going on the road, Amis changes his methods significantly. For him, and for Reinhart, it is always best to avoid some of the effects of the cheat. Amis must depart before people have time to react, and it is this departure that makes him such a successful trickster.

4.4.2 *Milte*

Amis can be a positive character, if judged generously. He has clearly done everything just as he should when we enter at the beginning of the bishop episodes, and the bishop persecutes him unjustly, even if he does motivate the later cheats himself. He does a great deal of damage, but on the other hand, he is equally rich in those qualities that are traditionally viewed as good (albeit in a less purely moral sense), like intelligence and good reputation. One might argue that Amis illustrates the distinction between worldly and Christian good. The narrative itself defines him with the qualities of wisdom and goodness: “Die einführende Charakteristik des Helden ist auffällig gegensätzlich angelegt. Der negativen Kennzeichnung folgt unmittelbar ein äußerst positives Urteil: Amis ist, seinem Amt entsprechend, *der buoche ein wise man* (vgl. 47).” (Ragotzky, 147). Again, these qualities are not necessarily Christian; the Stricker was aware that there were other sets of standards that one could hope to fulfil, that have nothing to do with religious values but can cause one individual to be accepted as better than another.

A representative of hypocritical Christian virtue, the bishop finds himself pitted against a representative of courtly virtue – or possibly of hypocritical courtly virtue, as we shall see below. In either case, courtly virtue comes out on top; where the bishop fails to fulfill his obligations, Amis succeeds in living generously, and prevails in his conflict with the bishop. We also see

⁸⁷ “Das Auftreten des bösen Bischofs wird als Widerspruch zu der Auskunft gewertet, der Pfaffe Amis sei der erste gewesen, der sich des Lügens und Betrügens bedient habe.” (Kalkhofen, 171)

again the theme of Christians lacking key elements of Christianity. *Parzival*'s hermit will not make an appearance here; members of the clergy in the *Amis*, including Amis himself, display a pronounced lack of Christian virtues such as charity, humility and obedience, and above all, they show a prodigious and universal preoccupation with wealth.

Amis's own obsession with acquiring wealth takes its major justification from his use of this wealth to practice *milte*, or hospitality, a key virtue in the eyes of a travelling entertainer like the Stricker. This hospitality was idealized in literature and culture, and marks the priest as a good character. Amis's famous hospitality, shown to everyone who enters his house, comes close to a practice followed by King Arthur and other wealthy noble characters in the more serious genres. A good king like Artus is described as very free with his property, making large and extravagant gifts to visitors to his home. *Milte* is not simply conspicuous consumption, but a necessary ingredient for a successful society.

What was implied here was not the Christian virtue of giving to the poor and needy, but rather the donation of rich gifts to friends, followers and dependants (Althoff, Family, 106), a practice with legal implications that strengthened the bond between lord and vassal. Though *milte* was essentially gift-giving, it was by no means optional, and by no means free of reciprocal responsibilities. It was the process by which a lord would distribute his area's wealth among his subordinates, and gain or cement their loyalty at the same time. In "Die milte-Thematik in der mittelhochdeutschen Sangspruchdichtung," Berenike Krause conducts a thorough exploration of *milte* in contemporary culture and literature. Throughout her literary examples, *milte* appears as a necessary institution, and not simply a nice thing to do⁸⁸.

For the survival of most people who produced literature, there was nothing optional about *milte*, and they were clearly in favour of the practice that enabled them to continue writing poetry,

⁸⁸ "Die Treuebindung wird durch regelmäßige Geschenke immer wieder gestärkt. Dies spiegelt sich in der Literatur wider: Im Epos *König Rother* aus der zweiten Hälfte des 12. Jahrhunderts heißt es von den Gefolgsleuten: *sie waren deme kuninge alle holt, / daz machete silber unde golt, / daz er in kunincliche gap*. Die *milte* des Lehnsherrn ist keine persönliche Gnade, sondern seine Pflicht und ist selbstverständlicher Bestandteil der vasallitischen Bindung." (B. Krause, 14-15)

songs and epics⁸⁹. The minstrels make it clear why *milte* is so necessary: even prominent 'stars' like the Stricker were paid for their work by means of these voluntary donations. With the size of the payments left at the discretion of the lords, it is no surprise that Krause reports a high incidence, in contemporary works, of pleas of poverty, and especial praise of generosity as a virtue. "Wie gezeigt werden konnte, behandelt ein Großteil der *milte*-Strophen die soziale und finanzielle Situation der fahrenden Dichter: Vermutlich nimmt das Thema *milte* in Tugendpreis und moralischer Ermahnung vor allem deswegen einen prominenten Rang ein, weil die Dichter existentiell von der Mildtätigkeit abhängen." (B. Krause, 209) Career entertainers performed for lords or other high-ranking people⁹⁰, so it was of these people that *milte* was expected, and to whom it was attributed. Courts belonging to powerful people provided literature-producers with their livelihood, so the large festivals held at court would attract many performing artists of various kinds.

The courts also provided minstrels with security. Legally, any travelling performer was almost a beggar, regardless of how rich or in demand. Indeed, contemporary laws seem to have discriminated against the travelling performer rather severely. Krause points out that the 1225 *Sachsenspiegel*, created not long after the *Amis*, excluded any migrant person from legal protection,⁹¹ an injunction that would have included a travelling performer.

⁸⁹ "Sie wird hier als Pflicht und Selbstverständlichkeit erachtet wie im verhältnis von Lehnsherr und vasall." (B. Krause, 209)

⁹⁰ "Wie die Anrede als *herren*, *edelen*, *ritter* und *fürsten* oder die Namensnennung bestimmter Gönner verdeutlicht, richten sich die an weltlichen und geistlichen Adelshöfen wirkenden Sangspruchdichter an ein adliges Publikum, an Laien und Geistliche, oft unmittelbar an Papst, Kaiser, Fürsten oder Herren kleinerer Adelshöfe." (B. Krause, 15)

⁹¹ "Wer ohne festen Wohnsitz war wie die Fahrenden, blieb aus der Rechts- und Friedensgemeinschaft ausgeschlossen, was Schutzlosigkeit für Person und Habe bedeutete. Mit der Rechtlosigkeit war ihre Ehrlosigkeit verbunden, die ihnen Glaubwürdigkeit und Eidesfähigkeit nahm und damit das Recht, als Kläger oder Zeuge vor Gericht aufzutreten." (B. Krause, 71)

Die Legitimations- und Profilierungsbestrebungen, die aus diesen Strophen sprechen, deuten darauf hin, daß sie, ... zum gewöhnlichen fahrenden Volk, den Spaßmachern, Musikanten und Unterhaltungskünstlern gezählt wurden. Wie diese scheinen die fahrenden Sangspruchdichter Demütigungen und Erschwernisse erlitten zu haben. Aus diesem Grund soll an dieser Stelle der Stand der Fahrenden in der mittelalterlichen gessellschaft erläutert werden.” (B. Krause, 70)

Krause finds that the literate *Sangspruchdichter* did not appreciate being lumped in with the common juggler; they viewed themselves as spreading enlightenment, educating their audiences and leaving them better people than they were before. Indeed, they did promote virtue. The importance of various virtues is emphasized again and again, coupled with encouragement that members of the audience practice such virtues, and reasons why they should: “Die Dichter nennen und erläutern immer wieder die höfischen Zentralbegriffe *milte*, *zuht*, *triuwe*, *schame*, *manheit* / *ellen*, *wârheit*, *stæte*, *mâze*, *reht*, *kiusche*, *erbermde* und *diemüete*.” (B. Krause, 15-16). The *Sangspruchdichter* connect one virtue in particular to Christian virtue: not surprisingly, audience members are reminded that God wants them to be generous with their superfluous goods. In fact, *milte* was the key to a God-pleasing life: “Die *milte* sei die entscheidende voraussetzung für ein gottgefälliges Leben.” (B. Krause, 209)

The virtue of *milte* also wins out for frequency. Even with all the emphasis on various virtues, *milte* receives a disproportionate incidence of mention in any edifying moral speeches that might be inserted into a festive entertainment⁹². In fact, *milte* was the most-often named virtue in primary texts of Krause's study⁹³. One does not conclude, then, that a patron's *milte* is

⁹² “Ein reichliches Drittel der Herrenlehrestrophen rückt die *milte* ins Zentrum des Interesses” (B. Krause, 18).

⁹³ “Eine sorgfältige Durchsicht der Strophen hat gezeigt, daß die *milte* die am häufigsten genannte Tugend ist, sie taucht in gut der Hälfte dieser Tugendaufzählungen auf. Etwas seltener werden *zuht* und *triuwe* genannt. *schame*, *manheit* / *ellen*, *wârheit* und *stæte* sind weitere häufig angemahnte Tugenden. Gelegentlich werden *mâze*, *reht*, *kiusche*, *vride*, *erbermde* und *diemüete* angeführt.” (B. Krause, 18)

characteristic of courtliness, but that the patron's courtliness hinges on that patronage: “Dem *milten* sprechen sie neben der *êre* noch weitere wichtige Attribute zu: *triuwe*, *wirde*, *wîsheit*, *ellen*, Schönheit und Gottgefälligkeit, kurz, die *milte* kennzeichne den höfisch vollkommenen Menschen.” (B. Krause, 209). A patron with the courtly virtue of *milte* automatically possesses all the others.

This relationship was mutually beneficial; the better the entertainment a court could attract, the better its reputation⁹⁴, so giving gifts to entertainers amounted to the purchase of higher standing in the noble community, and a reputation for generosity attracts more and better minstrels, and thus further-improved standing. Performers offered honour, or *êre*, a term with several definitions, but which, when applied to the generous lord, has value beyond personal vanity; in a society without credit ratings and social insurance numbers, reputation was essential to identity. The *êre* provided by minstrels was a defining part of any respectable court: “Da die *êre* im Mittelalter gesellschaftliches Ansehen, Wertschätzung und Macht bedeutet und sie somit zweifellos eines der entscheidenden ideellen weltlichen Güter eines adeligen Herrn darstellt, schreiben sich die Sangspruchdichter hier eine wichtige höfische Funktion zu.” (B. Krause, 89) The relationship between the travelling (and therefore information-disseminating) minstrel and the lord approached a gestalt similar to that between lord and vassal. The *milte* took the ostensible form of a free gift, but it was necessary, and real services were offered in exchange, in the form of putting a good word into faraway ears: “Ruhmverbreitung als Dank für mildtätige Geschenke ist bei den sangspruchdichtern des 13. Jahrhunderts besonders stark ausgeprägt. Wie schon erwähnt, sehen sie sich dabei in einem Dienstverhältnis zu ihren Gönnern, das sie Herren zur Freigebigkeit verpflichtet und und sie zu den milden Gaben berechtigt.” (B. Krause, 90)

⁹⁴ “Hochachtung erfuhren die Spielleute an Adelshöfen, wo das prunkvolle höfische Leben geliebt wurde. Für die dort häufig stattfindenden Feste engagierten Kaiser, Könige, Fürsten oder Grafen, um so auch ihren Wohlstand und ihre höfische Gesinnung zu demonstrieren, zahlreiche Musikanten und Dichter.” (B. Krause, 73)

4.4.3 Amis and *milte*

Whether truthfully or falsely, Amis's *milte* demarcates him as at least partially noble. "The mention of this virtue immediately places Amis within the socially elevated courtly nobility and demonstrates that we are not dealing here with the local priest of the *fabliaux* or *Schwänke*. It is also Amis's cultivation of *milte* which is the impetus for the opening episode." (Williams, Tricksters 64) But what is *milte*, and how does Amis really relate to it? Amis's possession of such a key virtue is viewed as excusing a great deal else. One could even consider his quest for *milte* a higher calling than many earthly pursuits. Kalkhofen finds the same spiritual value placed in Amis's generosity as the minstrels placed in that of their patrons: "Der Pfaffe Amis bedarf des Geldes ... nicht zu weltlichen, schlechten Zwecken, sondern zu metaphysischen, die als solche an der guten, der absoluten Ordnung teilhaben" (Kalkhofen, 141). In "Hof und christliche Moral: Inhaltliche Konstanten im Œuvre des Stricker," Daniel Rocher examines ways in which *milte* is treated as a Christian virtue in other *maeren*. Characters with great wealth have an obligation to share, and *milte* can encompass even spiritual virtues. In *Frau Ehre und die Schande* "Die weltliche, >höfische< *milte* – die nur die Edlen und Reichen ausüben können – ist zugleich die christliche *caritas*." (Rocher, 107). In this narrative, and in *Herren zu Österreich*, *milte* is presented as essential to any claim to nobility. Its lamented loss has a cause similar to Amis's origins, through increased expenses.: "In den >Herren zu Österreich< ... bedauert er, daß die Herren dieses Landes nicht mehr so viel *milte* zeigen wie früher, eben weil sie früher so *milte* waren, daß alle möglichen >Künstler< ihre Höfe aufsuchten, so daß sie bald nicht mehr imstande waren, alle zu bewirten und zu belohnen. (Rocher, 109)

The alternatives presented by Wailes, cutting back expenses or turning people away, are not approved here, so Amis has no choice but to continue receiving this flood of visitors, or cease to practice *milte* altogether. In the beginning, then, the motivation for Amis's actions is specifically designated as a virtue characteristic of a hero. He thus shares a defining characteristic with the nobler characters in the courtly romance, as he is motivated by noble ends. The narrative also favours Amis, describing him at the end as generous by nature, *vil miltes mutes*. (2250).

Practicing *milte* is not so unrealistic for a *Schwank*-priest. He does display many other parallels with heroic characters, as Ragotzky points out. With a slight shift of emphasis, and particularly taking into account the consistency of his victories, one could see the *pfaffe* as a sort of knight-

errant with a string of spectacular successes. “Die Schilderung von Amis’ Aufbruch ahmt ironisch die >>klassische<< Eingangssituation eines Ritterromans nach. Wie dort der Protagonist auszieht, um durch Aventiuren *ere* zu gewinnen, so zieht Amis aus zum *guot*-Erwerb. Während sich aber ritterliche Aventiure gerade jeder Kalkulation durch den Helden entzieht, hat der Pfaffe seinen >>Aventiuren-Weg<< genau vorausgeplant, und diesen Plan setzt er nun zielischer in die Tat um.” (Ragotzky, 152). Amis’s insatiability in amassing wealth does, in fact, show similarity with the knight’s pattern of amassing honour. The parallel becomes even more compelling when we observe the other contents of the oldest manuscript, Ms. R, from the late thirteenth century⁹⁵. It includes Amis with Iwein, Neidhart's songs, Dietrichs Flucht, Die Rabenschlacht and three *Minnelieder*, as if it were itself courtly in nature.

In R geht dem Text eine Abschrift des *Iwein* voraus, Lieder Neidharts folgen; eine gattungssystematische Deutung dieses Befundes ist problematisch, es sei denn, man interpretiert die Texte in R unter dem Aspekt >höfische Literatur versus Kontrafakturen höfischer Literatur<. Dann wären *Iwein* und der *Pfaffe Amis* ebenso als komplementäre Stücke aufzufassen wie der Neidhart-Teil und die (nachgetragenen) Minnelieder am Schluß der Handschrift. (Schilling, 183)

The parallel recalls a commentary on the automatic (and therefore mindless) association of wealth with honour, or it may be another factor that simply makes Amis more sympathetic through his comic association with heroics. He sends his profits back to England with the same dogged consistency as a victorious knight might send his defeated enemies to King Arthur: “Auch dieser, sich nach fast jedem Schwank wiederholende Hinweis, daß Amis das erworbene *guot* nach England sendet, um die dort weiterlaufende höfische Bewirtung der Gäste zu finanzieren, erinnert an das typische Verhalten des ritterlichen Helden im höfischen Roman. Er schickt die Gegner, die er im Kampf besiegt hat, an den Artushof, ihr Bericht vermehrt seine *ere*.” (Ragotzky, 156). Williams, on the other hand, gives Amis more in common with Artus than

⁹⁵ “Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz Berlin, Ms. germ. Fol. 1062. - Pergament, Ende 13. Jahrhundert (enthält noch Hartmanns *Iwein*, Lieder Neidharts, *Dietrichs Flucht*, *Die Rabenschlacht* und drei Minnelieder).” (Schilling, 180-81)

with the knights sending him prisoners. His emphasis on *milte* is what has amassed him honour, so his procurement of wealth, as a means to that end, increases it, too.

This parodical treatment of Amis as knight-errant, and as generous nobleman, does as much to link him to the noble class as Reinhart's relationships with the other animals. This pseudo-nobility lends an air of justification to all that he does – but 'lends' is an appropriate word for it, as he must, upon closer examination, give it back. This justification of immoral acts through membership in a particular class points out the lack of moral logic in double standards; it is not all right to take by violence or verbal wrangling what belongs to others, and yet somehow it is all right for *certain people* to do so, recalling Reinhart's immediate resignation when Ysengrin steals his ham. When the larger and more powerful party takes what rightfully belongs to the weaker party, one is expected to accept the situation, as is simply the way of the world. In Amis's pseudo-goodness and pseudo-nobility we can read a glaring flaw in society in general, a theme that we shall encounter again and again.

The way in which Amis practices his *milte* is also more of a pseudo-nobility than the real thing. The expense he incurs has not always been so high; Amis practices it before he becomes a trickster, without any mention of short funds, but, after he gains a reputation as a miracle-worker, he must receive more guests as curious people come to see him. Rather than improving his situation, as it might with an Arthurian knight, this change serves only to increase the expense of the *milte* that he has been practicing all along, and motivating the stories. It is not only the *milte* that drives Amis to his acts, but *milte* combined with an enlarged sphere of people on whom it must be practiced.

When practicing *milte*, one never considers the cost. “Freigebigkeit also kann gar nicht, auch nicht durch ständische Rücksichten, eingeschränkt werden. Sie ist prinzipiell grenzenlos und kann deshalb niemals auf *überigez guot* verzichten. Denn – so heißt es auch in Strickers Lehrgedicht vom ‚Gebot der Ehre‘ programmatisch – wer sich der *milte* verpflichtet weiß, macht von ihr keine Abstriche, auch und gerade solche nicht, die ihm Schaden bringen” (Röcke, 53). Without sufficient wealth, then, *milte* is simply not *milte*. Wailes also argues that Amis's *milte*, being practiced by one who cannot, strictly speaking, afford it, is not *milte* at all, but rather immoderate overspending. Wailes considers Amis's unfettered generosity excessive, defining *milte* itself as a sort of moderation, writing: “Es ist bekannt, daß man im Mittelalter die Tugend

als einen mittleren Weg verstand, der zwischen entgegengesetzten Extremen (des Mangels und es Überflusses) lag.” (Wailes, 226).

If Amis’s motivation is unjustifiable, then his resulting acts are, too. Wailes does not overlook the eventual dropping of the specified *milte* motivation in the two final cheats, but describes it as more representative of a continuing theme than a break with any previous moral justification, discussing to what extent this theory is supported by the text. In these episodes, “Amis will *ein rîcher man* werden. Weil er mehr Geld will und Glück beim *liegen unt triegen* hat, macht er weiter. Soviel erwirbt er, daß er sich danach dreißig Jahre großzügiger Gastfreundschaft erfreuen und dennoch dem Kloster großes Vermögen bringen kann (Z. 2493, 2498-2500).”(Wailes, 238). Amis does attempt to behave like a rich man from the beginning, trying to practice a virtue restricted to the nobility. A real person could not be excused for engaging in criminal acts to cover his extravagance, and the Amis that Wailes examines is almost a real person – but this argument depends on how human Amis is.

Is Amis a realistic character? All the characters in *Pfaffe Amis* exhibit automatic behaviour, and Amis gives us no reason to exclude him from this definition. Some motivation is required for Amis to cheat others, or the story cannot take place at all. His motivation does appear to be insufficient; there certainly could be better reasons. The Stricker has not outfitted Amis with a pack of starving orphans to feed, but rather with curious houseguests. According to Wailes, this motivation is not enough.

If we are to believe the narrative, though, Amis performs this practice without sacrificing divine approval. Röcke points out that Amis is never specifically called profligate; quite the contrary: “auch der Vorwurf des *boeslichen vertuon*, der falschen und sündigen Vergabe von Gütern, trifft ihn nicht: Amis *vergap so gar swaz er gewan / beidiu durch ere unt durch got* (VV 48f.)” (Röcke, 53). Kalkhofen absolves the priest of all responsibility for becoming a trickster, explaining that he is forced into it by circumstances and his own dedication to the ideal: “Daraus wird der Schluß gezogen, daß der Pfaffe durch die in Wahrheit verantwortlichen Verhältnisse gezwungen wird, zum Lügner und Betrüger zu werden.” (Kalkhofen, 171).

Wealth is certainly not necessary for respectability; a perfectly good hero may have no property at all. *Tristan's* titular character remains happily landless for the duration of his life. He does regain control over his father's usurped lands, with expressions of indignation against the

usurper, but then immediately abandons the lands themselves to his foster-father, casting strong doubt on any motivating desire to possess them. A good and noble hero need not hand over all his spoils, though. He may gain financially from his heroic deeds, although material gain is not normally his primary motivation. Parzival literally rides into courtly life on an old nag, disguised as a foolish peasant, and having lost his legacy to interlopers. In contrast to Tristan, he makes no effort to reclaim the family fortune, neither when he is young and foolish nor when he is older and more experienced. He ultimately wins the grail castle, not because he wishes to own it, but because he hopes to restore the honour he has lost through failing the associated test. Hartmann's Iwein, too, rides out of Artus's court with no lands specifically attributed to his name, and does win castle and lands, but only because he has fallen in love with the lady who rules over them and wishes to marry her. A controlling interest in her lands takes the form of an added inconvenience that nearly destroys him; the lands require a protector, and if he refuses to guard them, his beloved wife will seek out another husband to take his place as lord.

A sympathetic hero may also cheat, but cheating for financial gain may be taking things too far, traversing the border demarcating *wîs*, intelligent, and *karg*, or crafty. Böhm specifies that *wis* is not to be used for the illegitimate acquisition of property: “Als Idealwort wird *wîs* nicht benutzt, um unmoralische Verstandesleistungen wie Arglist, bösen Vorsatz, hinterhältige Machenschaften oder wirtschaftliche Schlaueit beim Erwerb von Besitz zu benennen.” (Böhm, 69). Cheating is reserved for emergencies. Going too far with a cheat may cast doubt on a character's motivations, in the same way as doubtful motivations may invalidate a cheat. The *Amis* may therefore function as a criticism of the high priority placed on *milte* and other earthly virtues.

Laying aside for a moment the question of preexisting wealth, what are we to think of Amis's deeds? Bush explains why a knight who sets himself apart by his valour is nobler than one who does not: “For the nobility justification was not by birth alone; deeds of valour were a part of its code of values” (Bush, *Noble*, 108). Amis's actions are hazardous and difficult. Do they qualify as deeds of valour? We have already seen Amis's parallels with knight-errantry. Any knight is permitted to gain financially from his deeds, but all of Hartmann's, Wolfram's, and Gottfried's knights have more esoteric motivations than material gain; the gain arrives unbidden. Unless we equate Amis's material gain with the knight's amassing of honour, he is not behaving with analogous chivalry, no matter how impressive his feats. As Bush writes, “the intention of noble

deeds was not to make a living, as it normally was with the commoner, but to acquit and prove the performer's honour." (Bush, noble, 109).

What about the goal itself? Is it appropriate for Amis the priest? Röcke does not think so, and argues that, by practicing *milte*, Amis is behaving presumptuously: "Damit aber macht er sich – aus der Perspektive des Bischofs – der Sünde der Hoffart (*superbia*) schuldig" (Röcke, 52). For some critics, like Wailes, this characteristic is not one that makes him courtly, but merely evidence of courtly persons; that is, *milte* may be a courtly virtue, but wearing sunglasses at night does not make one a movie star. One practices *milte* as a sort of conspicuous consumption, defining oneself to the world as the sort of person who can afford to practice it. The idea of needing to amass money with which to practice *milte* is paradoxical, as *milte* is, by definition, limited to (and used to demarcate) those who can afford it without financial strain. One might argue that it is precisely because not everyone can afford to practice it that *milte* is a courtly virtue. If only rich characters may give freely, *Amis* shows only a parody of this virtue by presenting us with an individual's quest to take from others, in order to give later, offstage. His final goal is to practice an exercise that (falsely) demonstrates the preexistence of wealth. Nobles, at least in the idealized world of literature, do not need to amass wealth in order to practice this tradition because they already have it.

As a holy man attempting to practice a courtly virtue, Amis has limited options. Though Wailes accuses him of a deliberate unwillingness to simply curtail spending or find an honest way of acquiring extra funds, thrift conflicts with courtly values, and "honest work" is denied to the noble, who is expected to be idle. What is more, this sort of work is also denied to the priest; as a member of the priestly caste, Amis is not permitted to enter the trades to supplement his income. The earthly values of courtliness, practicing *milte* and maintaining leisure, come into direct conflict with Christian values at the very point that Amis occupies. He follows the forbidden courtly route to the best of his own insufficient ability, but a priest's coffers are not inexhaustible, and the money must come from somewhere.

But so much is true for the nobility, as well. According to Michael Bush in *Rich Noble, Poor Noble*, the characteristics of the real-life nobleman also depend on behaviours that display the presence of wealth. These behaviours are designed to set the noble apart from the commoner:

Apart from the acquisition of property, money was to be spent on a massive programme of consumption involving the maintenance of impressive households, stables and entourages, the purchase of expensive and distinctive clothing and the generous dispensation of hospitality and charity. In his attitude towards wealth, the true noble needed to eschew both the vices and virtues of the rich commoner. As well as not to appear mercenary and grasping, it was also important for him not to seem thrifty and austere.” (Bush, Noble, 107-8).

In reality, though, it was frequently impossible for a real noble to get enough wealth to behave like an ideal noble, and most could not (Bush, 173). Amis is therefore more realistic than Arthurian romances, from which stories one might conclude the the most frequently-encountered materials on earth were precious gems and silks. The real world contains no King Arthurs. *Pfaffe Amis* points out this problem: the wealth powering expenditure, even virtuous expenditure, is still wealth. Through his trickery, Amis demonstrates the other side of the courtly coin: what comes out must have gone in sometime.

4.5 The Holy Relic

Amis leaves his house open and full of servants who will receive his guests, and sets out into the world to begin cheating. He starts relatively close to his normal function by preaching a sermon at a church dedication festival. He announces that he carries a holy relic, which has requested of him that he build an edifice to house it. To ensure that he gathers as much money as possible, he stipulates that he will not accept donations from women who have been involved in illicit romances. He is swamped with offers; he is, after all, selling respectability.

A cheat like this one is effective with any demographic; adulterous women need not be present for it to work. Whatever the truth may be, a decision not to donate would be a public declaration of marital infidelity; it would become apparent to anyone that the woman who does not donate has cheated on her husband, even if she has not. Amis has taken the situation of the women’s virtue and hidden it behind a façade in which one may pay for the appearance of virtue. For its purchasers, this appearance of virtue has a high enough quality to justify the additional expense. Something that is apparent but not, strictly speaking, real might still be worth money. It is not,

however, announced that he is selling public declarations of innocence. This idea, too, he allows the women to generate for themselves.

Not only do these victims literally line up to play along with his deceit, but noble ladies everywhere literally ask for it, inviting Amis to perform his artificial miracles and exploit their vices for money:

*Im waz zu allen ziten bei
manger edelen vrowen bot,
die in sere paten durch got,
daz er zu ir kirwihe queme,
daz man in auch do verneme. (486-90).*

Rather than depicting the virtuous women responding with bitterness to the toll that Amis has levied on a good reputation, the narrative reports on the happy women, presumably adulteresses, who are only too glad to be fooled, or at least to pretend to be. While they do gain public esteem from this show, one cannot ignore that they are as eager for the opportunity to hand over their money as any of the other victims:

*Swa er hin kerte,
da enphiengen si in als einen got
und ergaben sich in sin gebot
und sprachen sint, er were
ein heiliger predigere,
daz er in dem lande umbe rite
und ein kirwihe niht vermite. (476-82).*

Amis demonstrates one common and effective way of sneaking a lie into discourse when he presents an unrelated physical object as evidence. By holding up the box and saying “See, I have Saint Brendan's head,” Amis provides evidence with no warrant, that is, he presents as evidence things that have no logical connections to the case he is trying to prove, and hopes that people will not look too closely at how he arrived at his conclusion. The reliquary is a tangible object that everyone can see perfectly well; the evidence itself cannot be questioned. Amis does indisputably have a box, but verifying that he has a box by no means tests whether he has a

saint's head inside it, or indeed any head at all, but the box is accepted as evidence that Amis carries a saintly relic, and, by extension, that that saintly relic performs the magical feat that he attributes to it, that of exposing adulteresses who attempt to donate to its fund. Amis is always quick to take his listeners past the stage at which one tests whether evidence is warranted; he demonstrates this useful skill again in the same episode, with the donations themselves. Because he has received so many donations, he insists, the town must have many virtuous women. This logical connection assumes that only virtuous women can donate, but glosses over any warrant that this restriction is the enforced:

*“Got hat in gotlicher weis
sein zeychen heut hie getan,
daz wir so manich vrowen han
so rehte gar lobesan
und da bi allez valschez an,
die sich alle so wol bewart hant,
daz si ane valsche minne stant
unde taugenlicher manne. (440-7)*

Untestability, and protection from testing when untestability is impossible, are vital to the success of all of Amis's cheats. We have already seen it in the bishop's questioning, where the responsibility to disprove untestable claims is shifted to the bishop. Amis will frequently offer victims eternal life in Heaven for their co-operation. This promise is also made on someone else's behalf, that is, God's, and cannot be tested. The victim cannot realistically know that he has or has not received eternal life and, should he find out, it would be in a situation from which there is no return to spread the word to others. We have already seen this pattern with Reinhart, who tends to offer bribes and rewards that cannot be tested, or at least which cannot be tested until too late. For example, Reinhart also attempts to pay a worldly debt in divine coin, when he promises Ysengrin an eternal reward for his compliance, in joining Reinhart's "monastery."

The victims here are divided into two camps, depending on how they got their information. For those who know that Amis is lying because they have committed adultery and then donated, it becomes necessary to defend the lie because they would be unwise to admit to their inside information. This information is necessarily packaged with other information, that they have

reached it in a socially unacceptable way. Besides, they now have something to gain. For those who know that Amis is lying because they suspect some of the first donors of cheating, there is something to lose, and they, too, maintain the façade:

“Die Vorbereitung besteht in der doppelten Bedingung, daß der Held zum einen ankündigt, von untreuen Ehefrauen nichts anzunehmen, und zum anderen sehr wohl nimmt, was sie geben. Erst aus dieser Voraussetzung entsteht, worauf es der Erzählung ankommt, nämlich der indirekte Zwang für die guten, die treuen Frauen, sich am Opfern zu beteiligen, um nicht in den Ruf der Untreue zu geraten.” (Kalkhofen, 157).

The Stricker describes several of Amis's victims as *wîs*. When one cannot generate weakness in one's foes through ignorance, one can always find another susceptible feature, in this case the high degree of socialization that leads to a character's description as *wîs*. Too much social aptitude can be as dangerous as a lack of it, as socialization frequently involves involuntary compliance with the established rule set, a personal sacrifice in the interest of the greater welfare of the whole. Here, the victims are certain that the situation is false, but co-operate anyway: “Die Frauen gehen diesem *gelogenen mære* sofort auf den Leim, sie durchschauen zwar seine Lügenhaftigkeit, sind aber unfähig, sich dem zu widersetzen.” (Ragotzky, 153). To “deceive” the women in the church, he directs social pressure from inside the group (other women) and outside (husbands) to force compliance. Even those who had no intention of donating and brought along no money still give something: “*Die niht pfenninge hatte, / die porget si harte drate / oder si oppfert ein vingerlin / guldin oder silberin.*” (409-12) to defend their honour against the eager assumptions of their fellows. The narration assures us that this hostility at least is not purely theoretical.

How did something invisible, like marital fidelity, become so closely tied to obvious and unrelated signs? “Die Ehebrecherinnen erwecken den Anschein ehelicher Treue, da ihr Opfer angenommen wird; die treuen Ehefrauen hingegen geraten in die Gefahr, des Ehebruchs bezichtigt zu werden, wenn sie sich dem Beweisverfahren nicht unterziehen. Die Wahrheit wird durch den Nachweis ihres äußeren Anscheins ersetzt” (Röcke, 62) Amis has created a black-and-white situation in which there can be no socially-acceptable explanation for not donating to his fund. Where before a lack of donation was not remarkable, here it attracts the attention of a

scandal-hungry community. Amis has used a divide-and-conquer strategy to mold his victims' behavior through their own collective power. "Ihnen droht im Falle, daß sie nicht opfern, der zwar unzutreffende, aber positive Anschein der Untreue. Aus diesem Grunde sind sie gezwungen mitzutun." (Kalkhofen, 158). This use of threats to cause victims to respond defensively is mirrored in later episodes, in which nothing can be gained by the victims, but, as in this episode, the scoundrel can gain along with the scoundrel. For their (also ostensibly voluntary, but really mandatory) donations, the women receive an item of value: the town must view them as completely chaste, which is valuable whether one is chaste or unchaste. They have gained unquestionable reputations for virtue, and do not seem to consider this product too expensive.

The idea that Amis can sell reputation as a product is not far-fetched because he has many of the qualities requisite for a high-quality *Sangspruchdichter*, including education and his soon-to-be-demonstrated ability to turn his audience toward virtuous acts⁹⁶. The women give pseudo-voluntary gifts in exchange for otherwise-unpurchasable enhancements to their reputations, and they depart from the transaction pleased, a pattern that is replicated when a wealthy patron gives (officially voluntary but actually required) gifts to a travelling entertainer who has the power to move from place to place and speak well about the patron, enhancing the patron's reputation. In fact, Amis must be a skilled performer indeed if the Stricker believes that the *pfaffe* deserves so much of their *milte*⁹⁷.

⁹⁶ "In diversen Sangsprüchen nennen sie Buchwissen und Gelehrsamkeit als Voraussetzung für Kunst.... Diese Kunstauffassung hängt eng mit ihrem Selbstverständnis als *lêrer* zusammen. Durch den Hinweis auf ihre Bildung unterstreichen sie die Berechtigung dieses Titels." (B. Krause, 101)

⁹⁷ "Strophen, in denen sich die Sangspruchdichter von den *künstelösen* abgrenzen, gehören dann zum Komplex der *milte*-Strophen, wenn sie die *milte* der Herren in bestimmte Bahnen, nämlich zu den Dichtern selbst, lenken sollen. Die Sangspruchdichter untermauern ihre Abgrenzung mit dem Argument, daß sie *rechte kunst* produzieren, während ihre Rivalen verachtenswerte Dilettanten seien." (B. Krause, 100)

According to Williams, a major theme in the *Amis* is the conflict between moral values and other social values – or value. Whether Amis is good or not depends, to a great extent, on what is meant by “good.” Williams points out that the meaning is conflated with material value when characters are given an opportunity to trade over their goods in order to become good:

“The *Kirchweihpredigt* episode (ll. 357-490) is initially made possible by Amis’s clerical status and the superstitious faith accorded to saintly relics, but it depends primarily on his ability to exploit the above-mentioned confusion between economic and moral values.... There takes place a collective and conscious self-delusion regarding the power of the relic as Amis provides all the female members of the congregation with the opportunity to buy a public declaration of their sexual propriety.” (Williams, *Tricksters*, 66).

Amis is able to sell real respectability because, as a priest, he can mandate belief. This strategy is possibly the most risky one he uses, as he does in fact make use of his social rank to augment his cheating, forcing the victims to comply. The community has no choice but to believe that the women who donate are virtuous; Amis commands them to. The trickster is normally pitted against an overpowered but incompetent opponent, but here, he uses his power as a priest to force people to do things. This technique is not completely foreign to the *Fabliaux*, although Hutton mentions that priests who abuse this power ordinarily end up on the wrong end of the cheat. “Si les prêtres qui se servent de leur *savoir* sont rares c’est assurément que leur position leur donne de multiples possibilités d’adopter une autre stratégie. Étant donné tout le pouvoir inhérent au rôle de prêtre il n’est guère surprenant que la plupart d’entre eux comptent sur ce pouvoir pour assurer leur victoire – avec les conséquences qu’on connaît bien.” (Hutton, 115) Amis's normal methods, though, might insulate him against identification with the victim. Like the successful tricksters of the *Fabliaux*, he does not depend on raw power over others: “Cela n’implique pas que tous ceux qui possèdent un tel pouvoir choisissent une stratégie fondée sur l’*avoir* – comme le montre l’exemple des prêtres, même les puissants peuvent ne pas se servir de leur pouvoir.” (Hutton, 115) He uses his deception against a wide demographic, rather than simply those who must obey him, and thus does not depend on his power the way the bishop does in the interrogation cheat.

The successful results of this cheat draw our attention to the rather telling fact that Amis sells a real product. Community opinion, intangible though it may be, does exist, and has material value. This value obviously exceeds that of the physical items that the church ladies hand over. But is the value of this saleable item, the appearance of virtue, more valuable than the virtue it replicates? Even the virtuous women elect to become complicit in Amis's deception, rather than risk their own good reputations - but, by doing so, they behave dishonestly, thus losing virtue of another type, honesty, in order to reap the benefits of their existing virtue of marital fidelity. Is virtue subordinate to the well-being of the virtuous person? Does one exercise virtue in order to reap the benefits, or is there another motivation that these women do not consider? Moreover, does real virtue consist in private actions or reputation? This episode calls into question just what is meant by the term "good," and an intangible evaluative concept like "virtue" may not become real until it has been recognized by some evaluator. Has Amis proved that none of the women in the town are virtuous, or compromised the honesty of those who are virtuous, or perhaps redeemed everyone and given the adulterous women a second chance at a virtuous life? Has he made the collective group of townswomen more or less virtuous on the whole? This episode inspires all of these questions, but does not answer any of them. Amis moves on and leaves the audience with the mess.

4.6 Invisible Pictures

In the invisible-pictures episode, Amis arrives at a court and offers to the king that he will paint a room with gorgeous frescoes full of pictures that can be seen only by those of perfectly legitimate birth. The king greedily decides to test his courtiers, not out of some fastidious drive toward quality control among the nobility, but for an excuse to take away the fief of anyone who was conceived illegitimately. When the knights arrive, he requires them to pay the master, Amis, for the viewing, and then leads them in. Predictably, an *Emperor's New Clothes* scenario ensues, in which the courtiers falsely claim to see the pictures, and even praise their beauty. When an unnamed foolish courtier exposes the fiction, long after the cheater has departed, the king is the last to confess that he can see nothing, and all the courtiers have a good laugh at his expense.

Although everyone was deceived and the knights themselves lied, all make the king the sole object of their shaming laughter: *Do wart ein vil grozer spot / da zu hone im ein schal.* (794-5). Why the king only? As the person in charge, he ought to have thwarted the cheat, but he greedily aided it instead, so perhaps it is reasonable to target him. But why laughter? The king has aided Amis in cheating them out of no small quantity of goods, and forced them to put time and expense into appearing at court, only to place them in a dangerous and stressful situation. Unless these knights simply have a good sense of humour, perhaps the king really is being punished, and effectively, through the tried-and-true method of community shaming.

Röcke agrees that the king must be punished; he is as greedy as Amis's bishop. The way in which Röcke describes this nameless king's style of ruling recalls, in its selfish exploitation of the sacred office, the bad king Frevel in *Reinhart Fuchs*: “Der französische König in Strickers ‚Amis‘ indes schert sich nicht um den Nutzen seiner Vasallen, sondern betreibt ihren Schaden und sucht sie mit Amis' Hilfe ihres Lehens zu berauben.” (Röcke, 67) Although *Pfaffe Amis* is certainly not a story of immoral people getting the punishments that they deserve, Amis's victims are not exactly role models, either. In fact, as Williams points out, this trickster's success often depends on the victim's defects: “His scholarly learning contributes to his success as a trickster, but is less important than his ability to manipulate the moral and intellectual failings of his victims.” (Williams, *Tricksters* 64). Here, Amis uses a strategy similar to Reinhart's; he locates the potential for evil behaviour, then manipulates it for his own gain. Though incited by someone else, any character who has been thus manipulated has still acted badly.

The king's desire to take back fiefs from his nobles replicates not only Frevel's selfish style of ruling but the bishop's desire to take Amis's money, so we know immediately that this transaction probably will not end well for the king. Any individual who becomes the butt of a joke has normally done something either wrong or foolish, which the community must address. Community shaming punishes an aberrant character, but the primary element in this punishment is corrective, not vengeful. This correction is as effective in the form of shaming laughter as it is in more hostile forms, and appears several times in the *Amis*. Mockery carries the same force in cases of foolish behaviour as it does in bad behaviour, so Böhm treats this sort of community shaming as part of Amis's justification even in cases where the victim is not specifically guilty of anything. Fools bring misfortune upon themselves: “wer sich wie ein *tôr* verhält – das ist die Moral seiner Geschichten – wird auch wie ein *tôr* von der Gesellschaft behandelt” (Böhm, 71).

This process is automatic and predictable, and the situation leading to the shaming requires no actual involvement from the community, although it tends to induce the community to involve itself. There is no culpability for Amis, then, in causing his victims to be shamed, as it was their flaws that made them vulnerable in the first place, but it should be noted that, in typical Stricker fashion, the fools and the villains tend not to be distinguished from one another in this respect.

4.6.1 The Mechanics of the Invisible-Pictures Episode

To generate the hidden situation, Amis keeps a secret, or performs a secret action, one that the other characters do not know about or cannot acknowledge. The simplest of these is the situation of which they are unaware: Amis acts unobserved. He can keep his secrets even when others know that he is hiding something, when he requests perfect privacy while creating the murals: “*die wile ich malende pin, / daz ir noch niman anders darin / in den ziten kumen sol.*” (557-9). and then repeats his request: “*Daz niman anders dar in ge, / daz gebietet uber al,*” (562-3). The king promises that, along with protection, this request for privacy will be granted. “*Ich schaffe zwen kneht da fur, / die nimant lasent dar in, / biz daz ich der erste pin.*” (568-70), guaranteeing that the painter has the opportunity to keep all the events inside the hall hidden.

Other characters may also contribute to the hiddenness of a situation if, like the adulterous women, they refuse to acknowledge events. The king's determination not to admit that he has been fooled is useful in keeping him fooled. Having paid the painter, the king has strong motivation to continue to believe that he has received services in exchange, and hopes not to look or feel like he has paid money for nothing. Amis first shows the “pictures” to the king alone, without a group of peers to apply social pressure, but the cheat still works.

When the nobles arrive, the king requires that they each enter the chamber and view the works of this “master,” after first paying him for the privilege. Every one of the nobles exclaims at the beauty of the nonexistent frescoes; while they react with incredulity, it is suppressed incredulity, and all the nobles accept Amis's story. The obedient knights pretend because the king does, thus creating a rule “*Do si den kunich horten jehen, / da stunde daz und ditz hie, / als in der meister wizzen lie, / do sprachen si alle “iz ist also”*” (708-11). They make two socially-apt, but potentially flawed assumptions: that whatever the king says must be true, and that what everyone

else says must be true. Based on these two rules, and the situation that Amis has created, the courtiers make a new one: if the king, along with everyone else, says that there are pictures on these walls, it must be true that there are pictures on these walls. The king's authority reinforces their belief, and they probably prefer to believe that their king is truthful. In fact, the knights trust Amis's trick over their own mothers: "*Do was mancher zornes vol / gegen siner muter umbe daz, / daz si sich niht hette behuetet baz.*" (718-20). Instead of doubting the story, the knights assume that their "blindness" is a sign of their own illegitimacy, "*und waren doch vil unvro, / daz si ir laster hetten erkorn.*" (712-13) and thus through obedient behaviour they leave their society open to being cheated.

Amis's strategy of providing an explanation of the situation after it has taken place, as he does with the reading donkey, is never repeated. Amis never again offers an explanation of suspicious evidence after it has been viewed, but rather generates preconceptions on which his victims can base their observations. There is more pressure at play than trust in the king's judgment; the knights also mistakenly trust in statements that they have already accepted as fact. Having been accepted, this information is difficult to question. By leaking a story about the magic pictures, Amis has provided information before it was sought. When it is time for the victim to determine what is happening, he will simply access previously-stored information, that there are paintings and they are invisible to bastards, before considering the testimony of his own eyes. The trick of "getting there first" also works on other people who have not hired the painter, who have either been told by an authority or learned through effort the "secret" of the new painted room. After the investment required to procure the fraudulent information, the courtiers would be more inclined to believe that it was true; nobles who have never questioned the legitimacy of their own birth now immediately assume that they must be bastards:

*so ist niman so gut,
so wise noch so wol bemut,
die daz bemelde kunnen sehen,
wan den so wol ist geschehen,
daz si rehte kint
von vater und von muter sint.* (521-6).

This arrangement includes no intrinsic reason for anybody to take the painter at his (very implausible) word, but because the characters believe that they have privileged information before they see the pictures, they have already accepted it as fact when they arrive. They base their further reasoning on this presumed fact, and arrive at the conclusion that was set out for them. As admission of this illegitimacy would be damaging to them and their families, the knights keep this conclusion to themselves. They may even pretend to be uninformed about the test in order to appear to pass without trying, reinforcing the pressure on others to keep quiet. Hoping to gain something from this privileged information, that is, not to have paid for nothing, they voluntarily participate in generating the cheat.

The narrator in particular does not reward their misplaced good behaviour. Besides the lying courtiers, other characters will be called *wîs*, including a brutalizing quack doctor from the final cheat. To be lumped in with him is not flattering; this doctor is as manipulated and used as the other dupes, and evil enough to be appropriately called a scoundrel. Though they are not evil, the courtiers are dishonest, and engage in the most ridiculous behaviour, as long as they believe they can escape with their respectability intact.

4.6.2 Rules as Weakness

Amis could never have cheated so successfully without hard-and-fast rules that everyone (else) followed; adulterous spouses must be shamed and ostracized, one must obey one's lord, and promises must be kept. Society needs rules to exist as society because messages must be encoded according to standard methods or they are unintelligible. Members of society require protection, both from one another and from outsiders. It is wise for characters to follow a set of rules, but rules become dysfunctional when characters are unable to break them even under circumstances in which they do not apply, or to consider that someone else might break them. When one is preoccupied with the rules, rather than with what is going on, or whether the rules are appropriate, they can be a great hindrance. The victim may never notice that the situation has changed, because watching for it would conflict with social regulations. By presenting a set of rules, Amis limits the behaviour of the other characters involved, particularly characters who may, like the bishop, be more powerful than Amis if allowed to use the full extent of their abilities.

In situations like these, rule-breakers become valuable to the community. A character who is known to break the rules loses respectability, but a character without respectability can therefore act with impunity. Special characters outside of respectable restrictions, such as the so-called fool at the court with Amis's invisible pictures, have power to combat cheating. According to Williams, the foolish individual who points out that the pictures are not there is in fact an official fool, and thus specially endowed with privileges beyond other people's: "Only the court fool, whose very nature makes him unique, dares to speak the truth and thereby forces the members of the court to recognize how they have been deceived." (Williams, *Tricksters*, 69). These special privileges make him particularly useful. In contrast, being socialized, or *wîs*, enough not to reveal that they cannot see the pictures, makes the others defenceless in the face of Amis's rule-bending. None of the courtiers, or the court ladies who are led in the next day, are foolish enough to admit to the universal blindness, but does speaking up make one a fool? In this case, being a fool involves more, rather than less, power, and the fool, or the foolish person, defeats Amis's cheat when no-one else could.

*Do sprach ein tumber da bi:
 "Ich weiz niht, wes kunnes ich si,
 ob ich vater ie gewan.
 Hie ist niht gemalet an.
 Hie siht nimant baz dan ich. (759-63).*

Being *wîs* is here treated as a form of intelligence that makes one more socially acceptable, but also more prone to being victimized by tricksters⁹⁸. On the other hand, an individual without a fief to keep can afford to break the illusion, because he has nothing to lose for lack of birthright. The presentation of this evidence, that someone else does not see the pictures, makes it easier to admit one's own observations into public view, and the others gradually join the fool's side in seeing the truth, although they continue to be identified with fools.

⁹⁸ "Im >Pfaffen Âmîs< sind es gerade die *tumben* (V. 759. 765. 782), die Jungen und Unerfahrenen, die den meisten Mutterwitz, den klarsten, weil unverbildeten Verstand haben." (Agricola, 308);

*Sust hetten die knehte einen strit
mit ein ander untz an die zit,
daz ir mer begonden jehen,
do konde nimant niht gesehen
und swer das jehe,
daz er do kein gemelde sehe,
der tet einem toren gelich. (767-73)*

In the end, “even” the wise ones begin to agree that nothing is there, as the realm of the socially acceptable is stretched larger and larger by the one rule-breaker and his enlarging group of followers “*Nu bedachten ouch die wisen sich, / wan si da niht ensahen, / daz si nach in jehen.*” (774-6) The king, presumably the most respectable, is last to speak up:

*Si jehen alle, iz were ein truge,
allentsamt gemeine
wan der kunich aleine,
untz er wol vernam,
waz im zu reden gezam. (784-8).*

associating his highest level of respectability with the highest level of deceivability by a rule-generating cheat. As the king, he depends on rules for his status and is therefore more bound by rules, and more cheatable, than anyone.

Besides using existing rules, Amis can use authority to create new ones, as he has done in the *Kirchweih* episode, in which he orders the populace to consider chaste anyone who donates⁹⁹. Where his own authority is insufficient, he can still make a puppet of someone who has more of it, extending his hidden self to incorporate others and assimilating their authority to command. The king is the highest-powered puppet that Amis manipulates. There is no need to trick an audience into appearing, as the king can simply command all the knights in the realm to come,

⁹⁹ *Ni gebeut ich euh bi dem banne, / die heut hie gewesen sey, / daz man si wizze valschez frei.*
(448-50)

and Amis need not trick them into believing that entering the chamber is worth the payment, as the king forces them to pay for the viewing. The king, rather than Amis, sets a price on the viewing: “*Sumelich gaben im ir gewant, / sumlich pfenning zuhant, / sumelich pfert oder swert. / Sust wart er rich und wert.*” (695-8).

The king's value extends further, as Amis departs as soon as the payment has been received. Ragotzky explains how Amis need not be present to use the king's authority to enforce the poisoned situation:

Seine Rolle nimmt jetzt der König ein. Er fordert von den Rittern, daß sie gleich beim Eintritt in den Saal, also noch bevor sie etwas gesehen haben und urteilen könnten, den *meister* entlohnen.... Sie erschrecken heimlich vor den leeren Wänden, aber ihre Furcht, ihr Lehen zu verlieren, ist so groß, daß sie den Ausführungen des Königs, der nun auch die Rolle des Führers durch die >>Galerie<< übernimmt, bedingungslos zustimmen. (Ragotzky, 155).

Amis uses the king to evade responsibility for the cheat. With the king's help, he is gone long before the community can recover from his trick. Besides, the king has taken on Amis's task. The authority, and the repercussions, remain with him.

The rules around key members of the community become community-damaging when those key members fail in their functions. As in the cheat before it, Amis has turned the community against itself by corrupting some of its members. Here, it is the keystone that crumbles first. A lack of virtue may be a flaw in the individual, but in a character with authority, this individual flaw produces a flaw in society itself, making the entire group vulnerable. Amis cannot generate flaws out of nothing, but only reveals situations with high potential for flaws: with such a vain and greedy king, and dishonest nobles, all was not well with this court even before Amis arrived. “Der Hof erweist sich als abstruses Konstrukt wechselseitiger Bestätigung und geheimer Ängste, von Schein und immer neuem Schein, wohingegen sich die Möglichkeit der Legitimation aus der heroischen Geschichte des Rittertums in den leeren Wänden verflüchtigt. Ehre als Schein und Ehre als schande; wenn erst ein tumber den allgemeinen Wahn zerreit und die Wahrheit an den Tag bringt (V 777 ff), dann ist das Urteil über diese Welt von Hof und Ehre bereits gesprochen” (Röcke, 69) Röcke's opinion is that the king has single-handedly produced the social environment that leads to his own downfall: “Denn der soziale Zusammenhalt des Adels fut

nahezu ausschließlich auf dieser Form der persönlichen Verpflichtung und Bindung. Wird sie abgeschwächt, zurückgenommen oder – wie vom französischen König in unserem text – durch Mißtrauen ersetzt, so ist dem Bestand von Herrschaft und Hof die Grundlage entzogen.” (Röcke, 67) Like Frevel, the inept and immoral ruler of the animal world, this king does not understand his position; he views his office as a source of power and goods, rather than a responsibility that he must fulfil. Unlike Vrevel, though, both the bishop and the nameless king break the rules first, attempting to abuse their power to harvest goods from lower-ranking persons in their service, people to whom they should be giving. Having given fiefs, this king is eager for an opportunity to take back. The rules, which ought to protect the community from Amis, were not being followed in the first place.

4.7 Doctor Amis

Böhm argues that Amis exploits not individual vices, but rather flaws in society, a configuration of rules and priorities that forces individuals to behave unethically: “Er kann aus der falschen Moral der Gesellschaft Profit schlagen. Dadurch manifestiert sich das Ausmaß gesellschaftlicher Instabilität, die ihren Grund in einem allgemeinen Egoismus, einem falschen Gottesverständnis und der Mißachtung des Verstandes hat.” (Böhm, 219). If virtues are designed to make society hold together, then vices are the holes in the social fabric, flaws not in individuals, but in the relationships among them. On a larger scale, individuals in a flawed society are conditioned to behave in a flawed way, and the more perfect they are by that society’s standards, the more there is wrong with them. It is not only vice that we see Amis exploit, but nor is it lack of intelligence that makes his victims into victims. Amis does not select particularly vicious targets because they deserve it, but because their vice makes them vulnerable and their wealth makes them worthwhile.

When Amis arrives at another court, where the lord is somewhat more interested in his courtiers' welfare, he is still able to gain control of the situation. The lord is seeking a doctor to cure an illness that has spread through his court. Claiming to be a doctor, specifically one who specializes in illnesses without visible symptoms, Amis is engaged to cure this group, and tells his employer not to pay him until the victims themselves say that they are cured. He takes the sick courtiers aside and has them swear not to reveal the details of his treatment for one week.

After this oath has been completed, he begins his “treatment.” Amis asks them to tell him which one of them is the sickest, so that he can kill that one and use the blood to heal the others. The horrified patients reason that, if they claim not to be very sick, the others will claim to be less so. All tell Amis that they are completely cured. Amis accuses them of lying to him, and they assure him that they are not. Pleased, he sends them to their lord to tell him that they are now well. Their incredulous leader asks each one in turn, and each affirms the lie with another oath. Amis is paid and departs, then, one week later, the courtiers report that they are all still just as sick, or even more so.

The sick courtiers' adherence to their code of honour, which is normally considered a virtue but here causes damage, allows Amis to control them. The knights are compelled through a rule that says they must do anything they have promised to do, so they must lie for Amis. Having promised not to reveal the “procedure,” they will not reveal how the treatment works for one week, and are unable to defend themselves without breaking their code of honour. Ironically, they then end up swearing on their honour that they have been healed, lying in order to protect the first oath. Rules that should protect the court and promote honesty undermine both.

Köppe points out that, in some episodes, it is the people who serve the rules, and not the other way around: “So erscheint... die Ideologie als eine Macht, die, obwohl er sie selbst geschaffen hat, den Menschen wie eine fremde Macht beherrscht.” (Köppe, 48) Schilling observes how adherence to rules such as oaths give Amis such a significant advantage: their actions can be predicted and controlled.

Hält man sich vor Augen, worin die Überlegenheit des Pfaffen Amis über seine Mitmenschen besteht, so erkennt man unschwer, daß diese nicht so sehr in einer allgemeinen intellektuellen Dominanz (*wisheit*) begründet liegt als vielmehr in der Fähigkeit, bei seinen Gegenspielern bestimmte Denkschemata, Deutungsmuster und gewissermaßen programmierte Handlungsabläufe abzurufen.. Dabei bedient er sich zum einen elementarer Wünsche und Gefühle wie Angst oder Begehrlichkeit. (Schilling, 197)

Although he entered the contract in bad faith, the sick still hold that contract as binding for the entire seven days. Like any other predictable behaviour, their unreasonable virtue is as useful as unconsidered vice for controlling a character. Having once sworn an oath, a knight must fulfil it,

no matter what the cost. Fear makes them claim to have been healed, but they continue to claim so after Amis has left. These knights are no longer controlled by fear, as Amis has left the court and cannot possibly kill them, but by their virtue.

*Als er urloup enpfiench
und ein wochen darnach ergiench,
do wart den siechen also we
sam da vor oder me.
Do saiten si dem herzogen,
wie er si hette betrogen,
der arzt, der si solt nern,
und wie si im musten swern,
daz siz verholn trugen
sechs tage, e siz gewugen. (907-16)*

When a character has come up with a lie on his or her own, that character must also accept the burden of proof. When Amis accuses them of lying: *Der pfaffe sprach: "Ir triget mich,"* (881) he assumes the role of the tester and places them in the position of cheater. They have just lied, and possibly attempted to have another person killed. So when Amis questions them, they are all the more vulnerable to him, and find themselves playing along. He uses the shifted burden of proof to support his own lies and Amis gains credibility by sending the courtiers instead of reporting the success himself. To maintain his credibility, the trickster-priest will often send messengers who are, in the apparent realm, uninterested in promoting his ends, but who are deceived or have a hidden motivation to lie. They can produce preconceptions about visual information, as in the Invisible Pictures episode, or act as the sole source of information, as they do here, where Amis avoids presenting the information himself. *"Nu get dan", sprach er do, / "unt sagt iz dem herzogen"* (886-7). An idea that comes from inside the kin group, or has already been accepted there, is accepted far more easily because it comes from a credible source, and it becomes unacceptable or even ridiculous to doubt or test it. Amis preferentially allows others to discover, judge and announce his miracles, rather than actively promoting them himself.

4.7.1 Divide and Conquer

How does it become necessary to tell this lie in the first place? If one of the sick courtiers had volunteered his life for the sake of the others, Amis would have found himself in an embarrassing situation, indeed. But the courtiers, when threatened with violence, are not at their most selfless. They will do whatever they think they must to preserve themselves, even at the cost of others – and this action is predictable enough for Amis to use and control. Williams emphasizes that the threat of death seems real to the courtiers, calling their false oaths a “fight for self-preservation” (Williams, 69). Doctor Amis’s victims not only predict that others will lie, but which lie they will tell and how to control it; they can either claim to be sick, but not very – in which case everyone else will claim to be completely healed, thus making them the sickest, or that they are completely well, in which case nobody will single them out. They are strategizing to manipulate others, engaging in Amis’s task more actively. This complicated prediction demonstrates an advanced ability to predict behaviour also seen in the church dedication. When the sick courtiers lie, in expectation that the others will lie, their lack of interest in one another’s welfare is not necessarily culpable. These people are all vassals of their lord, but not necessarily friends, so we have no reason to expect them to trust or protect one another. Althoff describes such a lack of mutual loyalty as normal by contemporary standards: “obligations only existed between the lord and each of his men individually, not between the men themselves.”¹⁰⁰,

This episode is one of only two in which Amis enforces obedience through the threat of violence, or other general force. He himself does not engage in violent acts, but he does make people think that he might. These sick courtiers may have heard of the legendary blood-healing method from such popular titles as Hartmann’s *der arme Heinrich*, increasing the plausibility of his statement that their lives are really in his hands: “*Den selben wil ich toten / und hilf euh uz den noten / mit sihem blute zehant.*” (851-3)

Groups, such as a court, village or parish, must work together as a sort of community in order to be effective. As he did with his holy relic, Amis has destabilized this group to get his way.

¹⁰⁰ Althoff, Gerd. *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Medieval Europe*. Translated by Christopher Carroll. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004. p. 4.

Individuals who normally and ideally work together have been set against one another: “Amis puts them in a position where the other members of their community are no longer fellows, but enemies, and allows their own attempts at deception to lead them into being deceived.” (Williams, 69). When normally friendly people such as the sick courtiers are pitted against each other, they must defend themselves from their peers.

Although the lord of this court is not corrupt, like the king in the invisible-pictures episode, Amis is able to exploit a weakness in the social fabric, made all the more effective by adherence to the norms specified by that social fabric. When society itself is flawed, virtuous adherence to the rules becomes harmful; by keeping their oaths, the courtiers have allowed Amis to escape. With only top-down loyalty, rather than a lateral one, this society reveals many indefensible weaknesses for Amis to exploit. It is impossible for the courtiers to present a united front when individual courtiers are responsible only to themselves and their lord. No amount of loyalty to the lord will make the courtiers loyal to each other, making it impossible to make rules against their backbiting mistrust.

4.7.2 Leaving Town

Amis escapes punishment in the invisible pictures episode only because he is no longer present. A judgement is passed on him, but he has already departed, as soon as he could: *da begonde der meister sazehant / zu dem kunege urloubes gern / und bat sich sines gutes wern.* (724-6). He does the same in the healing episode, in which he manages to leave seven days before the trick is finally revealed. He clearly departs as soon as possible, though not soon enough to threaten his primary goal, procuring money; he leaves after the silver is weighed: “*Ez wart im zuhant gewegen. / Do nam erdes urloubes segen / und hub sich dannen zehant*” (903-5). This strategy is used in every episode except the two that take place on Amis's home ground, the only two with consequences that extend throughout the story. Here, Amis is out of reach by the time the court realizes that it has been duped. Because of his mobility, the individual cheating episodes are not related to each other in a cause-and-effect relationship, but only as continuations of a theme; logically, if not artistically, they could occur in any order, and the removal of one would not affect the others. This additive relationship between events is ideal for a non-heroic trickster

character, as his deeds attract more negative consequences than do those of a hero.

Disconnecting the cause-and-effect relationship disconnects Amis from the effects of his actions.

In Amis's environment, then, causality has special limitations. Within a location events have a cause-and-effect relationship¹⁰¹. One event causes the event following it. A lord discovers that his courtiers are sick, so he sends for a doctor, so Amis arrives, so the lord hires him, so he takes the sick aside, and so on. The cause-and-effect plotline is not universal, though. There are other ways to string together a story. The additive structure, in which events are organized according to type, consists in the same theme repeating itself over and over¹⁰². The cause-and-effect and additive structures are combined in the *Amis* to form a mixed arrangement in which events proceed in a cause-and-effect fashion within the episodes, but the episodes themselves have little or no effect on one another: as soon as Amis leaves a location, his events pattern switches to an additive one, demonstrating that cause and effect are limited, in his universe, by place. When Amis leaves the French court, for example, events continue in the court, but not in a manner that

¹⁰¹ “Die häufigste Verbindungsart, die Motive miteinander eingehen, sind kausal verknüpfte Ketten. Durch Reihung bestimmter Motive ergeben sich dabei Handlungsstränge, deren einzelne Glieder notwendig miteinander erbunden sind. Solche kausalen Ketten können auf die verschiedensten Arten gebildet werden: Oft ist ein Hauptmotiv Prämisse für ein folgendes; in anderen Fällen versammelt ein Motiv einige erläuternede Nebenmotive um sich herum; dann wieder wird das Verhältnis von Ursache und Wirkung – aus Gründen der Erzählkomposition – umgestellt und ein oder mehrere Motive, die die Wirkung eines anderen Motivs schildern, nehmen die Anfangsstellung ein, das sie bedingende, “ursächliche” Motiv folgt ihnen nach.” (Frosch-Freiburg, 16).

¹⁰² “Bei der additiven Abfolge von Motiven in einer Erzählung spricht man besser nicht von “Verknüpfung” der Motive, sondern eher von Reihung. Dabei werden einzelne Motive (oft den verschiedensten Erzählstoffen zugehörig) reihend nebeneinander gestellt’ da sie nicht logisch miteinander verknüpft sind, ist ihre Aufeinanderfolge beliebig; ihr Zusammenhang wird meist auf assoziativem Wege hergestellt.” (Frosch-Freiburg, 16-17).

involves the absent priest; Amis's actions continue to influence the court, and people can talk about him, but no action that they take can influence him.

Avoiding negative consequences of his actions is a distinguishing feature for Amis in particular. Amis never fails. He never suffers or enters into the power of another character. He never needs to “think on his feet” to escape from a dangerous situation, as we have seen in the beast epic. Amis is never himself cheated, but always maintains complete understanding and control of his environment. Every cheat plays out smoothly, and no difficulties arise: only one of his cheats involves consequences that could be considered even remotely detrimental, his financial embarrassment following the reading-donkey episode. This consequence is by no means severe, and results from the two cheats that least warrant corrective action. In every other cheat, rather than defending himself against an aggressor, Amis plunders the (relatively) innocent, injuring nearly everyone he interacts with. Punished for self-defense, Amis then spends most of the story behaving badly and getting away with it.

4.8 Biblical Miracle Cheats

After departing from the court, Amis enters a series of short and simple episodes in which he exploits his own real identity as a priest as if it were a disguise, showing that he does not need to dress up as a doctor or painter to gain the appearance of abilities that he does not have, that is, to produce an apparent situation that diverges from the hidden one. He instead exploits his unaltered identity as a man of God to imply fabulous divine powers, making himself out to be more like the legendary priest than the mortal one. On the right priest, like Amis, priestly robes are indeed nothing but a disguise. As Agricola writes: “Das Amt des Geistlichen ist nur eine Äußerlichkeit, fast eine Zufälligkeit. Der Hörer vergißt über der Handlung das Kleid des Handelnden.” (Agricola, 304)

These episodes demonstrate similar methods: Amis arranges a “miracle” before entering the town, and then reveals it. This miracle consists of an ordinary occurrence, but one with no apparent cause, as if it had been pulled out of thin air; Amis hides a fish in a fountain, for

example, and guides his host into discovering it: a miracle! These simple methods lead to voluntary donations from his victims in excess of what they would have given to an ordinary priest. The damage reveals itself when the cheat degrades, after Amis has left – that is, as part of the aftermath itself. As in the more complex episodes, then, the humour is inherent in the very parts that reveal Amis's guilt.

In the episode that we shall call “The Resurrected Rooster,” Amis has a rooster killed for his dinner and then promises that the family's expense will be miraculously repaid before cockcrow (as the expense consists of the rooster, one might even say that it must necessarily be repaid before cockcrow). Amis has taken care to examine this rooster in secret before making his presence known to the family and sent an accomplice to buy a second just like theirs. When he enters the house, the replacement is already concealed among his personal effects. After the family has gone to bed, Amis literally acts in darkness, and places his own rooster back in the farm yard.

*Do daz leute slafen quam,
sinen han er her fur nam,
den er in der bare het
und liez in an die selben stat,
do iener han waz genumen. (965-9).*

Here, Amis accomplishes his illusion by an uncharacteristically non-social strategy, that of sneaking around at night. This strategy surfaces again only in the Credulous Provost episode. In most of the others, Amis prefers psychological manipulation to sleight of hand, but even sneaking around maintains the *Amis's* theme of combining incongruous apparent and hidden situations.

Amis uses his external holiness not to give spiritual well-being, but to get earthly wealth, and his identity signals congenial responses in his prospective victims. When he arrives at the *wirt's* house in the rooster episode, for example, “*Durch sin groze heilikeit / was si im des dienstes vil bereit,*” (939-40). Not only does he receive preferential treatment for his status as *pfaffe*, but this social identity makes his lies harder for the socialized person to question, as the holy man deals in matters of faith. It is forbidden to test God. Rules aside, Amis's real/artificial identity is that of a trustworthy individual. Traditionally, the holy individual prevents automatic behaviour and

promotes discipline, providing good advice to protect spiritual well-being, but Amis dons this disguise to perform the opposite function, generating automatic behaviour for his own selfish ends. The real/artificial holy man continues his miraculous career in another short episode, which we shall call “Amis the Prophet.” In this episode, he arrives in town as a holy man, but with a rare skill: this prophet has otherworldly knowledge, on top of his earthly learning. Röcke confirms that this identity opens doors for the priest: “Nur zu schnell wird Amis in diesem Milieu als *heilic man* anerkannt, gepriesen und weiterempfohlen, so daß es für ihn keiner großen Anstrengung bedarf, solche gegenspieler übers Ohr zu hauen.” (Röcke, 74)

In light of the usefulness of his *pfaffe* identity, it is not surprising that Amis takes on other identities when his purposes diverge, and he changes his role as easily as he changes costumes. Amis has acted as a painter and a doctor without credentials, and will go on to become a servant and an unskilled layman. With few exceptions, other characters follow the scripts associated with these assumed identities, and his performance in that role is always adequate. According to Williams, these costume changes are par for the trickster course: “The costumes worn by tricksters often associate them with certain skills, as was evident in Amis’s presentation of himself as artist and doctor. When Amis appears as a priest his victims consider his ability to perform miracles a professional skill and also believe him to be morally incorruptible.” (Williams, *Tricksters*, 70).

One activity that is often expected of a holy man is the holy miracle, such as the one in “The Resurrected Rooster.” Kalkhofen sums up Amis’s method of miracle production as the conversion of ordinary objects to ones that, in the apparent realm, are accepted as miraculous. “In allen Fällen besteht die Tätigkeit des Pfaffen darin, den Anschein von Wundern zu erzeugen, wo es keine gibt, um Geld einzunehmen; wissentlich veranstaltet er dasjenige auf irdische Weise, was er nachher fälschlich als wunderbar ausgibt” (Kalkhofen, 138). The earthly is made to appear miraculous. This miraculization is usually (but by no means always) made possible by visible appearances. What one can “see with one’s own eyes” is what has been satisfactorily demonstrated, and Amis is a master of producing visible situations that do not match their hidden counterparts.

Prophet Amis sends servants into town to inquire about a particularly rich and foolish citizen, and they write down these details in a letter, which is delivered to the “prophet” in secret.

*Swa er des nahtes bi dem wirte saz,
 so hette er einen kneht ie,
 der in ein ander hus gie
 unde vragte der mere,
 wie manich jar des were,
 daz der wirt die vrowen nam
 und wie dicke er zu Rome quam (1022-8)*

He studies these details before entering the town and happening upon the person in question, then feeds back this information, along with predictions for the future: he and his family will be rich, and live long lives, and go straight to heaven when they die: “*Da wider sait er in fur war, / si wurden alt und riche / und furen danne geliche / zu himel in einem tage.*” (1062-5). The individual, named only as the host, entertains Amis lavishly and has his family donate to him all that they ever intended to give to the church. Amis leaves with the goods, which are so plentiful, the narrator assures us, that the loss takes the family ten years to recover.

The victims' credulity is here (and elsewhere) powered by wishful thinking. Victims cheerfully accept Amis's flattery: “*Si wanten, er wer ein wissage. / Des geloubten si vil sere.*” (1066-7) The predictions themselves are highly auspicious, promising the sort of events they might hope to see in their futures. The easier and more pleasant it is to consider Amis a prophet, the more likely the townspeople are to do so; it is easier to talk someone into doing something enjoyable, and it is enjoyable to believe that all is well. With the resurrected rooster, the farmer is told that he has been privy to a real miracle, which is exciting, and even has some value thrown in in the form of a first-class private mass and a promise of eternal life: “*Swaz si ubeles hetten getan, / swie vil gesundet heten bi ir leben, / daz wart in allez da vergeben.*” (1008-10). He affirms their most wishful assumptions about the world; in the reading-donkey episode, the defeated bishop also walks away pleased: “*Des wart der bisschof harte vro.*” (301). Michael Schilling points out how significant a change of heart this pleasure represents: It is odd that the bishop should be pleased with an event that protects his desired victim. “So ist die große Freude, die der Bischof über die Lernfortschritte des Esels bekundet, nicht recht verständlich, da sie sich schwer mit der unsprünghlichen Absicht verträgt, Amis eine unerfüllbare Aufgabe zu stellen.” (Schilling, 191) Although he had originally hoped to ruin Amis, he changes his mind very drastically and, unreasonably, departs contented with his own defeat.

The practical side of producing miracles is simple: maintain a clear and obvious disconnection between the event and its source. Amis uses accomplices for these miracles. While they represent the active, hidden side, he becomes the apparent side, of the same actor. The hidden side of Amis seeks information that the apparent side can give back in a public show. The prophet's information is contained in a letter, which not everyone can read and is probably sealed anyway, a more secret means of communication than a conversation. Keeping the connection between himself and the information gathering hidden, he enters the stage, armed with his information. There is no mention of suspicion on the part of the victims, and neither the source of the information nor the veracity of Amis's claims is investigated.

In the "Faith Healer" episode, where Amis sends some artificial cripples to town and comes in to "heal" them, both Amis and his helpers are on stage at the same time, but as no connection has been implied, nobody seems to suspect one. The villagers might assume that a fake cripple would have interest in remaining an apparent cripple, evident in his having taken the trouble to fake it in the first place. So the healing (and thus the cripples) must be legitimate!

As he has done in the other holy-miracle episodes, Amis creates an apparent situation that follows an existing script, in which the holy man arrives, heals the sick and lame, and departs. The easiest apparent situation is one that exists before the cheater arrives. He knows how to exploit characters' built-in preconceptions, and can create a biblical plague for those who will look for one.

In the "Burning Cloth" episode, Amis receives a bolt of cloth from a particularly gullible noblewoman. He suspects that her husband, a knight, will ride out after him as soon as he finds out, and prepares a to put on a miraculous show for the knight's benefit. Removing the cloth on the inside of the bolt, he stuffs it with glowing embers. When the knight arrives and demands it back, Amis co-operatively hands him the prepared bolt and continues on his way. The knight is horrified to find that his property has set itself on fire, and, repentant, tracks down Amis and gives him further donations.

The knight's panic comes not from the sudden realization that he is holding a burning object, but the implication that he might have crossed a holy man, thus attracting the apparent, and conveniently untestable, wrath of God. The script was written for Amis before he arrived on the scene. Rather than simply a dazzling event with an unknown cause, it has become miraculous

because of the knight's superstitious association of the concepts of *priest* and *divine protection*. Connections with holiness induce people to act without thinking: the emphasis is on faith, after all, not analysis.

No investigation is made of Amis's many miracles. Preconceptions grounded in religion make more powerful blinds than other apparent situations because the victims are equipped with an assortment of handy Biblical tales and other popular stories. It is not difficult for them to apply this pre-formed script to similar life events. Röcke writes that the instant gratification that he accomplishes lends these episodes their air of the miraculous: "Was man wünscht, hat man – eine aus Märchen und Legende vertraute Erfahrung – auch schon in der Hand. Der Wunsch selbst und sein Gegenstand, Subjekt und Objekt des Wunsches sind noch nicht getrennt. Diese wohl noch magischen Denkformen entstammende Identität von Vorstellung und Besitz eines Gegenstandes ist in der Volksfrömmigkeit des Mittelalters als Wunderüberzeugung erhalten geblieben" (Röcke, 73). Schilling argues that this pre-scripted activity is more effective even than the visual effects of the cheat: "So wird die >Auferstehung des Hahns< für die Bäuerin nicht nur durch das gleiche Aussehen der beiden Vögel zu einem wahrhaften Wunder, sondern vor allem, weil die legendenhaften Berichte von >Bratwundern< dem Glauben and die Möglichkeit eines derartigen Geschehens bereits vorgearbeitet haben." (Schilling, 197).

In the holy-miracle episodes, Amis uses his traditional societal role as if it were an artificial costume. With no priestly virtues but intelligence, education and the ability to put on a good show, Amis's priesthood functions exclusively externally, that is, as a disguise like any of his other disguises. The townspeople want to believe in Amis; believing that he is a holy prophet allows them to believe other things that they would like to be true: that they have witnessed a miracle, or that all will be well for them. All decide that Amis is what he seems to be, and respond as if he were. He has produced an apparent situation and gained acceptance for it simply by making it attractive.

Amis's letter from his assistants, an object representing their unusually high education and community status, here serves quite ordinary and base deception. This piece of writing, normally a tool of learning and preserving truth, is used to generate ignorance and misconceptions; Amis's intentions, wrapped as they are in an equally respectable body, are just as incongruous.

4.9 The Cloth Merchant

The two final cheats contrast sharply with the first episode. The money-hungry priest travels to Constantinople and cheats two merchants out of huge sums, indeed their entire livelihoods, a crime that recalls what the bishop has attempted against Amis in the first place. In both episodes, and only in these episodes, violence is used and extensive storytelling takes place after the priest has left the scene, depicting more vividly the damage that he causes. If they represent an escalating criminality, these two final episodes will distinguish themselves in other ways, as well: longer and more complex than their predecessors, and set in a different location, they have much more in common with each other than they do with the rest. Amis takes more money, with less justification from the narrator – no more mention of his original motivation, of keeping up his household, is offered here to mitigate his greed. These episodes, particularly in conjunction with the first, seem designed to lead more smoothly to a justifiable repentance.

We have observed above several similarities between villain and fool. In some cases no distinction is possible; victims like the adulterous women or, depending on one's interpretation, the sick courtiers can be blinded by self-interest and therefore made vulnerable by it. But this lack of moral force in determining the victim can work both ways: if it is no worse to cheat a fool than to cheat a scoundrel, then is it no better to cheat a scoundrel than to cheat a fool? The escalating seriousness of the cheats, the increasing amount of money concerned, and the appearance of violence make these episodes more part of an ongoing crescendo than a new piece altogether. Amis does not become evil. Amis remains Amis, only more so than before.

In the first of the two, which we shall call "The Fabric Dealer," Amis convinces a foolish local *murer* that he can make him a bishop if only he will obey him for three days and say nothing but *deiswar*, "that is true." He then takes his bishop to a fabric shop and purchases the entire stock, on the *murer's* guarantee. He takes away the fabric, leaving the "purchaser" behind as surety. When he creates a decoy, Amis can make certain assertions with hidden meanings, such as his guarantee that the bishop is an honest customer; "*Min here koufet ane var.*" (1595) He probably is, although he is not the customer in this case. Amis shifts responsibility for the payment to someone else. Is he really stealing from the "bishop," and not from the merchant? In the bishop, Amis has produced a disposable persona that will be accepted as the real actor, with him as an extension. He can thus act in private while everyone monitors the bishop's honesty.

Amis also controls the merchant's defensive behaviours, and the false bishop remains obedient to Amis's instructions for an extended period after the priest has left. His success in this effort, and indeed all of his others, depends on his understanding of the victim's motivations, because what he understands, he can control. Ragotzky compares him to the monster in *Daniel von dem blühenden Tal* that makes people into mindless slaves: both rob their victims of sense and cause them to behave automatically. "Dort kann der rote, kahle Mann nur deshalb sein blutrünstiges Werk vollziehen, weil er zuvor seine Opfer ihres Willens beraubt und zu *toren* macht. Hier weisen sich die Kranken mit der Absage an jedes eigenständige Deuten und Handeln, mit dem Verzicht auf das Recht auf *widersatz*, selbst den *toren*-Status zu." (Ragotzky, 157). Keeping eyes on prize can make one trip over obstacles on the path. The cloth merchant ignores everything but the possibility of making money, so he is blind to the dangers he undertakes¹⁰³. His pleasure at his arrangement with Amis is clear and immediate: *Daz begonde dem wirte wol behagen*. (1575). Things appear to be going the way he wants them, and after Amis has left, the merchant resists evidence to the contrary. It is the merchant who starts making excuses for Amis, as annoyed and suspicious as he is.

*Do im niman niht brahte
noch ze bringen gedachte.
Daz wart im harte swere.
"Wo ist ewer kamerere
also lange?" sprach er.
"Ich wen, er wil daz silber her
bringen morgen bi dem tage.
Er wirket anders, daz ich sage,
ezn sei niht sin wille gar."* (1621-9).

¹⁰³ "Er kann nichts begreifen, weil sein Erkenntnisdefekt gerade darin besteht, daß er die Vermehrung von *guot* zum einzigen Wertmaßstab seines Handelns gemacht hat. Eine solche Verabsolutierung aber macht ihn zur Marionette seines Besitzstrebens, das unweigerlich im finanziellen Ruin endet." (Ragotzky, 162)

The merchant keeps a good face on things as suspicions mount. He does not wish to look as if he has been cheated any more than he wishes to feel that way, and he will avoid it as long as there is still some possibility that the deal is legitimate. He speaks to the bishop *In einer vreuntlicher clage* (1645). He even goes so far as to worry about the bishop's wasted time, saying politely, *Ich furchte, der tak si euch ze swar.*" (1655).

Unwilling to believe that he has been cheated, the increasingly uncomfortable merchant asks questions more frequently, desiring to know whether Amis intends to return the next day, or later. Disconcerted, but still convinced to say only *deiswar*, the false bishop responds to all of the merchant's questions in the affirmative. Finally the merchant begins accusing him of stealing, to which the bishop also gives an affirmative response. The *murer* clearly does not display any motivation to make the cheat work. He gains nothing from it, and has no motivation to trick the merchant. Like the donkey, he is merely obeying, automatically, in exchange for Amis's empty promise. Because his responses are automatic, rather than deliberately dishonest, they can expose the cheat as well as perpetuate it. When the fabric merchant complains:

*“ich weiz, wi ich gebaren sol
vor leide”, sprach der wirt,
“daz mir daz silber niht enwirt.
Ich wene, ewer kamerere
umb so kleines gut verbere
und daz euch immer mide ein jar.”* (1662-7).

the false bishop continues to respond predictably: *Do sprach der bisschof: “Daz ist war.”* (1668). Instead of lying to protect himself, the *murer* draws trouble that should be meant for Amis. According to Kalkhofen, he gains nothing as Amis's agent. In fact, the better he follows the trickster's directions, the more personal loss he incurs:

Die Figur des Maurers muß einsehen, daß es für sie in Wirklichkeit kein Bistum geben wird (vv 2007-2015); dazu gehört ihr Eingeständnis, überaus dumm gewesen zu sein (vv 2016-2019). Und es ist mit diesem Eingeständnis der Schwäche, daß sie zugleich weiteren Schlägen entgeht, also der Drohung gehorcht. Die Nebenfiguren der Episoden 3 und 4 reagieren auf die Drohung, Leben und Ehre zu verlieren, gerade umgekehrt, indem sie nicht die Wahrheit

sagen, sondern über die Wahrheit, ihre vermeintliche Schwäche lügen. Das ist, was sie nach dem Willen des Helden und der Erzählung in dieser Situation sollen. (Kalkhofen, 188).

As the butt of the joke, Amis's victims exist for our entertainment, and they suffer for it. The *murer*, or false bishop, may seem different from the rest with his naive honesty and good will, but as a fool, he must suffer like the others. With the exception of the adulterous women and the doctor in the jewel episode below, all of Amis's *affen* suffer for their foolishness; it is simply the way of the world that a fool will suffer, as in the Stricker's shorter comic verses, the *maeren*. The *murer's* suffering is used to produce joy in the listeners. To hear of the priest cheating a member of one's own class may not be so insulting as one might think; the ill-treatment of the fools may even provide added value. Kalkhofen has a similar argument: "Es entsteht nämlich keine Trauer in der Anteilnahme am Leiden Unschuldiger, sondern Schadenfreude am Unglück derer, die es diesmal erwischt hat." (Kalkhofen, 198). With this sort of reception, a trickster like Amis can be "bad" and still qualify as "good."

After Amis escapes, the false bishop has served his purpose and may be discarded, but he can still only answer in the affirmative. When finally the situation cannot be denied, the merchant admits that the servant has stolen his goods. He is not willing to relinquish his previous beliefs any more than necessary, though, and continues to assume that this otherwise-apparent idiot is still a bishop, an assumption that allows for possible recovery of his money. He ignores the possibility that the theft might be under the control of the party who has escaped, and blames the "bishop" for his financial ruin: "*Herre, swaz ich ie gewan, / daz hat er so gar da hin, / daz ich gar vertriben bin.* (1712-14). Once he has been told the truth, the merchant can understand it, but deliberately chooses to ignore it, as his primary interest in the false bishop is as guarantor of the money that he is owed.

Ditz was dem wirte swere.

"Er ist niht ein murere",

sprach er, "sam mir der lip min.

Er muz mir ein bisschof sin,

untz er mir gibt, daz er mir sol.

Dar nach gan ich im wol,

*daz er ein murer wese
sam daz er singe oder lese.” (1739-46)*

Not wanting to have been deceived, the merchant is resisting the new evidence. The *murer* cannot disengage from this situation unassisted, but is restored to the use of thought by a friendly citizen's offer to get him out of his situation, which has become unbearable, and he jumps at the opportunity. These two men must engage the merchant in a long conversation, though, as the fabric dealer refuses to believe their testimony. Constant insistence, expensive costuming, the automatic responses of others toward the august personage of a bishop, and simple greed have compounded with personal investment to insulate the *murer's* false identity against outside evidence, making the apparent identity appear so real that even the *murer* is fooled. He really does become a bishop, if one's social place is determined by how one is treated by others.

*Wan er mich so sere erte
und mich zu herren hete genumen,
des want ich, ich wer ze eren bekumen.
Was mir eren da von geschach,
daz er min zu eren jach,
des want ich immer wesen vro (1780-85).*

The *murer's* applied identity decays, rather than vanishes, leaving confusing vestiges behind. Unable to disengage from this role, he good-naturedly attempts to use his new social status to solve the problem: *Nu zeiget mir min bischtum / Ich swer euh einen eit, / ich vergelde euch vil bereit.* (1810-13). Residual bishopness remains to the end; his sense of his own identity has been damaged: *Ich weiz nu niht recht, wer ich bin* (1792), and the *murer* makes his promise conditional: *Hat mir der Kaplan gelogen, / seht, so sit ir betrogen.* (1813-14) because he sees himself half in one role and half in the other. He is temporarily unable to function normally in either.¹⁰⁴ By the time the *murer* is able to convince the merchant that he is not connected to Amis, the priest has escaped.

¹⁰⁴ Similarly, in the Juwelenhändler episode, the jeweller's social identity also depends on how he is treated by other people. Like the *murer* who suddenly finds himself halfway to being a

We know that the fabric merchant owns a pair of dishonest scales meant for cheating customers, so he probably does cheat his customers: *Sin selbes wage er gewan / und ein gloet also stark, / daz er wol die zwelf mark / an die einleften wack* (1612-15). The scales designate him as a habitual cheater, for whom the idea of cheating his customers is agreeable and attractive. This predisposition makes him vulnerable to Amis when, faced with an apparent fool, he assumes that he has the upper hand. He drops his guard, accepting Amis's story readily enough that he permits him to take away the goods without first having paid. The situation is particularly favourable for a merchant who is accustomed to cheating his customers: Amis gives the merchant an opportunity to name his price after the deal has been made. While it is the sort of situation that the merchant might like to be in, it would seem suspicious if he were not so eager for such a chance. After the priest's and *murer's* performances, this merchant is happy to assume that the ruinous offer is legitimate, and does not consider the possibility of other, less desirable, situations.

bishop, the jeweller is placed in the costume of a madman, with a physical mutilation, his shorn hair, to match it. He looks mad, he is treated as if he were mad, and he must pay for the treatment that has “cured” him or continue to be considered mad. This assigned identity is as true as it needs to be:

*Daz tet im als allez sin leben
durch die schande so we,
daz in daz laster mute me,
danne im der schade tete,
swie er si beide hete.* (2232-6).

The jeweller says that the doctor has treated him in such a shameful manner that he will always be shamed, complaining more about the damage to his identity than about the devastating financial loss that he has suffered at Amis's hands; through identity modification, the getaway has caused more damage than the crime by artificially undermining the jeweller's identity.

But he also has some less obvious flaws, such as his freedom with other people's money. His pecuniary greed and his lack of perceptiveness prevent him from questioning Amis's decoy until it is too late. In a contrast sharp enough to recall Amis's *milte* motivation, he gains money not to spend it on others, but to keep it; his hospitality comes with an invoice, although both he and Amis can be said to entertain at others' expense:

*Des morgens was die spise
bereit wol zu prise
uf des bisschofes schaden.
Die burger begunde er dar laden,
sine vreunt, der er schone pflac.*(1635-9).

As he can say only one thing, the false bishop cannot possibly have been consulted regarding this expense, and no such consultation is mentioned. Yet the joke is on the merchant, who will ultimately have to pay for this hospitality himself; his profligacy with other people's money has carried over to drain his own funds.

If the fabric merchant is a scoundrel, then is Amis, who stands opposed to him, a sympathetic character? What standards have been set for other characters in this story, like the *murer*? This unwitting accomplice involuntarily acts on Amis's behalf, distracting his victim while the priest makes his getaway, but he is not condemned because he remains sympathetic: "Der falsche Bischof hat damit die Lacher auf seiner Seite, der betrogene Kaufmann aber verharret weiter in ohnmächtigem Zorn." (Ragotzky, 162). He is sympathetic, then, because he is amusing; Amis's victims are made into clowns. This one is obviously "good," having attempted to remedy the situation, but his status as a sympathetic character derives more from the ironic humour in what he says, and from its contrast with the cheated fabric merchant's incoherent rage.

Amis's victim is not evil or greedy, and yet the audience is prompted to respond with joy to his suffering. The *murer* is not alone in his position as Amis's unwitting puppet; constantly in need of an agent to produce a situation with which he can disconnect himself, Amis has recruited many unwitting accomplices already. The king, the peasant host with the rooster and the sick courtiers, for example, are all used to disseminate information on Amis's behalf, but without being associated with him. Choosing the *murer* to act as his agent after his departure extends this strategy: the *murer* not only spreads a story that does not appear to be motivated by Amis, but

performs an action that does not appear to be motivated by Amis, that of purchasing the fabric, and even attracts the consequences of the cheat to himself.

The fabric merchant shows as much wishful thinking as the victims in the biblical-miracle episodes; when forced to admit that Amis has lied to him, he is unwilling to discount all of the information that he got from Amis, and continues to assume that the bishop is real. He has every reason to doubt the bishop, but, as it was for the peasants when they met the false prophet, it is simply more pleasant, or less painful, to believe Amis's story. Even when part of the story is undermined, the power of wishful thinking keeps the rest of it intact for as long as possible.

4.10 The Jeweller

In the second episode, which we shall call “The Jeweller,” Amis offers to purchase a jewel merchant's entire stock if he will deliver it to his place of residence for a small additional fee. The jeweller suspects Amis at first, dismissing his question about the price of his goods as spurious (which it is): *“Wie gebt irs alle, di ir hat?” / Er sprach: “Zwar die rede lat. / Ir muget si, so ich wenen wil, / vergelten niht. Ir ist zu vil.”* (1865-8). He gains interest when Amis pretends to be a high roller, reassuring the dealer that he has the money for the jewels and is serious: *Daz ich zu euch gedinget han, / des ist niht also vil, / als ich noch koufen wil.”* (1924-6).

The dealer certainly considers himself very shrewd, but shows more wishful thinking than superior business acumen. He decides that Amis can indeed pay for the jewels, apparently making the assumption simply because he bargains with him. His succeeds at getting a good price, and Amis's ambitious promises, also make the story easier to swallow. *“Ir dunket mich”, sprach der koufman, / “so frum, als ich erkennen kan, / daz ich euh des koufes wil jehen. / Got laz euch wol dar zu geschehen”* (1901-4). Making the jewel merchant think that he is getting a good deal produces a flattering situation that the victim would like to believe; still, like the fabric merchant, the jewel dealer will not allow Amis simply to leave with the unpaid goods, even after making the deal:

*zu sinen knappen er do sprach,
daz si die steine truegen hin.*

*Do sprach der koufman wider in:
 “Ich wil si nindert tragen lan,
 e ich daz gelt enpfangen han.” (1908-12)*

Amis offers a new deal: the merchant is to deliver the goods to Amis's place of residence, where, he promises, the landlord will measure out the payment to ensure that the scales are honest. Now flatteringly convinced that he will definitely not be cheated, the jeweller consents, and Amis promises extra money twice, once for coming along (1930-1) and again to ensure that the dealer is satisfied with the scales. This dealer had still been credulous when faced with a suspiciously serendipitous occasion. He is not trying to cheat Amis, but only interested in earning a gratuity. There is no hint of suspicion remaining in the description of his inner thoughts when he departs for Amis's quarters, but only an assertion that *Der rede wart sin vreude stark*. (1945).

When the merchant arrives at the specified location, Amis's servants capture him, tie him up, and steal the jewels. These actions are more effective because they are unexpected and invisible. Amis and his accomplices do not waylay the jeweller on the road at night, but lure him into a private and apparently safe place, lowering his defences along with their risk of being observed. The useful factor is not the outward appearance of the house, or even the thugs hidden inside, but the linking of these deceptively different situations; as in all the other cheats, unacknowledged truth remains true, and when the truth is not acknowledged, it becomes more difficult for a victim to respond to it. Rather than gathering material weapons to make them stronger, Amis has been strengthening his thugs by protecting them from the public view:

*Do er wider in die stat quam
 und die herberge nam,
 da liez er nieman innen sin
 wan sich und daz gesinde sin.
 Und sag eu, wa von daz geschach:
 Er tetz durch ir gemach,
 daz si sich selben dester baz
 bewarten und allez daz,
 daz si dar heten bracht. (1841-49)*

To facilitate his getaway, Amis pays a doctor to “treat” his victim, informing him in advance that the man is his father, who has developed a morbid obsession with the idea that Amis is a stranger who owes him money. He claims to be desperate, offering the doctor a huge sum, half in advance and half upon completion of the treatment, and he hands over the money. The doctor is glad to believe this story over the victim's own; he shaves the patient's head, strips him to his undergarments and proceeds to torture him with so-called treatments. Meanwhile, Amis escapes.

The doctor entertains no suspicion that Amis might be lying to him as Amis has again molded his victims' opinions before things started to get suspicious. This strategy is demonstrated in every episode, particularly here, in the doctor's office, where statements are made to mean their exact opposite. Amis knows that the captive will try to explain everything to the doctor who imprisons him, so he must turn this evidence of his criminality into evidence of his truthfulness, before it is submitted. In this case, all he has to do is define these protestations to the the doctor as symptoms of the disease:

*Im ist rechte ein tobesucht
kumen in daz houbet,
die hat in so betoubet,
daz er, sit iz im geschach,
zu mir anders niht sprach
wan: ‘Herre, geldet mir min gut.’
Swaz man sprichet oder tut,
so heizet er im gelten. (2002-9).*

His prior explanation both makes it plausible for the jeweller to be tied up and also prevents his escape, giving Amis time to set sail. The doctor already considers the jeweller insane, thus devaluing his testimony before he can speak. The doctor responds with reinforced certainty that Amis is speaking the truth. It is at this point that the priest's understanding of the workings of others' minds becomes essential. The jeweller's protest is exactly what Amis predicted.

*“Herre, helfet mir dar zu,
daz ich minen vreunden kunt tu
die not, die mir dirre man tut.”
Ich gab im heute min gut*

ze koufen, als er mich bat.
Ich han hus in dirre stat,
Do ers hin heim holte
und mirs vergelten solte,
so was da nimant danne ich.
Do vieng er unde bant mich
und hat mir nach den tot getan. (2053-63)

Far from ignoring the jeweller's pleading and reasoning, the doctor accepts it as evidence supporting his preferred take on the situation: *Er liez es niht durch sin gebet. / Er wolte in sinnrich machen.* (2136-7). The jeweller even produces evidence that he is not lying, instructing the doctor to send to his "son" for payment. When he discovers that Amis has disappeared, the new information is interpreted selectively, in a way that preserves what the doctor believed before and allows him to assume that he has not been tricked. He exclaims angrily that he will blind the father in order to shame the son who cares so little about his own family: "*sit er sinen vater so lat, / so wil ich in da mit schenden / und wil euch iezu blenden.*" (2186-8). He takes out his anger on the victim, as the fabric merchant does with the *murer*.

The doctor, typecast as a vulture preying on other people's desperation, has been offered whatever he asks by Amis, whom he hopes not to cheat, but at least to exploit. Amis has told a convincing story of desperation; as it has already exhausted his fortune, the cure for his father's illness has become worth a great deal of money to him: *wir geben euch, swez ir gert* (1991). In his willingness to exploit the desperation of others, the doctor is both malicious (punishable) and deceived (cheatable), two characteristics shared by most victims, but he is in fact paid for his services; the deceived doctor is, in fact, unique among the victims in receiving money from Amis's own hand. If he has supported good by defeating the bishop, Amis has supported evil by ensuring that this doctor gets paid, and found his way to the opposite side of the moral spectrum without making significant changes to his actions. Although he is never held accountable by the narrative, Böhm explains how Amis goes too far in the Constantinople episodes, and how the extent of his damage is not measurable in financial terms:

Der Erzähler betont das doppelte Leid des Händlers, der nicht nur seinen ganzen
 Besitz eingebüßt hat, sondern auch sein ganzes Ansehen und Selbstwertgefühl,

weil er gezwungen wurde, auch die “Behandlung” zu bezahlen. Von einem gemeinschaftlichen, verlachenden Ertragen der Verluste und der Schande, wie in den anfänglichen Episoden am französischen Königshof und beim Herzog von Lothringen, ist hier nichts mehr zu spüren. Vielmehr nehmen sich die Opfer noch gegenseitig aus. (Böhm, 222).

The results of his actions are characteristic of those of a villain. Not only does he cause damage to every community he comes in contact with, but he has been treated (spuriously) as a sort of Pandora’s box of deceit¹⁰⁵. We are expected to align ourselves with him, anyway, and thus with his *liegen und triegen*. Although it is not an end, but rather a means, his use of trickery to hurt others is still depicted as a sin. Böhm writes: “Es wird vom Stricker keine blinde Wahrheitsliebe gepredigt, dennoch wird der Versuch, anderen durch Verstellung vorsätzlich zu schaden, als Sünde bezeichnet.” (Böhm, 76). Though he does not emphasize it the way the *maeren* do, the Stricker does not spare us from learning about the damage that Amis does. Part of the priest’s success is escaping the fallout of his cheats, so a full account must include some of the fallout that must be escaped, even if it does cast additional discredit onto the trickster. We see how much he gets from his rich and foolish victims, but we also see them suffering as a result, for example, with the credulous farmers, who pay him so much “*daz iz in schadete zehen jar.*” (1061).

Ragotzky defends Amis's harmful actions as a form of nemesis, and reminds us that many of the priest’s victims consciously enter a game in which they know it is possible to lose. “Amis >>erlöst<< die Leute von dem *guot*, das sie zu Unrecht besitzen, weil sie kein Erkenntnisvermögen haben. Er mobilisiert mit seinem *liegen und triegen* ihr *liegen und triegen* und macht sie damit zu dem, was sie eigentlich sind, er identifiziert sie als Toren.” (Ragotzky, 166). Justice is not the issue here, but rather a sort of competition for resources, in which the

¹⁰⁵ “Amis fügt seinen Mitmenschen bewußt Schaden zu und spielt sogar eine Weile mit ihnen, alles auf für den Leser amüsanter-unterhaltsame Weise. Im Prolog des AMIS wird dagegen gerade Lug und Trug für den Sitten- und Kulturverfall verantwortlich gemacht.” (Böhm, 76)

situation that Amis combats, the concurrence of fool and his money, is *unrecht*, and to be undone.

The doctor abuses his prisoner, marking members of his profession as scoundrels: does this make Amis responsible for his violence, as he has hired a known scoundrel? The doctor, at least, seems to be conscious of the pain that he causes, describing future “treatment” in what sounds more like a threat, and giving his captive patient the alternative of playing along. This order is similar to Amis’s threat to kill the sickest person, in which situation he himself is the doctor. Doctors, it seems, are more closely associated with violence in this universe than is the trickster himself.

Having been threatened, the jeweller does co-operate: he must swear a false oath to escape, just as the sick courtiers did, but Amis himself never uses violence to compel others. The closest he comes to actual violent force is when he has the jeweller captured, and here he has others do the work on his behalf. Though he does not himself engage in the violent act, he does directly order it at the time it is committed. The servants are his agents when they attack:

*Zu sinen knappen er do sprach,
do si in daz hus quamen,
daz si den koufman namen
und in vil vaste bunden
und heimlichen überwunden,
daz sin niman innen wart.
An im wart ouch bewart,
daz er niht schreien mochte. (1958-65).*

Amis causes real violence only in these two longer final cheats, but he must know that he does so. Having played the grim, horrifying doctor himself, he must understand that his hired doctor will be grim and horrifying. Similarly, a character so skilled in predicting the actions and motivations of others ought to be able to predict severe repercussions for the jeweller and false bishop. Though the acts are not performed by his own hand, he is as much an agent of the *murer's* received beating and the jeweller's humiliation as if he had ordered them himself.

When the jeweller finally gives in to his demands and claims to be cured, the doctor responds as if he had worked a miraculous cure, and looks forward with joy to being paid for it:

*“Nu lob ich”, sprach der arzat,
 “den got, der uns geschaffen hat,
 daz ich euh sinnick han gemacht.
 Ditz was ein selige nacht,
 daz ir habet ewern sin
 und ich rich worden pin.” (2171-76).*

Satisfied, then, the doctor still refuses to release the jeweller until he sends for his wife, who brings payment for the “treatment.” Just as the fabric merchant clung to Amis's story, the doctor clings to it now: the jeweller was insane and is now sane, and owes him a large sum for the transition. Unlike the fabric merchant, though, he is never forced to give up the illusion. It is for the worst miscreant among his dupes that the priest's tempting lie is made reality.

4.11 Foreignness and Victims in the Greek Episodes

The jeweller, though manipulated by greed, is not nearly as guilty as the fabric merchant. He shows that he knows better, but is eventually blinded by Amis's persistence and promises of a gratuity, which Wailes views as a significant moral flaw: “Wegen seiner Gier auf nur zwei Mark rennt der Juwelenhändler in die für ihn vorbereitete Falle und verliert seine ganze Habe” (Wailes, 238). I believe that Wailes's opinion exaggerates significantly in the interest of finding dramatic symmetry where there need be none. The fabric merchant, as the less-honest victim, is easier to manipulate. Amis does not play the fool for the jeweller the way he does for the fabric merchant. As his attempts never fail, we must assume that he always selects the most effective method, and the role of the easily-cheated fool works on the fabric merchant, but not on the jeweller. The jeweller is simply less villainous than the fabric merchant, and this difference may influence their relative placement, allowing Amis's criminality to increase with every new episode.

On the other hand, Amis may not need a guilty victim in Constantinople. Are the final two cheats more acceptable because Amis is in a foreign country? He has travelled a long distance from England when he meets the fabric and jewel dealers. Besides the obvious difficulties that local law enforcement efforts would have in finding a foreigner who had immediately left for his own

country (*Parzival*'s Clinschor, for example, is never found again, and Reinhart Fuchs makes selective absences a mainstay of his own survival), and the lack of familial or friendship ties to violate, his foreign victims may be somewhat disqualified from audience sympathy. Christian laws dictate that the outsider is one's neighbour, but practicality, particularly in medieval society, dictates that a character owes nothing to anyone without some sort of kinship tie, and a conflict of interest is highly probable.

Gerd Althoff writes in *Family, Friends and Followers* that the formation of friendship ties was necessary for obtaining the protection of others: "It was actually in the interests of almost all people to be part of as large a network as possible, by belonging to as many groups as possible. Such bonds guaranteed protection and help in every possible area of life. After all, medieval society was hostile." (Althoff, *Family*, 7) The foreigner, on the other hand, has the least possible connection, producing the lowest possible level of sympathy. The possibility that a foreigner may not be Christian puts even the Christian imperative of mutual support at a convenient distance; pagans are there to be converted, killed, or made use of, and any author who says otherwise, such as Wolfram von Eschenbach in his *Parzival* or *Willehalm*, will take care to provide the audience with a compelling reason, implying that this approach is not automatically expected. In *Diu Klage*, another anonymous author's contribution to the *Nibelungenlied*, in which loose ends are tied up for characters who do not necessarily need completion, we find no mention of what becomes of one key character, and a king, Etzel. Müller explains that Etzel is not interesting because he is an outsider, and not even Christian. A non-Christian exists outside the ordinary field of view: "Indem die ‚Klage‘ das absolute Ende des Epos nicht akzeptiert und doch Etzel ein ruhmloses Ende bereitet, füllt sie die Leere, die für ein christliches Bewußtsein die *alten mæren* aufgerissen haben, mit Sinn auf: Die Grenzen der Welt fallen mit den Grenzen der Christenheit zusammen" (Müller, 121). When Amis leaves his cultural world and sails for another (albeit a Christian one), he leaves the "normal" world, and anything that he does "out there" is unlikely to influence events "back here."

In Wolfram's *Parzival*, Gahmuret marries a queen in a land foreign to him, where Christianity is not practiced. He swears that this heathen queen, Belakane, will be his only beloved, but becomes restless and journeys away back to Christendom in search of adventure. He enters a tournament and distinguishes himself, only to learn that the prize is the hand of the local queen, Herzeloyde. On top of this embarrassing situation, messengers from a past lover, Arnive, arrive

and claim her right to him. These two competing queens are unwilling to recognize his marriage to Belakane, and the knight's repeated, and vehement, protestations are barely resisted or even acknowledged at all. Nobody is interested in what he might have done "out there." Placement within this structure of "out there" has made Belakane irrelevant to most of the other characters around Gahmuret. Wolfram's characteristic humanization of the heathen is lost on most of his characters, and Ampflise and Herzeloyde casually dismiss Belakane with a mention of their baptismal superiority (irrelevant to Gahmuret) and instead compete with each other. "Obwohl Gahmuret seiner Sehnsucht nach seiner ersten – bis dahin noch einzigen – Ehefrau freien Ausdruck lasst, einer Dame, die er, wie er selbst sagt, mehr als sein eigenes Leben liebt... sieht die christliche Herzeloyde in ihr keine bedrohliche Rivalin" (Membrives, 41). Her lack of Christianity is not necessarily the source of her undoing, though; Membrives is adamant about the true reason: she is a foreigner. Well beyond any of their friendship groups, and a non-member of their culture, she receives no protection from it. No loyalty is offered to the outsider: "Nicht ihr Heidentum, das sie ja bereit ist aufzugeben, wird der Königin aus Zazamanc hier zum verhängnisvollen Schicksal, sondern einfach ihre Fremdheit, ihre... Zugehörigkeit zu einer andersartigen Kultur, die äußerlich besonders klar durch ihre Hautfarbe zur Schau gestellt wird." (Membrives, 41). According to Membrives, this "out-there-ness" extends into the foreigner's own country: even in Zazamanc, Belakane remains a foreigner as far as Gahmuret is concerned, and the powerful queen worries that her unfamiliar manners might offend the unpropertied knight (Membrives, 41). Amis can, like Gahmuret, carry a microenvironment of his own culture with him, and any actions that he performs on foreign soil resist punishment because his own law does not extend so far "out there."

4.12 The Credulous Provost

In this episode, appended in only one manuscript, we find a different sort of Amis, but many of the same themes. Again Amis dresses up, this time as a layman, and arrives at a church to ask the provost for a position serving God. The provost puts him to work tending the sheep and, after the shepherd has distinguished himself through good behaviour and austere living, the impressed churchman places him in charge of the donation box, as well. Amis later claims to have been visited by an angel who has demanded that he preach a sermon. He deferentially hands the

matter over to the provost, who, he says, is holy and wise, and therefore capable of judging such matters. The provost agrees to test him, and Amis passes with flying colours: Amis can, indeed, perform a church service. The provost calls some higher-ranking churchmen, who come to the same conclusion. Amis is miraculous, and in fact better than an ordinary priest: though the quality of his sermons has not been mentioned before, they judge his to have been an unusually good one, and the sermons he begins preaching for the public are described as particularly beneficial to the souls of the audience. People come from miles around to hear this miracle man speak, and the church becomes rich. Having filled the donation box, Amis gets his superiors too drunk to resist a burglary and then steals the profits, taunting them (a highly uncharacteristic move that would fit better into *Reinhart Fuchs* than with the logical trickster priest) as he leaves. The provost, like the king, becomes the laughingstock of the community.

Here, Amis continues his trend of allowing the victim to make the decisions, while controlling or predicting what decisions he will make. All of the new roles that Amis assumes have been assigned to him by the Provost. He is accepted as a layman, then made a shepherd, then promoted to the care of the donation box. He is then announced as a miraculous saintly figure; never does he assume a role through his own agency.

The provost readily assumes the role of the holy man who can define a saint. In fact, he is strongly motivated to do so. Amis can give him control because he knows that the provost will be happy to assume that he is holy enough to have this saint sent to him, and in a relationship of superior and subordinate, no less. Amis plays up this sense of holiness, complimenting him before he announces the event: “*ir sit so getriu und so wis / daz ichz iu wol tuon kunt*. (Provost, 94-5). As a religious man, the provost will also tend toward conclusions with biblical parallels. The miraculous description of Amis's angelic “encounter” is just the thing that the provost has come to expect from literary descriptions of such revelations, confirming his preexisting concept of what a miracle would look like.

The priest makes his lie far more foolproof by allowing others to manufacture it. If a man enters and claims to be a shepherd, it takes very little mental strain to suspect him of being something else. If a man enters and you make him a shepherd, you will find it much more difficult to suspect him of being something else, as you are invested in the truth of this identity. This

avoidance of cognitive dissonance keeps him in his social role. Some of the guilt of deception is also transferred onto the Provost, who has put Amis in his place.

According to Kalkhofen, the provost wants to see a miracle, but he also wants confirmation that he understands what one would look like, making pride a factor in his tendency to continue believing what he has said before. The similarity to the stories not only lends credibility, but flatters the provost's intelligence. "Das alles ist plausibel nicht aufgrund von unterstellten Selbstverständlichkeiten, sondern im Sinne derjenigen Mirakelerzählungen, die die ungelehrten Laienbrüder durch einen Eingriff der Transzendenz ausgezeichnet sein lassen." (Kalkhofen, 205). That the miracle is someone's performance of an act that he himself does every day, that is, a mere layman's achievement of his own elevated level of holiness, is all the more flattering, so the odds are stacked in Amis's favour even before the testing starts. The Provost tests, but at the same time hopes that Amis is really a miracle, saying "wil got, daz mac ouch hie geschehen" (1449) The tester is biased, and wants positive results from this experiment.

It is therefore safe for Amis to ask the Provost to judge for him whether his "vision" was real. He has located a person, the Provost, who is likely to arrive at a certain conclusion, that a miracle has occurred, and now produces circumstances that might lead to it, but allows him to reach the conclusion himself. Then, to set things in motion, he hands over apparent control of the situation to his puppet, telling him: *nu ratet mir, durch die namen dri, / waz iuch dar umbe dunket guot.* (Provost, 106-7). The Provost is under his control, but still acting as himself, and easily convinces his superiors that the miracle is genuine.

Amis disguises himself in order to conceal his abilities, rather than to pretend to have abilities that he does not. The ease with which this new Amis changes his identity does more than illustrate the spiritual shallowness of his initial role as a priest. It is Amis's most significant case of secrecy increasing potency; a good sermon is good, but when it is performed by someone who appears incapable of delivering it, it is much better, and warrants a more intensive audience response. Hiding his priestly abilities has made those abilities more effective. The holy men to react with naïve superstition to the sort of performance they presumably give every day.

*do der probest daz vernam
sin herze in den gelouben quam,
swaz er læse ode sunge,*

*daz ez mit alle erklunge
uz des heiligen geistes munde. (Provost, 149-53).*

When Amis is tested, by the very people who should be considering whether he is a fraud, he is still successful, because they are looking for reasons to believe him, rather than attempting to disprove what he says. The authenticity they attempt to verify is also not the authenticity in which he is deficient. They decide that there has never been anyone so wise, *si enheten gehort noch gesehen / deheinen man so wisen / so meister Amisen*. (Provost, 180-2), but Amis's learning and intelligence have been demonstrated many times. Rather than discrediting him as a fraud, his education glorifies the candidate. In fact, the narrative never mentions any high rating for any mass that he performs, except here, where he appears as if he should not be able to do it. By eliminating the connection between his knowledge and his formal training, Amis miraculizes it. Events without logical connections make the best miracles, and the best preservers of falsehood, as they generate an illogical base on which to reason. People can be led to illogical conclusions if they proceed logically from an illogical premise, and Amis's lies depend on this mechanism for their survival.

At the very least, Amis's priestly powers are good for the soul, or the souls of people who are oblivious to his tricks. With his priestly training in a hidden state, his austere living also does his audience good in a way that his ordinary (even if more honest) priestly life might not have, as it involves virtues that are not expected.

*im möhte diu sele wol genesen,
do si gesehen wes er phlac:
sin vaste diu was allen tac
und az et wazzet und brot;
dar zuo leit er groze not
von wachen unde von gebete. (Provost, 84-9)*

His pretended ignorance, when embellished with his elaborate penitential lifestyle, makes his quite ordinary knowledge miraculous. He is able not only to edify souls with more effectiveness than he is recorded as doing anywhere else, but he brings in more donations and makes them more available to himself.

Böhm describes this episode as an attack on a clergy so desirous of miracles that they will see things as more miraculous than they really are. “Indem Amis den Probst glauben macht, daß er, Amis, Visionen gehabt habe und vom heiligen Geist erleuchtet worden sei, wird diesmal die Wundergläubigkeit der Geistlichen bloßgestellt. Die Prüfungen, die Amis leicht besteht und die sich dadurch als völlig inadäquat erweisen, bestärken Amis’ Scheinidentität.” (Böhm, 219). This tendency to accept only that evidence that affirms what one already believes, or hopes to believe, is characteristic of all of Amis’s victims, making the Credulous Provost a reasonable object for the Amis study. Stealing the donation box may be new – Amis does not involve himself in burglary in any other story – but the rooster and fountain fish attest to his adeptness at sneaking around at night. While Amis may not ordinarily taunt his victims as he does here, much less take pleasure in their suffering, he is twice recorded as responding with pleasure to the success of his cheats: when his “patients” inform him that they are miraculously healed, and when he has his stolen jewels loaded onto his ship. Even in “The Credulous Provost,” Amis is still Amis.

Although this episode seems at first to bear little resemblance to the rest of the story, and in fact violates several important themes (Amis’s universal lack of malice, reliance on manipulating the actions of others rather than simply poisoning them, pretending to have resources or abilities that he does not, and short and concise episodes), it can still fit in quite well with the rest, and in fact bears even closer similarity to the Reinhart tropes, in which the trickster glories in his success and mocks his helpless victim. The credulous provost episode is a significant example of the power of wishful thinking; the victim chooses to believe a manufactured story not because circumstances imply that it is the case, but because it is such an attractive prospect.

Amis, the priest, has put on a disguise that makes his abilities appear miraculous, by the same principle that is observed in the biblical miracle episodes: the events seem to have no logical cause behind them. Because he is disguised as an uneducated peasant, there seems to be no logical reason for his priestly abilities. He shows interest only in evidence that Amis’s story is true, and, like the co-operative victims in Reinhart, expends his own energy to become a more effective victim. He argues for Amis’s authenticity and places him in one advantageous position after another, without the trickster seeming to request them.

4.13 Judging Amis

Is Amis a hero? A villain? If justice needs to be served, then he is neutral at best. Röcke writes that criticism tends on the whole to classify characters as either wise or foolish, friend or foe, evil or good:

Leitbild der Interpretation ist die in sich geschlossene, einheitliche Persönlichkeit, die immer das eine oder das andere ist: entweder gut *oder* böse, schlau *oder* dumm, Diener der Werte und Normen *oder* in Opposition zu ihnen. Alle Figuren, so auch der schlaue Pfaffe selbst, scheinen von Anfang an festgelegt, repräsentieren lediglich bestimmte Typen des Verhaltens und können deshalb auch strikt unterschieden werden; mögliche Überschneidungen ihrer Motive und Interessen, Veränderungen oder gar ambivalente Entwicklungen werden nicht gesehen oder nachträglich ausgeschlossen. (Röcke, 39).

Röcke disapproves of this approach, arguing that the value of the Stricker's work comes from a lack of such polarization. "Im Gegensatz dazu sehe ich die Besonderheit und auch den Reiz von Strickers ‚Amis‘ gerade darin, daß er sich einer solch eindeutigen Wertung entzieht, die Figuren in Widersprüche treibt, die jenen Dualismus von vornherein ausschließen, und nicht auf der Einsinnigkeit, sondern auf der Ambivalenz des Geschehens, des Auftretens und Handelns der Figuren insistiert." (Röcke, 40)

We have already seen that the *Amis* is not a story that always and exclusively punishes fools, or villains. Amis is at least as dishonest as his dishonest victims who "get what's coming to them," so the winner is really the worst crook of them all. Böhm writes: "Einerseits wird dem Leser das Gefühl vermittelt, dem Betrogenen sei aufgrund seines falschen Verhaltens, seiner Uneinsichtigkeit, Dummheit oder anderer Defizite recht geschehen, was den eigentlichen Betrug 'verharmlost'. Andererseits geht ein Lügner als Sieger hervor, egal ob seine Absichten ehrenhaft waren oder nicht." (Böhm, 75). Deliberately targeting fools, but occasionally benefitting them, exploiting other people's vices, but occasionally abetting them, Amis is not a moral force, but an amoral one.

He exhibits none of the malevolence that Reinhart does, barring the credulous provost episode, and in fact no opinion at all of his victims, positive or negative. His motivation has nothing to do

with correction, in particular nothing to do with the constructive community shaming (save for avoiding his own) that we observe in the invisible-pictures episode and the Stricker's *maeren*. He even prevents it in the holy relic episode, allowing offenders against common morality to go free or even benefit from his cheats, if it should serve his own purpose.

Amis, then, is neither hero nor villain. His victims are neither innocent nor despicable, and can display similar faulty behaviours to those of the priest. The view of Amis and the bishop as opposing immoderations, for example, extravagant versus miserly, is more symmetrical than the somewhat implausible view of the good and innocent Amis, forced through his virtue to maintain his household in the face of persecution and mounting expenses. As two sinners, they now stand at opposite ends of the same spectrum. The good/evil dichotomy is misleading, as Amis exists to trick people, not to be an avenging angel. If he should happen to do some avenging, then it has cost him nothing. *Pfaffe Amis* is no morality tale. Amis's sin or virtue, except inasmuch as it contributes to the comic effect, is irrelevant, so to see him as a positive or negative character – defending him for his practice of *milte* or demonizing him because his *milte* is a mockery – misses the point. *Amis* does not promote any sort of behaviour, but functions to throw morality, both good and bad, out the window:

Alle Welt habe er schon betrogen, *mit sînen listen überwant*” (v. 1556) und ausgenommen, als er einen neuen *list* ersinnt, mit dem er noch größere Summen erbeuten kann. Der Begriff *list* paßt so gut zu Amis wie kein anderer: ambivalent und schillernd wird er je nach Kontext und Betroffenheit positive oder negative empfunden. (Böhm, 220).

The triumph of cleverness over foolishness, not that of right over wrong, is a theme of the Stricker's work, and of the genre as a whole: “Time and again the comic conflict in the narrative world is told in such a way as to satisfy the recipients' desire, as nurtured by the tales themselves, to see the clever triumph.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 84) Cleverness supersedes virtue, and its opposite, foolishness, has been substituted for vice, and it is not only the community's support that the fool loses. Böhm writes: “Wer sein Ansehen durch falsches Verhalten aufs Spiel setzt, wer so lebt, daß er seine Ehre verlieren wird, der verliert auch die Gunst Gottes und somit die himmlische *êre*.” (Böhm, 46). How does Amis stand with the Divine? He does treat his guests well, so well, in fact, if we are to believe the narrative, that he gains God's favour: as the

narrative tells us, *Er vergap so gar, daz er gewan / beide durch ere und durch got, / daz er der milde gebot / zu seinen zeiten ubergie.* (48-51). Amis practices the worldly virtue *milte* in the service of God, and succeeds.

One must certainly confess that Amis makes a less desirable person than character. Böhm writes that he was never meant to be imitated: “Der Zugang über die Erzählhaltung hat ergeben, daß Amis vom Erzähler nicht verurteilt wird, aber auch nicht – und das ist vielleicht das Neue, das diese Interpretation zeigen konnte – gelobt und zum nachahmungswürdigen Vorbild erhoben wird.” (Böhm, 225). So Amis exists not to instruct, but to amuse. To do so, he violates the rules while at the same time suspending any serious audience outrage. What can we conclude about Amis as a “good” character? If Amis were a real person, he would unquestionably be a miscreant, but he is a comic character. In his introduction to *Pfaffe Amis*, Schilling points out some of the many glaring logical paradoxes in the *Amis*, all of which point to the characters' identity as characters, and not as human beings:

So wäre die Freude des Bischofs über den Lernerfolg des Esels erzählfunktional begründet: Ein Erfolg ordert demonstrativ und spontan die Darstellung von Freude, und es spielt in diesem Moment keine Rolle, daß der Bischof aufgrund seiner eigentlichen langfristigen Interessen vielleicht auch Unmut zeigen könnte. Gleiches ließe es sich auch über den Kopf des Maurers sagen: Solange der Erzähler einen potentiellen Bischof mit Tonsur benötigt, ist der Maurer kahl. Geht es dagegen darum, eine Gebärde des Zorns und eine Bestrafung an Haut und Haar vorzuführen, muß derselbe Maurer mit Haaren ausgestattet sein, die man ihm ausreißen kann. (Schilling, 194-5)

Wailes is correct when he writes that Amis behaves irresponsibly, but in his case, the irresponsibility improves his effectiveness. The irresponsibility is the point. Anyone who wants to learn how to behave should ask for *Erec* instead.

4.14 Is Amis's Conversion a Cheat?

Amis does appear to repent at the end, but it takes him thirty years to get there. These thirty years are described to us as thirty years of virtuous living because he practices the almighty *milte*, but how literally should we take this account?

*Dar umme sulle wur preisen
den pfaffen Ameisen,
swie verre er fur in daz lant,
daz man zu allen ziten vant
grozen rat in sinem hus. (2251-5).*

The narrative suggests to the reader that we should praise Amis because his household received guests so well even when he was not at home. Again like a knight, Amis is described as living a virtuous life followed by an ascent into heaven, with a stop at the monastery in between:

*Do der pfaffe gewerte
drizick jar in den eren,
da begonde er ane got keren,
daz er die leute verswur
und in ein grawes kloster fur
mit allem sinen gute. (2260-5)*

Is this a standard-issue happy ending: even Amis can be saved? Is it sarcasm? The narrator clearly states that Amis receives eternal life - *Do verdiente der pfaffe daz, / daz im daz ewige leben / nach disem leben wart gegeben. (2280-2)* – and even invests the audience in his welfare, saying: *Also muz uns vil schone / die riche himeles krone / werde gegeben, (2283-5)*. But what does the enigmatic Stricker really wish on us here? Perhaps this is another, now partial, revelation of the apparent versus the hidden, and he expresses a special hidden wish that the audience should share Amis's fate.

One might optimistically decide that he hopes that, no matter how egregious our sins, we might be forgiven, too. Amis's behavior is described as "good": *Mit leide und ouch mit mute / dient er vliziclichen got / und erfult sin gebot / beide fru und spate. (2266-9)*. Rocher does not accept this

story, describing this ending as ironic. The double meaning extends to the end: “Er läßt den Pfaffen Amis, wie wir gesehen haben, sein Leben als frommer Abt im >grauen< Kloster beschließen (allerdings, wie wir es auch bemerkt haben, nicht ohne ein gewisse Zweideutigkeit im >erbaulichen< Epilog!).” (Rocher, 111). Böhm also recommends that the audience question the sincerity of the ending, referring us back to the unlikely statements from the beginning that suggest that the narrator is not to be trusted: “Das Problem der AMIS-Interpretation scheint mir darin zu liegen, daß man die Aussagen des Erzählers immer wieder für bare Münze genommen hat.” (Böhm, 228). Böhm does treat Amis’s repentance as another cheat, calling it a *Scheinbekehrung*, and using it as an example of how easily people can be fooled. “Seine Scheinbekehrung spielt er für alle überzeugend, was wiederum deutlich macht, daß sich die Menschen von den Äußerlichkeiten völlig blenden lassen” (Böhm, 219). The cloister may be what is criticized here, though, and not exclusively the priest’s sincerity.

Amis may be saved through other means besides his disputed good behaviour, or lost through the hollowness of his repentance; donning a monk’s robe, on its own, is as spiritually meaningless as any of Amis’s other disguises. If there is more than one way to be holy, then being holy only on the outside (apparent, but not hidden) may be what is criticized here. By wishing the same on us as he does on Amis, the Stricker may be implying that we are already bobbing in the same shallow-keeled boat.

We cannot determine what the priest himself is thinking. He certainly seems to be popular in his new place, but Böhm sees this popularity as the result of skilful trickery and nothing more:

Auch diesmal ist Amis überzeugend: er schafft es, daß man ihn schließlich zum Abt wählt. Dieses Amt fällt ihm nicht etwa in den Schoß, denn der Text betont ausdrücklich die Aktivität des Pfaffen, mit der er auf sein Ziel hinarbeitet: “*sô geschuof er und erwarp*” (v. 2501). Seine ehrgeizigen Pläne hat er offensichtlich noch nicht beiseite gelegt; als Abt verfügt er über das Vermögen des Klosters, das er “*mit buot und mit rate*” (v. 2498) verbessert (Böhm, 224).

Perhaps Amis has done the same with the credulous provost, and the monastery plays the same role as the donation box: he enriches it because he knows that he will partake of the spoils. Alternatively, he may merely enjoy exercising his hospitable nature on the other monks. When the narrative tells us: *Mit gute und mit rate / bezzert er daz kloster so, / daz sin die munche*

wurden vro. (2270-2), what sort of *rate* would he use? He has shown himself to be very wise, but all we have seen him do is deceive people into transferring their wealth to him. If there is not a cheat involved in the conversion, something has changed.

The rest of the story is about cheats. Why would this episode be any different? Böhm clearly does not believe that Amis has turned over any new leaves:

Dieses verblüffend kurze wie überraschende Ende des AMIS muß genauer untersucht werden. Dazu muß man sich ins Gedächtnis rufen, was bisher in dem Roman thematisiert wurde: Da sind einmal Amis' erfolgreiche Betrügereien, die auf seiner geschickten, vorausschauenden Planung beruhen und mit denen er ein Vermögen ergaunert hat (Böhm, 223).

This would make the cloister ending, instead of a result of the episodes before it, a continuation of the string of additive events. The only cause-and-effect episodes would be those at the beginning. On the other hand, if it is a cheat, then it works differently than the other ones do: we are provided with no privileged view of his hidden actions. Is the final cheat on us?

4.15 Summary

In contrast to Reinhart Fuchs, Amis keeps his universe tidy. Where the fox constantly runs into angry animals hoping to avenge his past crimes, a factor that motivates many of his cheats, Amis usually remains anonymous, changing environments to set the cause-and-effect counter back to zero. In fact, it appears that the only cause-and-effect relationships in his universe are limited by place: the only cheats that continue to influence him throughout the story are those that happen on his home ground, where he cannot maintain his itinerant anonymity. Thus his cheats end by informing us that Amis leaves town, after which the community may or may not respond and ineffectually bring his deception to light. As clean as his environment, Amis does not display the chaotic emotions or malice that his beast-epic counterpart does; his one motivation, gaining money to finance his *milte*, has no impact on his treatment of other characters. The nameless victims, about whom Amis exhibits no opinion at all, are easily manipulated through their automatic reactions and dogged adherence to social rules or personal agendas.

Does Amis practice *milte*? His social position precludes it, and he obviously lacks sufficient funds to pay for it; *milte* is meant to display the pre-existence of wealth, and is not normally viewed as justification for acquisitiveness, but Amis's actions are described as pleasing to God, and critics draw parallels between the priest and the more serious, heroic knights who traditionally practice the virtue. But how do they pay for their *milte*? Where does Arthur get his legendary wealth? Amis's tale of acquisition, rather than donation, reminds us that what is given away must have come from somewhere.

The bishop, arguably the character who starts it all, does not consider Amis's hospitality appropriate to his position, but he disciplines the priest not out of a sense of propriety but out of greed. He wishes to obtain the priest's wealth, and will take it away unless he can perform an impossible task arbitrarily set by his opponent. Impossible tasks provide fertile ground for cheats to grow, and the bishop's attempts fail, not because he is evil, but because he lacks the flexibility and comprehension of the cheater character.

The bishop behaves more aggressively than any of Amis's other victims, motivating not one but two cheats to such an extent that Amis must, for the only time ever, cheat reactively rather than proactively. The reading-donkey cheat proceeds backwards: it is motivated by another character who wishes to take the trickster's wealth, rather than a trickster who wants to take or keep wealth from someone else. The trickster has no opportunity to make a careful plan, and, as a result of his success, no wealth changes hands. Because the reading-donkey cheat has taken place on his home ground, Amis is unable to escape the consequences, which remain with him throughout the story, motivating events in other locations. Amis's confrontation with the bishop is the only one of its kind.

Amis's methods depend on advance preparation, in contrast to Reinhart's cheats, which are mostly reactive. Amis creates preconceptions in his victims by giving them false information by which they will later judge all evidence they find about the cheat. As Amis can predict not only how the other characters will think, but what evidence will be available to them, he feeds them preconceptions that turn everything they perceive into evidence that his story is true. His methods also depend on the untestability of his claims. He provides unwarranted evidence, tangible enough in itself but unrelated to the point he wishes to prove, or promises rewards that are so far off that they cannot be reliably tested. His use of victims' religious faith is especially

successful, as testing is forbidden in faith matters, and Amis is able to promise eternal life. The victims, who already carry with them scripts of Biblical miracles, need not have new preconceptions formed by the time they view the evidence. Miracles are produced easily enough; any effect without an associated cause is sufficient to amaze his credulous audience, and Amis has the advantage of both religious instruction and identity as a leader in the faith.

To separate himself from the false messages he sends, Amis sends messengers from within the kin group of those he wishes to deceive; in the invisible-pictures episode, for example, he has the king tell his court that the walls are painted, and the peasants are used to announce his holy miracles to one another. As his agents, they remain under his control even after he has departed from the scene, facilitating his escape. By using members of a group against each other, Amis attacks the cohesiveness of the community, but he would be unable to do so without the social rules that bind the victims to their automatic behaviour in the first place. Amis does not produce, but simply unearths, flaws in the community.

Amis may usually use his victims' vices to control them, but his is not a story of punishing or correcting the guilty. A rigidly virtuous character is just as defenseless against his cheating as one that is strongly motivated by vice. Virtue is just as much a weakness as vice, equating the fool with the villain under the category of those who must, or will inevitably, receive some sort of misfortune. It is not a question of good prevailing over evil, but of the adaptable over the inflexible. Reinhart is punished for leaping into the well after what he thinks is his wife, and rewarded for some of his worst crimes. This principle holds true in the *Amis*, where good and evil are irrelevant compared to clever and foolish.

5 *Tristan* and Other Works

The cheating in *Reinhart Fuchs* and *Pfaffe Amis* links them to a variety of genres in contemporary and later literature, such as the Stricker's and other *maeren*, and the courtly romance *Tristan*, as well as providing links to the future of the trickster such as *Ulenspiegel*. Isolde's trial by ordeal in *Tristan*, for example, provides new insights into *Reinhart* and *Renart*: the fox is considered trustworthy enough to swear an oath to clear himself, while the queen, Isolde, is not. More interesting, though, is the philosophy behind Isolde's oath, and the oath in *Renart*'s trial: what, in an oath or other statement, constitutes truth? As a popular subject for contemporary discussion, the value of the distinction between factual truth and a statement's likely interpretation makes for a highly appropriate narrative element. While his precursors swear a similarly loaded oath to Isolde's, factually true but designed to be misinterpreted, *Reinhart* avoids it entirely. Does this change represent a different way of thinking, or is it simply another one of many scenes dropped from *Renart* in the condensed German adaptation?

The Stricker's works provide an ample source of tricksters, and his courtly romance, *Daniel*, is no exception. Daniel is a trickster-hero; he fulfills all the requirements of the hero, but occasionally cheats when he must. Though he remains a powerful warrior and performs remarkable feats, his accomplishments demand much more from the author: rather than mustering impossible and editorially convenient strength to perform whatever impossible actions are required of him, Daniel uses rules, deception and social restrictions to cheat more powerful characters into giving up some of their strength. The experimental merging of hero and trickster also takes place in the Stricker's *Amis*, in which a heroic structure and motivation is applied to a cheating trickster character.

We have observed how *Reinhart Fuchs* changes as it is adapted from its sources, and this phenomenon is as prominent with another, later work, *Till Ulenspiegel*. *Ulenspiegel* is an ideal specimen from the archaeology of the trickster, providing, as it were, a cutaway view of several strata of transmission. The work demonstrates the continuity and evolution of fables over time; itself traceably borrowed from sources and then adapted and re-used later on, many scenes from *Ulenspiegel* represent easily-identifiable elements of the literary fossil record, allowing us to watch the stories evolve.

5.1 Trials, *Tristan* and Pre-Christian Connections

Reinhart's oath-taking scene, in which the fox is instructed to lay his paw on the teeth of a so-called saintly relic and swear his innocence, has been pared down significantly by the time we hear it from Heinrich; Reinhart never makes it to the oath-swearing part of the procedure.

Precursors exist in which the fox really does swear oaths: that he has done nothing to the she-wolf that he would not do to his own mother, for example (an assertion that may be interpreted as one chooses). The fox, as much as possible, is a nobleman and must have a good deal of backing at court to be permitted such a privilege; indeed, it has been denied to queens. An oath is sworn when the court has reasonable confidence in the honesty of the swearer, a level of trust for which Reinhart is comically inappropriate. Some characters are not provided with this opportunity, and must instead undergo an ordeal. But where there is a task, with rules, there can be cheating.

Isolde, an imported queen who bears an enchantment causing her to fall fatally in love with her husband's nephew, Tristan, must maintain love relations with Tristan in order to survive, and even fakes her wedding night with her husband, Mark, by sending a lady-in-waiting to impersonate her. At no time has she been faithful to her husband, but she must swear an oath that she has, or be gruesomely executed. To complicate the matter further, unlike Reinhart, she has no family or background in the area, and thus lacks the credentials that would allow her to swear an oath. She must instead undergo an ordeal, a miraculous test requiring divine intervention for a negative result. Ziegler writes that Isolde's ordeal, the ordeal by fire, is common for issues of marital fidelity. Isolde must undergo an extensive religious ceremony, then pick up metal objects that have been heated until they glow red, carry them a specified distance, and have her hands examined for wounds.

The unreality of the situation is already recognizable in this fictionalized atmosphere. The fire ordeal, which was a real process used to decide cases in which a ruling was otherwise

impossible, had never proceeded in this manner¹⁰⁶: everyone who underwent such an ordeal in real life was burned, and they were examined days later, not for wounds, which were a foregone conclusion, but for infection.

Yet there is nothing factually untrue about Isolde's oath. Literally, it is the case that no man has been between her legs but her husband and the pilgrim who carried her across the river, but in this literal truth, Isolde tells three implicit lies. First, she behaves as if her relations with the pilgrim were innocent enough to be casually confessed in public. As the scene that the judges have witnessed is an innocent one, they accept this information and, like the other cheating victims we have seen, assume that this information (over which the cheaters have control) exhausts the relevant facts. Second, through her implication that the relations are innocent, she also implies that this individual is a stranger, leaving the hidden situation, that the pilgrim is Tristan, covered up. Third, through the general phrase referring to location, rather than more specific language about sexual relations¹⁰⁷, Isolde implies that being carried across the river was the occasion on which the pilgrim became relevant to her oath.

Tristan and Isolde thus co-operate to produce a hidden situation, in which she and Tristan are lovers and Tristan arrives to carry her across the river on her way to the trial, and an apparent situation, in which they barely tolerate each other and a stranger carries her. In both of these cases, Isolde's oath would be literally true.

¹⁰⁶ “In these ordeals the victims are examined on the spot and judge, a state of affairs that has more to do with telling a good story than with fidelity to reality.” (Ziegler, 7)

¹⁰⁷ *daz mînes lîbes nie kein man
dekeine künde nie gewan
noch mir ze keinen zîten
weder ze arme noch ze sîten
ane iuch nie lebende man gelac
wan der, vûr den ich niene mac
gebieten eit noch lougen,
den ir mit iuwern ougen
mir sâhet an dem arme (Tristan, 15711-19)*

This literally true, but misleading, oath is not a unique event in contemporary culture, but a favourite ethical question of the time¹⁰⁸, and one which connects Isolde to the Germanic past and future: the trial by ordeal, Ziegler writes, existed in Germanic regions before the introduction of Christianity and was maintained more out of necessity than out of compatibility with the new worldview. The pre-Christian expectation, that an oath need only be literally true, even if no-one else who is present can be expected to understand it, was the popular opinion of the day¹⁰⁹, but already well on its way out by the time *Tristan* reached the German-speaking world. In fact, the ordeal was by this time a barely-viable relic of the past¹¹⁰, so presenting the scene as morally questionable is a timely move, particularly in the context of other fictionalized queens undergoing similar ordeals. Ziegler compares Isolde to the saintly queen Kunigunde, who has been faithful. She requests the most gruelling ordeal possible, and makes sweeping, general oaths

¹⁰⁸ “The use of false oaths that were literally true posed a major legal and ethical problem during the entire Middle Ages. There were two sets of opinions on the matter of such oaths: according to one view, if the wording of the oath literally covered the facts, the oath was true. It was not important if the others present understood what was going on, because the oath functioned independently of bystanders. The Church rejected such an understanding: if the swearer gave his oath a meaning that no one else could be expected to comprehend, then onlookers could not take it into account in answering their subjective questions about the matter at hand.” (Ziegler, 4).

¹⁰⁹ “The nature of the judicial oath at this time was still in flux. While the clergy were keenly aware of the Christian understanding of the oath – that it must be true in all senses of the word, internally as well as externally – the nonclerical population still saw the oath largely as a matter of form: if performed correctly, it constituted truth. Truth resided not outside the oath but in the oath itself.” (Ziegler, 128)

¹¹⁰ “In the legends of the ordeal by fire, endured by saintly queens, remained fixed in a hagiographic amber for centuries. These ordeals were essential elements that justified the veneration of their heroines, because the tests revealed the women’s sanctity. In thirteenth-century secular literature the ordeal by fire, scathingly attacked by Gottfried, receives a burlesque treatment twenty years after the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council in a short work by Stricker.” (Ziegler, 10)

about her fidelity – oaths that cannot be misinterpreted¹¹¹. Ziegler treats Isolde as a sort of anti-Kunigunde, with her hidden guilt and carefully deceptive oath. Isolde's oath is a highly effective cheat: she is not burned, and is immediately acquitted.

5.2 *Daniel*

The Stricker's *Daniel von dem blühenden Tal*, a self-conscious heroic epic, revolves around the powerful, but also crafty, knight Daniel and his assorted heroic deeds. Through what Schilling calls its “Thematisierung der List”¹¹², this heroic epic offers all the requisite features for the trickster epic as well. Daniel, with his iron resolve to enhance his reputation, becomes a sort of Amis, seeking victories for glory as diligently as Amis seeks maximum profit for his ruinous *milte*. *Daniel* is not half-and-half, almost a heroic epic and almost a trickster story, but, in my opinion, meets all of the requirements for both. Though he accomplishes his ends by means of cheating, Daniel still must fight. A knight's worth is evident in his battle prowess; even Arthur fights here, and the iconic king kills his would-be conqueror by his own, ordinarily delegating, hand.

Daniel's adventures are relatively episodic, but each provides the hero with a magical object, piece of information or useful alliance that he can use later to gain an unfair advantage over the otherwise-impossible obstacles that come his way. As a human who must face monsters, Daniel

¹¹¹ “In the Richardis and Kunigunde legends the course of events surrounding the ordeal involves the advice of the queen at the point at which the king becomes aware of the rumors. Their unswerving marital fidelity gives them a standing in the matter that Isolde cannot have, since she has never been faithful to her husband.” (Ziegler, 124)

¹¹² “Der knapp 8500 Verse lange *Daniel von dem Blühenden Tal* stellt sich mit seinen zitierenden und motivischen Bezugnahmen auf Hartmanns Iwein in die Tradition des klassischen Artusromans, leitet aber mit der Darstellung eines unangefochtenen Protagonisten, mit der Thematisierung der List und mit ironisch-parodistischen Elementen zu den nachklassischen spätmittelalterlichen Vertretern der Gattung über.” (Schilling, 179)

must use unfair advantages of his own, such as deception, a sword that can cut anything, armour that cannot be cut (unfortunately never used on each other), private knowledge of hidden situations, and social manipulation.

His magical armaments, which would make a warrior undefeatable in open fighting, allows Daniel to cheat at that activity that defines him as a knight, but such helpful objects are not unheard-of, and do not tarnish his valour; after all, the warrior still has to fight to use them. In contrast, after short deliberation he rejects the Medusa-like head that turns to stone anyone whose gaze strikes it, because it would spoil his reputation. The chivalric code to which he must adhere occasionally forces Daniel to do things that he does not wish to do: reluctant to help the ladies who come pleading for rather inconvenient assistance, Daniel realizes that he cannot refuse them, if he is to maintain a good name.

Daniel, then, follows a set of rules, but only to a reasonable extent. Though he has rejected one weapon with which even a 'poor woman' could be victorious, he has no qualms about recruiting a woman to use another such device on his behalf, the invisible net that cannot be escaped. Obedient to the rules regarding his honour, but not slavishly so, Daniel combines the knight, with his courtliness, with the trickster, in his cleverness.

The entire work follows this trickster theme, occasionally without Daniel's involvement. Sir Gawain, the courtly archetype, proposes that King Arthur lie to a conquering giant, pretending to surrender his court and buying time to amass an army. The giant, a typical victim, is so confident of his own and his master's strength that he easily agrees to these terms, even though he sees through Gawain's tactic.

Daniel later meets the dwarf Juran, who loses his life because he himself tries to cheat. He wields the all-penetrating sword and impregnable armour that will ultimately belong to Daniel, and he hopes to force himself on a young noblewoman by killing her family and followers. Juran is undefeatable when armed, but Daniel convinces him to put this advantage aside in exchange for an opportunity to win the lady's voluntary love. In return, Juran agrees to follow a set of rules. The objective, the lady's love, is more valuable to him than his physical power over her. The possibility of acquiring her love is, of course, a lie; Juran has committed crimes against her that she is unlikely to forgive, and threats against her person that she is unlikely to ignore, but once again the cheating victim chooses to ignore information that is not under the cheater's control.

The match begins and Daniel quickly gains the advantage. Realizing that he is outmatched, Juran attempts to cheat. He rushes to retrieve his sword and kill his opponent. His cheat is unsuccessful, but only, the Stricker assures us, because Daniel has longer legs. The knight gains the sword and the dwarf is defeated. His cheat has failed, but he dies only because he refuses Daniel's *sicherheit*. Does he actually need to cheat, as Artus needs to defeat King Matur and his giant? Juran's proclivity for murder and rape calls his primary motivation into question. Here, an obviously evil – and, more important, unsympathetic – character has failed to cheat successfully.

In another situation, rather than thwarting someone else's cheat, Daniel refuses to cheat. Forced to defend the Lady of the Bright Fountain from monsters bearing the magical head that kills all who look at it, Daniel demonstrates more accurately his ultimate aim. In the past, we have seen him refusing to turn away from danger, and reluctant to lose, but always for an underlying reason. Daniel uses the head to defeat the creatures, by which means he becomes aware of its potency and ease of use; he realizes that it could be helpful for defending Arthur's throne. We witness Daniel's thought process as he considers whether he can use the head. If defending Arthur's throne were his only aim, the head would be useful, but Daniel has higher priorities to motivate his desire for victory. Though he could use it to win, other people may look down on him for using such a device: even a 'poor woman,' that is, a non-noble, non-male (and therefore unarmed and non-fighting) person could win physical superiority with it. The value of Daniel's victory for Arthur depends on the honour inherent in it.

After considering his potential embarrassment, Daniel concludes that it would be dangerous for him to carry such an indiscriminately deadly object on his person, then finally he realizes, or perhaps decides, that it is infernal in origin and ought to be destroyed. It may be Daniel's intention to win the various contests that appear to him, but his highest priority is his reputation. He believes that the head would improve his effectiveness at any contest, but victory is secondary to his motivation for the *aventure* in the first place. He concludes that such a device would be counterproductive, and abandons it.

Still decidedly a good, victorious character, in spite of his single-minded goal (seeking glory is perfectly acceptable for a knight), Daniel attributes to God his victory over the heads, insisting that the rescued lord of the Bright Fountain not thank him. Does this hero have divine favour, as Amis does? When Daniel uses his magical armaments to defeat the giant, though the narrative

praises the giant's valour, it is to God that Daniel's victory is attributed: God does not deign to save the giant's life.

A series of dirty tricks leads Daniel to more *aventure*, and more glory: first the knight is suddenly ensnared in a net, which is invisible and thus cannot be resisted through any sort of heroic prowess. His captor requests that he save her family from a creature who plagues them, a bald man who must bathe in blood every seven days to survive. This creature gains control over the mind of anyone who hears him speak, so a fair fight is impossible. Daniel blocks his ears and pretends to be a member of the hypnotized masses in order to behead the monster from behind. Naturally, he is just in time to save his young captor's father, and his friend the Lord of the Bright Fountain, from being harvested for the blood bath.

Meanwhile, the armies of Arthur and Matur of Cluse are at war; Daniel is eager to end this fighting with a quick victory, and to leave at least a few of the combatants alive, so he suggests a strategy similar to the one he used in the blood bath: he asks all of Arthur's army to block their ears and then, when the enemy armies approach for the final showdown, activates Matur's deafening, indeed debilitatingly loud, siren.

This device is ordinarily used to summon opponents for fighting, but has been repurposed to make fighting impossible. Matur's armies must surrender before Daniel will agree to deactivate the agonizingly loud noise. Surely Daniel's cohorts are relieved to see the gruesome fighting at an end, but must wonder: could the famous 'poor woman' also have managed this victory? A contemporary adaptation, Garel von Muntabel, suppresses this strategy¹¹³, implying at least one contemporary opinion that Daniel's strategy was not entirely within the usual bounds of knightly mores.

¹¹³ *die banier nam er in die hant*

und dructes dem lewen in den hals ze tal,

und brach si in dem hals enzwei.

dô was gestillet daz geschrei

von des lewen munde. (Der Pleier, *Garel*, 712-17).

Later, Daniel makes use of another technique that could be used by a woman, but defends his honour at the same time. When Arthur is kidnapped by the giants' creator, who then defeats even Parzival, Daniel again realizes that he must do something out of the ordinary to save him. The greatest knight in this work, and the titular hero, Daniel has already been defeated by a woman, when she used the invisible net to ensnare him. According to Daniel's reasoning with the head, the invisible net, a device with which an unarmed woman, though certainly not a poor one, can gain a physical advantage over a fighting man, must entail an unfair advantage and be unfit for a knight's use. It fails the 'poor woman' acid test. Daniel indeed never uses it, nor does any knight who is in his right mind, but the circumstances are too compelling for the knight to ignore its usefulness entirely.

Daniel may not use the net himself, but need not do without its benefits. He does not borrow it, but rather the maiden Sandinose, who captured him earlier. He has not asked her father, to whom the net was originally presented, and who is in fact standing nearby. Instead, Daniel rides out to the castle to find the daughter and ask for her help. We are not made aware of any past event in which the Lord of the Green Meadow gave the net to his daughter, but when Daniel needs it used, she is the one to ask. The maiden is given credit, and she is rewarded, for the victory.

It may be true that Daniel sneaks up behind the bald blood-bathing man because it is the only way to defeat him, but the fact remains that we are cheering on a hero who attacks from behind. This knight-cheater, presented with impossible tasks and unthinkable consequences for failure, must do whatever it takes to win. Thus the fighting in *Daniel* is not normally the sort of formal contest that we see depicted between Daniel and Juran, with a literal line in the sand. Characters in courtly stories like *Parzival*, *Iwein* and *Erec* use lance and sword, and are satisfied to have unhorsed their opponents and agreed upon conditions of *sicherheit*; going any further leads to messy consequences, such as Parzival's many misfortunes that lead from killing his unrecognized cousin, or Laudine's initial attempts to murder Iwein for killing her husband in his overeager attempts to capture him.

In contrast, most of the fighters here are clearly trying to kill one another. The final battle, in which large numbers of unnamed knights are slaughtered in inches of standing blood, recalls in its relentless brutality a *chanson de geste*, rather than a fantastical courtly adventure. It is a fight that is better ended, and Daniel's dirty trick a welcome rescue that allows the kingdom to retain

any knightly population at all. Once again the ends, like Daniel's quest for glory, or Amis's quest to practice *milte*, are more important than the means. Arthur's soldiers, fighting for their lives, do not challenge the second giant to a courtly joust, but attack him with whatever they have, including bows and arrows.

What sort of fight is the war between Arthur and Matur? Attitudes of the transmitting scribes are clear: one image from ms. Germ. 1340 clearly depicts one of the assailing knights as using a crossbow, a weapon not of courtly competition but of outright war. Unlike Daniel, the knight who fights opponents in single combat for distressed maidens, these knights have no underlying quest for glory, but simply seek to win. What does this wartime standard tell us about the relationship between the cheater and the victim? The rules, if there are any, are used to hobble the victim (social regulations) or to motivate the cheater (desire to practice *milte* or to get a glorious reputation); they are not applied to other interactions. Informed by *Daniel*, one might quite reasonably say that the cheater and the victim have been at war with one another all along.

5.3 The Stricker's *maeren*

While the moral order may be violated *in* comic tales, in the case of the Stricker, the moral order is violated *by* the comic tales. The Stricker's short stories, known as *maeren*, take the requisite form for morality stories, but are often centred on highly questionable morals. The Stricker, a creative and experimental writer, was no stranger to flouting convention, and his *maeren* attract astonished attention even today. Haug, as we will see below, questions the artistic and comic merit of the Stricker's amoralized moral tales, pointing out the early stages of a phenomenon that Coxon outlines in the comic stories of the late Middle Ages, and which we shall see in *Ulenspiegel* below:

“The increasingly drastic character of the contents of these tales (violence; sexual and scatological ‘obscenity’) reflects the position of this literary form in late medieval (German) urban culture as an accepted medium for addressing deeper socio-psychological needs, giving voice to the conflict between individual bodily needs and the demands placed by society on its members.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 177)

But what does Stricker do to the morality in the morality tale? By including a representative of heaven in the “Drei Wünsche” story, he has a character who defines morality itself, and makes it behave in a morally questionable manner. A desperately poor couple laments their poverty to God, for days on end without stopping. They finally receive a response, from the mouth of a real angel, that it is God’s will for them to be poor. They are given three wishes, argue about what ought to be done with them, and in their escalating hostility squander all three wishes on petty bickering. They are left no better off than before. While it has the structure of a moral tale, the rather inappropriate angel, mouthpiece of God himself, disqualifies it. Biblically, God recommends that humans ask him for everything they need, in the well-known passage from Matthew 7 that recommends that one ask God for everything¹¹⁴. In contrast, this God has sent an angel to order two humans to stop asking him, and even to punish them for their persistence, by means of the three wishes. The angel knows they will use the wishes to hurt themselves; he says so himself, and as a representative of God, he would know the future. What is the moral here? One might conclude that arguing with one’s spouse makes one poor, or unqualified for wealth, a nonsensical proposition; or that one should not pray to God to alleviate grinding poverty, an unbiblical one, particularly bizarre in a story involving a representative of God. It would be a simplistic assumption that the odd twist was nothing but a justification for the poet’s almost definitely monied audience and their placement above such people as are represented in the story. So what are we to do with this amoral moral?

Coxon examines several other morals in later stories, and finds an answer. For example, one story offers the conventional wisdom that a husband’s home life will be better if he fulfills his sexual responsibilities to his wife:

“The comic impact of this passage is heightened by its usage of the archetypal closing strategy of the narrator’s advice to his audience, lending a transparently false semblance of moral authority to his ignoble and cynical sentiments’ not that

¹¹⁴ “aut quis est ex vobis homo quem si petierit filius suus panem numquid lapidem porriget ei aut si piscem petet numquid serpentem porriget ei si ergo vos cum sitis mali nostis bona dare filiis vestris quanto magis Pater vester qui in caelis est dabit bona petentibus se” (Biblia sacra: iuxta Vulgatam versionem, Matthaeus 7, 9-11)

this ‘parodistic’ turn does anything to detract from the implicit misogynistic point of the tale.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 42)

In fact, Coxon finds, it is the non-moral “morals” that gleaned the most popularity from their audiences: “there are signs that it was precisely the rather less austere ‘moral-exemplary’ tales that prospered in this context.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 178) The moral in the “Drei Wünsche” story is further complicated, though, when the husband dies of grief because of the event. His heavenly father, asked for a fish, really has handed him a snake, as he has promised not to do. Though it takes the format of a moral tale, the three-wishes *maere* presents a distorted morality in which characters are punished not for wickedness, but for behaving unwisely. Has the moral been replaced with an im-moral? It is not necessary to conclude that the “moral” to this story is simply an anti-moral if we recall the sur-morality present in the trickster’s universe. Just as it is in the *Amis*, foolish behavior is treated as a serious crime. Coxon’s commentary on later works would be just as applicable to this story:

“In vielen dieser Erzählungen scheint die Regel zu gelten, dass allgemeines Fehlverhalten auch durch Verspottung und exkludierendes Gelächter bestraft werden soll, einen Prozess, der durch Erzählerkommentar vorangetrieben und/oder in der Erzählwelt selbst, auf Figurenebene also, ausagiert wird” (Coxon, *wol gevallen*, 55).

The “Drei Wünsche” story does adhere rather firmly to a set of rules, then, but some critics disagree. Walter Haug writes that this ending, in which the man dies of grief over his loss, spoils the fun (Haug, 13). Coxon also points out that comic writing that incorporates unpleasant themes such as serious injuries and other misery, takes a big risk with its audiences. There is a fine line between the comically grotesque and the simply grotesque:

“Violence which permanently harms or even destroys the integrity of the body is a feature of a smaller number of tales, perhaps because this issue, not dissimilar to that of blindness, pushed the comic functionality of these texts to the very limit. It is notable, for instance, that such violence is not infrequently invoked or suggested without actually being realized on the narrative level.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 148)

Haug compares the “Drei Wünsche” story to “Der Gevatterin Rat,” another pseudo-moral tale in which husband and wife suffer from their mutual hostility; the husband in particular bears his wife nothing but hatred. The wife fakes her death and stages a mock funeral, and the husband is so overjoyed that he does not attend. The wife hides with a female relative, who changes her appearance so that she cannot be recognized, and arranges a chance meeting between the two. He marries this “new” woman, squandering his wealth on her, and then finds out that she is the same person. According to Haug, in both of these works the Stricker spoils our enjoyment by denying us a happy ending:

Mit der Enthüllung der Wahrheit explodiert der Schwank typusgerecht in einem komischen show-down. Bliebe es dabei, könnte man sein uneingeschränktes Vergnügen daran haben. Aber es gibt kein versöhnendes Gelächter, weder zu zweit noch in der Öffentlichkeit. Der blamierte Mann gewinnt kein neues, besseres Verhältnis zu seiner Frau, vielmehr weiß er nicht, ob er ihr Vorwürfe machen oder ob er sie loben soll. Und unter den Leuten ist er lebenslang dem Spott ausgeliefert. Dieser Schluss nimmt der Enthüllung das Befreiende und vermindert damit die komische Wirkung, von der der Schwank seinem Wesen nach lebt.” (Haug, 15).

The cheerful ending which Haug believes the audience desires is replaced by a purely sadistic one, in which humour can be found only in enjoyment of the fooled party’s suffering¹¹⁵. We have seen this phenomenon before, though, and *Schadenfreude* might reasonably provide enough humour to make the tone of this story rather more positive than tragic. Coxon stipulates that some of the comic value in these stories, particularly in the narrator’s obvious approval of the victim’s suffering, is inaccessible to modern audiences¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁵ “All of the above epilogues are predicated on the recipients’ glee in the suffering of figures who fail to live up to social expectations and who are thus deemed to deserve their humiliation.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 42)

¹¹⁶ “However unpalatable these closures may be to the modern reader, they are symptomatic of many late medieval comic tales as crude satire: literary entertainment which held up human vice

The morality-flouting setup in more than one of the Stricker's works, clearly taking the form of moral tales but more accurately viewed as warnings against placing oneself at risk, would recall the treatment of Amis's victims, whose suffering is used to warn us against cheats and liars. But some of these tales, according to Haug, lacked such practical warnings and cut straight to sadism. As an example, he uses the tale of the greedy nobleman and the horse dealer. Scolded by his relatives for being too selfish (another incidence of the *karg* character, but this time one who goes unpunished), he offers to give away horses, but then finds fault with every horse the dealer sends him. The merchant, who has served him faithfully, is ultimately ruined, and the relatives give up on the prodigal: he is obviously never going to change. The story ends with a weak appended explanation that the horse dealer deserved what he got, that is, financial ruin and banishment, because he served an unfair master. Haug sees this explanation as justifying evil, and emphasizes the *Missklang* that appears throughout works such as these.

Die Geschichte verhöhnt jede Moral. Sie bricht mit dem von Ragotzky angesetzten Grundprinzip, demzufolge am Schluss die gerechte Ordnung wiederhergestellt sein sollte – es sei denn, es wäre möglich, über den Düpierten zu lachen; doch gerade dies schließt sich hier aus. Ohne das Epimythion könnte das eine böse Geschichte sein. Durch das Epimythion, das die Bosheit rechtfertigt, wird daraus eine Erzählung, die mit einem Missklang endet. (Haug, 22).

The Stricker's *maere* universe is similar in this way to that of *Reinhart Fuchs*: it does not have a moral order that protects the innocent or punishes the guilty. The prevailing theme throughout most of the *maeren* is the infliction of misery on the characters, not of its resolution. He counts

and folly to ridicule, reaffirming conventional norms and expectations.” (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 39)

only two, “Der nackte Bote” and “Das erzwungene Gelübde,” as having conciliatory endings; the rest simply degrade into uncomfortable chaos¹¹⁷.

Good is not served in the *maeren*, but there is more to them than the suffering of their victims; if the whole point is watching someone suffer, then why use a plot at all? Some of the *maeren* may very well appear morally bankrupt and sadistic, but they still retain a sort of comic force, even if the humour is frequently dissipated with an offhand comment about how the victim of the joke goes on to undergo gruesomely intense suffering as a result of it; the laughter catches in one’s throat. Undermining the humour, or the morality, breaks the rules of humourous writing in general, which is just what one can expect the Stricker to do. In “Die drei Wünsche,” foolishness punishes itself, and this punishment is associated with the will of God; the suffering of the clown can be quite severe in this respect¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁷ “Ansonsten kommt es so gut wie nie zu einer wirklich versöhnlichen Lösung. Der arme Mann, der durch die Unbesonnenheit seiner Frau seine drei Wünsche verspielt, stirbt am Ende vor Gram. Der Ehegatte, der aus Liebe seiner Frau verspricht, ihr alles, was sie sage, zu glauben, wird gnadenlos lebendig begraben. Die Frau, die sich am heißen Eisen verbrennt, geht mit einer verkrüppelten Hand durch das Leben, wobei ihr Mann, der sich nur durch Trug aus der Affäre gezogen hat, sie künftig hassen und, so sehr er nur kann, verächtlich machen will. Wenn die eingemauerte Frau ihren Sinn wandelt und freikommt, so meint sie zwar, ihr Vorbild würde alle bösen Weiber im Land auf den Pfad der Tugend führen, aber im Grunde kuschen sie nur aus Angst, dass ihnen dasselbe Schicksal zuteil werden könnte. Der Mann, der in „Der Gevatterin Rat” seine eigene Frau nochmals heiratet, gerät nicht nur in ein quälend zwiespältiges Verhältnis zu ihr, sondern er sieht sich sein Leben lang dem Gespött der Leute ausgeliefert. Obschon die Frau im „Klugen Knecht” sich nach ihrem Fehltritt sehr um ihren Mann bemüht, liebt er sie, wie es heißt, nicht mehr so wie zuvor. Der geizige Edelmann kommt ungeschoren davon, während der Pferdehändler, der sich redlich Mühe gegeben hat – mit der Billigung des Autors – in den Ruin getrieben wird. Und wenn im „Ehescheidungsgespräch: der Konflikt fröhlich im Bett ad acta gelegt wird, so schweben darüber doch die Gewalt und die Lüge”. (Haug, 23-4).

¹¹⁸ “dummheit bestraft sich selbst. Man darf darüber lachen.” (Haug, 12).

The clown must be punished because his or her actions were performed without any thought behind them, that is, automatically. Automatic behaviour need not be vicious; even a commendable action can become condemnable if it is not thought through. In another *maere* involving two kings and a scoundrel, the king who exercises constant, excessive *milte* toward the scoundrel is ultimately dethroned by him; excess of any kind is to be condemned. In a shocking divergence from the mechanics of the *Amis*, even this primary, all-redeeming virtue becomes a flaw when the rule is applied automatically. “Zur *mâze* gehört also auch der Verstand, denn das richtige Einschätzen der Situation und der gute Wille allein genügen dem Stricker nicht. Wer ohne Maß lebt und handelt, dem unterlaufen (ungewollt) gewichtige Fehler, die das Sozialgefüge empfindlich stören können, auch wenn es um ein Übermaß in bezug auf sogenannte tugenden geht.” (Böhm, 50). *Amis*, a creation of the same author, does not exercise *milte* automatically; this excessive king simply hands over whatever he is asked. *Amis*, though unwilling to refuse *milte*, remains in control of just what is handed over, and can thus avoid a similarly bad end.

5.3.1 Limited Information and Visuality in *maeren*

The emphasis on visual information, and the tunnel vision of the victim who can sense nothing that is not under the cheater's control, can also be observed in the *maeren*: in the short comic stories in which a wife must hide her lover from a husband, who has come home unexpectedly due to an eye injury, she will usually distract him by further impairing his visual perception. Frosch-Freiburg explores the various ways in which the woman in this story deceives the husband, and all either deny visual information or undermine its validity¹¹⁹: the wife covers the husband's face, or splashes water in his eyes, for example, but she need make no attempts to subdue any other sensory information.

Another tale shows the use of obscured vision in a literal sense, the darkness. A pair of students who arrive at a miller's house and engage in sexual relations with his wife and daughter under

¹¹⁹ “Oft lenkt sie ihn einfach ab, einmal spritzte sie ihm, in Badezuber sitzend, die Augen voll Wasser, ein andermal erklärt sie seine Wahrnehmungen für Sinnestäuschungen, und schließlich hilft ihr eine Nachbarin oder Magd aus der schwierigen Situatiton.” (Frosch-Freiburg, 129)

the cover of darkness is another popular theme. One sneaks into the daughter's bed and seduces her. The other student, envious, tricks the wife into rising to attend to the baby, and switches the beds around so that she will mistake him for her husband; she does, and responds positively to his amorous advances. The objects of deceit are certainly not congratulated for their poor perception, but neither are they alone. A spouse's somewhat implausible inability to identify an impostor-spouse in the darkness is not isolated to stories such as these. Besides the many victims of Amis's creative costuming, Marke is deceived by Isolde and Brangane in the *Tristan* stories, and Brunhilde, to some extent, by Siegfried and Gunther in the *Nibelungenlied*. In all of these cases, the switch works in the same way; the impostor takes on the character's identity in the only way to which other characters respond: visually. Visual information produces a new apparent identity, and its manipulation an easy and powerful tool.

5.3.2 Schneekind stories

Besides being manipulated, information can be limited by social pressure forcing characters to ignore it. In the popular *Schneekind* story, which should not be automatically attributed to the Stricker, a cuckolded husband arrives after a long journey to find his wife holding a too-young infant. Not wishing to broadcast the incident, as he would bear part of the shame when cuckolded, he is forced to pretend to believe her obviously false story that the child was conceived of snow. This is the first cheat: the wife explains away a hidden situation, that she has become pregnant by means of another man, through an apparent situation, that she has been impregnated by other means. The husband, although he sees through her story, must respond to the apparent situation in order to preserve his own community status because the hidden situation is packaged with information that makes him socially unacceptable.

The hidden information, though, remains just as relevant as it has in the *Amis* and in *Reinhart*. In the second part, the husband takes the child on a journey and sells him, claiming upon his return that, being conceived of snow, the boy has melted. The distraught wife knows that this is not the case but, having come by this knowledge through socially unacceptable means, she must also respond to the apparent situation, in order to preserve her earlier lie.

Writing on a corresponding French tale, *L'Enfant qui fu remis au soleil*, Percy defines the husband's motivation for accepting the initial lie as a practical one: if made public, the wife's behaviour would dishonour him. The exchange between husband and wife is similar:

the husband in *L'Enfant qui fu remis au soleil* only pretends, out of expediency, to believe the explanation his wife has volunteered to explain her pregnancy. The ambiguity she created to mediate between alternative explanations of the child's birth is eventually exploited by the husband to mediate between alternative explanations of his disappearance, that he was sold into slavery or that he melted on a mountain top. (Percy, 77)

Plausibility is, after all, relative; the husband may accept the story if he chooses, as he has been required to profess such a belief in the past. Not to have done so would have proved equally ruinous to his reputation:

The husband in this story initially supposes that the sign provided by the presence of the newborn child is demonstrative proof that his wife has been intimate with another man, but her claim to have been impregnated with a snowflake, in conjunction probably with that tenet of his Christian faith which obliges him to accept the virgin birth of Christ, persuades him of his impotency to refute logically his wife's contentions. (Percy, 77)

Is the *Schneekind* story antireligious, alluding to the concept of the virgin birth as a story that violates probability and logic, a sort of "gateway drug" to becoming a dupe? Comic allusions to the convenience of the story, suggestions that it sounds like the sort of lie that a young woman in trouble might make up, were not new, but does this tale compare the sexless conception of Christ to other conceptions that must be kept from public knowledge? If so, do the *Schneekind* tales brand the story as a source of logical fallacy which, as we have seen in other fallacies committed by victims, the audience is warned to avoid? It is highly unlikely that such tales would be so revolutionary; the travelling husband is never described as rejecting the Holy Mother's virginity in order to see through his wife's claim, and, indeed, he does not need to. Nor is he the victim in this story, but the wise character who dissimulates successfully; his religious beliefs, to which we have no access, do not make him into a fool. It is the wife, in fact, who makes the allusion, and the husband – the successful cheater – who ignores it.

5.4 *Ulenspiegel*

The cheating tradition continues long after the high middle ages; as late as the early sixteenth century, the cheater *Ulenspiegel* borrows liberally from the *Amis*, and demonstrates to what extent a work can reflect the diversity of its past, with nearly all of its content adapted from a wide range of identifiable works. Like *Reinhart Fuchs*, the work contains a name loaded with multiple, descriptive meanings. The name of the corrupt king, Vrevel, could mean either 'boldness' or 'grievous sin.' *Ulenspiegel*'s name is similarly difficult to nail down, and seems to hint at features of his character – but not necessarily, as we shall see.

Reinhart and Pfaffe Amis change identities easily. Like *Ulenspiegel*'s, their success often depends on their assumed identities, and, just as *Ulenspiegel* easily finds work in various trades in which he has no credentials or experience, Amis and Reinhart never fail to induce other characters to treat them as if their assumed identities were genuine.

In this way, the victims exhibit the same sort of automatic behaviour exhibited by victims in other stories, a distinction that may be all that they have in common. Oppenheimer asserts that *Ulenspiegel*'s victims all deserve their punishments in one way or another¹²⁰, but such a generalization may likely proceed from an unnecessary attempt to locate dramatic symmetry that need not be present for the work to function. *Ulenspiegel* also exhibits a preference for victimizing individuals in other groups besides those who commit crimes, such as those who use language that is not slavishly explicit, those who help him, those who disapprove of his profession, or those whom he has victimized in the past. Despite this preference, *Ulenspiegel*

¹²⁰ “What is indeed remarkably consistent – though this too proves nothing – is the text's, and *Eulenspiegel*'s, seemingly unrelenting contempt, which falls into at least these acute categories: contempt for dishonest scholars; contempt for dishonest tradesmen, hotel-keepers, and farmers; contempt for dishonest officials and nobles; contempt for dishonest citizens and politicians; contempt for dishonest doctors; and contempt for stupid people generally.” (Oppenheimer, xxxi-xxxii)

restricts his cheats to none of these, nor does he restrict himself to dishonest victims, not to mention episodes in which he indiscriminately deceives an entire town or university. From a moral or didactic perspective, Ulenspiegel's cheats, like Amis's and Reinhart's, tend rather to be broadcast into the wind and allowed to fall where they may.

Also like Amis and Reinhart, Ulenspiegel does mostly evil and often commits acts that the audience would not abide in a real person, yet is intended to remain sympathetic. His motivation is often vague or imperceptible, in contrast to the *Amis*, and he is shown to have other options, unlike Reinhart, who is usually fighting for his life. He does not exit the story in as explicitly sympathetic a way as Reinhart or Amis, who both do good works. Amis even repents, to some extent, whereas *Ulenspiegel* dedicates three entire episodes to the trickster's unrepentant attitude and stubborn avoidance of good works at the time of his death. Yet, as Oppenheimer insists, "N. has evidently taken pains to ensure that we sympathize with Eulenspiegel" (Oppenheimer, xxxix) by such means as sequencing the events to restore Ulenspiegel to the audience's favour after the trickster has gone too far.

This sequence is as essential to Ulenspiegel as it is to the series of tales in the *Amis* and *Reinhart*. The cause and effect relationship is limited to location for Amis, and Reinhart also benefits from making himself scarce after a cheat has taken place. Ulenspiegel, too, is often described as unable to continue cheating in a certain location because people have gotten to know him there, and he must depart for another location, either due to banishment or to facilitate further cheating. Though significantly less so than *Ulenspiegel*, the *Amis* and *Reinhart* are somewhat episodic; the order in which they are presented does add value to the whole, but the parts need not necessarily take place in this order to make logical sense. The *Renart* material is necessarily episodic, of course, coming from multiple authors and not forming a cohesive unity, but events in *Reinhart* and the *Amis* do often motivate one another to some extent: Reinhart ends his story by killing off a bad king, rather than after unsuccessfully stealing a chicken, stranding a trusting animal in a church full of angry humans for no reason, or committing rape; presented in a different order, the episodes might have made the fox appear evil, or at least incompetent. *Ulenspiegel*, though, also appears to be arranged in a particular order, with victim types and cheating strategies grouped

together and, according to Oppenheimer, his failures are optimally placed to restore sympathy whenever he does something spectacularly evil¹²¹.

5.4.1 Literal Truth and Actual Lies: the Demonic Trickster

In a manner similar to that found in Isolde's oath, Ulenspiegel frequently manages to lie to others, or to twist the meaning of others' statements, by privileging literal truth over intended or perceived meaning; messages between individuals are necessarily encoded into language and idiom, and then broadcast, and Ulenspiegel deliberately decodes them incompletely, revealing a changed meaning. In several episodes, Ulenspiegel appears to be motivated by the pursuit of literal truth, literally fulfilling a command while avoiding as much as possible the spirit in which it was given¹²². Like Isolde's oath, Ulenspiegel's literalized truth is designed to be both literally true and functionally deceptive. This pursuit of literalized truth is characteristic of *Ulenspiegel*, not the predecessors; it is new with him.

The persistent emphasis on the word 'truth' and on the literal or absurdly precise following of instructions does not appear in the sources of Eulenspiegel's tales. In the sources, again, the stress is on the pleasure of deception, as a sport to be

¹²¹ “Unlike the heroes, such as Pfaffe Amis, of the major sources, Eulenspiegel is presented as by no means invincible, as by no means the constant victor in his exploits. He becomes in fact not only a sympathetic character but also a more interesting one because of his carefully timed defeats.” (Oppenheimer, xxxix)

¹²² “Eulenspiegel seems to care, in this adventure at least, about the language people speak, and about the relations between that language and clarity between human beings. The same may be said of more than half of Eulenspiegel's adventures, in which, with impressive obviousness, he spends his time in reacting to the metaphors and hyperboles of others (and as often as not making no money in the process) or in showing others, through rhetorical devices of his own, how language deceives as well as reveals.” (Oppenheimer, xxxiv-xxxv)

enjoyed for its own sake, rather than on its more serious implications (Oppenheimer, xxxvi).

Though this pursuit of the literal truth at the expense of effective communication by no means characterizes the work as a whole, it does connect Ulenspiegel to Reinhart and Isolde's oaths. His truth is true only inasmuch as Isolde's oath is 'true,' and only by the same principle. Isolde's too-literal, and therefore incomprehensible, encoding of her message deceives the hearers, and Ulenspiegel "deceives" himself when he decodes messages in a similarly defective way.

Ulenspiegel is, at least, thoroughly un-Christianized, and possibly even anti-Christian. He does align himself with priests and other religious status-holders, but only those who are corrupt enough to encourage his abuse of his fellow-man; a *pfaffe* helps him to cheat a farmer out of a bolt of cloth by using his trusted status as a holy man to tell him a more compelling lie, and another friend, a bishop, becomes angry and goads him when he declares that he will mend his ways.

These people take advantage of their priestly status in the same manner as Amis does, using it more as a disguise than as an actual identity, and thus rejecting or degrading the sanctity associated with their positions.

After his death, too, Ulenspiegel's corpse is nearly disinterred. In an obvious deviation from hagiographic legends with perfectly preserved and sweet-smelling bodies, the priest and the council are forced to stop digging and fill in the hole, because the stench from the body is so intense that it is impossible to remain near it. Rather than being converted to the essence of roses, the stench of Ulenspiegel's corpse is enhanced.

The character is certainly no saint; though Amis may undermine the sanctity of his position, he is certainly not at war with the priesthood. When Amis does preach a sermon, it is a good one. He is a well-educated and effective speaker, perfectly capable of fulfilling a priestly role, whereas Ulenspiegel, though he is not in a position to shame the Church personally, displays automatic hostility for anyone who is genuinely pious. He goes out of his way even on his death-bed to insult and humiliate religious officials who attend to him.

Like Reinhart, Ulenspiegel need not gain from hurting others, but rather goes out of his way and expends resources to lead them, particularly religious officials, into shameful acts, such as goading a priest into defecating on the floor of a church, or telling another priest to take as large a donation as he sees fit, in hopes of tempting him to greed and thus, through this greed, tricking him into plunging his hand into yet more of Ulenspiegel's ever-present feces. A beguine appears at his death-bed to pray for him, and Ulenspiegel provokes her to wrath through blatant, unprovoked insults (again involving scatological allusions), then describes her reaction as typifying the entire group. Ulenspiegel's infernal connections, then, are by no means restricted to his name. If not a devil, he is at least devilish, and at war with Christianity.

In reference to its similarity with the dubious naming of Vrevel, the question of Eulenspiegel's name deserves consideration. There is the plain meaning, that of the owl and the mirror, represented in woodcuts associated with the work and described in two episodes as being used to represent the individual in question. Next, there is a typically broad pun, too appropriate not to be deliberate: "the name can also be understood as 'Ul'n speghel,' a command or invitation to 'wipe one's arse' (Honegger, 129f; Wunderlich, 10f) in contemporary hunter's jargon (from 'ulen,' to sweep or wipe clean, and 'spiegel,' arse or behind)." (Oppenheimer, lxiii) The prevalence of scatological jokes in the collection suggests that this similarity may not be accidental. Finally, a meaning with darker implications: Ulenspiegel's name carries an apparently evil alignment¹²³. The character is once described as responding with horror to the sight of a crucifix, so the idea is not too far-fetched.

¹²³ "Beyond this lies the metaphorical idea of the owl in Eulenspiegel's day. According to the *Etymologicum Teutonicae Linguae* of Cornelius Kilianus (1598) the Dutch 'wl,' which is the source of 'ul' or 'ulen,' was a symbol of the 'homo stodius et improbus,' or the stupid and evil or wicked man (Cf. Also Honegger, 130)" (Oppenheimer, lxiii)

5.4.2 Sources and Adaptations

Oppenheimer lists nine sources¹²⁴ for *Till Ulenspiegel*, among which the *Amis* is responsible for five chapters¹²⁵. The germination of so many sources in the same piece demonstrates how a story can evolve over time, influencing future works and at the same time borrowing from the past. Oppenheimer describes modern-day “children’s” adaptations of this work itself as themselves altered, to protect modern sensibilities that find the *Ulenspiegel* material inappropriate for children.

If every German is weaned on Eulenspiegel's adventures, so to speak, and believes that he knows who Eulenspiegel is, he has probably not read his adventures in their original, highly scatological forms at all, but instead run into one of their numerous bland adaptations. The satire too has been censored, or so toned down, that its native hue of sophistication, and adult and often merciless instrument, has been sicklied o'er with the pale cast of mortification. (Oppenheimer, xxi)

One should not blame the translators, though. Offensive material in the rambling original work produces trouble with transmission: *Eulenspiegel* adaptations, or at least those with which the non-scholarly public would be familiar, are significantly shortened and altered by a ruthless, chapter-cutting cleanup. Oppenheimer claims that Ulenspiegel's

incessant need to expose human gullibility, superstitious fears, and naive frailties – this, if anything, is the theme of his life – has so horrified translators and adaptors of his tales that they have consistently mistranslated, misadapted, misrepresented, and mischristened them, subjecting them to a prudishness that

¹²⁴ “Lappenberg, Lindow, and other scholars trace the adapted tales and the Foreword to nine sources: Pfaffe Amis, Pfaffe vom Kalenberg, Gonella, Poggio, *Le cento novelle antiche*, Morlini, *Wigoleis vom Rade*.” (Oppenheimer, 1)

¹²⁵ “Chapters 1, 27, 28, 29, and 31 are traceable to *Der Pfaffe Amis*.” (Oppenheimer, 1)

would no doubt have made Eulenspiegel and his sixteenth-century audience laugh with derision (Oppenheimer, lix)

but in light of the more salacious and less intelligent *Ulenpiegel* material, it seems unlikely that gullibility or frailties are the exposures that offend modern editors.

For the purposes that Oppenheimer cites, such bowdlerizing alterations are unavoidable: in the collection of ninety-five stories; for example, the primary source of humour in at least seven (depending on one's definition of 'primary source') occurs when Ulenpiegel defecates on something that belongs to somebody else. This number represents fewer than half of the chapters in which the protagonist's bowel movements constitute at least part of the punch line, and the unsaleable material does not end with this extensive array of toilet jokes. In one memorable episode of painfully forced humour, Ulenpiegel boils an employer's dog because he has been instructed to boil hops to make beer, and "hops," conveniently, is the dog's name. Indeed, if not for a slim percentage of the *Ulenpiegel* chapters, a modern editor who hoped to salvage a saleable comic work, for entertainment, from this material, would likely be faced with an impossible task; its value is entirely historical, and interest in a faithful adaptation necessarily scholarly.

Faced with rambling source material that contains elements that might be considered weak, offensive, or ponderously long in the recipient culture, an editor must make changes: the same thing may have happened with *Reinhart Fuchs*, with its drastically shortened scenes, inserted moralizing interjections, and careful arrangement that provides rational motivation for many of the fox's existing actions, downplays some of his worst deeds and allows him to exit the work a redeemed fox. Most of the *Renart* material does not appear in *Reinhart*. Regardless of whether these alterations represent a deliberate cleanup, an explicit re-working for educational purposes, or, probably, something else entirely, the effect is largely the same: a great deal is lost and changed in the transmission from one culture to another, producing a new and different work.

The modern *Ulenpiegel* adaptations that Oppenheimer so enthusiastically derides are not bad imitations, but rather new works in their own right, certainly as 'new' as many of the medieval

adaptations available to us today; *Ulenspiegel* itself borrows extensively from older works¹²⁶, and, in turn, lends to future ones.

Even more striking than the numbers of sources that contribute to *Eulenspiegel*, and which combine with the author's remodeling of them, is the book's enormous influence. As has been suggested, it endures to this day. It reaches into literature, art, music, philosophy, and dance. It also digs even deeper, into national consciousness and character, into the mysteries of ancient linguistic community. (Oppenheimer, lv)

5.4.3 Conclusion

We have observed that these contemporary tricksters share characteristics with each other, and with a later trickster based partly on their culture. These characters are not isolated incidents but examples from a wider trend evolving over time: by examining these characters we can look at the fossil record, preserved in crystallized linguistic amber, and watch as the ideas, such as factually true lies, or persistence of false stories beyond their usefulness, spread more and more widely across a culture and even filter through to new areas, in this case, fictional literature. Outside influences, like the legal concepts that we see explored in *Tristan's* trial, as well as in *Reinhard Fuchs*, surface again and again in fiction as authors join in the greater, more practical discussion. By the time we get to *Ulenspiegel*, we find something new, similar to the loaded oath but different in its motivation and usage: *Ulenspiegel* does indeed pursue literal truth at the expense of effective communication and honesty, but the oath-swearing scenario has disappeared. There is no formal legal setting, and no divine hand is expected to smite any character who makes an utterance that is not true, factually or otherwise. In other ways, though, *Ulenspiegel* is similar to Reinhart and Amis. Like his predecessors, he uses disguises, social manipulation and double realities resulting from lies, even copying some cheats outright.

¹²⁶ “At least thirty-three of the tales appear to be taken directly from earlier authors, and many of the rest contain echoes, phrases and aphorisms found in the previous texts.” (Oppenheimer, xlix)

That is not to say that cheater characters evolve from one another like organisms; ideas can mix to an extent that genes cannot, and new, fresh ideas are constantly invented and imported. A character is never based exclusively on other characters, and all the characters discussed here are unique, even the adaptations. While all of his predecessors discussed here are attributed divine favour, Ulenspiegel is treated as demonic, an anti-saint. Isolde and Tristan, though they carry out a spectacular cheat, and long-term deception, are by no means comic characters. Tristan and Daniel are real knights – but Amis is also treated like one. The Stricker's characters, moreover, show an originality not observed in the other, adapted stories. They are, to a significant extent, something new – the only real constant in Medieval cheater stories, or indeed in Medieval literature in general: a new spark of creativity, inexorably merged with, and dependent on, what came before it, adds a new component to the development and history of literature.

6 Conclusion

The cheaters in the *Amis* and in *Reinhart Fuchs* continue a theme that does not begin or end with them. The works examined in this study are not adaptations of existing material, but single steps in the progress of greater literary phenomena.

Unlike the good hero, the cheater need not be taken seriously and, because the cheater in general is not meant to be law-abiding, there is no place for judgment of his actions. What the cheater *should* do is not relevant, but only what he or she *can* do, or seem to do. Both cheaters in the two works with which this study is concerned, and to some extent other cheaters of the same time period, accomplish their cheats by means of a similar pattern: the cheater uses the compulsion of other characters to follow their own internal rule sets by manipulating the apparent situation until the rules compel the victim to act. This strategy produces two situations, one true (usually hidden) and one apparent (usually social), and causes or allows them to diverge. While the victim preferentially responds to the apparent situation, the cheater is left free to react to what is actually going on.

The popularity of cheater protagonists demonstrates how willing, even eager, audiences are to accept a morally questionable hero; cheater stories are not meant to be imitated or evaluated. They are meant only to be enjoyed. The cheater's universe is a deliberate, self-conscious unreality in which impossible objects and implausible situations exist and can be believed. In this non-serious forum, the wicked cheater can display even blasphemous or demonic characteristics, engaging in acts that the audience would find unacceptable in real life, while still remaining completely sympathetic.

Morality in the traditional sense holds very little sway in the *Fabliaux* or cheater universe; there is no possibility of discussing characters as governed by it, but only of how it is treated. Rather than being served by the hero, morality serves the plot: "Conformity to the dictates of a traditional Christian morality is a variable in the fabliaux. Its services may be enlisted to sharpen the comic denouement by certain authors, but it may as readily be left in abeyance, or its contravention may be deliberately flaunted." (Percy, 95) Criticism and lay readership here follow the same example. Morality is demoted to a small and optional theme, and another criterion becomes the mark of the victorious character: "The side we are invited to take in

comedy is often not right over wrong, but cleverness over stupidity.” (Perfetti, 49-50). Another prevailing theme in trickster literature, according to Classen, is pettiness: nothing is allowed to be treated too seriously, lest the victim’s suffering be translated to audience sympathy. “The comic by itself results from a conflict between norms, their breach or transgression, though mostly not too egregious to hurt or to insult badly, otherwise laughter would choke in our throats and give way to tears or wrath.” (Classen, 5). If the victim’s suffering becomes too severe, he continues, it is minimized as much as possible through the same casual treatment afforded to really minor misfortunes, and the cheater’s actions, no matter how damaging or immoral, is treated as a minor infraction. Distance is maintained from the victim, whereas the cheater is placed as much as possible within the audience’s social fold, directing medieval kinship-based sympathy toward the victorious character:

The audience, or those who laugh about it, feel that they are on the same level with the foolish or extraordinarily acting person. In that case those who laugh indicate that they are not concerned either about the norms or about the sanctions imposed on the transgressor. In other words, in this situation laughing opens the eyes toward the margin, the obscure, the devious, and relays how much the negative element can be enjoyed and cherished. (Classen, 5).

The audience, then, shares in the cheater’s joys, becoming complicit in his or her devious actions. As Reinhart wins, the audience wins along with him.

6.1 Qualities of Cheaters and Victims

Reinhart is unusually intelligent, high-born and resourceful. He never gives up, no matter how discouraging his situation may be, nor does he lose his composure in public. Amis is also introduced as particularly competent, with both native intelligence and formal education. Intelligence is essential: like the *Fabliaux* writers, the Stricker consistently privileges intelligence over power, even in his courtly epic, *Daniel von dem blühenden Tal*.

If we contrast Amis with his first opponent, and the arguable source of all his troubles, we see a pattern that appears throughout all the stories, in both *Reinhart* and the *Amis*. The bishop is *wis*,

which does not necessarily translate to 'wise.' The courtiers who falsely claim to see Amis's nonexistent paintings, in order to protect their fiefs, are similarly *wis*, and so is the quack doctor whom Amis dupes into keeping a sane man prisoner. Though vulnerable to cheats, such characters know how to take care of themselves, at least in a situation to which they are accustomed. The doctor still ensures that he is paid for 'curing' his non-patient; *wis* is not necessarily a negative trait, but represents the high degree of socialization needed to maintain a high rank in society.

6.1.1 Power as a Liability

Unfortunately for the courtiers, the power of authority can be a liability if relied upon too completely: "traditional authority figures regularly become victims of their own strategies, they are shamed and wounded, and ultimately turn out to be the butt of the joke." (Classen, 106). Among the characteristics common to counter-normative writings, Jost describes: "role-reversals, especially of the villain and the courtois, the dispossessed and the powerful, as at Mardi Gras" (Jost, 432). This treatment associates the written, fictional events with traditions enacted in life, again bringing the audience into the equation. Also typical of counternormative writing is "deception and trickery, especially of a person of a higher social order" (Jost, 432), making the dominant character not only more likely to lose, but generally easier to deceive. As Jost writes on the subject of counter-normative literature as a whole: "No traditional hero wins in a Bakhtinian topsy-turvy world of power inversion and role reversal which comically puts down the socially prominent and thereby raises up the socially disempowered, often to the joy of the latter, and the audience." (Jost, 431).

These new standards do not necessarily overwrite the old ones; Pfaffe Amis does not suddenly become worthy of imitation simply because he wins, nor does *Pfaffe Amis* function in any way to argue that Christian morality is invalid. Rather than destroying it, the Trickster (as a general phenomenon) plays with morality, repurposing it for other uses, for which it was not traditionally intended. In a more modern tale, Perfetti describes Chaucer's Wife of Bath not as working to reverse gender stereotypes, but as using them in a different way than the traditional one:

The Wife's strategy (as designed by Chaucer) is to reappropriate clerical clichés instead of contesting them. Rather than trying to argue that women are smart, she appears to accept women's weakness of intellect only to turn this apparent weakness to their advantage. Chaucer is obviously playing his own game with logic, but in the process, he lends his words to a female character who demonstrated that despite her overt embracing of female corporeality and experience, her mind is as sharp as that of any man. (Perfetti, 41).

Amis's use of "good" to define *Amis*, then, becomes the literary equivalent of turning a screw with a butter knife: it may not be the normal, recommended usage, but it can be made to work. At the same time, though, Chaucer's negative stereotypes, like the butter knife, or the concept of "good," are damaged. The Wife's very use of the stereotypes in this manner disproves them: clearly she possesses a perfectly good intellect. Similarly, audience support for *Amis* and *Reinhart*, rather than their (relatively) innocent victims, does call the desirability of the amorphous, lofty "good" into question. At least in a fictional character, is it really what people want? Will it necessarily prevail? Is it a reasonable standard to apply to those attempting to navigate a world that is not itself "good"? It is, like Chaucer's negative female stereotypes, another impossible situation from which one can emerge victorious only by cheating. "as the Wife has said, women are condemned no matter what they do, they might as well use their allegedly feminine skills to their advantage." (Perfetti, 45-6).

It is this resignation to (not to be mistaken for cheerful acceptance of) the negatively-viewed situation, and this effort to surpass it by means of inventive resourcefulness, that characterizes the Trickster in general. Mary-Jane Schenck's theory on the trickster epic's emphasis on intelligence over power suggests that it was a result of social change in the environment in which they were created. The rise of the towns meant the proliferation of a culture in which one's wits and labour are the most valuable asset. Rather than distinguishing oneself by birth, a citizen climbs to the top through intelligence and effort; as wit became more important and therefore interesting, it began to be attributed to more characters. The Old French *Fabliaux*, and the predecessors to *Reinhart* and *Amis*, undermine the concept that a hero ought to be stronger or better because of inborn characteristics, and their German successors continue this process.

Other critics examine this phenomenon and reach less ambitious conclusions, but not necessarily conflicting ones. Gabrielle Hutton observes in a broad study that consistently successful characters are those who must improvise with non-power resources, producing a pattern of the clever, weak character and the incompetent, strong one: “les deux groupes qui ont le plus de succès dans les fabliaux, les femmes et les clercs, n’ont presque pas de pouvoir concret sur lequel s’appuyer et, par conséquent, ils sont pratiquement obligés d’exercer leur *savoir*.” (Hutton, 115) The weaker member thus becomes the more powerful by means of those features that make him the weakest; unable to depend on raw power, it becomes necessary to develop something better. The cheater reverses the expected order by taking on the more powerful character and winning. But power does not necessarily make a character fail in this environment, unless other positive qualities are also lacking. Unsuccessful characters are those who rely entirely on their power and fail to consider the possibility that they could be defeated:

Si les prêtres qui se servent de leur *savoir* sont rares c’est assurément que leur position leur donne de multiples possibilités d’adopter une autre stratégie. Étant donné tout le pouvoir inhérent au rôle de prêtre il n’est guère surprenant que la plupart d’entre eux comptent sur ce pouvoir pour assurer leur victoire – avec les conséquences qu’on connaît bien. (Hutton, 115)

The bishop, then, reflects why the table-turning found so often in the French *Fabliaux* was plausible; he has so much confidence in his superior power that he takes no precautions, and is easy to cheat.

6.1.2 Temporary Reversal of the Status Quo

In allowing a less powerful character to defeat a more powerful one, the trickster story produces an alternate universe in which the customary status quo is reversed. “Within the context of dialogic, social, sexual, political, gender-related, familial, clerical, and interpersonal tensions, fableors reverse traditional dominance while flaunting joyful hilarity, or black humor.” (Jost, 431). Rules that favour those who are normally more powerful are the first to be dismissed, and disobedience becomes a necessary ingredient for success. “These lower social roles of faithful wife, holy cleric, dutiful servant, honest husband gain power by becoming their opposite:

unfaithful, unholy, disrespectful, dishonest, and thereby upend the social hierarchy as they grasp power from their social betters, and ultimately win the contest of supremacy.” (Jost, 432). In contrast to the reinforcement of the status quo and acceptance of unfairness as a function of the comic text generally, Jost argues that, within the text, it is often those characters who do not stay in their places that are the most successful, because their misbehaviour is more entertaining than that of their victims. “Insofar as they display, at the same time, unusual witticism and intellect, their transgression is easily accepted because it serves, like in all good jokes, for the public entertainment, and retribution against an unjust power system.” (Classen, 107). Jost discovers a theme of change, in which the existing power structure is criticized and either disrupted or destroyed: “the replacement of one constraining system, at least for the lower classes, with another which posits a wholly other register of victors achieving new social and economic success, is the *modus operandi* of the genre – the way it endorses change.” (Jost, 430). Other defining factors of the genre, according to Jost, include “high-spirited hilarity and fun, joyful satisfaction in upsetting the social order” (Jost, 432), “temporary social disruption accepted as exciting and wondrous, not cataclysmic” (Jost, 432), and, significantly, “a return to the status quo at the end, often hastily concluded with no more fanfare than a joyful carnivalesque celebration of victory.” (Jost, 433). Writing on the literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, Classen interprets even this temporary disruption of the social order as criticism of the existing social order in life: “Although the power structure is probably never permanently changed at the end, the laughter provoked by the *fabliaux* signals wishful thinking on the part of the members of the lower classes, particularly in the urban settings, hence the intelligentsia, and definitely the *fableors* themselves.” (Classen, 106).

If this trickster functions to undermine the established order, then perhaps the trickster epic can, too; Reinhart and Amis play out a cheating counterpart to the traditional heroic knight's role. They have their own series of adventures and perform amazing feats through their particular brand of prowess.

But can there be a high-ranking cheater in a carnivalesque atmosphere? Reinhart is himself a nobleman of sorts, and can be called to King Vrevel's court along with the other select animals. He is permitted, like a nobleman, to clear his name by swearing an oath on a holy relic. Amis's string of spectacular successes, and his obsession with sending his profits back to his house to amass wealth recall a knight's drive to send defeated opponents to Artus to amass honour. Amis

has more in common with the noble hero than we see in the actual knights that he encounters. His practice of *milte*, though, viewed in context with his financial inability to do so, complicates the resemblance. Amis's lack of resources to practice a knightly virtue motivates all of his cheats, threatening to make this near-knight into a satirical one. It is possible that Amis's, and Reinhart's, noble features are carnivalesque in themselves, applied as they are to characters who are so unworthy of them.

To what extent does Amis diverge from the ideal? The introduction goes so far as to demarcate him as the source of all the *liegen und triegen* in the world; though this assertion proves false, both he and Reinhart do activate a sort of chaos, which remained latent until the arrival of the trickster. How and with what effect is this chaos released? We have seen that victims tend to be made vulnerable through their own flaws, particularly vices. This principle can be expanded to the community, as well. Where the community is structured in a dysfunctional way, Amis or Reinhart reveal and exploit that flaw as easily as they would a weakness in an individual. Such potential chaos often exists within the most respected aspects of the community; rules meant to protect it are powerful enough to become damaging when applied in inappropriate situations.

Characters who are *wis* like the bishop or the courtiers adhere preferentially to social regulations, particularly when faced with a potential penalty for non-compliance. This high degree of socialization brings out the flaws inherent in a community, as rules must be followed at all times, and can be used in special cases, for which the rules make no allowances, to make members act against their own best interests, and against those of the group. Individuals are kept in line through rewards of high community status, and threats of low status, responding more readily to the carrot and stick enforcing good behaviour. They devote more energy to the rules themselves than they do to the reasons for which the rules exist, that is, the needs of the community itself. This wrongly-focused attention allows Amis to turn the community against itself, in the invisible-pictures episode and elsewhere. When 'treated' by doctor Amis, the sick courtiers are made vulnerable by a rule against breaking an oath; they lie to their lord and endanger their own health in order to keep an oath that they have made to Amis. At the church dedication ceremony, it is the community's injunctions against adultery that allow Amis to exploit its women's desire for community membership.

This phenomenon becomes even more serious in *Reinhart Fuchs*, where the court is unable to prosecute Reinhart because it observes the law, and he does not. Returning to the invisible pictures episode of the *Amis*, the individual who most lacks respectability, described only as unintelligent, or, according to some critics, an official fool, is easily able to resist the trickster. By refusing to comply with the established order that ties the hands of everyone else, and confessing that he cannot see the pictures, even asserting that nobody else can, he cures the court members of their collective insanity. The fool becomes the most valuable, and the least ridiculous, member of the community.

6.2 Double Reality

To operate, Amis generates twin situations that work in tandem: a hidden one and an apparent one. For example, he arrives at a house as a holy man and promises a miraculous resurrection of a dead animal (apparent) and then secretly produces an identical animal to impersonate the dead one (hidden/true). Reinhart usually produces only one situation, an apparent one, to correspond, to his best advantage, with the existing hidden situation, such as when he sends his captors, Brun and Tibert, into dangerous places by promising that they will find honey or mice there.

At King Vrevel's court, where he is being tried for his many crimes, Reinhart takes an existing situation that is already known to everyone and hides it under an apparent one, carefully choosing to create an alternative to which the king prefers to respond. Though other, more intelligent, characters are present, Reinhart knows that the king is the only one who counts. In another cover-up, his advocate, Crimel, argues that the plaintiff's completely true and damning testimony is not plausible. It is literally true that the testimony is not plausible, but the statement glosses over the problem: though unlikely, the testimony is completely accurate. By hiding the situation under an apparent one, Crimel uses a frequent trickster's tactic, using a literal truth to tell a practical lie.

Victims in this scene include the king, who is tricked into believing Reinhart's offer of a miraculous cure, and the jurors, who are duped forced to follow Reinhart's instructions for the king's cure. The king is the most effective victim here, not only because of his power, but because of the advanced degree of tunnel vision that he exhibits. Victims are easiest to control

when they focus on one thing in this way. Vrevel here reacts to nothing outside of a narrow field of view, believing what the cheater says, and accepting only evidence that supports it.

Tunnel vision is useful when Amis and Reinhart make use of their disguises. Though depiction of Reinhart in clothing is kept to an understandable minimum, he still adopts the role of a monk when he accepts Ysengrin into his monastery, a performance that works as well as a disguise. Amis dons the outward persona of an artist, a doctor, a merchant, and a priest, and every time, his victims are just as trusting and receptive as Ysengrin and Vrevel are to Reinhart. According to Jost, the use of disguises is characteristic not only of the *Fabliaux* but of counternormative literature in general, in which “disguises, themselves often humorous, facilitate deception against a powerful antagonist” (Jost, 431), producing for the Trickster further similarities with the Mardi Gras standard discussed above.

It is logical to refer to Amis as 'disguised' as a priest: if he could not preach a first-class sermon, one might say that his priesthood is as superficial as Ysengrin's. In fact, it is only the sermons, which are essentially performances, and which need not be sincerely motivated, that give Amis anything at all in common with the holy man he claims to be.

As a priest, Amis is expected to fulfil the function of the good advisor who guides his flock away from automatic behaviour and toward conscious choice to do what is right, motivated entirely by their welfare and serving God. Instead he encourages automatic behaviour, and makes God serve him, creating fake miracles to exploit his followers' credulity and make money. As a priest, Amis is received in people's homes, and considered more trustworthy; the priest can speak for God, and deals in matters of faith, which are not compatible with testing. As the *pfaffe*, Amis can take advantage of existing scripts to which victims will respond preferentially to true events, making his miracles highly plausible and almost expected. His priesthood resides completely in the apparent realm, and is essentially a disguise: he plays the part of a fictional character, the miraculous sort of priest, rather than the ordinary one. Classen describes this image of the artificially sacred as a characteristic that would persist for centuries: “laughter within a religious setting has always been an unnerving phenomenon, challenging the authorities and undermining the sacrality of any given situation.” (Classen, 90).

The collective *Amis* displays a pessimistic attitude about priests; Amis defeats a greedy bishop, he is able to bribe local priests to allow him to preach their inauguration sermons and, in the

Credulous Provost, several so-called holy men are exposed as incompetent. The admittedly anomalous Provost episode may even be a real-world attack on the clergy who wish too intently to see miracles, though neither Amis nor the *Amis* can confidently be described as specifically at war with the priesthood. When Amis does preach a sermon, it is a good one, even one that does his viewers' souls a great deal of good. He is an effective priest, perfectly capable of fulfilling a priestly role, as we see not only in the Provost episode, but also in the introduction, the church-dedication sermon, and the holy miracles section.

While Amis's priestly competence is never questioned, his honesty is under attack. Ysengrin might be viewed as similarly insulting, as a wolf who takes on the monk's role and performs it very badly, as can Primaut, who is sincere in his devotion only when drunk. His mass consists mainly of donning priestly garments and howling, and he is ultimately mistaken for a demon. If these predatory entities count as priests in these trickster epics, then it might be best for characters to stay away from the church.

6.3 Popularity of the Cheater

The institution that is traditionally viewed as the guiding light for good behaviour, then, is recreated as dishonest, greedy and even dangerous. The *Amis* and *Reinhart* spheres reflect this theme somewhat uniformly; really commendable actions are difficult to find. How, in a culture that valued adaptations of French literature for its improving qualities, did works like *Reinhart* survive? How did Heinrich sell the rape scene? Written medieval literature depended for its survival on continued popularity; without a demand for more manuscripts, there is no motivation for manual transmission, and if we take into account the high cost of parchment, we see that the survival of even an existing manuscript depended upon its continued estimation as more valuable than its parchment. Not only did Heinrich adapt his *Reinhart* from the many popular French sources, but his work received an apparently faithful transmission, surviving in two manuscripts and numerous adaptations.

Those individuals who did preserve an old work by re-inscribing it could be helpfully faithful to their original, or, occasionally, ruthless about making changes to portions of the story that they personally disliked. Although it was written down, then, the *Reinhart* material still essentially

had to be re-told to continue to exist today. Transmission of other works, such as *Tristan* and the *Nibelungenlied*, boast added continuations, created by other writers who may have considered the works too unfinished. These added endings, packaged with the original as if they were part of the same work, show us a literate public that was willing to make alterations.

And yet the worst instances of cruelty and violence tend not to be edited out of these presumably comic tales. As Gordon writes: “Audiences today may find that many such laughs in the *fabliaux* are marked with cruelty.... Frequently, the *fabliau* laugh track directs us to laugh when others fall down, to laugh at their reversals of fortune or their silly misunderstandings.” (Gordon, 488-9). Symons emphasizes that humour is not universal, but rather subjective:

Ultimately, humour, like other aspects of taste, is both personally and culturally determined rather than ‘natural’. This is particularly clear from some feminist reactions to the *Miller’s Tale*, which have found its fabliau premise offensive rather than funny; such readers would likely reject the humour of both the *Miller’s Tale* and its analogues on the same grounds. (Symons, 89-90)

It may be perfectly reasonable to find the humour in cheater stories unfunny or even offensive; some contemporary audiences may have responded in the same way. After he rapes Hersant, a crime for which we are given no logical motivation, Reinhart makes jokes about it to the animals who arrive to save her. This joking is a further attack on Hersant, and serves as added cruelty, rather than humour; rape was a serious crime punishable with the worst available penalties, so Reinhart has done things that the audience would recognize as unacceptable. Though moral lessons are inserted everywhere, in a significant divergence from the source material, the piece does present regicide as a potentially patriotic act. I suggest that these moralizations are at least slightly tongue-in-cheek, constantly condemning the protagonist for his misbehaviour, yet gleefully reporting it anyway, and approving of highly similar crimes committed against Reinhart; right and wrong behaviour depend here on the identity of the individual at the receiving end than on the actions themselves. *Reinhart* takes the form of a parodical reverse of the instructional courtly epic. The characters demonstrate in detail what not to do, and the narrator responds with mercenary subjectiveness. The moralizations, then, function more for form's sake than for moral edification of the audience. A false moral tale uses moralizing

interjections to produce a structure on which to build amusing rather than educational discourse, and the epic as a whole dismisses morality just as entirely as does the *Amis*.

6.4 The Demon Trickster

With his many demonic tendencies, Reinhart can be viewed as an allegory for the Devil, whose behaviour cannot logically be evaluated concerning moral right and wrong. These demonic tendencies run through the entire work, and even Reinhart's methods are more those of a demon than a villain. Pfaffe Amis finds flaws in his victims and uses them for gain. Reinhart, on the other hand, causes bad behaviour where it does not necessarily already exist. He functions as a sort of cheerleader for evil. This strategy makes the victim into an evil or at least flawed character, more so than before Reinhart arrives.

Reinhart is not vague about this devil theme. The narrative points out that the fox is red, and Reinhart threatens Ysengrin with perdition with no apparent motivation. Dipreht the cat is also observed to commend Reinhart to the devil. Reinhart's motivation also contrasts with that of his counterpart, Amis: Amis hopes to gain, whereas Reinhart hopes to injure, even if he himself must expend effort or resources to do so. Reinhart acts out of unmotivated malice when he encounters Dipreht the cat, whom he attempts to ensnare in a hunter's trap, when he meets Primaut, whom he locks in a church with angry humans, and with the two royal advisors who protect his legal rights at his own capital trial. Clearly any interaction with Reinhart is dangerous, for almost any character.

Priests are not absent from *Reinhart Fuchs*. Though he is not in league with him, Reinhart uses a priest to catch Dipreht, and in the *Renart* material, it is also a priest whose split tree snaps shut on Brun the bear, and who attacks him with items taken from the church itself. Reinhart has preexisting hostile relations with this priest, but also some of the animals; he makes an especial point of harassing Ysengrin. Because the wolf has many characteristics that imply a religious official, such as a tonsured head and commitment to joining a monastery, hostility to Ysengrin pantomimes hostility to a monastic individual. His cousin, Primaut, also decides to preach a sermon, and decides to be tonsured, as he enters the state of unmotivated victimhood.

Association with the church can lead a character to harm¹²⁷. The churchman is not always a sympathetic character, and represents a disproportionate number of cheating victims.

Though demonic, Reinhart fulfils a useful function, again an infernal one. The prime evil of his society, the tyrannical King Vrevel, can do as he pleases, and does. No-one is powerful enough to stop this evil individual, except Reinhart. The task of removing evil people from circulation falls to the devil; no amount of worldly power can protect even the wickedest tyrant from his own bedevilment. After Reinhart poisons him, Vrevel's corpse mutilates itself, leaving carnage worthy of Doctor Faustus¹²⁸.

If his society requires a character analogous to the devil to come and stop him, Vrevel can be safely classified as evil, which brings us to another popular theme in trickster literature: as bad as the trickster may be, it can be argued that the victim is worse. As Jost writes:

Generally violence is perpetrated against victims perceived as unworthy, such as lascivious friars or abbesses (*De .iii dames qui troverent .i. vit / The Three Women who Found a Penis*), young bridegrooms (*Joulet*, narrated by one Colin Malet), stupid husbands (*De la saineresse/ The Healer*), greedy bordello owners (*De Boivin de Provins / Boivin of Provins*), and the like (Jost, 434).

Classen agrees that audiences, which often identify with the cheater, also tend to condemn the cheating victim as patently inferior to themselves as individuals: "The audience can laugh... because it feels superior to the ignorant, foolish person on the stage or in its general presence." (Classen, 5). The victim of laughter is depicted as evil in other genres as well, for example religious literature, which often held up the devil, and those unfortunate souls who were damned, to derision, rather than pity for their suffering, as it marked the laughing individuals as members of more desirable social groupings: "It was even permissible for the saintly person to laugh at the

¹²⁷ "The most fundamental socio-cultural antipathy of all is directed towards those in religious orders or ecclesiastical offices in whose care the spiritual welfare of the laity was entrusted." (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 156)

¹²⁸ *sin houbet im en dreu spielt, / in neune sich sin zunge vielt. (Reinhart, 2243-4)*

devil and those who were damned. In that way, laughter established boundary markers between groups.” (Pigg, 205). To laugh at the victim’s suffering, then, may be a response to the suffering itself, inasmuch as it qualifies as an attempt to distance oneself from it, or from the possibility that one may suffer in the future.

6.5 Amorality

The trickster epic is not serious, so the trickster’s criminal actions are not to be taken seriously: “cleverness seems to exonerate the perpetrator, who never suffers the consequences of his immoral behavior, and often profits by it. Never is compensation or assistance considered to remunerate the often-foolish victim of outrageous destructive actions. Game, and not social welfare, is the narrative intent.” (Jost, 435). Just as modern trickster characters cause gruesome damage with impunity, the medieval trickster receives a *carte blanche* for violence, social damage and cruelty: “the genre’s content is amoral and anti-normative in this respect because it ignores, dismisses, or disregards any moral import, or any damage to others, much like a children’s cartoon presenting actions bereft of consequences” (Jost, 435). The dismissal of morality means that it is also unnecessary to attribute only negative qualities to the trickster, and neither Reinhart nor Amis is thoroughly bad, particularly in comparison to many of the individuals that they encounter. The continuous structure of *Reinhart Fuchs*, necessarily absent from the *Renart* collection, ensures that this single evil-but-good act comes last, thus appearing as the main point to the fox’s existence. He has redeemed himself, so to speak, and not by changing his behaviour. We know from their continued transmission that somebody must have found our antiheroes quite likeable. What good qualities they have, while they remain well clear of any sort of Christian good, are in a worldly sense the best.

On the attraction inherent in the trickster epic, Percy writes:

It is an axiom of the genre that audience sympathy in the fabliaux is always solicited for the duper figure... so that all fabliaux, in the very restricted sense implied by the foregoing discussion, end “happily,” and impart something of the comic enjoyment of witnessing the triumph over adversity of a favored, sympathetic figure, whose “goodness” however is also narrowly and uniquely

defined by the literary context and may seem ambiguous or even perverse by conventional Christian-moral standards. (Percy, 84)

How is this goodness defined? Amis is ultimately motivated by his initial desire to practice perfect *milte*, a courtly virtue attributed significant weight in the tales told by minstrels. Amis has many worldly virtues, such as education, intelligence, and, most important, his *milte*, which appears to justify any action. The bishop is his original opponent, and thus invites comparison. He keeps a smaller household than Amis does; his curtailed expenses mark him out as *kerge*, an attribute with one meaning close to stinginess, and the opposite of *milte*. This vice is an especially bad one according to minstrels like the Stricker, who might have depended on other people's *milte* for payment.

Amis is in fact described as pleasing to God by means of his *milte*, which is apparently enough to redeem him in spite of its being a worldly, rather than Christian, virtue. While the bishop is not specifically described as *displeasing*, his death is attributed to God's mercy for Amis, and Amis, not the bishop, is described as gaining salvation at the end of his life. When Amis joins the monastery, he does not return his ill-gotten gains, and in fact takes them with him, but he is said to devote himself to God and to gain salvation.

6.6 Laughter as Socially Corrective

Amis also has something else to redeem him: although his stories appear to carry no *moral* force, there still remains a possibility that they could be applied to the audience's life in other ways. This trickster is still some variety of good, and he may serve as an example to prevent an inadvisable 'bad' act in real people. Can this principle be applied to *Reinhart*? What if *Reinhart*'s impotent moral lessons have a purpose beyond a structural one, even if we cannot intelligently declare that the devil has behaved atrociously? The comic universe occasionally abuses someone in order to teach that person a useful lesson.

Examining miracle plays, though, Krummel concludes that this lesson is not counternormative at all, but quite strictly normative. In this theory, the cheating victim belongs not to a powerful group, but to a category that the audience is meant to view as "other."

Noah's wife – the sexually Othered – nearly disrupts the integrity of her family by threatening their lives throughout her obstinate and even passive aggressive refusal to enter the ark; we see that the shepherds – the economically marginalized – are prepared to harm Mak until an angel interrupts their abuse; and we witness the Jews – the religiously different – as they repeatedly force the host to endure socially destructive acts of violence. (Krummel, 187)

Rather than being brought down from a high level, this victim is to be punished for his or her status as an outlier, in order to be pressed back into normal society, and as it is society itself that enforces this assimilation, it is always presented as legitimate¹²⁹.

While this structure implies a humour of superiority, many such victims are destined, at least in the miracle plays, to be redeemed, to be conveyed by means of derisive laughter from the realm of the Other to the audience member's own social sphere. In this case, distancing laughter, though it still marks the inferior and unsympathetic "other," also facilitates the conversion from unsympathetic characters to sympathetic ones. The derisive laughter conceals an intrinsic invitation to stop being so foolish and join the party.

The comedy of the Croxton play, like that of *Noah* and the *Second Shepherds' Play*, is at once comedic and not comedic (if we reflect on what generates humour). The Croxton play invites a response fraught with stupefaction at the absurd behavior of the Jews just as the inappropriate fastidiousness of Noah's wife and the inane naiveté of the shepherds obtains a sense of superiority: Noah's wife does not know that the ark will save her; the shepherds cannot distinguish between a sheep and a baby; the Jews do not know that Christ's

¹²⁹ "The poets of our texts work on the basis of a qualitative difference between the malicious 'spot' of an individual (which if anything is a sign of pride) and the deserved punitive laughter of society at large. The illegitimacy of the one does not impinge upon the legitimacy of the other, and thus, in terms of comic tales, it is perfectly reasonable for an audience to deride certain characters who themselves are guilty of wantonly deriding others." (Coxon, *Comic Tales*, 44)

body rests inside the sacramental wafer. (How stupid they all are!) (Krummel, 181).

As Wackers writes, the trickster's abuse is, similarly, not purely malevolent: "in the modern view the feeling of superiority in a ridiculing standpoint may be dominant, while the didactic goal is implicit at most. In the Middle Ages it was the didactic goal that made the ridiculing acceptable." (Wackers, boert, 203) Could Amis and Reinhart be punishing the foolish, as Wackers' comedy does the wicked? In either case, the deceived character, as the object of ridicule, demonstrates a course of action that should not be taken, either because it violates the laws of the group, or because it is particularly self-destructive. "Through ridiculing the aberration they implicitly present the norm, from which the aberration diverges. The audience is expected to share and/or adopt this norm." (Wackers, boert, 201) Laughter, at somebody's expense, is serious business, not simply to ridicule but to correct aberrant behaviour. Inherent in the assertion of superiority associated with mockery is an invitation to conform and join the superior group.

In this case, laughter implies that the status quo will be restored: "laughter signals that there will be sanctions, and harmony can be reconstituted without too many efforts since the entire community backs up the traditional order and regards the sanctions as appropriate." (Classen, 5). Upsetting the social order, then, may serve as more of a release valve than as a genuine criticism or recommendation of change. As a temporary release of social strain, it serves the status quo by undermining it.

Images of status reversal in medieval culture would thus be likened to a kind of release valve, allowing for a temporary vent of the pressures created by status boundaries. The implication is that women are allowed to rule ... because in daily life they are expected to stay in their place. Moreover, the laughter produced by the image of a woman beating her husband or cuckolding him before his very eyes is often directed at the husband, who has received his due by letting her violate the natural order.... although it is the man who is ridiculed, the figure of the unruly woman is used to reassert social norms. (Perfetti, 14-15).

Perhaps it is possible, then, for cheaters to set a standard that can be applied to the audience and real life. Though not specifically punishing transgressive characters, Amis does punish foolish ones, which links him to a long tradition in which comic discourse points out all of the worst aspects of life and holds them up to ridicule. “In the history of medieval literary criticism, beginning with the introduction of Averroes to European readership, tragedy and comedy were counterpoised to one another in performing an ethical service; tragedy was the art of praising the virtuous, while comedy was blaming the sinful.” (Alfie, 370). Amis, then, functions as a warning not to be fooled by tricksters like himself and, according to Alfie, this function may have been much more serious business than expected. Application of this theory smooths over incongruencies in what audiences might have considered funny. Reinhart’s rape scene may not have been meant to induce laughter:

Different writers during the Middle Ages, many with unique viewpoints, repeated the commonplaces that comedies adhered to certain stylistic traits diametrically opposed to those found in tragedies: comedies were fictive stories dealing with low-born individuals, written in a low or middling style, and with a plot structure that begins in chaos but resolves with the establishment of order. Nothing in the medieval definitions of comedy indicated laughter. (Alfie, 369).

Whether it is meant to be humorous or purely serious, the Amis is easy to interpret as a cautionary tale. In fact, Agricola views the thoughtless behaviour exhibited by the victims as the primary purpose for the Amis as a whole:

Die negative Gestalt des Betrügers wirkt damit über ihre literarische Existenz hinaus positiv in die Wirklichkeit. Âmîs warnt die Hörer vor sich und seinesgleichen und mahnt sie, klüger zu sein als die Übertölpelten. Das ist der Zweck seines Gestaltetseins, und dadurch erhält er für den Stricker die Berechtigung zum literarischen Leben. (Agricola, 305)

So in spite of the lack of moral implications, the *Amis* does have practical applications for real life, including suggestions for the audience's behaviour. Amis's bad behaviour is good for you,

and the *Amis* exists not to discourage evil deeds, but to warn audiences to practice the *Lebensklugheit*¹³⁰ that would protect against them. Reinhart's victims, similarly, demonstrate the practical disadvantages of allowing oneself to be led by the devil: wrath, pride and gluttony make an animal weak and vulnerable.

By injuring their victims, then, the tricksters do us good. Cautionary tales prevent disasters by relating similar situations and how they came about. The trickster epic, and *Pfaffe Amis* and *Reinhart Fuchs* in particular, warn us not to fall into the same traps as the victims, to prevent in the audience whatever vice or foolishness is dissected. Reinhart and Amis are not good, but they are good for us.

6.7 Stories Against Morals

We should not confuse these lessons with morals. The *Amis* and *Reinhart* are not stories with morals, but stories against morals, in which morality is pointedly meaningless. Laughter involves the audience, but not as learners, as Nichols writes,

granting license to free the spectator from moral or rational speculation. This is very different from medieval drama in general. For whether religious or secular, other dramatic genres of the era had to correlate the space of representation with the world of the spectator in order to make the point that what the viewer saw on the stage should or should not, depending on the subject, be emulated in everyday life, or at least serve as edification. But farce

¹³⁰ “Die Lebensklugheit ist also nicht nur Erfordernis des täglichen Lebens, sie ist die Voraussetzung des sittlich richtigen Handelns, und sie ist ebenso sehr ein Gebot der Religion. Erst durch die Verknüpfung mit dem christlichen Glauben wird sie zur wahren Klugheit. Durch den Vortrag seiner Schwänke will der Stricker die Hörer zu einer Lebensklugheit erziehen, die sie befähigt, das Gute vom Bösen zu unterscheiden, um auf ethischem und religiösem Gebiete zu ihrem Wohl das Gute tun zu können.” (Agricola, 311)

refuses to play within this mimetic space, and, in so doing, releases the spectator from the obligation to draw moral inferences. (Nichols, 194)

Because the process leading to victimhood is inevitable, moreover, the trickster is relieved of much of the culpability for his or her crimes, becoming more 'good' in his own universe as well. Reinhart Fuchs may trick Ysengrin and Primaut into being captured by human enemies, but he could not have gotten them captured if they had not been such dedicated gluttons. All the victims' natures are such that they are liable to being caught even without assistance from a trickster, a phenomenon that Reinhart himself demonstrates when he deceives himself into leaping into a monastery well. A foolish villager would have been cheated out of his goods sooner or later, the dishonest merchant had it coming, and a stupid, greedy wolf cannot be expected to exercise a great deal of prudence.

The tricksters Amis and Reinhart are both described with the adjective *karc*, which means clever, and this term is not completely positive, implying more deviousness than serviceability or virtue. They are not specifically morally corrective. Amis usually punishes evil characters, but only when his interests happen to conflict with theirs. He occasionally does them good; his cheating carries no moral implications. The victims, too, are not necessarily evil, as Amis and Reinhart punish both the fools and the socialized, the good and the evil.

6.8 Laughing at victims

We have seen in Krummel's example that characters can be redeemed from objects of derision to sympathetic characters; now we see that they can be both at once. Victims are not specifically evil, nor are they necessarily described as particularly unintelligent. They are simply characters who, knowingly or otherwise, engaged in a battle of wits with the trickster and lost. "Though we may feel sorry for the gullible *Fabliau* dupe, it often is the case that we get the joke and are laughing at the victim, the cuckold husband, the *trompeur trompé*. Such outbursts of superiority laughter indicate with which characters we may sympathize, with which characters we may identify." (Gordon, 488). Identifying with the victim, according to Rodway, makes us not less but more liable to laugh at his or her expense: "Often... it assumes the guise of a good-natured attack on another character with whom we have some underlying cause for partial identification.

Then our tolerant laughter at him protects us, in much the same way as our laughter at ourselves protects us, by forestalling the probably less indulgent laughter of others and burking further criticism. Thus humour is a tone indicating amusement without judgement or attack without malice.” (Rodway, 36) Nichols, on the other hand, theorizes that derision labels a victim as outside of one's circle¹³¹, and that, by laughing at the victim, the audience disengages from any potential association with him or her. In a culture where trust and loyalty are based on kinship ties, the outsider, no matter how sympathetic, is as suspect as the known criminal; neither one, for example, is capable of swearing an oath.

Besides the dangerous outsider status that is attributed to the victim, the structure of the narrative itself condemns anyone whom the trickster cheats. The incompetent character is at cross-purposes with the protagonist, and therefore becomes the new villain regardless of any other characteristics.

The use of moral defect as a weakness that warrants punishment *in the same way* as vice warrants punishment conflates the persecution of the trusting or foolish with indignation against vicious acts. The fools and the villains become indistinguishable. A character who is fooled can gain, like the quack doctor or the adulterous women in the church-dedication sermon, or lose, like the rest of Amis's or all of Reinhart's victims. There is no need for the victim to be evil, but in an environment where it is no worse to cheat a fool than to punish a villain, the trickster cannot be quite entirely good. If it is no worse to cheat an idiot than to cheat a scoundrel, then it is no better to cheat a scoundrel than to cheat an idiot.

6.9 Modern Applications

The tricksters occupy their own world with its own laws. Paul Wackers compares this universe to the Carnavalesque that Bakhtin observes in the worlds of Rabelais, who wrote some three

¹³¹ “one that exposes, even celebrates the disorder of a much less genteel aspect of the human. It is a laughter predicated on de-solidarity, on dis-identity: the audience laughs to indicate that they are... not a dupe of the *sur*-ordinary.” (Nichols, 207)

hundred years later. Jost writes that counternormative writing, in which category the trickster story is included, typically involves “a Dionysian sense of abandon, unrestraint or license” (Jost, 432), a theme that ties the genre to this Carnavalesque, but although these features are counternormative, their overall effect, Jost writes, is not. “Contrary to the counter-normative elements in its content, *fabliaux* vocabulary level, diction, sentence structure, style, and all-pervasive rhyme are overwhelmingly, even determinedly, normative: colloquial, every-day, anti-elitist, purposefully unsophisticated” (Jost, 453). Which leads us to the question that Perfetti poses: “Does Bakhtin mean by radicalism that carnival laughter can effect change in social fabric? Or, because it is utopian, is the desire for such change merely an unfulfilled wish, limited to the ‘fantastic’ realm of the imagination?” (Perfetti, 14). Köhler-Busch argues that the second is the case, describing the transgressive nature of Bakhtinian carnival as impossible to maintain. “Once the portrayal of the social transgressions has become too severe, the carnivalesque collapses and we return to our everyday space and its expectation of ideal behavior to which our transgressions in the carnivalesque have helped us adjust.” (Köhler-Busch, 279). Writing on *Diu Crône*, Köhler-Busch describes the carnival space produced by laughter as unstable, containing intrinsic safeguards that cause it to fall apart as soon as characters take the joke too far. “In pushing beyond the limits of what is acceptable behavior in carnival the space collapses. Suspension of reality can be sustained for a time only before participants return to the dominant reality. Consisting of liminal, temporal, and co-created space, carnival cannot continue to exist once the community that created it and agreed to its concomitant reality no longer emotionally occupies that space” (Köhler-Busch, 278).

Other critics, though, emphasize the power of the carnivalesque to transgress the boundaries of fiction itself. On Rabelais, Bakhtin writes, “Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom.” (Bakhtin, 198) Similarly, the audience of *Reinhart Fuchs* or *Pfaffe Amis* is drawn into complicity with egregious acts of which they would normally disapprove, for the sake of the tricksters' relatively weak purposes, or for the sake of humour itself. The three-hundred-year gap need not stop us from comparing the two worlds, either, as Bakhtin traces the

carnival concept all the way to ancient times as an unbroken tradition¹³². These tricksters around 1200 do appear to have enacted many of the same traditions, particularly the disconnect from moral evaluation and its associated responsibilities, and the trickster's determination to upset existing power structures in favour of chaos. Bakhtin's words seem almost as if they were made to apply to *Reinhart* or the *Amis*:

carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. (Bakhtin, 199)

If Wackers is right to apply Bakhtin's theory to *Reinhart*, then we can experimentally apply it to the *Amis* as well. The laughter against the represented social groups like the greedy king, the hotheaded, superstitious knight or the credulous clergy and peasants becomes carnival laughter, not alienating or corrective, but celebratory of the innate, liberating ugliness of the human animal:

it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival. (Bakhtin, 200)

Bakhtin writes that this 'carnival' laughter is directed not specifically at the object in view, but all people, everywhere and at every time. Just as every person is included in the carnival world, this laughter applies to everyone. Of course Ysengrin is an attack on the clergy, even if this attack was started by a clerical author. Of course the nobles and peasants that *Amis* encounters are

¹³² “The tradition of the Saturnalias remained unbroken and alive in the medieval carnival, which expressed this universal renewal and was vividly felt as an escape from the usual official way of life.” (Bakhtin, 198)

stupid and credulous, even if the Stricker must count on one or the other for payment. After all, these social groups that the Stricker, and Heinrich, are lampooning are part of the world, and therefore imperfect. In contrast to corrective laughter, though, carnival laughter includes no implication that the laughers are any better off:

Let us enlarge upon the second important trait of the people's festive laughter: that it is also directed at those who laugh. The people do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world. They, too, are incomplete, they also die and are revived and renewed. This is one of the essential differences of the people's festive laughter from the pure satire of modern times. The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it. The wholeness of the world's comic aspect is destroyed, and that which appears comic becomes a private reaction. The people's ambivalent laughter, on the other hand, expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it. (Bakhtin, 200-201)

If this gentler, more universal form of mockery really has been lost to modern satire, then a modern audience may have difficulty understanding why audiences were happy to laugh at some of the questionable scenes in *Reinhart Fuchs*. We have been seeking to learn the meaning of the fox's cheats, but that may have been a mistake. They may simply be ordinary events in this closed-off carnival world of perpetual destruction and rebirth, where meaning itself is pointedly refused.

Reinhart's inclusion in the host of cheating victims also makes sense in Bakhtin's context. Though apparently smarter than those around him, Reinhart is not consummately superior to them, and failure is possible. *Reinhart* shows and even states that nobody can manage never to be the fool. The fox is often overpowered, tricked, or at least surprised by the actions of others. It is his responses to untoward situations, and not his ability to plan and carry out a cheat, that distinguishes him as an effective cheater. Amis, on the other hand, always wins. He enters his cheats with an airtight plan, complete from preparation to escape. Reinhart appears to have made a detailed plan only twice, when he appears for his trial as a doctor, and when he freezes Ysengrin's tail in the ice. In fact, his success with Ysengrin depends to some extent of his chance discovery of a bucket on the frozen pond: clever planning may be one of Amis's defining

characteristics, but not of Reinhart's. Where Amis's perfect plans elevate him above the consequences of his cheats, and he never enters their messy realm of vulnerability, Reinhart remains down on the ground with them, without a perfect plan to keep his paws clean. Far more than Amis, Reinhart's reactive style makes him part of his victims' environment.

Amis, on the other hand, derives neither pleasure nor pain from causing suffering. He has one desire only, and expresses emotions only in relation to the fulfilment of that desire. He bears his victims no malice or judgement, and in fact narrative moralizing is completely absent. No character in the *Amis* universe is subject to the kind of constant evaluation that Heinrich applies to his, and Amis exerts no effort to punish anyone. Those who are injured are simply those who stood between the cheater and the spoils on which he casts his eye. Where *Reinhart* rejects morality, the *Amis* behaves as if it had never been invented in the first place, making the *Amis*, in my opinion, as good a candidate for Bakhtin's carnivalesque as *Reinhart*.

6.10 Final Analysis

While the more serious heroes must meet a rigorous set of moral standards, the cheater has a wider range of motion, and is thus much more useful for storytelling. The varied situations in which cheaters can find themselves also add to their attractiveness: a cheater usually begins to cheat when faced with a problem that is both impossible and imperative to solve; it becomes necessary instead to find a way around the problem, that is, to cheat. Impossible situations often arise because of an overpowered enemy or difficulty, that is, not simply a powerful enemy, but one against whom the cheater's own power is useless; or because the cheater simply has very little power. Cheaters are often taken from less-powerful strata of society, and their victims from relatively more powerful ones; relying on their own raw power makes them careless and therefore vulnerable. Apparently advantageous features, then, can make a character less potent in dealings with others; it is the highly-socialized victims who are weakest against cheats that involve societal rules. Characters described as *wis*, such as the invisible-pictures courtiers, or highly-educated experts, like the two advisors who protect Reinhart in his trial, are themselves easier to victimize. A highly socialized group is a weak one, too, in the church-dedication episode of the *Amis*; rules that are slavishly followed regardless of appropriateness are rules that can be turned against individuals or the community as a whole.

While rule-following is important, cheaters tend more often to use automatic behaviour from other sources, particularly personal, selfish ones; victims of cheaters observed in *Reinhart* and the *Amis* are more often, though by no means always, made vulnerable through their flaws, particularly moral or intellectual ones. Passions can be obeyed as thoughtlessly as arbitrary standards, and in both cases victims adopt a limited perception, a tunnel vision that excludes any potential input that is not under the cheater's control. Characters who hope to cheat depend on this phenomenon, often using it to pass off even the least plausible costumes and ruses; Amis in particular changes his identity as easily as clothing, always accepted as what he claims to be, even without a demonstration of credentials.

The cheater generates a separation, between a true side, which is hidden, and an apparent side, which is false. "Hidden" does not necessarily imply that the situation is unknown; some of the most satisfying cheats succeed when everyone involved knows exactly what is going on, and participates, anyway, helping to hide the situation along with the cheater – often voluntarily, as in the case of the church dedication sermon.

This richness of unknown facts that we find in cheating stories differentiates the cheater-epic from the heroic epic, in which information tends to gravitate toward public knowledge, and the hero normally achieves fame and glory without having to promote himself; Reinhart and Amis, in contrast, press for anonymity and demolish any existing reputation, by denial or by fleeing the scene. This thwarting requires energy, though, and repercussions can sometimes only be postponed, rather than avoided; Amis is forced into his mission for ill-gotten gains because of unwanted attention due to a successful cheat, and when his deeds catch up with him, Reinhart finds himself under fire. But the order of the tricksters' universe mirrors that of the courtly epic in many other ways, and the two are not incompatible: in courtly epics, the morally good rule-follower is the hero, who must ultimately win, and the morally evil rule-breaker is the villain who must lose. In the trickster world, the win/lose dichotomy hinges instead on wit and discernment. Reinhart is already a member of the royal court, and Amis's actions in his quest for wealth often mirror those of a knight-errant in his quest for glory.

The cheater, though, is not good. Reinhart exhibits pronounced demonic characteristics, and Amis is far too greedy to be either a good priest or a good knight. His exercise of *milte* from his house is somewhat less impressive when one knows where he gets the resources to do it. But the

cheater is not bad, either; one cannot deny that Amis is generous and intelligent, or that Reinhart is determined and resourceful. Both cheaters have very good qualities, and trickster stories neither glorify nor discourage bad behaviour. Tricksters like Amis and Reinhart, and their counterparts elsewhere, have no moral accountability and are not meant to be evaluated from a moral perspective. Evaluation is, however, important; fictional cheaters warn against counterparts in real life. The cheater stories, then, though they are not themselves 'good,' are still good for you.

Cheating themes discussed here are not limited to *Reinhart* and the *Amis*, but appear in many other works, even from other genres and centuries. All of the Stricker's other poetry perpetuates to some extent the theme of intelligence trumping power. *Tristan and Isolde*, a love story, revolves around cheating. It is a cheat that leads to the catastrophic tragedy of the *Nibelungenlied*, and later works such as *Eulenspiegel* depend on tropes and even pre-built cheats from earlier works; the themes are more extensive, and last longer, than the works themselves.

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