

LACANALE, Marcella. 2020. "S'en est de branche en branche alez". *Il Roman de Renart tra raccolta e ciclo*. Roma: Viella [Biblioteca di Studj Romanzi 4]. Pp. IX + 186. ISBN 9788833133287, Paper € 26,00. ISBN 9788833135564, ePUB € 14, 99.

This work draws from Marcella Lacanale's doctoral research at the University of Macerata, which combines thematic-anthropological analysis with textual criticism to propose a convincing reconstruction of the editorial history of *Roman de Renart*. The edition chosen by the author for her study is Martin's (based on the ms. A: Paris, BnF, fr. 20043). This seems the fittest choice as proven by the findings resulting from Lacanale's analysis.

Lacanale's work is divided into an introduction and four main chapters, followed by conclusions. Each chapter focuses on one of the operations identified by Paul Zumthor (1983) for the realization of a literary text: production, execution, circulation, conservation.

The first chapter is devoted to the production phase of the text and is in turn divided into two sub-chapters. In the first part, the author catalogues and analyzes seven recurring literary motifs selected on the basis of their 'dynamism' (i.e. their actual influence on the development of the *fabula*) which mirror the many ways through which Renart the fox escapes death and goes "de branche en branche". These seven recurring literary motifs are: 1) King Noble's partiality; 2) the promise of penance; 3) the request for confession; 3) the missed blow; 5) the dogs; 6) the false relic; and 7) feigned death. The author notices how these motifs are not evenly distributed throughout the episodes of the *Roman* but are mostly concentrated in *branches* I–XVII (seventy-six occurrences), while their presence significantly decreases from *branche* XVIII onwards (five occurrences in total). Obviously, as she clarifies, if "a different edition of the text had been adopted, the distribution of recurring motifs would not appear so clearly bipartite" (69, n69, my translation). The same analysis is applied to three recurring formulas in the second sub-chapter ("Or se commence a propenser", "Or est Renart en male trape", "engin et art") of which the author observes the distribution in the *branches* and their eventual co-presence with the aforementioned narrative motifs. Above all, the second formula, which marks a dangerous situation, anticipates the narrative motifs that ensure the fox escapes its death once again. In this case, as the author admits (85), the division into two groups can still be perceived, although in a less clear-cut way than the one in the first sub-chapter. Nonetheless, this analysis suggests the seeming existence of

two *Romans de Renart* which show completely different attitudes toward recurring stereotypical motifs and formulas (161).

The second chapter is still linked to the production phase and focuses on intertextual references which the author defines as “allusions”. These may be internal (to the *branche*), external, referring to unattested episodes, or incongruent (i.e. referring to episodes attested in a partially different version). As in the first chapter on formulas and motifs, the majority of allusions are concentrated in *branches* I–XIV. Also, the mechanism of intertextual repetition is often triggered by one of the seven narrative motifs, namely the request for confession, which the author of the *branche* uses to recall the fox’s past (or future) exploits. Lacanale observes that many of the allusions are incongruent and irrelevant, i.e., they do not refer exactly to a specific passage in a *branche* but more generally to an episode of the fox’s adventures which may have been well-known given its oral circulation. Thus, the mechanisms that should ensure cohesion between the *branches* are actually those that hinder it (111). Such a high incongruity rate of allusions affects the reliability of reconstructive hypotheses about the respective chronology of the *branches* that rely too heavily on intertextuality. However, Lacanale’s analysis corroborates the hypothesis of a first single poem attributed to Pierre de Saint-Cloud: while *branches* II–Va are the most quoted throughout the *Roman*, they refer exclusively to themselves since the ten allusions in Va point to *branche* II and the only one in II is a self-quotation.

In the third chapter, the focus shifts to the performance phase as both communication and reception. The author, retrieving and examining theories on the oral origin of the *chanson de geste*, eventually hypothesizes that the peculiar conditions of performance influenced the structure of *Roman de Renart* at the time of its composition. The traces of orality, intentionally inserted by the authors in order to facilitate the performance, are indeed most present in those *branches* which also embed narrative motifs, formulas and intertextual allusions. Thus, the incongruities observed seem to depend on the conditions of the performance. The author/jester was interested in informing the inattentive and noisy audience in the squares about his repertoire, capturing its attention and retaining it through general references to orally known episodes.

The observations so consistently collected in the first three chapters allow the author to further a coherent and partially original hypothesis on the manuscript tradition and the nature of the archetype of all the witnesses in the fourth and final chapter, which is devoted to the conservation phase of the text, i.e., the editorial history of *Roman de Renart*.

It is generally accepted that the fourteen manuscript witnesses (divided into three families: α , β , γ) and the nineteen fragments all descend from a common archetype (X). While witnesses from the β and γ families tend to reorganize the materials in a coherent and consequential manner, the α sub-archetype (to which ms. A belongs) provides an orientation deemed as illogical and incoherent, much less 'readable' (149) but closer to the archetype. According to Lucien Foulet (1914), the archetype would be the work of a collector who merely juxtaposed a series of texts, copying them one after the other without giving them a logical order. Lacanale accepts the hypothesis of such an early Renardian collection which contains an initial group of *branches* (I–XVI) that were not coherently organized. However, developing Massimo Bonafin's (2001, 453) proposal about the occasional character of this first collection, she suggests the author was a jester as a justification for the presence of 'the voice' (i.e. the traces of orality) and the concentration of recurring motifs, formulas, and allusions in the first *branches*. In the *branches* composed later and absent from this first collection, the system of references vanishes together with the signs of orality. The *Renard* ceases to become a collection of distinct episodes and attempts to become a cyclical *Roman*. However, as pointed out by Bonafin (2008, 4), the dynamism of the fox, that is his being a trickster, stands in the way of such a transformation.

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