

# Reynard the Fox



by Michael Woods and Robert St Cloud



To Eileen & Bid

# Reynard the Fox



by Michael Woods and Robert St Cloud





Published by Tricksterville Publishing  
Moor Road, Saxmundham, Suffolk

all rights reserved  
copyright: illustrations by Michael Woods  
text by Robert St Cloud

ISBN 978-1-5262-0692-3.

First published 2017

Limited Edition

/ 100

Reynard is a trickster and a fox. The power and savage humour of his stories depend on our ability to hold on to these two identities simultaneously.

His origins are unknown, lost in thousands of years of oral tradition. He is first introduced to us through the medieval Latin text, Ysengrimus, and the late Twelfth Century Roman de Renart, written in old French, which places Reynard firmly in a courtly setting, echoing the contemporary Roman de Gestes, and savagely satirising the hypocrisy of the contemporary church and the venality of the court.

The Reynard tales were popular throughout the Middle Ages. Chaucer made use of them in the Nun's Priest's Tale. William Caxton printed the Historie of Reynard the Foxe, which he translated from a very successful middle Dutch version.

Later retellings, including Goethe's poem translation, Reineke Fuchs, lack the comic savagery of the medieval originals. And Reynard comes down to us in the modern era mostly through rather bland children's versions.

# Reynard

about the illustrations and the text



Reynard the trickster presents himself to the world through a mask and these illustrations by Michael Woods return us to the essence of the trickster beast. They revel in the reality that Reynard is a liar, an adulterer, a murderer and that, like us, he is an animal. They take us back to his medieval origins where, whilst being alive to all his brutality and sadism, we cannot help but be enchanted by his quick wit and laugh at his cunning.

The extracts from the story that appear in this book are translated from Branche I of the old French Roman de Renart with some assistance from a recent modern French translation by Jean Dufournet and others.

The text adheres closely to the storyline and spirit of the medieval fable. Each chapter begins with a narrative synopsis and the illustrations are accompanied by extracts, which are direct translations of the original rhyming couplets rendered in blank verse. Some of the names of the characters appear in their more accepted English form, based on both Caxton's translation and more recent usage.

	Page
Chapter I: Chanticleer the Cock	9
Chapter II: Bruin the Bear	15
Chapter III: Tibert the Cat	23
Chapter IV: Grimbert the Badger	31
Chapter V: Noble the Lion	39
Chapter VI: Ysengrim the Wolf	51
Chapter VII: Poincet the Dog	61



## Chapter I: Chanticleer the Cock

Winter has passed and the hawthorn is in flower and Noble the Lion calls his subjects to court. They all obey with the exception of Reynard, who, like a rogue baron, has taken refuge in his castle, Maupertuis, that some call Wickedhole.

But at court trouble is brewing for Reynard. The list of grievances against him is long. He is accused of many crimes, including raping Arswynd, wife of Ysengrim the Wolf, and pissing on their children and blinding them.

Noble, however, is inclined to overlook these complaints and it appears that Reynard's luck is in, until Chanticleer the Cock and his wife Pinte the Hen arrive...



Midday finds Reynard resting in his lair.  
Earlier he's secured a big, fat pullet  
For his larder and then devoured the leg  
Of the plumpest, free-range chick. So now  
He takes his ease, revelling in plenty.



With God's blessing all would have turned out well  
For the Fox. But now Chanticleer the Cock  
Arrives with Pinte, whose eggs are extra large.  
Pinte and her sisters are pulling a cart  
Draped with an awning. Inside lies a hen  
In a litter, dressed up as a coffin.  
Reynard with his razor fangs, has left her  
In a piteous state. Her thigh's ripped open  
And her right wing is missing completely.  
Now Noble the King has eaten his fill  
And is weary of courtly proceedings.  
The very last thing that he wants to hear  
Is old Chanticleer with his clucking hens  
Flapping their hands in this dreary lament.  
But then Pinte starts up, "In the name of God,  
Gentle beasts, dogs, wolves, whoever you are,  
Pray, come to the aid of the poorest wretch.  
Cursed be the very hour that Pinte was born!  
I had five brothers on my father's side  
And that beast Reynard has gobbled the lot.  
Who ever did suffer so great a loss?"



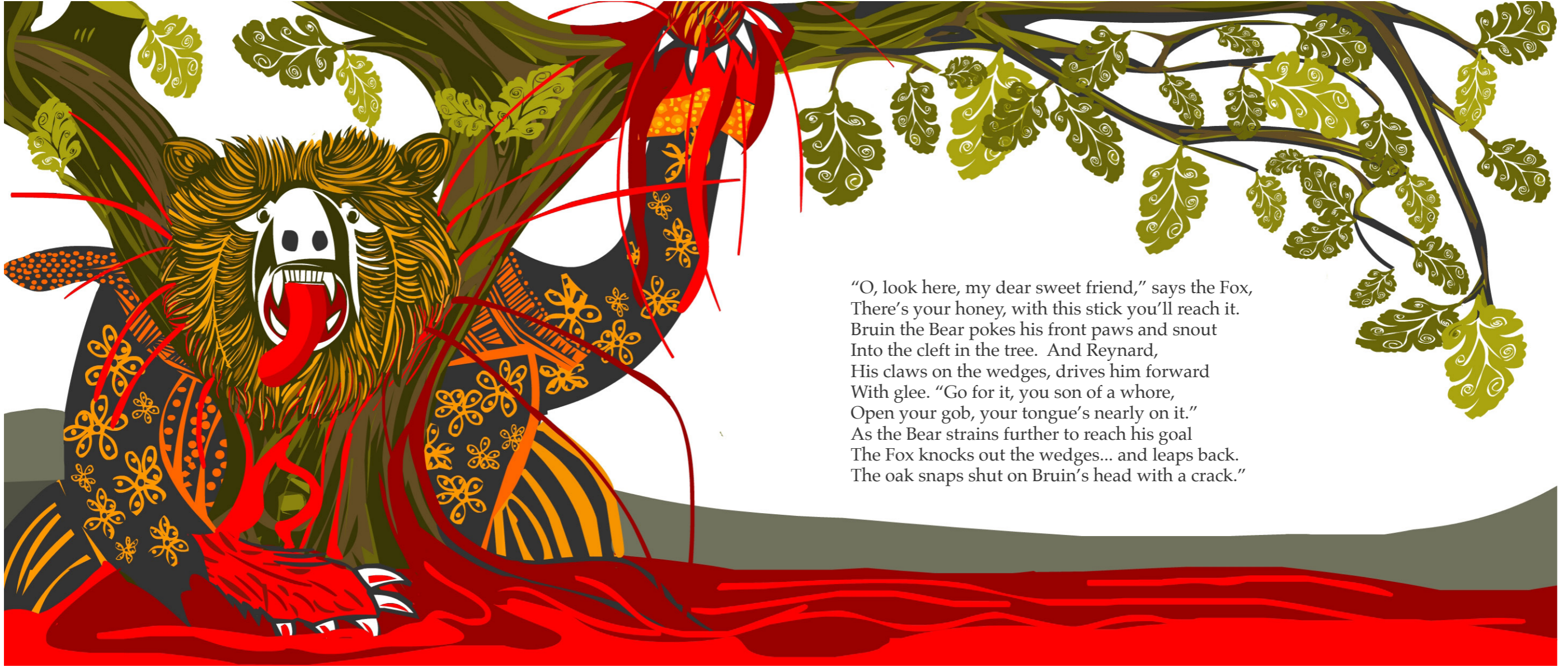
## Chapter II: Bruin the Bear

Noble finally declares that the Fox must be brought to answer for his sins and he sends Bruin the Bear as his messenger to bring the culprit in. Bruin is welcomed at Maupertuis. The wily Reynard tells him he was on his way to court that very moment, but, being a poor man, he was first preparing himself with a frugal meal and six deniers worth of the freshest honey. At the mention of the word 'honey', Bruin loses all his judgment.

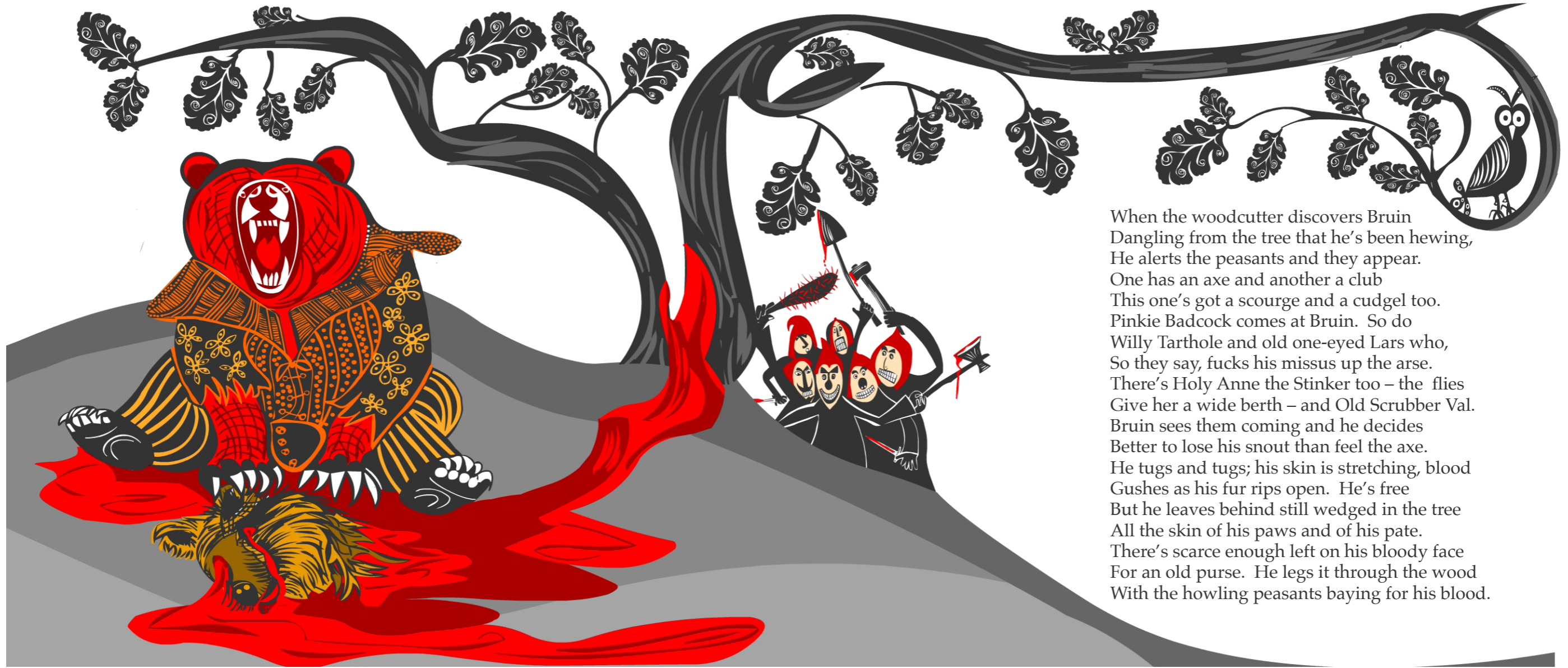
He allows Reynard to lead him into the woods and the Fox takes him to a spot where he knows a woodcutter has been splitting an oak with wedges. He persuades the drooling bear that the honey lies in the crack in the tree...

“Nomine Patre et Christum fille  
And by the holy relics of Saint Giles,”  
Exclaims Bruin (and Reynard sneaks a smile).  
“Honey. Oh honey ... it’s the very thing  
My poor belly yearns for. I’d give you more  
Than the world for that honey, God save you.”  
“Dear, Bruin,” says Reynard. “Grant me your oath  
That you’ll swear to keep this under your hat –  
And, by the faith I owe Ginger, my son,  
I’ll fill your belly with first-class honey  
Whose freshness will make you weep with delight.  
It’s just nearby... and I can trust you, right?”





"O, look here, my dear sweet friend," says the Fox,  
There's your honey, with this stick you'll reach it.  
Bruin the Bear pokes his front paws and snout  
Into the cleft in the tree. And Reynard,  
His claws on the wedges, drives him forward  
With glee. "Go for it, you son of a whore,  
Open your gob, your tongue's nearly on it."  
As the Bear strains further to reach his goal  
The Fox knocks out the wedges... and leaps back.  
The oak snaps shut on Bruin's head with a crack."



When the woodcutter discovers Bruin  
Dangling from the tree that he's been hewing,  
He alerts the peasants and they appear.  
One has an axe and another a club  
This one's got a scourge and a cudgel too.  
Pinkie Badcock comes at Bruin. So do  
Willy Tarthole and old one-eyed Lars who,  
So they say, fucks his missus up the arse.  
There's Holy Anne the Stinker too – the flies  
Give her a wide berth – and Old Scrubber Val.  
Bruin sees them coming and he decides  
Better to lose his snout than feel the axe.  
He tugs and tugs; his skin is stretching, blood  
Gushes as his fur rips open. He's free  
But he leaves behind still wedged in the tree  
All the skin of his paws and of his pate.  
There's scarce enough left on his bloody face  
For an old purse. He legs it through the wood  
With the howling peasants baying for his blood.



### Chapter III: Tibert the Cat

The King, enraged at the insult to his messenger, sends Tibert the Cat to bring Reynard to answer for his crimes. Tibert is cleverer than Bruin but he too falls victim to his greed. With the promise of a feast of mice and rats in a grain store, Reynard lures him instead to a barn where the owner, a randy village priest, has laid out snares to protect against night raids on his poultry.

Tibert is lured into the net by Reynard and his struggles awake the household. The priest leaps forth from the arms of his concubine, convinced that he has at last caught the hated Reynard...

Reynard knows the priest's trap inside out  
But doesn't let the cat out of the bag.  
"Come you this way, my Lord Tibert," says he.  
"(Shit, what a cowardly chicken have we here?)  
That's it, I'll keep close guard on the outside hereabouts."  
And Tibert springs, a great leap in the dark,  
Yet he finds no bed of wheat nor barley  
For the net grabs him cruelly round the throat.  
He pulls and strains but there is no escape  
And all his struggling efforts are in vain.





The priest, pork sausage in his hand, leaps out  
Of bed. Tibert gets a proper thrashing –  
A hundred cudgel blows descend on him  
From the holy father and his harlot.  
But Tibert of the sharp fangs spies the priest's  
Jewels hanging down and with teeth and claws  
He rips the man's right bollock from its sack.  
His woman stares in horror at the wound.  
Three times she howls and on the fourth she swoons.



Poor Tibert makes his getaway and, with  
The villagers in hot pursuit, he curses  
The Fox aloud for all his wicked crimes.  
“Ah, Reynard, Reynard, may your soul be damned!  
Yet I blame myself, Red Reynard has foxed  
Me yet again. As for that base cuckold,  
The priest, let God rain abject misery  
And precious little bread on him and on  
His filthy whore for beating me so sore.  
His vile parish is avenged; for henceforth  
His peal will ring out on a single bell.



#### Chapter IV: Grimbert the Badger

Grimbert the Badger, Reynard's cousin, is the third messenger sent by the King to bring the Fox to account. He gets preferential treatment at Maupertuis but, after the pair have dined, Grimbert warns Reynard that, if he continues to provoke Noble and his barons, he will inevitably be hanged. The Fox trembles with fear and Grimbert suggests that he should confess his sins to him before they leave for court...



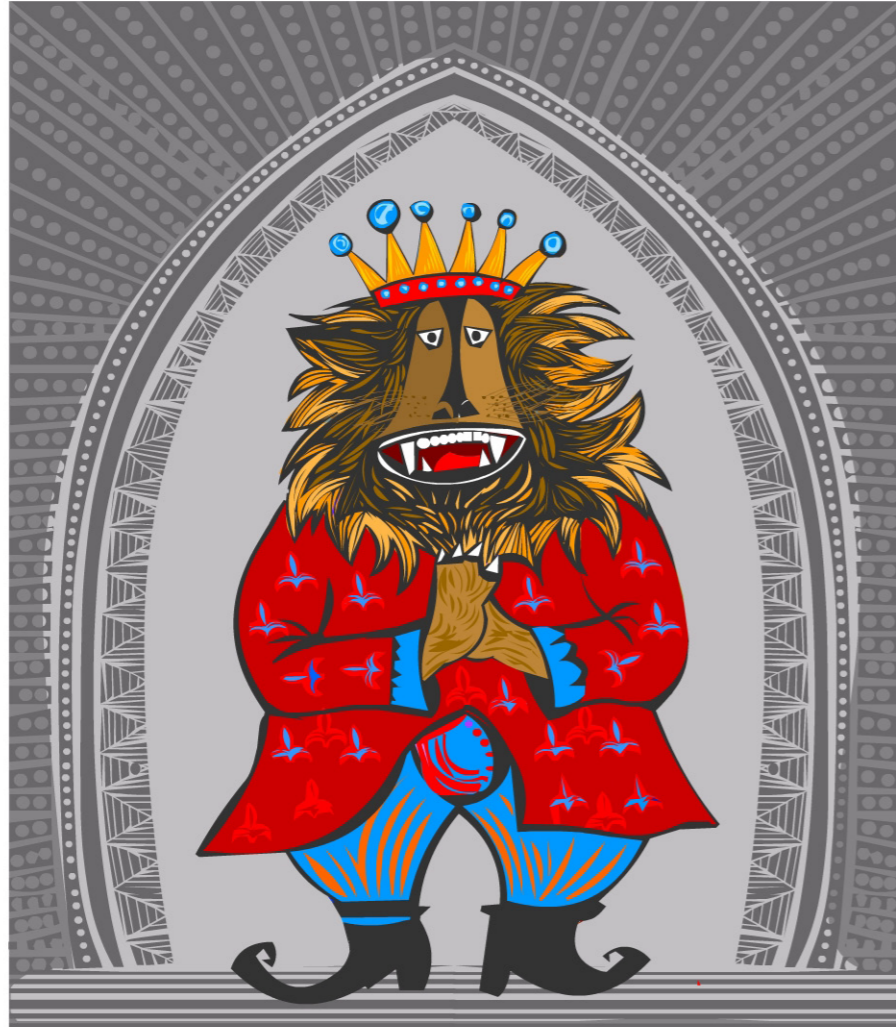
Reynard picks out Grimbert from afar  
By the way he runs and his customary  
Descent arse-first into the Fox's lair.  
He throws his arms about his cousin's neck  
And sits him down on cushions fine to share  
A hearty feast. The Badger eats his fill  
Choosing to dine before delivering  
The fateful scroll he's bearing from the King.

Later, when Reynard breaks the royal seal  
And reads, his wicked heart stops in his breast  
And his face turns dark. "May God have pity  
On me, cousin, for I shall surely hang.  
If I could but be a monk at Cluny  
Or Clairvaux... but no, what good is that to me?  
Their houses are so full of hypocrites  
That I would only reap misfortune there."  
"What wild words are these when the morn may see  
The last day of your life?" replies Grimbert.  
"I beg you now, confess your sins to me."  
Reynard nods. "Excellent idea," says he.



"Here are my sins. I have loved with passion  
Arswynd, the wife of Ysengrim, the Wolf.  
And, take no heed of her protestations  
Of innocence, for I have truly shagged her.  
Mea culpa, my Lord, I do penance  
For the one I gave her up the bum.  
And I have so wronged the Lord Ysengrim,  
May God have mercy on my wretched soul,  
That I do not dare look him in the eye.  
I'll tell you how one time he was deceived:  
I lured him into a wolf trap. For he  
Was gagging for a tasty lamb for tea.  
The wretch received a hundred vicious blows  
That day before he made his getaway."





## Chapter V: Noble the Lion

After accompanying Reynard to court, Grimbert is dismayed by the savagery of the Fox's accusers who insist that he shall be hanged instantly without trial. But the King is swayed by Grimbert's declaration that Reynard has truly repented. And to prove it, the Fox vows to take the cross and go on pilgrimage.

Reynard, however, is soon up to his old tricks again. He kidnaps Coward the Hare and is taking him back to his lair when he runs into the King and his royal entourage.

Noble and his barons lay siege to the Fox's castle, Maupertuis. But one evening Reynard emerges from his fortress to find the whole camp asleep and Queen Fièrè alone in a clearing in the woods. And he rapes her.

Such treason must be avenged. Reynard stands before the king once more, a noose around his neck. But at the eleventh hour Lady Ermelyn, the Fox's wife, arrives with a treasure chest of gold and silver...

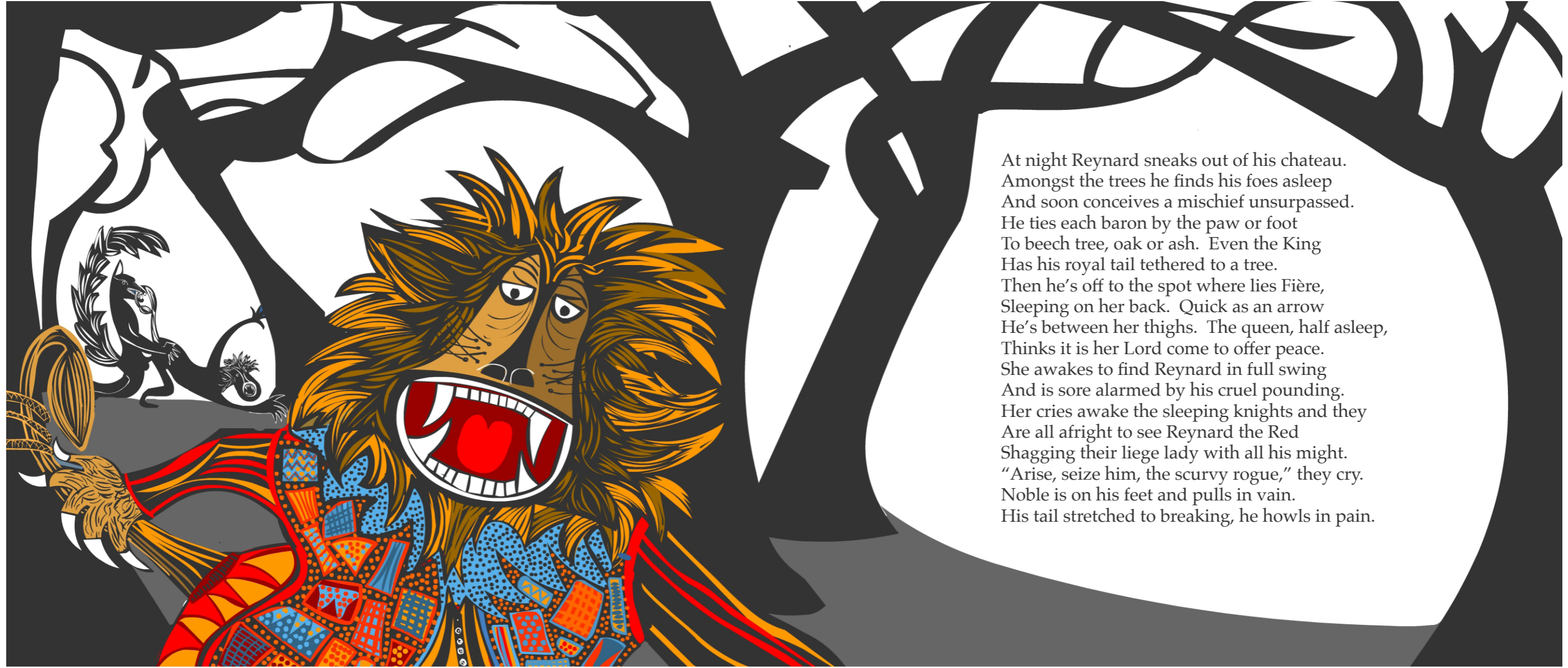


Here is Reynard the pilgrim: round his neck  
The holy scrip and wooden staff in hand.  
The King orders him to renounce his tricks  
And evil deeds so that he may be saved.  
Reynard can't believe his luck; he agrees  
To all the King's demands and quits the court  
On the stroke of noon. Noble's wife and queen,  
Fière, bestows her favour on the Fox.  
"Lord Reynard, pray for us and we will pray  
for you."

"My lady," says he, "I'm grateful  
For your prayer but there's one more thing.  
Your grace will ease my trial by giving me  
Your ring." Moved by his devotion, Fièvre  
Proffers the ring and the Fox receives it  
Gladly. "By my faith, your token will be  
A deadly scourge against my enemies."

The King and his men at arms encounter  
 Reynard in a valley wide and overhung  
 By four rock pillars that reach sky high.  
 The Fox stands boldly on the highest peak,  
 Grasping by his legs poor Coward the Hare  
 So that his ears hang down most pitifully.  
 Reynard has plans to take him home for tea  
 For his hungry cubs. But now he espies  
 The King and Queen and royal company  
 In the woods below and he takes the cross  
 In both his hands and calls out defiantly:  
 "My Lord King, may God curse the poor gobshite  
 Who encumbered me with this cape and staff  
 And beggar's purse. Here take back your rag."  
 And he wipes his arse with the pilgrim's cape  
 And throws it at the animals below.  
 "Saladin sends his regards, my liege,"  
 He cries, "through the services of this true  
 And pious pilgrim who stands before you."





At night Reynard sneaks out of his chateau.  
Amongst the trees he finds his foes asleep  
And soon conceives a mischief unsurpassed.  
He ties each baron by the paw or foot  
To beech tree, oak or ash. Even the King  
Has his royal tail tethered to a tree.  
Then he's off to the spot where lies Fièrè,  
Sleeping on her back. Quick as an arrow  
He's between her thighs. The queen, half asleep,  
Thinks it is her Lord come to offer peace.  
She awakes to find Reynard in full swing  
And is sore alarmed by his cruel pounding.  
Her cries awake the sleeping knights and they  
Are all afraid to see Reynard the Red  
Shagging their liege lady with all his might.  
"Arise, seize him, the scurvy rogue," they cry.  
Noble is on his feet and pulls in vain.  
His tail stretched to breaking, he howls in pain.



Alas, Reynard had failed to tie the tail  
Of the standard bearer, Tardif the Snail,  
Who swiftly draws his sword and flails about,  
Releasing his colleagues from their bonds  
With such elan that many lose their limbs.  
Then with hue and cry they pursue Reynard  
Who flees apace but, entering his lair,  
His feet are grabbed by bold Tardif who holds  
Him there like a trusty knight until the King  
Draws near. Reynard, beset on every side,  
Is held captive to the delight of all.  
"Leave him to me," says Ysengrim the Wolf.  
"Such a dreadful vengeance have I planned  
That news of it will spread throughout the land."  
But the King rejects his plea and blindfold  
Reynard is led away to custody.



Ermelyn falls at the feet of the King,  
 "Sire, for the love of our Lord, I pray you,  
 Have pity on my husband! I will give  
 To you, my liege the riches you see here,"  
 Says she, "If you will spare my Lord  
 Reynard."

The King examines the great treasure chest  
 Which lies before him. He has a weakness  
 For gold and silver. "Lady Ermelyn,"  
 Says he. "Reynard has wronged all who are  
 here.

You'll not believe the evil he has done.  
 My noble barons say that he must hang  
 On the hour and I accept their judgment."

"Sire, for the love of Jesus pardon him."

"Oh very well," says the King. "And for love  
 Of you. But on condition – if he sins  
 Again, by my royal oath, he will swing."





## Chapter VI: Ysengrim the Wolf

Reynard escapes once more but his enemies are soon in hot pursuit. He hides in a dyer's cottage and, hunting for food in the dark, he falls into a vat of yellow dye.

The first person he encounters after his ordeal is Ysengrim the Wolf, who fails to recognise the bright yellow fox. Together they plan a raid on a peasant's house to steal a hurdy gurdy. They wait for darkness to fall and then look for a way into the house.

The Wolf slips in through a window and Reynard instantly slams it shut. The noise awakes the peasant and his dog who attack Ysengrim.

The Wolf escapes at last and he limps home in dreadful pain. He creeps into bed exhausted, desperate for sleep. But Arswynd his wife has other ideas until she makes a terrible discovery...



No sooner on the road again, the Fox  
Spies Ysengrim, the Wolf who's big and strong.  
Reynard greets him, "Arternoon, chap," says he.  
"Heavens, my man," Ysengrim exclaims.  
Where have you come from? You're not from  
hereabouts?"

"Fuck no, from Suffolk. I lost me money  
And I been looking for me fuckin' mate -  
Been all over the fuckin' place. You ain't  
Seen him I don't reckon?"

"No my good man,"  
Says the Wolf. "Tell me do you have a trade?"  
"Yeah, I'm a fucking good minstrel," he says.  
"But yesterday some big old boys give me  
A fucking hiding. Fuck if the buggers  
Didn't steal me fuckin' hurdy gurdy  
And I ain't had fuck all to eat since then."  
"Really! And pray what is your name, good man?"  
"What me? They call me fucking Lancelot.  
Bit posh, eh? And what about your highness?"  
"You're speaking to Monseigneur Ysengrim."



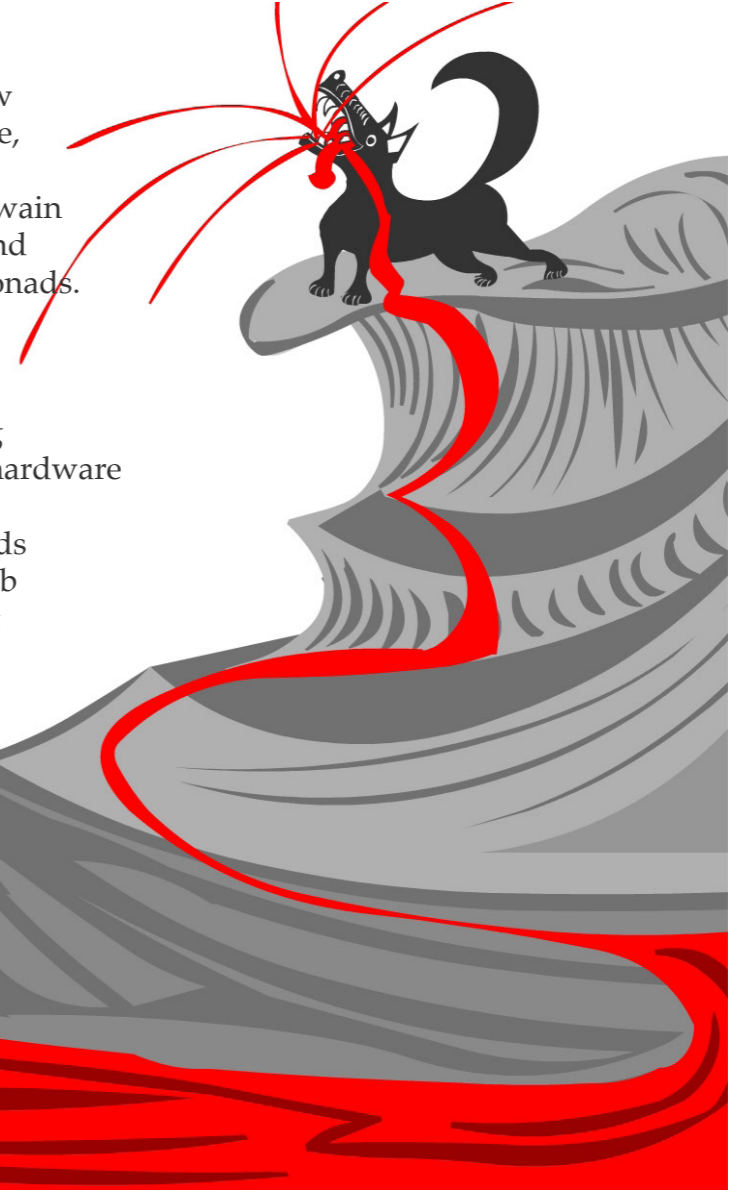
From his snores they conclude the peasant sleeps  
But by the fire a savage guard dog skulks.  
He's in the hearth close by the peasant's bed  
Which hides his view of the two trespassers.  
"Brother," says Ysengrim, await you here,  
While I go and work out a way that's clear  
To that hurdy gurdy."

Says Lancelot,  
"Fuck me, you gonna leave me here alone?"  
"What are you afraid?"

"Never, chap, not me.  
But if some fucking count do pass this way  
And he chance on me all a-fuckin' lone  
Then a fuckin' hiding I'll be in for."  
"By the love of God," Ysengrim replies,  
"You'll never find courage in a minstrel  
Nor wisdom in a woman nor a priest!"



When the wary peasant hears the window  
Slam, he's up like a shot and lights the fire,  
As is his wont whenever trouble strikes.  
Ysengrim attacks – grabs the crouching swain  
By the bum. But his cries awake the hound  
Who clamps his jaw around the Wolf's gonads.  
A tug of war ensues: they pull and shake;  
Ysengrim hangs on to the peasant's arse  
But suffers much agony from the fangs  
Of the snarling cur. One more savage tug  
And the Wolf's unmanned; his precious hardware  
Left behind, he leaps madly for the door.  
The peasant's hue and cry alerts his friends  
And neighbours and, as the avenging mob  
Draws near, Ysengrim beats a sore retreat  
Without his nob - and scuttles to his lair.





Arswynd ignores his pleas and touches him  
Just where by rights his mighty cock should be.  
“Alas,” she cries. “And where’s my saucisson  
That always used to dangle hereabouts?”  
“My dear,” says he, “I lent it to a nun,  
Who pressed me hard and would have otherwise  
Retained me in her garden. She promised  
To return it.”

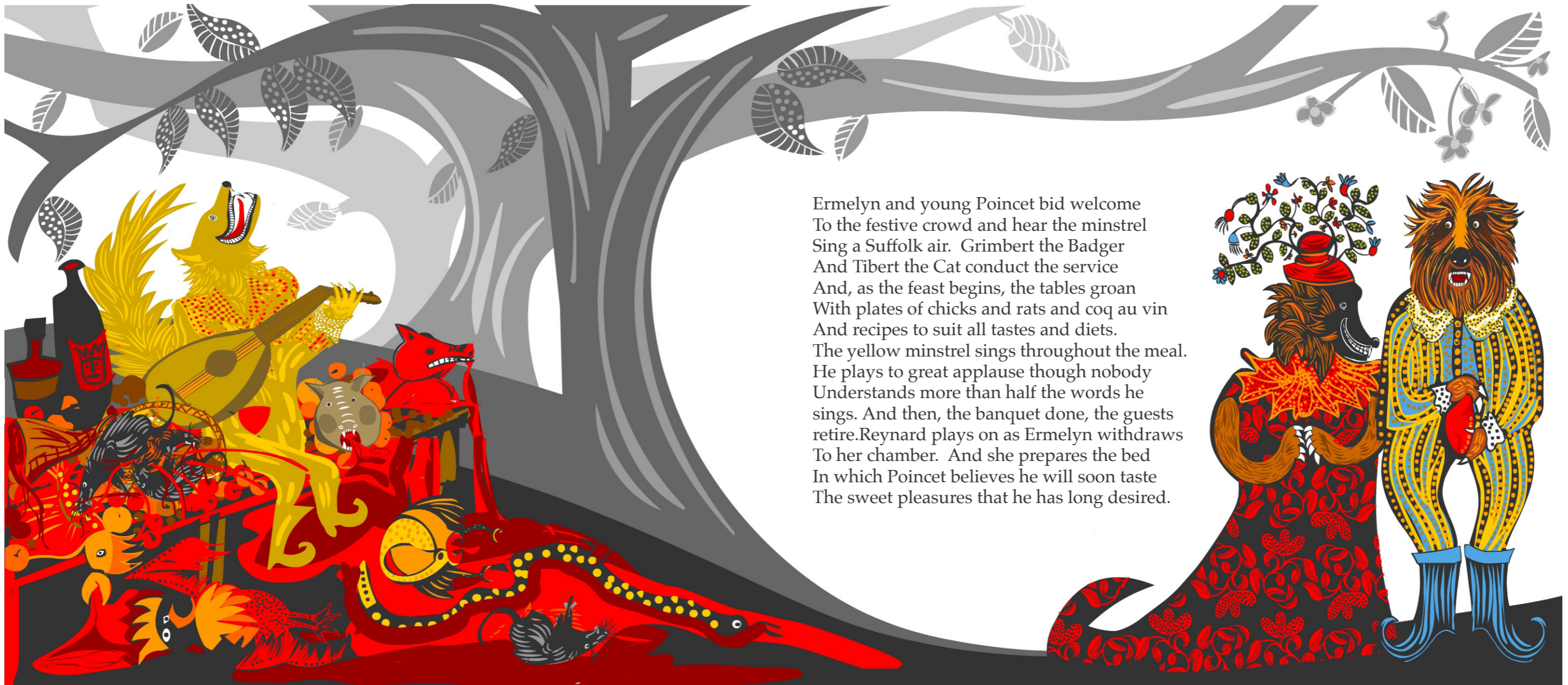
“What horror do I hear?”  
Arswynd replies, “Even if she had sworn  
Thirteen oaths and given you fine pledges,  
She’ll never give it back. Now off you go  
And tell that stinking whore that I must have  
My sausage back and bring it here tonight.  
Fail to do my bidding and you will swing  
For I will take my grievance to the King.”



## Chapter VII: Poincet the Dog

After many months on the road as a minstrel, Reynard heads for home. But on reaching Maupertuis he discovers that Ermelyn, assuming her husband to be dead, is about to remarry. At the wedding ceremony Reynard, still disguised as a Suffolk minstrel, befriends her new spouse, Poincet, a cousin of Grimbert.

The wily Fox persuades Poincet to visit the nearby tomb of a martyr in order to be blessed with a son. There Reynard has set a trap. As they approach the martyr's grave Poincet receives a shove in the back from Reynard and he falls into the snare which grips him by the neck and arm. Poincet calls on the martyr to save him but in vain...



Ermelyn and young Pincet bid welcome  
To the festive crowd and hear the minstrel  
Sing a Suffolk air. Grimbart the Badger  
And Tibert the Cat conduct the service  
And, as the feast begins, the tables groan  
With plates of chicks and rats and coq au vin  
And recipes to suit all tastes and diets.  
The yellow minstrel sings throughout the meal.  
He plays to great applause though nobody  
Understands more than half the words he  
sings. And then, the banquet done, the guests  
retire. Reynard plays on as Ermelyn withdraws  
To her chamber. And she prepares the bed  
In which Pincet believes he will soon taste  
The sweet pleasures that he has long desired.

Reynard seeks out the newly wed bridegroom  
And addresses him in his rustic tongue:  
“Poincet, chap, you’re a wise old boy, they say,  
So hear me out and fuckin’ good’ll come  
Your way. There lie a martyr over there  
And God ha’ give him the power to perform  
Fuckin’ miracles. Get you down there, chap,  
Barefoot and a church candle in your hand  
And you’ll be fuckin’ sure afore the morn  
The seeds is sowed for your son to be born.”  
“I’m with you all the way,” says bold Poincet.  
And off they go towards the martyr’s tomb.





From above Reynard mocks him with these words:  
"Poincet chap, ain't you a-praying long enough?  
You took a right shine to this 'ere martyr,  
You going to be there all the fuckin' night?  
D'you want to be a hermit or a monk?  
'Cause if you do, I'll help you fuckin' out.  
Though I'm bugged if I know why you'd want  
To hole up in there all your fuckin' life  
When you're hitched up with such a tasty wife."

The day is done and the dark night holds sway  
And here come at great speed four panting hounds  
With a farmhand who knows these woods right well.  
They find Poincet in the trap and tear him  
Limb from limb till his sweet life ebbs away.  
Reynard watches and in great fear he runs  
Along the hedgerow to the safety of his lair.



Reynard finds Ermelyn, lying in her marriage bed and reveals his true identity. He gives her a good hiding for deceiving him. But in the end they are reconciled through the services of a pious pilgrim...

And now Reynard lives out his days in love  
And perfect harmony with Ermelyn.  
He tells of his adventures on the run:  
The dangers overcome and his escape  
By falling in the dyer's yellow tank.  
And how Ysengrim lost his cock and balls  
And never will he get it up again.  
He tells her all and she laughs heartily  
And Reynard finds himself at last at peace  
And vows no more to roam but take his ease.



And some contend that Reynard kept his vow,  
Though in all honesty I can't see how.  
Like Ysengrim I'm of the firm belief  
That once again he's lying through his teeth...

