ON TRANSLATING THE YSENGRIMUS

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The importance of the **Ysengrimus** in the history of medieval beast epic is universally acknowledged. Composed around 1148-50—several decades before the earliest branches of the **Roman de Renart**—this Latin epic of more than 6500 lines is the first poem to develop the antagonism between the fox and the wolf into the animating principle of a sequence of narrative episodes, and the first to endow these animals with individuality by attaching to them the now familiar names of Ysengrim and Reynard. Whatever possibilities for development may have been latent in the animal-stories of the oral tradition, this monument of clerical learning undoubtedly constituted a major source of material and of inspiration for the writers who developed beast-literature in the vernacular tongue, as Lucien Foulet amply demonstrated.[1] However, the importance of the Latin epic is unfortunately matched by its inaccessibility to modern readers—an inaccessibility created by the difficulty of the Latin text. The agility of the poet's wit, the bizarre quality of his imagination, and the elaborateness of his rhetoric and wordplay, all combine to make the poem far from straightforward reading even for accomplished Latin scholars. Nor, until recently, have potential readers outside of Germany and Belgium been easily able to get help from modern translations. The first to appear was the version of J. van Mierlo (**Magister Nivardus' Ysengrimus**, Antwerp, 1946), but since it was in Flemish, it remained to most readers as inaccessible as the original text. The German version of Albert Schönfelder (**Isengrimus: das flämische Tierepos aus dem lateinischen verdeutscht,** Münster/Cologne) appeared in 1955, and held the field for the next twenty-five years, during which time English and French scholars were still without a translation in their own language.

Recently, however, there has been a welcome spate of interest in the poem, evidenced not only in critical studies but also in renewed efforts to translate it. The first English version, by F.J. and Eleanor Sypher (**Ysengrimus, by Magister Nivardus**), was published in New York, in a limited edition of 250 copies, in 1980. Although no French version has yet appeared, Mlle Elisabeth Charbonnier of the University of Paris III, has recently completed a French translation of the poem as a 'thèse de troisième cycle' under the direction of M. Jean Dufournet, and hopes that it will be published shortly. My own translation of the **Ysengrimus** into English was completed some years ago, and is designed to be published alongside of the Latin text; I have for the past five or six years been working on a very full historical and literary introduction, incorporating a great deal of fresh research on the poem, which represents the first attempt at a comprehensive account of it since Ernst Voigt's introduction to his monumental edition of 1884. As a prelude to this work, I offer below a relatively brief critique of the German and English versions of the work, in an attempt to show that there is still room—and indeed need—for further attempts to provide an accurate rendering of the poem for modern readers. I have been through both these translations line by line, comparing them with my own version and with the Latin text, and registering disagreements; my comments, therefore, are not based on sampling, but on a thorough collation.[2]

Schönfelder's version is on the whole reliable, in the sense that he does not often make grammatical or syntactical errors in translation. Sometimes he makes minor omissions—of words (e.g., **siccandus** in I 165), of phrases (VI 215b), or of whole lines (I 431). Sometimes, his translation fails to follow the speech-divisions indicated in Voigt's edition—whether inadvertently or deliberately, it is not clear. On occasion, inaccurate translation arises from ignoring the narrative context; in Book III, for example, he inexplicably takes the **eadem domus** of line 618 to be the lion's court, whereas it is a clear reference to the lodging-house which had held the wolf and the animal-pilgrims during the pilgrimage-episode of a year before. (Cf. his rendering of **ibi** at line 657). At VII 335-6, he has the lazy serving-girl unaccountably lacerating her own body with her fingernails—whereas it must be the enraged **domina** of line 334 who inflects this on her as punishment. The inadequacies of Schönfelder's text, however, stem for the larger part from his failure to follow the agile movements of the poet's mind, or to respond to the play of his verbal wit. The edge of the fantastic logic is too often lost, so that the translation reads dully and slackly. In the court-episode in Book III, for example, Schönfelder quite misses the point of the sheep's affected hesitation as to whether Ysengrimus, tail-less after the fishing-episode, is the same wolf as 'the other one, an Englishman' (**Anglicus alter**), who had appeared in the pilgrimage-lodging a year earlier (III 659). The witticism is, of course, based on the medieval joke that Englishmen had tails.[3] Schönfelder translates **Anglicus alter** as 'that second Englishman', and adds a note solemnly explaining that English wolves had longer tails. I give below a few more examples of this sort, which will serve at the same time to indicate something of the verbal and mental agility at work in

the Latin text, and the difficulties and dangers in store for any translator. (I have translated Schönfelder's German into English for convenience.)

I 579-80

Parta michi teneo, data non redduntur egenti,
Et preformido rebus egere datis.

The wolf has been describing his own limitless greed. He never gives anything away, he says, he is utterly contemptuous of moderation, and he rejects the bonds of loyal friendship. In Schönfelder's rendering, the wolf follows up this stirring manifesto thus: 'I keep what I've won for myself, I never return a gift received to anyone who needs it, and I avoid the waiving of any presents'—of which the first clause is redundant, the second weak, and the third obscure. In fact, the second two clauses give the reason for the first: 'I keep my profits for myself; gifts aren't returned when you need them, and I am afraid in advance of needing what I give away.' The wolf's selfish witticism is entirely lost in the German version.

III 1044

Prosperitas simplex est, ubi teter olor.

The feebleness of Schönfelder's translation—'Good fortune is poor, where there is a bad smell'—is a pointer to its inaccuracy. **Olor** here is not the word for smell, but the poetical variant of **cygnus**, meaning 'swan'; thus the aphorism means 'unqualified good fortune is found as frequently as black swans'—i.e., never. When the line is correctly interpreted, its ironic pointing re-emerges.

III 1155-6

Nec, quia non poscas ueniam, inficiorue mororue,
Gratia non gratis, quando rogatur, adest.

The fox has been impudently acting as the lion's spokesman, magnanimously 'forgiving' the wolf for the 'crime' (which is itself no more than a fiction of the fox) of challenging the lion to a duel. Reynard represents the king as ready to grant mercy without the wolf having asked for it: 'Nor do I refuse or delay mercy because you don't ask for it; grace is no longer gratuitous if it's requested.' The point of the wordplay—that the 'grace' of **gratia** disappears if it is given 'in exchange' for a demand, and not spontaneously—is completely lost by Schönfelder, who translates: 'A favour is not to be had for nothing at the time it is requested.' The grudging spirit of this quite loses the joke, which depends on the contrast between the generosity of the words the fox attributes to the lion, and the cruel use he makes of them, torturing the wolf with 'forgiveness' he hasn't asked for, for crimes he hasn't committed.

V 688-90

Vellem, quicquid habet mundus, ouile foret,
Vos etiam excipio non clare, ignoscite, fratres,
Me solum excipio, cetera nulla quidem.

These lines form part of the fantasy in which Ysengrimus ecstatically describes to the monks of Blandinium his proposals for a new monastic order, based on the eating of sheep. He proposes selling all the church ornaments and turning them into sheep. 'Let us dine constantly with sheep, on sheep and more sheep', he says. Schönfelder translates the next line (688) 'I could wish that the whole world was a sheepfold'. **Ouile**, as noun, is of course the Latin word for sheepfold, but Schönfelder is missing the comedy of the wolf's visionary excitement, in which the word fits better as the neuter form of the adjective: 'I could wish that whatever the world contains were mutton'. The succeeding lines, which make little sense as a sequel to 688 in Schönfelder, follow naturally from this interpretation: 'I don't even except you entirely, brethren, pardon me! I except myself alone, but nothing else at all!'

VI 227-8

Anne tibi externo potius, rex docte, fauere
Quam consanguineo debuit atque sibi?

These lines occur in the booty-sharing episode. The lion, having vented his rage on Ysengrimus for sharing out the booty into three equal portions (rather than giving him the 'lion's share'), ironically defends the wolf's 'egalitarianism' to the fox: 'I may be king, but so what? One counts as one.' The sarcasm in this is met by an answering sarcasm from the fox, who likewise pretends to defend the wolf: 'Should he have favoured you, a stranger, oh wise king, rather than his kinsman and himself?' In the same vein, he claims to be unable to see why the king should be angry with Ysengrimus, who has just offered him his skin for the second time. Only at the end of the speech does he take care (in case the lion had any real doubt) to make explicit his belief in the wolf's presumptuousness-the switch being signalled clearly by the words **Vera tamen dicam** (233). Schönfelder completely misses the cool irony of the fox's speech, making him nervously placatory from the start: 'Wise king, shouldn't he have favoured you, a stranger, rather than himself and his kinsman?'

The above examples demonstrate the need for a translation which will not only correct such errors as there are in Schönfelder's text, but will also be intelligently responsive to narrative context, and to the intellectual acrobatics of the poem. At first glance, the English translation of the Syphers might seem to fill this need—its lively and spirited style suggests a

confidence in the translators which may well inspire an answering confidence in its readers. But any such confidence would, unfortunately, be misplaced.[4] No translator of the **Ysengrimus** can hope to avoid error entirely, and I must acknowledge my own indebtedness to the Syphers' version for allowing me to catch a dozen or so slips of my own. Nevertheless, it must be said that the inaccuracies of their translation amount to more than occasional lapses, and the sheer **extent** of the errors it contains is both surprising and disturbing. It is not a question, as it is most often with Schönfelder, of minor slips, or of an occasional inability to grasp the precise point of a witticism or piece of false logic; it is a question of widespread and fundamental incompetence in Latin translation, resulting in errors so basic and so frequent that this version can in no sense be relied on as a faithful representation of the text. To select particular examples—even of the most glaring mistakes—would not sufficiently indicate the scale of this misrepresentation. I therefore give below a sample series of errors in the first 700 lines of the poem (i.e., about one-tenth of its length), with the Latin text followed first by my own rendering (marked M), and then by that of the Syphers (marked S), so that readers may reach their own conclusions. Where I can do so, I add concise notes to indicate the source or nature of the errors; since, however, they often seem to spring from an impressionistic, rather than a firmly grammatical, interpretation of the Latin, it is not always possible to identify the source of error with exactitude.

I 67-8

Denique si fidens obliquat lumina uictor,
Oblitus fidei fit memor ille fuge...

M: 'At last, if the trusting victor [sc. the cat] turns his eyes aside, the mouse, oblivious of loyalty, thinks only of flight...'

S: 'But if the one who is confidently in control looks away, the other forgets about the cat's confidence and remembers to run off.'

(The point is one about loyalty—of course ironically attributed to the cat/mouse relationship—not one about confidence.)

I 93-4

Vix quoque, quin quamuis passim iubeatur inire,
Ter mallet noctes octo cubare foris...

M: '...and although he had just been and was continually being ordered to enter, he would rather have dossed down outside for four and twenty nights.'

S: 'He would scarcely have done it, indeed, although he was repeatedly pressed to go inside. He would rather have slept outdoors for three times eight nights...'

(**Vix** split off from the syntactic unit to which it belongs, and unnecessarily and inaccurately expanded.)

I 136

Me, uelut ingruerent nubila noxque, trahis!

M: 'You drag me in as if night and cloud were gathering!'

S: 'You're dragging me off as if under cover of night and fog.'

(Erroneous translation of **ingruerent;** the point is not that bad weather would hide an act of violence, but that it would provide a reason for taking shelter.)

I 145

Qui spes magna mei patrueles? obsecro, uiuant!

M: 'How are my cousins, those rising hopes? I pray that they are well!'

S: 'And what great expectations are there for my little cousins? I wish them every good fortune!'

(Ignores case in first half-line; treats pres. subj. as if fut. indic. in second.)

I 154

Sufficere ut possint grandia, parua iuuant...

M: 'Little things play a part in the provision of big ones.'

S: 'Just as big meals can be satisfying, so small ones are helpful.'

(Failure to recognise **ut** as introducing a final clause, signalled by subjunctive. **Ut** = 'as' would take the indicative.)

I 215-16

Collige desertum custos, latoris egentem
Fer miserans...

M: 'Take up what's abandoned [sc. the bacon] as its safe-keeper; have pity on its need for a bearer and carry it...'

S: 'As a compassionate guardian, take up the lost property that has no thief to take it...'

(Confusion of **lator** and **latro.**)

I 235-6

Juncta legens arbusta uie, citiore redemit
Circuitum cursu preceleratque uirum...

M: '...passing through the trees by the side of the path. He made up for his roundabout route by a quicker pace, and overtook the man.'

S: 'Finding his way through a nearby orchard, he made the circuit at a faster pace, and outdistanced the man...'

(Case ignored in 235a; precise point of 235b-6 lost.)

I 245-6

Unde huc cumque uenis, iter est tibi pene peractum,
Ut nolis, ego te nunc reor esse meum...

M: 'Wherever you've come from, your journey is almost over. Although against your will, I now adjudge you mine.'

S: 'Now that you have come this far, your journey is nearly over. Since you're unwilling to go on, I think you're mine now.'

(?Failure to recognise **undecumque** in tmesis. ?Failure to recognise, and assign function to, subj. in **nolis**, and thus to assign correct concessive meaning to **ut**—see Lewis and Short, s.v., II. C. 4. e.)

I 253-4

Hic ueluti prensurus erat, par ille prehenso,
Tam citus hic sequitur, tam preit ille piger.

M: 'The man was as if on the point of catching him, he was as good as caught—so quickly did the man pursue, and so sluggishly did the fox advance.'

S: 'Reynard was on the point of being caught. It looked as if he were as good as caught. As fast as the hunter followed, the lazy fox went ahead at the same pace.'

(**Prensurus** treated as if passive, rather than active in meaning. Unnecessary division of syntactic unit leads to inaccuracy—**tam...tam** translated as if **tam...quam.**)

I 268

Cogitat esse nichil post sua terga doli...

M: '...it didn't occur to him that there was fraud behind his back.'

S: 'He thought there was no surprise behind his back.'

(Failure to transpose the negative in English produces nonsense.)

I 275-7

Nunc obliquus ad hanc partemque incedit ad illam;
Non redit aut prodit lineolasque terit,
Sed numquam uenturus eo, quo creditur isse...

M: '...at another moment he darted off at a tangent to this side or that. He went neither back nor forward in his little incursions, but he never arrived at the point he seemed to have been making for...'

S: 'Next he falls off to the side this way and that. He doesn't go backwards or forwards; and he traces little paths, but he never comes from the place he seems to have gone to.'

(**Incedit** translated as if **Incidit;** 277 translated as if **eo** meant 'thence' rather than 'thither'.)

I 297-8

Prodiit, a leua rediens, oculosque latentem
Querentis gemitu bis reuocante preit...

(Dropping back behind him, Reynard has lured the peasant into looking back over his right shoulder.)

M: '[Reynard] went forward, coming back on his left side, and going in front of him, with a double groan recalled the peasant's eyes from the search for his hiding-place.'

S: '[Reynard] sails out, returning from the left, and comes before the hunter's eyes as he calls the hidden creature with a couple of grunts.'

(Syntax is garbled, resulting in a forced translation of **querens** as 'the hunter', and overall nonsense.)

I 331

Ter tenuit caudam prensor, ter tenta fefellit...

M: '...three times the captor had grasped his tail, and thrice it had cheated him when grasped.'

S: 'The hunter grabbed his tail three times, and three times missed his try.'

(Translation fails to acknowledge **tenta** as fem. sg. and therefore connected with **cauda** as subject of **fefellit**—? assumes it is neuter plural of ***tentum** = 'a try'.)

I 353-4

Ut fuit abstractu te caudam prompta tenente,
Sic quacumque soli parte morabor, erit.

M: '...in whatever part of the world I reside, my skin will be as speedily removable as it was when you were holding my tail.'

S: 'Just as my tail got away quickly when you were holding on to it, so, whatever part of the country I visit, it will be there with me.'

(Failure to recognise subject of **fuit/erit**, which is **pellis**, carried over from line 351. Failure to recognise irony of 353; 354 is in consequence split off from rest of sentence and emptied of meaning.)

I 371-2

Adice relliquias, et non aliena uorasti,
Cui seruas, operam conciliantis agens?

M: 'Eat up what's left over; you won't have devoured what's not yours. Who are you keeping it for by way of compensation?'

S: 'Add the leftovers now, and you won't need to mix your foods when you eat tomorrow—what good does it do you to play the part of a mediator between opposing extremes?'

(Confusion of **seruo** and **seruio**; complete garbling of 371b and 372, which comes out as nonsense. For the meaning of **conciliare** here, see Voigt's glossary.)

I 401

Res est forma rei, factis facienda notantur...

M: 'One event is the model for another; what is to be done is indicated by what has been done...'

S: 'Things are the way they look. Past performances point the way to what has to be done...'

(Translation of 401a is meaningless; point of whole line is lost.)

I 404-6

Et si, quam sapiens crederis esse, fores,
Carpere te saltem, quamuis pietate careres,
Hec mea non sineret publicus acta pudor...

M: '...if you were as wise as you are thought to be, even if you were devoid of family feeling, your sense of public propriety wouldn't allow you to criticise these acts of mine.'

S: '...if you were as clever as you're believed to be, public opinion would not affirm that my behaviour had even harmed you, although you are lacking in good faith,'

(Complete failure to unravel syntax.)

I 407-10

Ubertate tuus si tanta uenter egeret,
Quanta non dubitas indiguisse meum,
Pace mea potuit saluo michi uirga bacone
Cortice plus medio rosa fuisse tibi.

M: 'If your belly were to need so great an abundance as you know well that mine did, as far as I'm concerned the gnawed willow-twig, with still more than half its bark, could have been for you, so long as the bacon was reserved for me.'

S: 'If your belly requires so much rich food, then you don't doubt that mine needs as much. For my part, after my ham had been taken care of, I was still capable of gnawing more than half the bark off your stick.'

(Unnecessary division of syntactic unit, and complete failure to understand it.)

I 419

Protinus ergo tue completo fine querele...

M: '...once the end of your complaint had been reached...'

S: 'Therefore the outcome of your dispute with me is a foregone conclusion.'

(Translation shows no attempt to reach meaning through analysis of the syntactic construction of the line.)

I 429-30

Iussus abit, uerum quamuis et iussus abisset,
Sacra uerebatur frangere dicta patrum.

M: 'He left as ordered, but even although he had left as ordered, he was still afraid of breaking the sacred precepts of the Fathers.'

S: 'He was commanded, and he left, although he would have left anyway. He was afraid of breaking the holy laws of the fathers.'

(Division of syntactic unit, and failure to understand it; tense of **abisset** ignored.)

I 465-6

...monachus sic ista fuisse
Arbitrio synodi nec secus acta probat...

M: 'Thus, and not otherwise, does the monk prove that things happened, for the decision of the court.'

S: 'This monk showed that, in the judgement of the court, he should have acted as he did, and no differently.'

(Translated as if **ista fuisse...acta** were **se egisse**, and a 'should' intruded from nowhere.)

I 491-2

Reinardus patruum, si quicquam diceret ultra,
Irasci metuens fraude benignus ait:...

M: 'Reynard, fearing to anger his uncle if he said any more, spoke in the bland tones of deceit.'

S: 'Reynard was afraid of putting his uncle into a rage; regardless of what he might otherwise have said, he addressed him with seeming goodwill:...'

(Translation of 491b unaccountably garbled.)

I 504

Vistis et esca hodie cuncta licere iubent.

M: '...the requirements of food and clothing make everything permissible these days.'

S: 'Clothing and food require to be valued together today.'

(Not only incorrect, but meaningless in context. Mistranslation apparently due to a failure to look beyond the first Lewis and Short entry for **liceo**, meaning 'to be for sale, to be valued', to the entry for the impersonal verb **licet**—and, of course, also failure to recognise this extremely common verb.)

I 524

Interit erumpens, permanet ira latens.

M: '...anger dies as it bursts forth, but lives on when it is buried.'

S: 'He suppressed his bursting anger and it stayed in hiding.'

(Case and syntactic construction ignored.)

I 551-2

Nonne querebaris uesanum ambabus abusum
Particulis uterum pene uorasse nichil?

M: 'Weren't you complaining that your raging stomach had devoured next to nothing when it had eaten up both shares?'

S: 'Didn't you complain that the mad wolf, after eating up the two portions at once, had consumed almost nothing from either?'

(Confusion of **uterus** with **uter**, leading to syntactic garbling.)

I 557-8

Fac dapibus licitis insanum assuescere uentrem,
Cuius ob ingluuiem noxia nulla times.

M: 'Accustom your raging belly, on account of whose greed you fear no crimes, to its lawful foods.'

S: 'Accustom your ungovernable belly to permissible

foods, from which you need fear no harm on account of your gluttony.'

(Unacceptable torturing of **cuius** leading to loss of sense and ignoring of indicative in **times.**)

I 561

Res proprias, medias, alienas credis easdem...

M: 'Your own things, other people's, communal property...they are all the same to you...'

S: 'You think that your own goods, those of others, and those in between are all the same.'

(Nonsensically inaccurate translation of **medias.**)

I 587-8

Cetera iussa geram, liceant hec, abdico carnem,
Si michi quid dederis carius, unde ciber.

M: 'Your other commands I'll carry out if these allowances are made; I'll give up meat if you'll give me something better to feed on.'

S: 'I shall act on other orders—they allow this: I am going to abstain from meat, if you give me something more appetizing to dine upon.'

(Complete failure to understand syntactic articulation; subjunctive in **liceant** ignored.)

I 591

Pauca uola ut mutes, et cetera cuncta licebunt...

M: 'I want you to change a few things, and all the rest will be permitted.'

S: 'I want a little bit—so that you'll mend your ways—and you'll be allowed all the rest.

(Failure to perceive syntactic connection between **uolo** and **ut mutes.**)

I 593-6

Diceris (et uerum est) in me peccasse frequenter,
Cum dederim, ut nosti, commoda multa tibi,
Tam fidus fido, quam concolor Anglicus Indo,
Quo michi plus debes, hoc minus usque faues...

M: 'You are said (and truly) to have sinned against me many times, while I have conferred many benefits on you, as you know. You are as loyal to a loyal friend, as an Englishman resembles an Indian in colour [i.e., not at all]; the more you owe to me, the less good turns you do me.'

S: 'You might be said, and it is true, to have sinned against me many times. When I gave you—as you are aware—lots of good things, I was as faithful to my loyal friend as an Englishman has the same complexion as an Indian. The more you owe me the less you like me.'

(A non-existent subjunctive introduced into **diceris,** while the perfect subj. in **dederim** is ignored, so that **cum** is inaccurately translated 'when'. The syntactic units are then wrongly divided so as to produce nonsense.)

I 605-6

Sit quamuis in uentre tuo tam creber et amplus
Angulus, es numquam uel satiandus ibi.

M: '...although the recesses of your belly are so abundant and roomy, if you're not stuffed full there, you never will be.' [lit.: 'there, or never, are you to be satisfied']

S: 'However much is in your stomach, crammed as it is, there is still a big empty corner: you're never even satisfied there.'

(Complete failure to unravel quite simple syntax of 605-606a; failure to recognise gerundive, and perverse interpretation of **uel,** in 606b.)

I 613-14

Quem nunc ergo dares, tu solus habeto baconem,
Pars tua quarta foret, par modo noster eris...

M: 'You can have all to yourself any bacon you might now give. A quarter was going to be your share, but now you'll be our equal...'

S: 'Therefore, if you were to produce a ham right now, you alone would possess it and a quarter of it would be your share. We shall now be on equal terms...'

(This is patent nonsense in English.)

I 619

Spe labor in seniore, fames stimulatur utroque...

M: 'The old man's [sc. the wolf's] efforts were increased by his desire, and his hunger by both...'

S: 'Effort stirs up hope in the old beast and hunger spurs them both.'

(Passive construction treated as if active, so that the meaning is entirely reversed.)

I 675-6

Quod si consilium non exaudire recusas,
Hortor, ut hic sapiat dupla cupido semel...

M: 'But if you don't refuse to listen to some advice, I urge that your two-fold greed may show some wisdom for once...'

S: 'Although you are not refusing to listen to advice, I am urging you on so that your twin lusts can feast here for once.'

(Obliteration of conditional clause; failure to identify meaning of **quod si**—see Lewis and Short, s.v. **quod,** VII.)

The section of text from which these errors were taken was chosen simply because it is the opening of the poem, not because it contains an unusually heavy concentration of inaccuracies. The mistakes continue at this degree of frequency from beginning to end of the translation. When it is borne in mind that the examples I have given are of the most obvious and easily isolable mistakes alone, some idea of the

unreliability of the whole can be formed. Some of the examples given here demonstrate characteristic mistakes which are repeated over and over again (e.g., simple misunderstanding of the meanings of **ut** and **cum**, careless confusion of similar words, the ignoring of mood and tense, incorrect linking of words which do not belong together syntactically on the one hand, and on the other, the splitting up of syntactic units in such a way that the overall meaning is destroyed). Ignorance of the common meanings of words in medieval Latin (**miles** is translated 'soldier' at I 32, **pietas** as 'honesty' at I 418) culminates in downright anachronism at V 360, where the fox is made to say (in a poem composed ca. 1148) 'I am a friar' (for Latin **Frater ego**: 'I am a brother'—i.e., a monk). Suspicions might perhaps be aroused in an alert reader by the number of times that the translation reads as nonsense in itself; see, for example, the translations of I 867a, I 988-91, II 399-402, III 1051-2, III 1147-8, IV 58, IV 320, VI 293. Some instances of this produce comic effects of a kind that the author of the **Ysengrimus** would doubtless have relished: for example, IV 804—'Turning round in their tracks, their hindquarters ran off'; V 1077—'The pious abbot had carefully provided himself with a millstone behind his back'; VII 648—'...a man is barely safe crawling along upright on his two legs'. It is regrettable that a translation that will probably, by its surface liveliness, attract attention to and arouse interest in the **Ysengrimus**, should be so ill-fitted to support any serious or well-grounded study of the poem, since it misrepresents not only the poem's witty logic, but even the particularities of the narrative action—what is done or said, in the simplest sense.

There is still a need, then, for an English version that will do justice to this original and demanding poem, and I hope that I may give the hostages to fortune that any critic ought to be prepared to produce by the publication of my own translation before long.[5] As I mentioned earlier, in this version a further aid to understanding will be provided by a very detailed introductory analysis of the historical references in the poem, and the kind of aims and context for its production that these suggest, together with an equally lengthy analysis of its literary structure which clarifies the coherence and artistry of the whole. There is still a great deal of work to be done on the poem, and I can testify to the absorbing nature of its pursuit; so unusual and complex a work repays all efforts spent on the attempt to understand it. The recent expansion of work in the field of medieval beast-literature in general, and the quickening of interest in the **Ysengrimus** in particular, are encouraging signs that at long last the respect paid to this fascinating work may be transformed from lip-service to active study and research.[6]

FOOTNOTES

1. **Le Roman de Renard**, 2nd edition, Paris, 1968.

2. I have unfortunately been unable to locate a copy of van Mierlo's translation in a British library, and have thus had to exclude it from this comparison. Nor have I made a thorough examination of Mlle Charbonnier's translation, which she was kind enough to send me; sample checking suggests, however, that it in general represents the text both accurately and intelligently.

3. Cf. Nigel de Longchamps, **Speculum Stultorum**, ed. John H. Mozley and Robert R. Raymo, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960, lines 1531-8.

4. For purposes of comparison it may be mentioned that as far as the above instances are concerned, the Syphers' text improves on Schönfelder only once, and then not entirely satisfactorily. The rendering of III 1156 as 'Thanks are thankless when they are asked for' preserves the word-play, but at the expense of the precise meaning; it is not thanks, but mercy that is in question. Elisabeth Charbonnier's translation offers another interpretation: (in English) 'Ingrates obtain grace, when it is requested on their behalf' (taking **gratis** as abl. pl. of **gratus** rather than as adv.). This is technically possible, but does not fit the context, where the point is that there is no such request. In the other instances analysed, Mlle Charbonnier's interpretation coincides with my own.

5. The publishing house of E.J. Brill, Leiden, has expressed an interest in its publication.

6. I acknowledge with gratitude the help and advice of Robert Coleman, Michael Lapidge and Neil Wright in the preparation of this article.