The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the College of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis/dissertation entitled:

An Analytical Comparison of Foxes Within European and Japanese Beast Tales

submitted by Aaron Boss in partial fulfillment of the requirements of

the degree of Master of Arts .

Dr. Greg Garrard – Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies

Supervisor

Dr. Michael Treschow – Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies

Supervisory Committee Member

Nina Langton – Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies

Supervisory Committee Member

Dr. Mo Pareles – Department of English Language and Literatures

University Examiner
Abstract

The use of foxes as a trickster figure is a common motif in cultures around the world, with two prominent manifestations being Reynard the Fox – the villainous protagonist of the *Reynard Cycle* from medieval and Early Modern Europe, and the *kitsune* – multiple-tailed supernatural foxes from Japanese folklore, literature, and mythology. 19th and early-to-mid 20th century scholarship utilized dated methodologies of formalism and structuralism, leading to comparisons of superficial similarities and speculations of a common origin. This thesis offers an analysis of both the *Reynard Cycle* and Japanese *kitsune* narratives utilizing methodologies drawn from both anthrozoology and cultural-historical analysis. I argue that the character of Reynard did not so much shape medieval European attitudes on foxes as he was shaped by pre-existing prejudices refracted through contemporary political concerns. In contrast, the *kitsune* of Japan encompass both secular and spiritual narratives, with their roles ranging from serving as moralistic – if sexist – warnings about women who did not conform to their social norms, to servants of Inari – the deity of commerce and agriculture, to the stars of tragic romances and vengeful plots to sow destruction and chaos. The thesis concludes by evaluating the two methodologies in relation to the two corpora.
Lay Summary

The use of foxes as a trickster figure is commonplace in modern media, but is a practise that dates back thousands of years and is not unique to North American and European culture. While the Western view of the fox is commonly attributed to Reynard the Fox – a figure in medieval European beast fables, the Japanese view of foxes is shaped by *kitsune* – multiple-tailed foxes with supernatural powers. This study aims to use the methodologies of anthrozoology and critical animal studies to analyze and contrast these two bodies of work, evaluating their significance in shaping how both cultures view foxes and determining whether the similarities ascribed during the 19th and early-to-mid 20th centuries are merely superficial.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................ iii

Lay Summary ................................................................................................................................ iv

Table of Contents ......................................................................................................................... v

List of Figures .............................................................................................................................. vi

Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 1

Reynard the Fox ......................................................................................................................... 15

Kitsune ...................................................................................................................................... 42

Kuzunoha .................................................................................................................................... 54

Tamamo-no-Mae .......................................................................................................................... 59

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................... 70

Works Cited ................................................................................................................................. 76
List of Figures

Figure 1  REYNARD THE FOX................................................................. 15
Figure 2  Reynard’s triumph.............................................................. 37
Figure 3  Kitsune ............................................................. 42
Figure 4  Kuzunoha .............................................................. 54
Figure 5  Daji.............................................................. 59
Figure 6  Sesshōseki ............................................................. 64
Introduction

Anthropomorphized animals are something that most people will recognize as a staple feature of modern media – animated movies and television series, video games, comic books, and literature commonly feature non-human animal characters with human mental, physical, and social characteristics. What might not be commonly known is that the use of anthropomorphized animal characters in modern media is an evolution of ancient allegorical and spiritual traditions found worldwide. While many examples of anthropomorphized animals in media draw from the tradition of Western European beast-fables, East Asian nations like China, Korea, and Japan have their own long-running traditions of anthropomorphized animals, often possessing supernatural abilities, featuring in both ancient texts and modern media. While many species of animals are prominently utilized in both European and Japanese beast-tale traditions, often out of recognition to their relationships with humans, one of the species with the greatest degree of cross-cultural resonance is the fox. Following World War II, American and Japanese scholars influenced by the Western anthropological methodologies of formalism and structuralism made observations regarding similarities between European and Japanese folklore – particularly their use of foxes as a trickster archetype (Nozaki vii; Opler and Hashima 46) – and some nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth century scholars have gone so far as to say that they are derived from a common source (Narkiss 47; Sauer 343; Müller 10429–10432; Ghosh-Schellhorn and Alexander 157 - 160). The purpose of this thesis is to utilize the modern anthrozoological and cultural-historical methodologies to comparatively examine the fox-related folklore of Europe and Japan – particularly how these corpuses developed and influenced how foxes are viewed by each society – in order to re-evaluate the depth and significance of these purported similarities
and connections in light of the profound cultural and religious differences between Europe and Japan.

In order to understand the basis of anthropological claims made during the nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth centuries, it is important to understand the outdated methodologies of formalism and structuralism, as well as more recent methodologies such as anthrozoology and cultural-historical analysis. Structuralism emerged during the early twentieth century, and was based around Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure’s 1916 study of semiology and semiotics—the interplay of signs, symbols, analogies, allegories, metonymy, metaphor, and signification—which he believed could provide a framework for analyzing all aspects of culture and society (Parker 37). Formalism, a related system of cultural analysis that is often lumped together with structuralism, was developed in 1928 by Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp in his analysis of Russian folktales, where he attempted to apply an empirical scientific method to literary analysis. As its name suggests, formalism is a system of literary criticism that exclusively examines the formal or generic characteristics of texts while disregarding the influence of intangible concepts such as culture, society, and authorship (Rich 8). While the conclusions Propp draws through this method of analysis are strictly meant to be applied to the set of Russian folktales he analyzed, his work in determining the basic elements of the stories and their functions has been applied to stories in general (Parker 58). Saussure’s theory of language was most-famously applied to cultural anthropology by Claude Lévi-Strauss in the 1950s. Lévi-Strauss posited that myths and other cultural narratives can be broken down into constituent elements called mythemes, which form a web of connections between the beliefs of cultures and narratives, even those separated by hundreds of kilometers and thousands of years (Sturrock 8). As far back as the nineteenth century, folklorist scholars speculated that all beast fable-related literature ultimately originated
from the ancient Indian text known as the *Panchatantra*, though the more recent polygenetic model of anthropology has challenged this monocausal theory (Narkiss 47; Sauer 343; Müller 10429–10432; Ghosh-Schellhorn and Alexander 157 - 160). Structuralism was an exceptionally popular method of cultural analysis up until the 1970s, when its flaws and shortcomings – such as the assumption that if two things are similar, they must be connected and related to one another – became increasingly apparent. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, post-structuralism emerged as a critique of structuralism’s flaws and shortcomings, pioneered by philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault (Sturrock 4), and in recent times structuralism has been mostly discredited – though some of its concepts, such as the aforementioned trickster archetype and assessment of symbols and mythemes, remain useful tools for analysis.

An important aspect of structuralism that has endured despite its decline is its emphasis on the role of allegory and symbolism in narrative. Allegory refers to the use of characters and places as metaphorical representations of various aspects of human nature or society. In medieval Europe, allegorical narratives such as fables and parables came to be highly developed tools for conveying Christian moral truths (Cavill and Ward 80), though the tradition dates back to ancient times. One of the most significant forms of allegory is the Vice figure, the sole purpose of which is to embody evil. The Vice archetype also often falls under the trickster archetype, using duplicity by pretending to be helpful or good and even at times changing shape to lure in victims, and in Christianity was seen as embodying the Devil and in stark contrast to the unchanging goodness of God (Cavill and Ward 81 – 82). Within medieval folklore, various species of animals, such as apes, snakes, and foxes, were associated with the Devil and thus assumed to be evil, and in fabular narratives often play the role of a villain (Best 118). Allegorical
representations have thus contributed to the development of the Western concept of “beastliness” and the use of animalistic terms as pejorative phrases (Midgely 112 – 113).

The modern field of anthrozoology – also referred to as human-animal studies – is a contemporary academic field derived from the post-structuralist tendency to disrupt and overturn assumptions taken for granted by past systems of analysis. It focuses on critically examining the current and historical relationships between humans and non-human animals, and is an interdisciplinary field of research that draws from multiple fields of study. Anthrozoology emerged in the twenty-first century alongside the ecocriticism movement, questioning the relationship between human society and cultures and the so-called natural world – in this case, the complicated relationships between humans and non-human animals within the Anthropocene, a proposed geological era wherein humans have become a dominant force of ecological change (Tobias and Morrison 2). Unlike earlier models of analysis, anthrozoology is interested in examining how representations of non-human animals impact humanity’s relationship with those animals, and is less biased towards similarities and more attentive towards the specific roles that these representations play in cultural and practical histories. Anthrozoology’s methodology is multidisciplinary, blending fields such as biology, history, ethology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and philosophy (Hosey and Melfi vii, 1); approaches to it are highly diverse (Hosey and Melfi 2, 8), with a multidisciplinary approach being required in order to “fully appreciate [the] different metrics and perspectives” involved in how humans and non-human animals interact (Hosey and Melfi 8). According to Erica Fudge, anthrozoology focuses on three metaphorical domains regarding the relationships between humans and non-human animals: domestic, wherein animals are seen as companions; factory, wherein animals are objectified as tools; and animal rights rhetoric, wherein animals are seen as citizens with rights
equal to humans (Fudge 15 – 16). Professor Fudge’s definition, however, seems to disregard the relationships between humans and wild non-human animals.

Anthrozoology seeks to not only understand but dismantle the anthropocentric bias that is ingrained in most human societies and influences how we interact with non-human animals, and replace it with a biocentric perspective that views all life as equal (Fudge 13). A key argument in anthrozoology’s deconstruction of anthropocentrism is that throughout history humans have “otherized” non-human animals, and that this speciesism is the cause of humans – particularly those living in European-influenced societies – interacting with non-animals in a form of systematic oppression akin to sexism, racism, and other forms of marginalization and discrimination (Vandersommers).

Another contemporary methodology, which enjoys a longer pedigree, is cultural-historical analysis, a subset of cultural studies which examines and extrapolates the unique historical context behind cultural phenomena such as myths and legends, storywork and folklore, society, class systems, gender relations, religion, literature, artwork, and other aspects of culture. Examples of cultural-historical analysis include historians and geologists ascribing the Biblical parting of the Red Sea and the Greek legend of Atlantis to the eruption of the Thera volcano in the sixteenth century BCE (Manning 498), or crediting cultural phenomena with causing social and intellectual movements like the Enlightenment on cultural phenomena (Delanty and Isin 152). Cultural-historical analysis was pioneered in the 1960s by French philosopher and sociologist Michel Foucault as a rebuttal to the then-current Annaliste and Marxist social-historical models of analysis (O’Brien 26 – 27; Varela 108), which he felt placed too much emphasis on the importance of historical patterns. Other aspects of cultural historical analysis were developed through the interest that anthropologists took in the concept of culture and how
different cultures developed over time and were related to one another (Gullestrup 24; Wuthnow 16; Delanty and Isin 152), although early cultural-historical analysis was marred by Eurocentric rhetoric and the dismissal of non-European societies as barbarous and savage (Delanty and Isin 152). Owing to its roots in European philosophical traditions – in part as a criticism of structuralism and functionalism’s assumptions of interconnectedness and failure to investigate and research the assumed network of cross-cultural connections (Delanty and Isin 152; Wuthnow 10) – cultural studies has tended to focus on the topics of symbolism, allegory, language, and discourse (Wuthnow 16). Despite the importance of culture to all aspects of human society, however, the study of culture is an impoverished field of research in comparison to other social sciences (Wuthnow 12). Cultural-historical analysis is particularly useful in mapping the development and transformations of societies through how their narratives evolve across time, though it is limited in that the cultural-historical approach assumes that culture operates independently of nature, and that literary traditions develop according to intrinsic drivers. In spite of these limitations, it offers nuance, cultural and historical context, and complexity to the formalist treatments commonly used in nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth century analyses, and is therefore useful as a supplement to them.

While both the anthrozoological and cultural-historical approaches are valid methods of examining human-animal relations, this thesis seeks to evaluate their respective usefulness in relation to two distinct literary corpora. Utilizing modern anthropological techniques to assess whether the similarities between European and Japanese fox-tales are truly superficial is a topic that has thus far been neglected by academics, ethnographers, and folklorists. An analysis using modern theoretical methods raises the question of whether it would be more informative to think of the fox as an animal figure from an anthrozoological perspective, or as an allegorical figure
from a cultural-historical perspective. Indeed, it is possible that the European and Japanese canons examined here invite entirely different analytical approaches.

While an anthrozoological analysis of the similarities and differences between the cultural depictions of foxes would be enlightening, few treatments of the European Reynard Cycle examine how the narratives impacted and were impacted by human interactions with foxes. Furthermore, most Anglophone studies of non-Western European relations to animals were conducted during the late nineteenth and early-to-mid twentieth centuries, primarily through the lens of formalism and structuralism, while the work of many modern Japanese folklorists and scholars like Kyōgoku Natsuhiko and Tada Katsumi is not available in English. Nevertheless, a cross-cultural analytical comparison of the medieval European Reynard the Fox beast fables and the Japanese legends and narratives revolving around the kitsune fox-spirits could assess whether ethnographic observations of the mid-twentieth century are purely superficial or actually point to shared traits beyond the use of foxes in the capacity of a trickster figure. While there are some striking similarities, in order to understand how foxes are utilized and viewed within both European and Japanese cultures, it is important to understand the fundamental differences in how animals are regarded by European society versus how they are regarded by Japanese society.

The fox, taxonomically, is an animal belonging to the genus *Vulpes*. Distantly related to the genus *Canis* – that is to say, wolves and dogs – foxes evolved in northern Africa during the Miocene period and have thus coexisted with humans throughout our evolution (Likius et al. 579); with a 2019 archaeological study indicating that humans in the Iberian Peninsula may have attempted to tame and domesticate foxes during the third and second millennia BCE, and at the very least used them in funerary rituals alongside bovines and dogs (Grandal-d'Anglade et al).
The largest and most widespread species, *Vulpes vulpes* – the red fox – is particularly notable for its ability to sense the Earth’s magnetic field, using it to help them hunt in the winter with incredible accuracy (Červený et al). Unlike the wolf – which is generally seen as being emblematic of wilderness, and the dog – which is generally seen as being emblematic of civilization, foxes are highly adaptable and capable of existing in either environment, particularly with rural human habitation. Befitting this liminal nature, anthropomorphized foxes are commonly cast into the role of the trickster figure; an archetype that appears in myths, legends, stories, poems, fables, and other cultural narratives around the world.

The trickster figure as an anthropological concept was defined by structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss in his 1958 seminal text *Structural Anthropology*, derived from his analysis of Native American storywork. The trickster is a character archetype who subverts societal and moral expectations by serving as “a mediating figure [who] traverses the social order by bringing disorder [while also] creating order through […] foolishness and deception” (Nicholas 12). Western Europe and Japan prominently feature trickster figures in an abundance of literary works that have profoundly influenced the depiction and perception of foxes in both regions. However, the fox as a trickster figure does not have the same function in the two cultures. Reynard the Fox originated in twelfth century Europe as the manipulative villain-protagonist of a cycle of satirical beast-fables and poems; while the East Asian legends and narratives revolving around supernatural foxes – commonly known as *kitsune* in Japan – originated as moralistic warnings for men to not trust women who deviated from the rigid patriarchal boundaries of Confucianism.

The European view of animals developed from medieval Christian theology, as influenced by both the Bible and Greek philosophy. According to the Bible’s Genesis 1:26, God
proclaimed on the Sixth Day of Creation that He had created humanity in His own image; and
gave Adam, the first man, dominion over the Earth and permission to use the animals and plants
of Creation however he saw fit. In Genesis 3:16 to 3:20, God exiles Adam and his wife Eve from
the Garden of Eden for having disobeyed His order not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge
– according to popular theology having been tricked into doing so by Satan in the form of a
serpent – and cursed them with lifetimes of suffering and pain to redeem themselves of this
Original Sin, though their dominion over the Earth and all living things is not revoked as part of
this divine punishment. Through colonialism and imperialism, Christianity and European views
on nature were exported globally (White Jr. 1204 – 1205), and still possess a significant global
impact on how animals are represented as inferior and subordinate to humans.

The Great Chain of Being – a foundational aspect of anthropocentrism – is a medieval
Christian theological concept adapted by Neoplatonic philosophers from the writings of
Aristotle. The Great Chain of Being asserts a pyramidal hierarchy of perfection amongst all
things. Rigidly hierarchical and idealistic in its depiction of an integrated natural order, God is
positioned at the top of the pyramid, followed by angels, humans, birds, sea-life, land animals,
plants, and finally minerals at the bottom. Each tier on the Great Chain of Being also contains
subdivisions, such as the ranks of angels according to medieval theology; and humans are
likewise arranged according to the social ranks of medieval society, with the kings and Popes at
the top and serfs at the bottom (Jensen, Chapter 1). This belief in humanity’s supremacy over the
natural world culminated in sixteenth century French philosopher René Descartes’ theory that
animals lacked souls and thus the capacity for reason, intelligence, emotions, and suffering
(Descartes 32 – 34). The Cartesian view of animals as unthinking, unfeeling organic machines –
while not without critics and detractors – facilitated the widespread maltreatment of animals, and
vestiges of it persist to modern times – such as the scientific community’s disdain for researchers anthropomorphizing non-human test subjects by projecting emotions and thoughts onto them, which is derided as a form of anthropocentrism (Holleman 6; Davies 721). As a result of these systems’ continued influence, non-human animals are seen as inferior to humans by much of Western society, with words such as “bestial” and “animalistic” being used pejoratively to describe violent behaviour. A further result of this fundamental disconnect between humans and non-human animals is that – aside from the snake being identified with Satan and the lamb with Jesus – non-human animals were not afforded spiritual significance in Christianity – with a few exceptions, like St. Francis of Assisi – and came to be utilized merely as fabular allegories to represent different aspects of human nature and society – though this tendency is not unique to Christianity or even Western civilization.

In contrast, the traditional Japanese worldview – influenced by a syncretism of Shinto, Buddhism, and Taoism – holds that not only humans but animals, plants, and even inanimate objects possess souls or can develop them once they reach a certain age, which lends to a significant degree of overlap between them. Shinto, the principle belief system of Japan, is often reduced by Western scholars to a blend of polytheism and animism, though this does not accurately encompass the full scope of Shintoism (Yamakage 45). Practitioners of Shinto worship supernatural entities called kami, which can be divided into two main categories with a degree of overlap between them: amatsukami or celestial kami – which correspond the closest to the Western concept of polytheistic gods, and kunitsukami or earthbound kami – which are embodied by lakes, rivers, trees, mountains, and other objects in the physical world (Yamakage 164 – 166). Furthermore, Shintoism puts forth that all things – humans, animals, and even inanimate objects – have souls and the potential to become kami (Yamakage 45, 97, 129). While
Shinto lacks Christianity’s clear definition of “sin” (Yamakage 36), physical, mental, and spiritual cleanliness are important aspects of Shinto, and water is seen as a particularly effective means of purification (Yamakage 70, 74). Negative emotions, immorality, blood, and death are seen as sources of kegare or spiritual corruption, and are to be avoided or cleansed (Yamakage 37, 95 – 97, 123 – 125). There are conflicting accounts as to how Shinto originated: according to Motohisa Yamakage, Grand Master of the Yamakage Shinto sect, Shinto developed out of the reverence that ancient Japanese people felt towards the natural world (Yamakage 47), and was shaped by Taoist and Buddhist influences; developing into syncretic sects such as Shudo Shinto, Yoshida Shinto, Shirakawa Shinto, and Shake Shinto over the course of Japan’s feudal era (Yamakage 47). Following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, “National/State Shinto” was purged of its syncretic elements and standardized as Japan’s national religion (Smyers 22), becoming a tool of ethnocentrism and nationalism leading up to and during World War II. Motohisa decries this as a corruption of traditional Japanese spirituality and values by Western culture (Yamakage 43), though it should be noted that Motohisa’s statements cannot be taken at face value given his vested interest in defending the reputation of Shinto. Many of the principal Shinto shrines employ the narrative that the religion has “continued in an unsevered line from prehistorical times to the present” without any deviations, contradictions, or changes (Breen and Teeuwen 4); though this fundamentalist narrative is both a result of and disproven by the significant restructuring of Shinto that occurred as part of the Meiji Restoration. Conversely, some scholars – such as historian Toshio Kuroda – put forth that Shinto emerged at some point prior to the eight century as a result of syncretism between indigenous Japanese beliefs and Chinese Taoism (Breen and Teeuwen 5). In modern times, Shinto is divided into various sub-divisions, the most-prominent of which are State Shinto and Cult Shinto. State Shinto emerged following the Meiji
Restoration’s attempt to purge the syncretic elements from Shintoism, was re-established after Japan’s defeat in World War II, and is the official doctrine supported by the major shrines across Japan (Nozaki 15; Smyers 22). Cult or Shrine Shinto, conversely, embodies the faith as it is actually practised by individual worshippers, and often deviates from the teachings of the major shrines (Breen and Teeuwen 4).

Buddhism, which is practised alongside Shinto in Japan, is a religion and philosophy developed in India and is based on the life and teachings of Siddhārtha Gautama, a prince who gave up his worldly possessions to travel across India, eventually attaining enlightenment as the Buddha (Becker 1–2). Buddhism is split into three main branches: Theravāda Buddhism – practised mainly in India; Vajrayāna Buddhism – practised mainly in Tibet; and Mahāyāna Buddhism – practised mainly in China, Korea, and Japan (Becker 3). In all its forms, one of Buddhism’s fundamental beliefs – derived from its roots in Hinduism – is the samsara, a cycle of rebirth where a person’s karma – determined by their deeds, emotions, and mental state in-life – determines the form they take in their next life, with the goal being to break free of the cycle and attain nirvana or enlightenment (McClelland 240; Becker viii). An aspect of this system is that a person with negative karma can be reborn as an animal through regressive transmigration, while an animal with positive karma can be reborn as a human through positive transmigration (McClelland 19; Becker 2, 19, 85). This belief contradicts the Christian and rationalist dichotomy between humans and non-human animals, but still embodies an anthropocentric hierarchy of being. Mahāyāna Buddhism – particularly the schools of Zen and Pure Land Buddhism – carries a profound influence on Japanese culture and the way in which they perceive animals. Mahāyāna Buddhism, which originated in India and spread to China (Dumolin 35), believes that the Buddha apotheosized into a divine being by attaining enlightenment (Dumolin
and that those who attain enlightenment also become deific bodhisattva and transcend the cycle of reincarnation to dwell in the Pure Land. As it evolved in over the course of the sixth century, Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism came to purport that all living beings – not just humans – possess the capacity for enlightenment and thus Buddhahood, which contrasts with other branches of Buddhism (Dumolin 76). Zen Buddhism emerged in China in the sixth century as a result of an uneasy syncretism between Mahāyāna Buddhism and Taoism (Dumolin 65 – 66, 79), and spread to Korea and Japan in the seventh century (Dumolin 36). Zen Buddhism attempts to understand the meaning of life and seek enlightenment through self-knowledge and wisdom, focusing on meditation and other techniques of honing the body and mind; and rejects rational thought, philosophising, and rituals as pathways to enlightenment (Dumoulin 13, 27, 54, 85).

Mahāyāna Buddhism spread rapidly throughout Japan during the Heian period (794 - 1185) and was firmly entrenched in Japan by the Kamakura Period (1185 – 1333), where Pure Land Buddhism was developed by the Japanese religious reformer Hōnen (Blum 3 - 4). Focusing on the teachings of the buddha Amitābha (Dumolin 35), Pure Land Buddhism emphasizes that adherents should disdain the defiled physical world and seek enlightenment to ascend to the Pure Land. Buddhism initially competed with Shintoism and the Taoist onmyōdō after its arrival in Japan, being seen as an alien influence (Hardacre 24, 98 – 99), though its popularity came to eclipse that of Shinto to the extent that the Shinto kami were seen as inferior beings to the Buddhist bodhisattva, and the two religions eventually underwent a significant degree of syncretism (Breen and Teeuwen 7, 95; Hardacre 97).

In summary, while both “Western” and “Eastern” worldviews place humans above non-human animals, the Christianity-influenced Western worldview perceives animals as not only inferior to but wholly distinct from humans, who were made in God’s image, while in the
Buddhism-influenced Eastern worldview animals and humans are intrinsically and spiritually connected through the cycle of rebirth. This leads to a profound distinction between Reynard the Fox and Japanese *kitsune*, which was often underestimated by structuralists focusing on the similarities. In order to compare the Reynard Cycle to the Japanese *kitsune* folklore, however, it is necessary to examine the two traditions while being mindful of the role of allegory regarding vulpine representations in European folklore and the spiritual veneration of foxes in Japan.
Reynard the Fox

Figure 1: REYNARD THE FOX, 1846. Steel engraving, German, 1846. Wilhelm von Kaulbach, for an edition of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Reineke Fuchs*.

Reynard the Fox is an anthropomorphic red fox who serves as the central character of the Reynard Cycle – a vast international collection of medieval and early-modern poems, fables, novels, and epics primarily spanning France, Germany, the Netherlands, and England. While the Reynard Cycle consists of innumerable regional variants and many tales have been lost to time, it is generally considered by scholars to consist of four main entries: the eleventh century Latin *Ysengrimus*, attributed to a monk called Nidvarus; the twelfth century French *Roman de Renard*,
begun by a troubadour named Pierre de Saint-Cloud and continued by a number of anonymous authors; the thirteenth century Dutch Van den Vos Reynaerde, attributed to an author known only as Willem; and the fourteenth century Dutch novel Reynaerts Historie, attributed to a Flemish author known as Aernout. Most subsequent entries – the most prominent of which is Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s 1794 Reineke Fuchs – are translations and localizations, with various changes to conform to changing sensibilities. One of the more noteworthy localization changes is that the names of the principle characters and locations sometimes drastically differ from iteration to iteration. For example, Reynard is also known as Reynardus in Latin, Renart or Renard in French, Reynaerde or Reineke in Dutch, and Reinhart in German.

Originating as a union of ancient Greek and Christian traditions, Reynard’s influence over the allegorical portrayal of foxes in Western European and North American fiction cannot be denied, and remains intact to this day in media featuring anthropomorphic fox characters, which are almost ubiquitously stereotyped as cunning tricksters. Much of the scholarly literature surrounding Reynard focuses on either Van den Vos Reynaerde or Reineke Fuchs, and locating scholarly analyses and translations of earlier narratives is difficult – with sometimes only a singular source being available for analysis. Jill Mann’s English translation and analysis of Ysengrimus sheds light on how the compilation of poems about foxes was connected to the intense rivalry between monasteries and the clergy in early medieval Europe; and Thomas Best’s 1983 book Reynard the Fox is especially pertinent, as it dissects each of the prominent narratives of the Reynard Cycle while also supplying analysis regarding the context of historical references, the function of varying depictions of the titular character, and the authors’ motivations for making alterations to the narratives. However, most of these sources date back to the 1980s, prior to the inception of anthrozoology, and as such their utility mostly pertains to a cultural-historical
analysis. Anthrozoological literature pertaining to Reynard is rare at best, as only passing
mention is made to how the narratives impacted the ways that Europeans treated foxes during the
medieval and early-modern periods, which makes performing an anthrozoological analysis of the
*Reynard Cycle* difficult.

Commonly depicted as a villain, Reynard the Fox originates from the union of two
different but similar interpretations of the fox: one stemming from Greek mythology and
philosophy, and the other from Judaism and Christianity. While many scholars have credited
Aesop as one of the inspirations for Reynard’s character, Aesop’s fabular trickster-foxes were
informed by the philosopher Aristotle, whose Great Chain of Being and other musings were
adopted by medieval theology. Aristotle’s interpretation of the fox was as a sinister and cunning
creature formed of gristle and bone, and its dwelling in burrows facilitated its association with
the Underworld (Wallen 10, 13). This view was in turn a codification of the first known instance
of Western literature depicting foxes as being malevolent: the myth of the Teumessian Fox, a
vulpine monster that preyed upon the city of Thebes and was destined never to be caught
(Wallen 13, 42). In the Jewish Torah and Christian Old Testament, many translations of Ezekiel
13:4 and the Song of Solomon 2:15 localize the Hebrew word for “jackal” as “fox” while
referring to them as cunning thieves, and also associate them with false preachers and even Satan
himself (Jones 26 – 30; Wallen 17). However, other translations of those passages instead refer
to the jackal, suggesting the use of the fox was a result of localization and likely informed by the
aforementioned Greek view of foxes as wicked and chthonic creatures. The biblical
interpretation of foxes as malevolent and cunning informed the depiction of Reynard outside the
literary sphere throughout the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries – particularly in
ecclesiastic iconography. As Reynard’s popularity grew, he became a common symbol of evil
and corruption – to the point of being equated with Satan himself in popular proverbs. Dozens of medieval churches across Europe contain illuminations and carvings depicting Reynard dressed as a bishop, priest, pilgrim, friar, or monk; often preaching to a crowd of dimwitted livestock in order to lure them to their deaths (Jones 26 – 30). However, these ecclesiastical dimensions are absent from all but the earliest entries in the Reynard Cycle, as each iteration altered the narrative’s setting and satirical commentary to better suit the contemporary events surrounding their authors’ lives as well as appeal to the target audiences, thereby effectively secularizing the narrative and its characters. Rather than target the Church, later iterations of the Reynard Cycle narrowed in scope and began targeting the medieval justice system through the narrative known as Le Plaid or the Court Episode, which eclipsed the other Reynard Cycle fables in popularity and prevalence (Best 70; Parlevliet 108; Bouwman and Besamusca 12).

Reynard has been portrayed in an innumerable number of ways – an anarchistic iconoclast, a cunning serial killer, a corrupt noble, and he has even been recast as a hero – but even at his most villainous he represents the underdog who struggles against the overbearing and often-corrupt authority of the church, nobility, and monarchy, and with his mastery of rhetoric triumphs over opponents with greater physical and political power. It is likely these qualities that granted Reynard’s stories a remarkable degree of plasticity and enabled him to serve as a mouthpiece for the various authors of the Cycle, and his status as a villain – and in later narratives an antihero – enabled the authors to voice opinions that would be seen as controversial and even treasonous with impunity. From a cultural-historical perspective, the Reynard Cycle’s status as a satire of medieval society conveys information on how the representations of animals can inform readers about the society, class, and gender relations of when and where it was written. From an anthrozoological perspective, Reynard is more than a mere literary figure, and
many scholars have noted that his portrayal as a cunning villain has impacted the perception of foxes in Western society so profoundly that his influence continues to be felt to this day. For example, the often-romanticized tradition of the English fox hunt – brought to England by the Romans and ceremonialized under the reign of King Cnut in the eleventh century – was popularized in the later medieval period as much by the anthrozoological perception of foxes as being wicked and cunning as for the practical purpose of protecting livestock from predators and for the purported medical benefits of consuming their body parts (Jones 37 – 38, 40). In fact, “Reynard” is still a common term for foxes in traditional British hunting songs lauding their cunning nature as worthy opponents (Jones 23).

The first entry in the Reynard Cycle, *Ysengrimus*, carries the most cultural-historical weight despite having been examined the least by English-speaking scholarly sources. An anthological collection of several books over six-thousand five-hundred lines long, *Ysengrimus* was written in approximately 1148 and attributed to a monk called Nidvarus (Bouwman and Besmusca 13 – 14; Mann 1), who was believed to have been a member of St. Bavo’s monastery in Ghent (Mann 78). However, it is widely accepted that the stories collected in *Ysengrimus* are derived and recycled from a disparate array of earlier sources, including Aesop’s Fables, Bulgarian and Germanic folklore (Bouwman and Besmusca 10), and the eleventh century collection of earlier beast fables such as *Ecbasis Cuiusdam Captivi* (Best 1) – which features the misadventures of an unnamed trickster fox and his unnamed wolf nemesis. The exact number of stories recorded in *Ysengrimus* is debated by scholars, though the most agreed upon number of texts is seven (Best 2).

Examined from a cultural-historical standpoint, the satirical nature of *Ysengrimus* laid both the tone and groundwork for future entries in the Reynard Cycle, and offers a window into
the world of twelfth century Europe. At the time when *Ysengrimus* was written, a rift had formed between the clergy of the Church and the monasteries spread throughout Europe. The monasteries, which were dedicated to simple but rigorous lives and saw the bishops of the Church as being corrupted by the sins of pride, avarice, and sloth. In particular, the monasteries resented the clergy’s claims of political and ecclesiastic authority over them, which involved forcing the monasteries to pay tithe to the bishops (Mann 111). Monks who defected to the clergy in order to become bishops – thus obtaining wealth and political status – were deeply resented for their perceived greed, ambition, treachery, and hypocrisy; and were seen by monks as being the epitome of ecclesiastical corruption (Mann 117). This prejudice is clearly shown through the titular figure of *Ysengrimus* – a wolf who is referred to as “both an abbot and a bishop” (Mann 13 – 14), and who complains that the rigors of monastic life are the source of his many vices (Mann 10 – 13). Ysengrimus is portrayed as immoral, gullible, and above all-else greedy, and embodies ecclesiastic, judicial, and political corruption. While Ysengrimus is characterized by “unmitigated cruelty and greed” (Mann 20) and is meant to be seen as the villain, the wicked and cunning fox Reinardus – who would later become the titular figure of the Reynard Cycle – is little better. Throughout the narratives of *Ysengrimus*, Reinardus – whose status as a villainous trickster enables him to serve as a mouthpiece for Nidvarus’ controversial opinions – serves as the wolf’s advisor and takes advantage of his station to repeatedly trick, humiliate, torment, mutilate, and ultimately kill him (Best 45; Mann 23, 33). Of note, Book III of *Ysengrimus* contains the “Sick Lion” fable (Bouwman and Besmusca 111), and is the key narrative of the compilation as it provides the groundwork for future entries in the Reynard Cycle. Book III is itself derived from a Greek fable ascribed to Aesop (Bouwman and Besmusca 10), by way of the *Ecbasis Cuiusdam Captivi* and *Aegrum Fama Fuit* – a Latin parable about a
A fox who uses cunning to avoid being tricked and eaten by a sick lion. In the “Sick Lion” fable, King Rufanus the Lion falls ill and seeks advice from Ysengrimus, who in turn summons his advisor Reynardus. The fox tells the lion that his illness can be cured if he wraps himself in the freshly-skinned pelt of a wolf, whereupon Ysengrimus is promptly skinned alive – a metaphor for him being stripped of his office – while the triumphant Reynardus gloats (Best 6 – 16; Mann 182).

The historical dimensions of Ysengrimus are apparent in its allusions to people, places, and occurrences in and around Ghent in the twelfth century. Nidvarus uses the titular character as a vehicle for his disgust towards monks who opted for the office of priesthood (Mann 87), and also makes a number of allusions to contemporary historical and political events. Rufanus the Lion-King and his court are intended as satirical stand-ins for the Count of Flanders and his court – which was not just a social gathering but played a significant role in political and legal administration (Mann 99); and mocks the ineffectuality and illegitimacy of the Count’s declarations of peace, which were often disregarded (Mann 101 – 102, 104). Nidvarus’ hatred for the clergy is made readily apparent through the villainous Reynardus wishing he was more like Anselm of Tournai, a bishop whose diocese encompassed the monastery to which Nidvarus belonged, and who Nidvarus held in particular contempt (Mann 109). Examples of this include Reynardus declaring that Bishop Anselm outstrips even the Pope in terms of avarice, using the Biblical analogies of “[devouring] like Satan and [holding] like Hell” (Nidvarus V 30) to further emphasize the bishop’s perceived corruption and avarice. Pope Eugenesis III is also targeted by Ysengrimus’ anti-ecclesiastical satire, which blames him and Anselm for the Second Crusade (Mann 121 – 122). That Reinardus escapes punishment for his crimes by offering to go on a pilgrimage also serves as a criticism of the common method of repentance in medieval Europe.
and how it could be used as a means to escape justice. Reynardus’ false pilgrimage is of significance as it ties into artistic depictions of him as a false cleric and the Book of Ezekiel’s description of false prophets as being “like the foxes in the deserts” in terms of malevolent duplicity (Jones 26 – 30).

Academic interest in *Ysengrimus* first arose when it was rediscovered in 1814, and its great importance to the Reynard Cycle and its influence in shaping beast-epics within medieval Europe was discerned (Mann 1, 3). This discovery also helped spur a renewal of interest in beast-fable literature in general and the Reynard Cycle in particular, which had diminished significantly over the course of the eighteenth century. In the mid-nineteenth century, *Ysengrimus* was translated into German and Dutch for the purposes of scholarly analysis – which primarily revolved around debating its origins. Leopold Sudre’s 1893 treatise on *Ysengrimus* downplays its importance in order to portray the Reynard Cycle as the result of popular oral culture, which French scholar Lucien Foulet refuted in his own analysis of *Ysengrimus*’ relationship to later entries in the Reynard Cycle. The length and complexity of *Ysengrimus* deterred scholarly analysis for much of the twentieth century, until a revival of interest in beast-epics during the 1970s and 1980s brought it back into the limelight of scholarly analysis through a post-structural lens (Mann 6 – 8).

The second prominent entry in the Reynard Cycle, the Old French compilation *Roman de Renard*, also spelled *Roman de Renart*, was begun around the year 1176 by a troubadour named Pierre de Saint-Cloud. While not informative from an anthrozoological perspective, the *Roman de Renard* is generally cited by scholars as the beginning of Reynard’s history, as its rapid spread throughout Western Europe was what facilitated the further development of the Reynard Cycle. Much of the *Roman de Renard*’s sheer popularity can be attributed to its accessibility: in contrast
to Nidvarus’ *Ysengrimus*, which was intended to be read by educated clerics and thus written in Latin, Pierre’s adaptation targeted the secular nobility but was written in the common language of French, which at the time was spoken throughout most of Europe (Best 33). This enabled wandering troubadours, poets, and minstrels to spread the Reynard Cycle across France, Flanders, and Anglo-Norman England by the twelfth century (Sauer 343). As such, *Roman de Renard* forms the backbone of subsequent adaptations and translations of the Reynard Cycle. Though many of these were vernacular localizations and have almost completely disappeared due to having never being recorded, a significant number remain well-known in their countries and languages of origin (Bouwman and Besmusca 9 – 10). Anthrozoologically, the influence of the *Roman de Renard* on codifying the popular perception of the animals portrayed therein – especially the fox – is not particularly well-documented but also cannot be denied, as its popularity was such that the French word for “fox” was changed from “goupil” to “renard” during the thirteenth century (Best 2; Simpson 237). From a cultural-historical perspective, the *Roman de Renard* – like *Ysengrimus* before it – is satirical in nature and provides a look into society at the time it was written. However, rather than censuring the clergy for greed and corruption it instead targets the feudal system and the popular genre of chivalric romance by criticizing the “deceit, violence, and corruption on the part of supposedly noble knights” (Best 45); while also offering political commentary on contemporary events such as the Crusades (Best 34; Sauer 343). The secularization of the Reynard Cycle was likely in part the result of Pierre and his contemporaries lacking Nidvarus’ insight into and discontent with the inner workings of the Church. Another possible impetus behind secularizing the satirical fables was the establishment of the Inquisitions – a group of ecclesiastical investigatory institutions infamously
inclined to torture and execute dissenters on the charge of heresy – in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, making criticizing and mocking the Church a dangerous game (Deanesly 216 – 218).

The *Roman de Renard* is a compilation of nonchronological narratives called Branches, which are comprised of various tales and manuscripts written by different authors (Bouwman and Besmusca 11 – 12). Branch II is the only one known to have been written by Pierre de Saint-Cloud, with the other Branches having been composed by anonymous sources over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Bouwman and Besmusca 111). As would become standard for future adaptations, the *Roman de Renard* changed the names of the principle characters and introduced new ones – Ysengrimus the Wolf became Ysengrim or Isengrim, Renardus the Fox became Renart or Renard, King Rufanus the Lion became King Nobel or King Noble, and Sprotinus the Rooster became Chanticler. New additions to the narrative who would play important roles in both the *Roman de Renard* and future adaptations included Brun the Bear, Tibert the Cat, Birchemer the Stag – King Noble’s steward, and Grimbart the Badger – who is Renard’s cousin (Best 43). The *Roman de Renard* is also considered the foundation of the Reynard Cycle in that it is the first to codify the narrative of the “Court Episode,” which was heavily modified from the Sick Lion narrative (Book III of *Ysengrimus*) and spans Branches I, II, and III of the *Roman de Renard*. In total it includes 1700 lines, in contrast to the 1200 lines of *Ysengrimus*’ Book III (Bouwman and Besmusca 111). Chronologically one of the later Reynard stories, the Court Episode serves as a satire of medieval justice system and social castes, wherein cunning triumphs over physical strength and social standing (Parlevliet 108). Pierre de St. Cloud’s original iteration of the Court Episode, told in Branch II, opens with Ysengrim – who is now a constable rather than a priest, in keeping with the satire being aimed at the justice system – and his wife Hersent petitioning the lion-king – now named Noble or Nobel – to take action
against Renard for his mutilation of their children and rape of Hersent (Best 42). Nobel refuses, mockingly dismissing Hersent’s rape as an affair of gallantry and courtly love, despite his other courtiers petitioning to have Renard – who claims to be an impoverished nobleman, embodying Pierre de St. Cloud’s resentment towards the wealthy and privileged (Best 62) – placed on trial while bringing forth their own grievances against him. Grimbart is sent to Renard’s den – referred to as Malpertius – and summons him to face trial by swearing his innocence on a holy relic. Pierre inserts social commentary about the impartiality of trials being undermined by political rivalries and judicial corruption by having Ysengrin conspire with Roonel the Hound – the court-appointed judge and purported paragon of virtue – in order to lay a trap for Renard that will see him maimed or killed. Renard detects their trap and manages to escape back to Malpertius with Grimbart’s help, pursued by Roonel’s pack of hounds in a parody of the knightly chases common in chivalric tales. The poem’s satire of the medieval legal system attempts to impart a moral lesson against wrongdoings and the pursuit of justice using underhanded means, having Ysengrim’s attempt on Renard’s life fail but the fox not escape unscathed by the hounds’ fangs as punishment for his crimes (Best 44 – 45). However, Pierre’s version of the Court Episode is not the best-known, as the anonymous author of Roman de Renard’s Branch I composed a revision of the court sequence wherein King Nobel sends Bruin the Bear and Tibert the Cat to bring Renard to court, but both are tricked and grievously injured while Renard returns to Malpertuis (Best 60 – 64). Nobel then sends Grimbet the Badger, who successfully convinces the fox to arrive at court. Renard acquiesces under threat of torture, and despite his attempts to excuse his transgressions is sentenced to execution. Renard escapes execution by volunteering to go on a pilgrimage to Santiago Compostella as penance. Upon being released, however, he instead promptly attacks Couart the Hare, mocks King Nobel to his face, and flees back to
Malpurtuis to fetch his family before fleeing the kingdom for his life (Best 67 – 68). In contrast to Pierre’s moralistic approach, Branch I’s rendition of the court sequence presents Renard as an underdog triumphing over those who possess superior physical strength, learned wisdom, and social standing – which was likely an important factor in his popularity among the lower-class castes of medieval European society.

The German *Reinhart Fuchs*, written by the obscure poet Heinrich der Gličezäre at some point in the 1190s (Widmaier 2; Best 34, 96), is of the lesser-analyzed iterations of the Court Episode and is often overlooked by English-speaking scholars, such that Thomas Best barely touches upon it in his overview of the Reynard Cycle. Notably, it is the only medieval German adaptation of the *Roman de Renard*, being derived from an amalgamation of Branches II, V, III, IV, XIV, I, X, VI, and VIII (Widmaier 3; Best 34), and as such has been extensively studied by German scholars (Widmaier 12 – 17, 243 – 247). Unlike other adaptations, which end with the titular Fox going into exile, *Reinhart Fuchs* uniquely ends with Reinhart the Fox poisoning King Vrevel the Lion, carrying the moral message warning that duplicity often results in success while honesty goes unrewarded (Best 34, 96). While most scholarly analysis of this narrative is written exclusively in German, recent analysis has primarily concerned itself with comparatively analyzing the legal system as depicted in *Reinhart Fuchs* with how it functioned historically under twelfth century Germany’s Staufer regime, and how the beast-fable satirized the ineffectuality of the era’s justice system (Schaus 61; Widmaier 72 – 73, 130 – 133, 232) – topics that are also applicable to other versions of the Court Episode narrative. Another relatively recent cultural-historical topic of analysis is the examination of the fable from a feminist perspective, focusing on how the treatment of female characters and what can be extrapolated regarding the roles of women in medieval society and the justice system (Schaus 62). Although
this body of work is unfortunately not available in English, it is still applicable in examining how
other versions of the narrative treat Reynard’s rape of Hersent as a trivial matter at best and a
joke at worst – when they don’t simply omit the crime altogether, and the extent to which
Reynard’s wife Hermaline is complicit in his crimes.

The Dutch *Van den Vos Reynaerde* is the next significant development of the Reynard
Cycle – a thirteenth century Dutch epic poem by an author known only as Willem, containing
twice the amount of lines as its precursor in the *Roman de Renard* (Bouwman and Besmusca
111). As with the *Roman de Renard*, *Van den Vos Reynaerde* changes many of the characters’
names and the target of the narrative’s satire to reflect the political situations of the Netherlands
during that time – Renard becoming Reinaert, and Ysengrim becoming Isengrijn, Tibert
becoming Tibeert, and Brun becoming Bruun. The authorship of *Van den Vos Reynaerde* is
somewhat contested, as Thomas Best speculates that it expands upon an earlier Dutch adaptation
of an amalgamation of Branches I and III of the *Roman de Renard*, also known as *Le Plaid* or the
Court Episode – which he calls the “Proto-Reinaert” – by a Flemish author known as Aernout
(Best 70). Most other scholars, however, attribute authorship of *Van den Vos Reynaerde* to
Willem alone (Parlevliet 108; Bouwman and Besamusca 12). Regardless of its contested
authorship, *Van den Vos Reynaerde* primarily follows the plot of *Le Roman de Renard*’s Court
Episode as related in Branches I, though it is not a direct adaptation. Best claims both Aernout
and Willem made a number of alterations to the narratives and the characters in order to suit their
individual and oppositional opinions regarding the nobility: while “Willem thumbs his nose at a
band of dullards trying to impose restrictions on their intellectual superior, [Aernout] was
probably intent on vindicating tradition” (Best 70). *Van den Vos Reynaerde* is one of the more-
commonly analyzed iterations of the narrative, as it serves as the source of most subsequent
adaptations, but also provides a critique of thirteenth century upper-class society in the Netherlands. Several scholars have speculated that the political satire portrayed in Willem’s text was an allegory to the antics of the court of King Philip I of Namur, chiefly that “[the] figure of the concupiscent and vacillating Noble the Lion seems to be based on Philip, who slavishly followed the King of France’s orders” (De Vries 100 – 101). Best speculates that Reinaert’s vicious anarchism and open contempt towards King Noble and his courtiers appealed to Willem’s own sense of contempt towards the Dutch royalty, their courtiers, and their “encroachments on his liberty” (Best 96); and for this reason he selected the fox as his mouthpiece and appended an ending where Reinaert escapes the bonds of the feudal system as a means of vicariously living out his own desires. Conversely, Aernout’s version of Reynard – whom he evidently detested and expressed contempt towards in his writing – does not voluntarily go into exile but instead flees for his life, terrified of facing King Noble’s wrath and uncertain of his ability to escape justice (Best 96).

The narrative of the Dutch Van den Vos Reynaerde – which changes the spellings of the names – begins similarly to Branch I of the Roman de Renard, with King Noble the Lion hearing the grievances of his courtiers towards Reinaert, the Baron of Malpertus (herein depicted as an actual castle), who has violated Noble’s edict of peace on several occasions. Tibeert the Cat and Grimbeert the Badger – Reinaert’s cousin – attempt to defend the Fox, saying that Reinaert has repented his sins, is living the frugal life of a hermit, and has converted to vegetarianism. Differing from Branch I of Roman de Renard, in Van den Vos Reynaerde it is Canteclere the Rooster who rebukes Grimbeert rather than his wife Pinte – telling a different story in the process (Best 73). King Noble is also more taciturn and stoic than his counterpart in the Roman de Renard, and shows a greater degree of wisdom and caution (Best 74); but as with his French
counterpart sends a summons to Reinaert, which is ignored. King Noble sends Bruun the Bear – known for his immense strength – but Reinaert escapes by tricking Bruun into going after a bee hive and being stung half to death. King Noble then sends Tibeert the Cat – known for his intelligence – to bring Reinaert to court; but Reinaert tricks Tibeert into entering a hen-house to look for mice, whereupon he is brutally beaten and badly wounded by the farmer. Finally, Noble sends Grimbeert to bring him to court. Reinaert is unable to harm his cousin and accompanies him to court, where he is placed on trial and sentenced to execution. It is at this point – specifically line 1886 – where Van den Vos Reynaerde truly diverges from Roman de Renard; and where Thomas Best asserts Aernout’s authorship ends and Willem’s begins (Best 86). Best asserts Willem’s authorship meshes poorly with Aernout’s and the juncture contains numerous inconsistencies and a few continuity errors (Best 87 – 88). Willem also alludes to Isengrijn’s portrayal as a corrupt clergyman in Ysengrimus, which was absent in the Roman de Renard, and uses this as a plot-device to enable the Fox to cheat death. While his enemies are distracted building the gallows, Reinaert evades execution by tricking King Noble with the promise of treasure, thereby framing Bruun, Isengrijn, Tibeet, Grimbeert, and his own father in a conspiracy to assassinate the king (Best 89 – 90). Unlike his French counterpart, King Noble is not easily fooled by Reinaert’s lies, but his more-gullible wife Gente is the one who falls for them and pressures her husband into freeing the Fox (Best 91). Reinaert takes advantage of having been excommunicated by Isengrijn in order to trick Noble into sending Cuwart the Hare to accompany him, and offers to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to atone for his sins (Best 92; Bouwman and Besmusca 13). Out of sadistic cruelty, Reinaert has Bruun, Isengrijn, and Isengrijn’s wife Hersuint mutilated in order to obtain a satchel and boots for his pilgrimage; and he departs accompanied by Cuwart and Belijn the Ram – the court chaplain (Best 93). However, Reinaert
returns to Malpertus, kills and eats Cuwart, and tricks Belijn into taking the rabbit’s decapitated head back to Noble, who is enraged. To save face for this humiliation, Noble has Belijn executed and gives the wolves and bears free reign to hunt and devour the rabbits, sheep, and foxes of the world (Best 98). Reinaert and his family flee from their castle, but in contrast to the desperate flight of *Roman de Renard* they take a leisurely pace so as to better mock their pursuers (Best 96).

The next significant literary evolution of the Reynard Cycle is the fourteenth century Dutch novel *Reynaerts Historie* – an adaptation of Manuscript B of *Van den Vos Reynaerde* combining aspects of Branche VI of *Roman de Renard* (Best 107). Thomas Best attributes the authorship to an unknown Flemish author (Best 87, 104), though most other scholars agree that Aernout was the one who wrote it (Parlevliet 108 – 109). Best dismisses it as an inferior work to *Van den Vos Reynaerde*, though he admits it expands more upon “the conflict between fox and society begun by the author of *Branche I*” (Best 103). *Reynaerts Historie* underscores the Fox’s plasticity and adaptability as both a character and an allegory: in contrast to the sadistic serial killer and anarchistic freedom-seeker of *Roman de Renard* and *Van den Vos Reynaerde*, *Reynaerts Historie* recasts Reinaert as a corrupt politician. In doing so, it rewrites the ending of *Van den Vos Reynaerde* so that Reinaert is persuaded by his wife Hermaline to fortify his castle of Malpertuus instead of fleeing, and expands upon the narrative from there – doubling the number of lines present in *Van den Vos Reynaerde* (Bouwman and Besmusca 111). *Reynaerts Historie* returns to King Noble’s prior portrayal as an incompetent fool, with Reinaert implying that the lion-king is so dependent on his advice that the court cannot function without him (Best 105) – a further satirization of the perceived ineptitude and corruption of medieval court society. Reinaert’s family is changed into a powerful political force comprised of not only foxes but also
apes – which were also associated by medieval folklore with immorality and Satan, being seen as monstrous distortions of the human form – and other traditionally malevolent beasts (Best 118). Reynard’s clan is also able to exert political, military, and ecclesiastical pressure on the King due to its close ties with the Pope – which offers further commentary on the perceived corruption of the Catholic Church. Contrasting sharply with earlier iterations, Grimbaert is now portrayed as Reinaert’s nephew and a willing accomplice who is equally as conniving as his uncle but not as treacherous (Best 109 - 110).

The second half of *Reynaerts Historie* effectively picks up where *Van den Vos Reynaerde* left off, but Lampreel the Rabbit – a different character from the Cuwart the Hare – arrives badly mutilated and informs the King that Reinaert made an attempt on his life. This reignites the conflict between Reinaert and King Noble’s court, setting the stage for Reinaert to triumph through cunning once again. Because Reinaert’s clan is a force to be reckoned with, King Noble is forced to temper his rage and proceed with greater caution than his preceding iterations. Aernout’s Reinaert conversely shows more arrogance and confidence than his prior iterations, not merely in his abilities as a trickster but in his position of irreplaceable importance to King Noble’s court (Best 113). Aernout also inserts a series of fables – portrayed as anecdotes told by Reinaert and his family members – that caution against equating an education with wisdom, among other morals; though the ultimate moral of *Reynaerts Historie* itself is to warn against mendacity and other forms of corruption in noblemen, clergy, and other authority figures (Best 114 – 115). Of note, Reinaert’s defence consists of 261 lines wherein he rebukes the renewed charges against him, reneges on his promised pilgrimage, and threatens to use his clan’s influence with corrupt Church officials to have Noble’s kingdom interdicted – a severe ecclesiastical punishment that would have excommunicated everyone living there and damned
their souls to Hell. Reinaert initially emerges triumphant through his wickedness and duplicity (Best 116 – 117), but this victory is overturned by King Noble himself, who confronts Reinaert over the insult of sending him Cuwart’s severed head as a gift and sentences him to death (Best 118). Reinaert is saved this time not by his own cunning, but by his clan, who rally around him and threaten retaliation if the King does anything other than acquit him (Best 119 – 120).

Reinaert spends 865 lines composing a lie that he had sent Cuwart and Beljin to deliver priceless treasures to King Noble and his wife, playing off the king’s greed as in prior iterations of the narrative; supplemented by a series of four fables largely borrowed from other medieval texts (Best 121 – 122). Playing on the medieval notion of debts and honor, Aernout adapts the “Sick Lion” fable from Ysengrimus but casts Reinaert’s father in place of Reynardus and has Isengrijn narrowly escape being mutilated (Best 123). Reinaert is summarily acquitted and sent to look for the non-existent missing treasure, but Isengrijn attempts to seek revenge for the Fox’s past misdeeds against him and his mate, Eerswinde. Again highlighting his mendacity, Reinaert manages to talk his way out of each of the Wolf’s accusations, framing the telling of outright lies as a legitimate form of diplomacy in the process (Best 126 – 127). Isengrijn’s duel with Reinaert largely mirrors their trial-by-combat in Branche VI of Roman de Renard and again highlights the ineffectuality of such a means of determining justice; though the Fox’s clan plays a larger role in setting up the battle, as befitting Reinaert’s role as a political leader (Best 127). Reinaert blinds Isengrijn in one eye but almost loses the duel, winning in a typically underhanded manner by crushing Isengrijn’s testicles while the Wolf is distracted. Having thus proved his “innocence” through victory in combat, Reinaert is subsequently acquitted of all crimes, and in a speech lasting 112 lines uses shameless flattery to become King Noble’s chief advisor (Best 128 - 129). Reinaert returns to Malpertuus triumphant and plotting to use his increased influence with the
King in order to further his malicious ambitions and insinuate more members of his clan into the nobility. In an authorial insert, Aernout drives home the moral message that “[cynical] but articulate hypocrites […] have taken charge everywhere, in both Church and state, [and that justice], loyalty, and truth have been replaced by greed, cunning, hatred, and arrogance” (Best 130). Best asserts that this pessimistic conclusion embodies the overall attitude of despair prevalent in the Late Middle Ages, a time of war, plague, famine, and political and ecclesiastical corruption. Best further observes that the evolution of Reynard’s narrative from him being exiled to him obtaining political power as the king’s advisor correlates to the overall decline of society during those centuries as a result of the aforementioned political and social issues. Best jokes that subsequent authors chose not to continue this trend by going so far as to have the Fox usurp the throne and instead opted to make lesser alterations while adapting the epic (Best 131) – though in making this statement Best neglects to mention Reinhart Fuchs, which precedes Van den Vos Reynaerde by roughly a century and ends with the titular fox committing outright regicide.

From the fifteenth through to the seventeenth centuries, Van den Vos Reynaerde and Reynaerts Historie received numerous translations and adaptations that appended increasingly moralizing alterations to the narrative. The 1473 Dutch novel Reynardus Vulpes by Nicolaes Ketelaer and Geraerd de Leempt included an epilogue warning that “[society] is plagued with trickery, [and that] the fox stands for all wicked deceivers [who dominate] civilian, military, and ecclesiastical life” (Best 132). In 1481, Reynaerts Historie was translated into English as The Historie of Reynart the Foxe by William Caxton (Best 133; Parlevliet 109), becoming the definitive version of the narrative during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and presumably supplanting earlier Anglo-Norman iterations. In late medieval and early modern society, the fox also began to be associated with sexuality, stemming from Reynard’s rape of Isengrim’s wife: a
fifteenth century pilgrim’s badge depicts a chained fox with an erection being led by a goose, and various carvings and woodcuts depict Reynard being tried for adultery (Jones 31). However, shifting moral standards in the seventeenth century resulted in further alterations being made to the narrative in order to downplay the magnitude and severity of Reynard’s crimes and wickedness, such as the appended sequels written by Edward Brewster in 1672 and 1681, which explore Reynard’s life at court and his relationship with his son Reynardine. By the eighteenth century, the crass nature of Reynard’s crimes made his exploits unsuitable reading material for the polite society of the cultural elite, and interest in the narrative sharply declined until almost the turn of the century (Parlevliet 109). In 1794, Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s Reineke Fuchs – a German translation of Van den Vos Reynaerde – was published and rekindled interest in the narrative of the rogue fox. Goethe’s rendition subsequently became the definitive version of the text for subsequent adaptations throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such that the majority of English translations and scholarly analyses are based on it (Parlevliet 110).

Despite varying portrayals, what remains consistent throughout the traditional Reynard Cycle is the titular fox’s nature as an allegory – initially for Satan and ecclesiastical corruption, and later transitioning into a representation of social, legal, and political corruption. The most significant shift in Reynard’s character and status as an allegorical figure came during the nineteenth century. While narratives featuring anthropomorphized animal characters were becoming highly popular (Jones 53), there was an increasing perception of animal stories as something suitable only for children. In both Britain and the Netherlands, a growing interest emerged in adapting the story of Reynard to serve as children’s literature, and in altering the narrative to make it more suitable for younger readers. Early nineteenth century British reprintings of Goethe’s Reineke Fuchs overlaid a fairy tale model to the narrative, trading the
sophisticated social analysis for a simplistic good vs. evil moral narrative in which evil – in the form of Reynard – was ultimately punished. From an anthrozoological standpoint, this process was influenced by the post-Industrial Revolution notion that narrative works featuring animal characters were only suitable for children – the reasoning being that both children and non-human animals were primitive in nature and thus the former would more easily identify with the latter. Further justification was grounded in the anthropological notion that the medieval period was the childhood of human civilization, and that narratives created during it were thus more suitable for children than sophisticated adults (Parlevliet 111). The stricter mores and morals of the nineteenth century British society also necessitated a great deal of censorship in order to make Reynard palatable for younger audiences. For example, in Felix Summery’s 1843 adaptation *The pleasant history of Reynard the Fox*, all references to religion and crimes like rape and murder were removed, and Reynard was executed for his crimes rather than escaping or being rewarded (Parlevliet 113). Other adaptations kept the original ending intact but appended a moral warning, while all of Reynard’s positive traits were removed to reduce him to a simplistic villain (Parlevliet 117). Possibly as a result of the difficulty in expunging the worst of Reynard’s crimes, foxes as central characters became increasingly scarce in English literature during the late nineteenth century – with a prominent exception being Beatrix Potter’s Mr. Tod, a recurring villain seen in *The Tale of Jemima the Puddle-Duck* and *The Tale of Mr Tod* (Jones 53 – 54).

The attitude towards Reynard in the Netherlands during the nineteenth century contrasts sharply with his diminished importance in English literature. Reynard’s intelligence and cunning were seen as positive characteristics and therefore emphasized, while his villainous traits were downplayed to the extent that he was portrayed as a family man and loving father. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Reynard became a symbol of Dutch nationalism.
(Parlevliet 117), to the extent that during the 1930s he was appropriated as a “heroic” icon of fascism and racism in the Netherlands. Notably, Dutch author Robert van Genechten published an anti-Semitic novel called *Van den Vos Reynaerde* in 1937, wherein a donkey named Boudewijn usurps political power in Belgium from Prince Lionel, the son of the late King Nobel, and becomes the pawn of a Jewish rhinoceros named Jodocus. Jodocus sets up a Communist republic, promotes mixed-species breeding – a blatant metaphor for interracial marriages – and proceeds to run the kingdom into the ground. Reynard is enlisted by Lionel to help regain the throne, and tricks Jodocus into entering an ambush where he is killed, though his followers escape into other countries (Barten and Groeneveld 205 – 206). The Dutch Nazi Party saw great potential in adapting the story for propaganda and made an animated version in 1943, portraying Reynard the Fox as an anti-Semitic “hero” of fascism who rallies the animals against Jodocus’ army of Jewish rhinos and chimeras. However, the German Nazi propaganda offices refused to release the film, highlighting contrast between the post-nineteenth century perception of Reynard as a heroic figure in the Netherlands and his continued perception as an untrustworthy trickster and villain elsewhere in Europe (Barten and Groeneveld 208 – 209).
In his analysis of the evolution of the Reynard Cycle, Thomas Best explains in-depth how the beliefs and opinions of the various authors of the Reynard Cycle impacted how the titular fox was characterized, all while using his status as an antihero as a vehicle for their political, ecclesiastical, and social grievances. Best is one of the only scholarly sources to conduct such an extensive analysis, though the conclusions he draws have been contested by other sources and are limited by his anthropocentric cultural-historical viewpoint. According to Best’s analysis,
Pierre de St. Cloud evidently detested the character of Reynard and changed the narrative’s focal point from the wolf to the fox in order to highlight how deplorable he was (Best 45). The author of *Roman de Renard*’s Branch I used the narrative of the court episode to criticize and ridicule both the nobility and feudal system (Best 69). Aernout dismisses Reynard as a *fel* – or cruel – individual no less than six times; while Willem, in contrast, appears to have revelled in Reynard’s wickedness, as he changes the foxes’ escape from King Nobel’s troops from a desperate flight to a leisurely jaunt (Best 94). Another observable trend that occurred over time is the increased anthropomorphism of the characters, and the correlational disappearance of humans from the narratives. In *Ysengrimus* through to the *Roman de Reynard* the characters are merely animals – albeit capable of speech amongst themselves; and humans make occasional but prominent appearances – such as the farmers who chase Reynard in the tale of the Fox and Rooster, or who beat Tybalt half to death in the Court Episode. Reynard’s lair is a simple fox-burrow, and Ysengrim’s family and King Noble live in caves (Best 6, 47, 62). *Roman de Reynard* begins the trend by satirically portraying the animals as riding on horseback, a parody of knights astride their noble steeds (Best 50; 68). *Van den Vos Reynaerde* escalates the trend of anthropomorphism by describing Reynard as wearing clothes, but balks at the earlier portrayal of the anthropomorphized beasts existing alongside non-anthropomorphic animals such as horses and using them in the same manner as humans (Best 74). Ysengrim challenging Reynard to a duel is a further example of anthropomorphism, as are the depiction of Maleperduis as a literal castle-fortress instead of a burrow. Therianthropic illustrations and illuminations dating as far back as the 1300s depict the animals as standing on their hind legs, wearing clothes, and wielding swords, with Reynard commonly being depicted wearing a bishop’s robes and mitre (Jones 21).
While a great deal of information can be obtained through a cultural-historical analysis of the Reynard Cycle, anthrozoological information on how the Reynard Cycle directly impacted foxes and vice versa is scarce. However, information can be extrapolated from how foxes were treated in medieval legislature. The continued vilification of the fox in medieval literature such as the Reynard Cycle served a practical purpose in warning farmers to keep a close watch over their livestock, as harsh conditions such as the Little Ice Age, the Great Famine, and the Black Death had caused severe food shortages, and any further threat to human sustenance was demonized as marauding and wicked. In England, the populations of wolves, bears, and boars – which competed with and preyed upon foxes – were hunted to extinction by the seventeenth century (Griffin 3); and the eighteenth century Enclosure Acts drastically increased the amount of heaths and fields (Mingay 86 – 87), resulting in the fox population undergoing an unprecedented boom in the late medieval and early modern periods. Ultimately, fox hunts became a popular pastime for the nobility and gentry in England, particularly following the Vermin Acts of 1532 – which listed foxes as one of the species to be exterminated (Jones 26, 38) – which in turn fed into the popular perception of foxes as cunning and wicked creatures.

Reynard’s development and evolution as a character reflect the changing societal and cultural mores in Western Europe over the course of nearly ten centuries; as well as the differing attitudes of the authors who wrote and adapted the branches of the Reynard Cycle. As Reynard’s malevolence was downplayed over the course of the nineteenth century, his cunning and mastery of rhetoric came to be seen as positive traits and were emphasized during his slow transition from villain to antihero. By the turn of the twentieth century, Reynard had largely faded into obscurity outside of scholarly analyses. Some adaptations aimed at casual reading exist, such as Harry Owens’ 1946 “Americanized edition” of the post-Raynaerts Historie Court Episode.
Entitled *The Scandalous Adventures of Reynard the Fox*, it uses mid-twentieth century colloquial language and Americanizes several aspects of the narrative, such as making the Tomcat – renamed Hintze – into a mobster; with Owens stating in his foreword that these alterations were an effort to make the narrative enjoyable to casual readers (Owens xiv). Reynard the Fox also serves as the forefather for Roald Dahl’s *The Fantastic Mr. Fox* and Beatrix Potter’s Mr. Tod, both of whom largely take after the benevolent and child-friendly family-man portrayals of the Victorian period (Parlevliet 70), while also retaining elements of Reynard’s original villainy – the former being a cunning thief and the latter a menacing threat. However, direct representations of Reynard in non-literary media are exceedingly rare outside of Europe. Aside from the Nazi-made adaptation of Robert van Genechten’s *Van den Vos Reynaerde*, Walt Disney had expressed interest in adapting the Reynard folktales into an animated film since the foundation of his studio but balked at the titular character’s vileness. In the late 1950s Marc Davis and Ken Anderson wrote a screenplay titled *Chanticleer and the Fox*, in which Chanticleer the Rooster was the protagonist and Reynard was the villain. The project lay dormant for over a decade, eventually being reworked into a children’s storybook in 1991. However, during its long hiatus the project served as an inspiration for both the 1973 *Robin Hood* animated film and Don Bluth’s 1991 *Rock-a-Doodle* animated film – both of which otherwise have nothing to do with the Reynard Cycle (Sampson). One of the more recent modern adaptations is the 2005 Belgian CGI-animated film *Le Roman de Renart*, loosely adapting the French poem of the same name. Localized into English as *The Adventures of Renny the Fox*, the film portrays Renart as a mischievous but benevolent heroic figure and is aimed towards young children – with its more serious elements being offset by slapstick humour and anachronistic jokes. Despite the film being a loose adaptation of the *Roman de Renard*, it also includes references to other adaptations such as
Ysengrimus and even Reinhart Fuchs, which only those familiar with the Reynard Cycle would recognize.

Both the cultural-historical and anthrozoological methodologies reveal that Reynard’s status as a villainous fox both influenced and was influenced by developments in medieval society; most analysis of the Reynard Cycle follows the cultural-historical method and sources examining the character from an anthrozoological perspective are surprisingly limited. Many sources attribute Western society’s attitude towards foxes as being cunning and malicious to Reynard, but very few go into any detail as to how and why those attitudes developed over the course of the medieval and early modern periods. Research seems to indicate that the negative perception towards foxes in Europe emerged as much due to them being a source of competition for limited food and land resources as the influence of the Reynard Cycle, if not more-so. Unfortunately, direct evidence of these factors influencing each other is largely scarce outside of the tradition of foxhunts in England, which to this day colloquially refers to foxes as “Reynard” in reference to the literary figure. Furthermore, pejorative views of foxes by European cultures predate the Reynard Cycle by centuries if not millennia, with the titular character seeming more like a prominent and frequently recurring symptom than the root of the disease itself. To meditate the relative lack of anthrozoological data, further in-depth research should be conducted into the role the Reynard Cycle has played in shaping perceptions and treatment of foxes over the last nine-hundred years.
Within the framework of Japanese spirituality, mythology, and folklore, there exist a plethora of supernatural beings variously called yōkai, obake, mononoke, or bakemono. In
keeping with the belief that everything possesses or can develop a soul, the term *yōkai* denotes a broad category encompassing ordinary objects that have attained sentience, humans and animals that have developed mystical abilities and transcended mortal existence, and even deific entities capable of bringing misfortune and disaster if offended (Foster 5). One of the most-recognizable and popular types of *yōkai* in both medieval literature and modern media is the *kitsune*, supernatural foxes possessing up to nine tails and a variety of mystical abilities. Despite the growing popularity of Japanese media during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the lack of translations for the majority of material – particularly by Japanese academics and folklorists – is a major constraint on the research of Japanese myths, legends, and folktales; as academic analyses by Western scholars tend to only superficially discuss them or interpret them through the lens of Western philosophies such as structuralism. Furthermore, most Western analyses of the significance of *kitsune* have tended to focus on just a few superficial aspects due to their ubiquitous presence within almost all aspects of Japanese culture (Bathgate xi – xii). As a result, much of the nuanced cultural content and context is only indirectly conveyed through media such as anime, manga, and video-games; or through analyses by sources that may not be seen as academic. However, unlike the Reynard Cycle – which has limited anthrozoological analysis and an abundance of cultural-historical analysis – both forms of analysis are applicable to *kitsune*, which play roles of both spiritual and secular importance to Japanese society and culture. A prominent English-language sources of information on *kitsune* and the numerous roles they play in Japanese culture are Michael Bathgate’s 2004 *The Fox’s Craft in Japanese Religion and Folklore: Shapeshifters, Transformations, and Duplicities*, an in-depth analysis of *kitsune* that opens with an examination of the legend of Tamamo-no-Mae – whose name translates as both “Jewel Maiden” and “Lady Duckweed” (Bathgate 4). Another
prominent Anglophone source of information on the role *kitsune* play in Japanese culture is Karen Smyers’ 1999 *The Fox and the Jewel: Shared and Private Meanings in Contemporary Japanese Inari Worship*, which focuses on dissecting worship of the Shinto and Buddhist deity Inari – including how both *kitsune* and regular foxes relate to it. However, while it contains an abundance of useful information, Bathgate’s text relies upon the outdated methodology of structuralism for its analysis; and Smyers’ book focuses primarily on Inari-worship, though she does delve a great deal into the role *kitsune* play in Shinto. *Monsters, Animals, and Other Worlds: A Collection of Short Medieval Japanese Tales*, a 2018 compilation of translated and presumably abridged folktales and legends compiled by Keller Kimbrough and Haruo Shirane, has proved invaluable due to its historical anecdotes adding cultural-historical context to the narratives. While not available in English and primarily written in archaic Japanese, 図説・日本未確認生物事典 (*Zusetsu Nihon mikakuninseibutsu jiten*; loosely translated as *Illustrated / Japanese Unidentified Biological Encyclopedia*) – a 1993 *yōkai* bestiary by folklorist and scholar Yoshihiko Sasama – contains information that most English-language scholars and folklorists do not delve into. While they may not be strictly considered scholarly resources, Michael Foster’s *The Book of Yōkai: Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore* and Matthew Meyer’s online *yōkai* database and accompanying bestiary texts proved fruitful sources of information as well, and serve to illustrate the need for more scholarly translations of Japanese folklorists’ work.

For much of its history, Japan was characterized by rigid social boundaries dictated by Confucianism (Shirane 17 – 18, 35 – 36), and developed strict isolationist policies during the Edo Period (1603 - 1868). The importance of Buddhism, Shintoism, and Taoism in maintaining these boundaries on a spiritual level is reflected in works involving *kitsune* and other *yōkai* – as Buddhist monks, Shinto priests and shrine-maidens, and Taoist mystics called *onmyōji* were seen
as the only line of defence between the carefully maintained order of civilization and the chaotic supernatural entities seeking to destroy it. The crossing of boundaries was a crucial theme of *otogizōshi* – prose narrative stories often told on painting-illustrated scrolls – and their later adaptations. In particular, the natural world was seen as forming an interstice between the world of mortal humans and the spirit-world inhabited by gods, demons, spirits, buddha, and other supernatural beings; and animals were often conferred with supernatural abilities as a result of this association. *Kitsune* are a premiere example of this, representing an intersection of the boundaries between animal and human, and between mortal and spirit. The rigidity of Japan’s social boundaries, however, meant that narratives where humans attempt to “make harmonious links to the other world through,” for example, marriage, were doomed to failure and tragedy (Shirane 38 – 39); often resulting in death or heartbreak. From an anthrozoological standpoint, the *kitsune*’s folkloric crossing of boundaries mirrors the red fox’s ability to inhabit and adapt to human settlement while remaining wild, juxtaposed to the domestication of the wolf into dogs. In her examination of *kitsune*, Karen Smyers notes that while foxes can be tamed they are unable to be truly domesticated, which in Japanese culture is the source of the folkloric antagonism between *kitsune* and domestic dogs, which in turn has led to dogs and foxes being used as ingredients for folk-magic and curses. Smyers also notes that the association between foxes and wilderness is also the reasoning behind *kitsune* being attributed with causing strange natural phenomena such as sun-showers and even volcanic eruptions (Smyers 97 – 98).

While represented in Buddhism and Shinto, *kitsune* are deeply associated with Taoist onmyōdo, which is reflected in many folktales and legends – including the two most-prominent and influential: the Tale of Kuzunoha and the Tale of Tamamo-no-Mae, which represent polar opposites on the spectrum of how *kitsune* are portrayed. In light of their importance to both
spiritual and secular aspects of Japanese society, *kitsune* narratives can be analyzed using either a comparative cultural-historical or anthrozoological framework, which expose the limitations of the structuralist and formalist assertions made during the mid-twentieth century. Given the importance of foxes to so many aspects of Japanese culture, society, and folklore, both approaches yield equally feasible results, making it difficult to determine which approach is best-suited to analyzing *kitsune* tales.

*Kitsune* is both the Japanese word for “fox” and refers more generally to their *yōkai* form, reflecting the potential for any fox to become a *yōkai*. In a similar vein to Reynard’s popularity influencing the French word for fox, the etymology of the Japanese word *kitsune* is often thought to derive from stories of fox-spirits seducing humans (Foster 178). Like many aspects of Japanese culture, *kitsune* trace their origins back to China, where narratives featuring supernatural foxes with multiple tails – called *húli jīng* – had become widespread by the fourth century. These narratives served as moralistic warnings for men to be wary of promiscuous women, and characterized the *húli jīng* as seductive shapeshifters who would assume the form of attractive women to lure in men to prey upon. By the eighth century, tales of fox-spirits had spread to Korea and Japan, and many early *kitsune* folktales – spread by Buddhist monks – continued the trend of their Chinese precursors (Nüffer 628). As with their Chinese and Korean homologues, *kitsune* originate when a fox reaches a certain age – usually one-hundred years – and develops supernatural powers, incrementally growing new tails and increasing in power until it has obtained a maximum of nine tails and power comparable to a god. The most common powers accredited to fox-spirits are shapeshifting, possession, and casting illusions (Foster 184 – 185); abilities which enable *kitsune* to subvert the boundary between human and animal, facilitating their role as trickster figures even in stories where they are benevolent.
The cultural interconnectivity and influence between Japan and China was greatest during the Heian period (794 – 1185), when Japanese society – especially the Imperial court and nobility – embraced Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, and came to view three nations (Sangoku) as the centre of the world: India (referred to as Tenjiku), the origin of Buddhism; China (referred to as Shintan or Tōdo), the origin of Taoism and Confucianism; and Japan (Nippon or Nihon) itself (Nozaki 19; Shirane 30 - 32), which unified these religious and philosophical systems. While Shinto promotes an intersectional perception of nature and civilization, feudal Japanese society was largely defined by borders, both spiritual and physical, and as such the crossing and intersectionality of these borders are a major theme in Japanese literature, particularly that of the Muromachi period (1337 – 1573). Much of the fox-related literature produced in the Heian period was spiritual and moralistic in nature, having been written by travelling Buddhist priests as a means of proselytizing (Shirane 16 – 18); though as time passed secular narratives became increasingly commonplace, forming an intersectionality of both genera and different forms of media as narratives adapted over time and were adapted to different formats (Shirane 20).

*Kitsune* have maintained a presence in Japanese literature since the sixth century and appear in both the eighth century *Nihon Shoki* (localized as *Chronicles of Japan*) and ninth century *Nihon Ryōiki* (localized as *Miraculous Stories from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition*) (Smyers 72; Foster 178; Shirane 37). During the Heian and Muromachi Periods, *kitsune* became popular figures in *otogizōshi*. Many *otogizōshi* were adapted from rural folktales and the tales of itinerant storytellers and Buddhist priests (Shirane 17 – 18); and across the Muromachi Period and into the Edo Period, many *otogizōshi* were significantly expanded from their folkloric roots and were adapted into a broad array of artistic media – including *etoki* illustrated scrolls; *ukiyo-e*
paintings and woodblock prints; and nō, kyogen, bunraku, and kabuki theatrical performances (Shirane 20; Leiter 291). These adaptations ensured that these narratives could be disseminated to people of all social statuses and classes, keeping them popular and relevant across the centuries, and preserving the narratives in times of civil unrest and war. Unlike the mostly-secular allegoric narratives of the Reynard Cycle, Japan’s kitsune folktales are often spiritual in nature, originating as moralistic warnings for men to be wary of promiscuous women: many of these texts depict a kitsune transforming into the shape of a beautiful woman with the intent of seducing and devouring the flesh and souls of human men, sometimes succeeding and other times being driven off or slain by a monk, priest, or warrior. Similar to the Christian belief in demonic possession, the phenomenon of kitsune-tsuki – being possessed by a fox-spirit – and other forms of yōkai possession were assumed by Western and Western-influenced psychologists and anthropologists to be a way of explaining behavioural and psychological disorders, as well as some illnesses (Nozaki 18). Other supernatural abilities attributed to fox-spirits include casting spells, flight, and emitting mystical flames from their mouths and tails, and mysterious fires were often blamed on kitsune (Nozaki 24 – 25; Foster 185). In many rural areas, malicious kitsune were so feared that well into the twentieth century even mentioning the word was taboo (Casal 3). Kitsune are often portrayed as rivals of tanuki – often translated as “badger” or “raccoon,” but referring to the Japanese racoon-dog – who are also portrayed as mischievous shapeshifters and masters of illusion; and as having an intense mutual hatred towards dogs (Foster 184, 187). Despite this penchant for mischief and malice, most folkloric kitsune still understood and abided by – or at least paid lip service to – the systems of loyalty, honor, obligations, and tradition integral to traditional Japanese society; repaying debts if they were incurred, as in the case of a kitsune who sacrificed one of his offspring to heal the son of a man.
who had saved him (Casal 19). Additionally, despite their cunning and immense supernatural
powers, *kitsune* could themselves be tricked and enslaved by *onmyōji* or *Yamabushi* – an esoteric
sect of mountain Buddhist hermits – called *kitsune-tsukai* or *kitsune-mochi*, a practise common in
the Izuna region and often deemed heretical (Bane 200; Bathgate 122, 127; Foster 184). A
weasel-like lesser variant of *kitsune* variously called *kudagitsu* or *osaki* – usually translated as
“pipe fox” because they were small enough to fit into bamboo pipes – are often shown as
familiars of *kitsune-tsukai* and were often blamed for cases of *kitsune-tsuki* (Nozaki 170).
Importantly, some legends establish the *kudagitsu* as being born from fragments of Tamamono-Mae’s malice following her death, tying them to that important narrative.

Unlike the moralistic Reynard the Fox narratives of medieval Europe, which lost their
religious signification over time, to this day *kitsune* play a number of anthrozoologically
significant roles in Japanese spirituality and religion. Within traditional narratives and folklore,
*kitsune* play a multitude of roles and can be benevolent, mischievous, or malevolent (Foster 178).
Their role in religion, however, is what makes them especially important to Japan: foxes are
regarded as sacred to Inari, a *kami* (a deity or spirit) worshipped in both Shinto and Japanese
Buddhism since at least the eighth century as a deity of food and commerce (Smyers 1, 7, 15).
Depictions of Inari range from an overweight man carrying a bag of rice, derived from Buddhist
interpretations; a beautiful goddess, derived from Shinto interpretations; and an androgynous
figure who is either both male and female or completely genderless (Smyers 8). It is unclear
when Inari worship historically originated, as well as when and how *kitsune* came to be
identified with the deity (Smyers 73). An early Western theory put forth by D. C. Buchanan in
1935 speculated that “the fox deity was the first goddess of rice and was displaced by Inari”
(Opler and Hashima 43), though this theory has since been disputed and rejected. Scholastic
evidence suggests that the worship of Inari originated with the arrival of the Hata clan from Korea around the second half of the fifth century (Smyers 16), whose members founded the first known Shinto shrine to Inari – the Fushimi Inari Shrine – in 711 CE (Smyers 15). Worship of Inari became widespread in the Heian Period following the relocation of the Imperial capital to Kyoto in 794 (Smyers 17). According to Shinto beliefs, Inari came to Japan “during a famine at the time of the creation […] riding on a white fox [and carrying] sheaves of rice” (Opler and Hashima 44). However, Inari was not always associated with foxes, and there is a distinct lack of documentation as to when this association originated (Smyers 75), though evidence points to it occurring at some point in the late twelfth century and being codified by the seventeenth century (Smyers 79, 81). Beginning in the Edo Period, Japanese folklore began ascribing a hierarchy among kitsune – particularly those that serve Inari (Sasama 111), with examples of different ranks including kiko, myōbu, tenko, and kūko. However, the details and distinctions between these ranks often vary (Picken 124; Casal 1 – 3), to the point that many writers simply classify all benevolent kitsune as myōbu (Nozaki 12), and some have put forth that the hierarchical system is a modern invention (Papp 173). Kiko, also known as senko, are the most-commonly depicted variant of benevolent kitsune within folklore and are the lowest-ranked in the celestial hierarchy, residing in the physical world and being capable of interacting with mortals – with shrines to Inari often keeping consecrated foxes seen as the incarnations of Inari’s messengers (Meyer, “Kiko”). White-furred kitsune called myōbu after a legend dating back to the Heian period, are ranked second-lowest in the hierarchy – having transcended physical form – and are depicted as being Inari’s emissaries and servants, with statues depicting myōbu kitsune being found outside shrines to Inari (Meyer, “Myoubu”; Nozaki 12). Tenko are the highest-ranked kitsune and were considered deities unto themselves, residing in the celestial realm of the gods.
Kūko are subordinate to tenko but were believed to be far more powerful, surpassing three-thousand years in age and serving as Inari’s advisors (Meyer, “Kuuko”). Inari is so identified with foxes that they are popularly depicted as being a deific kitsune, particularly within “cult Shinto” – the highly interpretive and idiosyncratic forms of Shinto practised individually or communally within small villages; though this depiction is strongly discouraged by both the main Shinto and Buddhist temples in the wake of the Meiji Restoration (Nozaki 15; Smyers 8). Inari’s shrines are distinguished by numerous unique traits – most-often red torii gates and red-scarfed fox statues (Nozaki 10), and they are one of the most widely worshipped kami – possessing shrines in almost every town and village in Japan (Opler and Hashima 45). As a result, Inari’s worship is uniquely individualistic and polysemic, with even priests at the official temples and shrines having conflicting viewpoints and interpretations (Smyers 9 – 10). The largest and most prominent shrine to Inari is at Fushimi in Kyoto (Nozaki 18), having been sponsored by the Imperial family as a sign of Inari’s importance to Japan (Opler and Hashima 44 – 45). Well into the Edo period, suspected cases of kitsune-tsuki were brought to Inari shrines in order to be cleansed of the evil fox-spirits, and even people as high-ranked as the daimyō (feudal lord) and would-be shogun (military dictator) Toyotomi Hideyoshi frequented the shrines when family members fell ill or exhibited abnormal behaviour. In feudal times, the foxes kept by Inari shrines were allowed to roam freely around villages, towns, and even the Imperial capital of Kyoto – in many cases irritating and even attacking government officials – well into the fourteenth century (Nozaki 3 – 4). Much like the kitsune themselves, Inari is often seen as capricious: benevolent and helpful if pleased but merciless and vindictive if angered, inspiring both love and fear in worshippers (Smyers 8 – 9).
The second category of kitsune within Japanese folklore are the mischievous or malicious nogitsune (Nozaki 15), which occur more-frequently within otogizōshi than their mostly-benevolent counterparts and also carry anthrozoological significance in how foxes were regarded by Japanese people. Unlike the religious role served by the myōbu and other benevolent kitsune, nogitsune often serve as a moralistic warning towards men to be wary of women who do not conform to the strict gender roles of Confucianism, or who flaunt their sexuality. Responsible for wild foxes being treated with suspicion and fear, particularly in rural communities where they would have been commonplace, the nogitsune have been compared by English-speaking analysts and observers to the European Reynard (Opler and Hashima 46). In stark contrast to the masculine identity exemplified by Reynard, however, kitsune are almost exclusively feminine: many onmyōdō texts refer to kitsune as injū – a kind of yōkai characterized by an excess of yin (feminine) energy and which feeds off yang (masculine) energy through sex, akin to the Western perception of succubi (Bathgate 41 – 43). The perception of kitsune as feminine is so strong that even the rare male examples – such as the titular character of the Tamamizu monogatari (The Tale of Tamamizu) – often take on a female form when interacting with humans (Kimbrough 557 – 558). Nogitsune in particular are often identified as attractive females, though the connotation is negative: women accused of seducing men to amuse themselves are pejoratively labeled meguitsune, or “female fox” (Opler and Hashima 46). Many tales of nogitsune involve them playing pranks on unsuspecting humans by assuming the form of beautiful women so as to rob them of their belongings, casting illusions to make them see things that are not present, or possessing them for the sake of humiliation (Opler and Hashima 46 – 47). However, other examples of nogitsune are malevolent, seeking to seduce unsuspecting men so they can devour
their life-force and flesh (Nozaki 26; Bathgate 41); or possessing the bodies of people to wreak havoc out of spite, malice, or to seek vengeance (Opler and Hashima 46).
One of Japan’s most prominent and famous examples of a benevolent *kitsune*, the Tale of Kuzunoha is a prominent example of the fox-wife genre – in which a fox-spirit assumes human form after falling in love with a human. Folklorist Seki Keigo defined the genre as having three variants, the “single-wife variant” wherein the fox assumes human form to marry a human man, the “double-wife variant” wherein the fox impersonates and supplants the man’s human love interest, and the “kikimimi variant” wherein the fox-wife bestows her half-human child with
mystical abilities or gifts (Bathgate 36). Tales of this genre originated in T’ang China and spread to Japan by the eighth century Nara Period, where they were recorded in compilations such as the ninth century *Nihon ryōiki* and Minamoto-no-Takakuni’s eleventh century *Konjaku Monogatari* (Nozaki 19, 27, 31; Bathgate 35, 38, 58; Meyer 463). The Fox-Wife narrative was transmitted across Japan by *setsuwa* (itinerant Buddhist monks) and developed at least 24 iterations and regional variants that continued to evolve as time passed; including *The Fox-Wife of Shinoda* – the tale from which Kuzunoha originates, *The Fox-Wife of Mino*, the aforementioned *Tamamizu monogatari*, and even the tale of Tamamo-no-Mae (Bathgate 38) – which will be discussed later. As it generally serves as a moralistic warning against the transgression of boundaries, the Fox-Wife narrative genre typically ends in tragedy, with the *kitsune*’s true form often being discovered by her lover or children, forcing her to return to the forest or else perish (Shirane 38 – 39; Bathgate 44), thus maintaining the motif of rigid social and cultural boundaries. From a cultural-historical perspective, the fox-wife’s return to the wilderness serves as a metaphor for the strict social boundaries, the numerous oppressions and constraints of virilocal marriages, and the roles expected of married women in Heian Period Japanese society (Bathgate 64 – 66); while also codifying a theological narrative enforcing the separation of sacred and profane (Bathgate 50). Some scholars such as Michael Bathgate and Karen Smyers have touted the tale of Kuzunoha as the ultimate evolution of the Fox-Wife narrative model, as rather than simply seducing a man out of lust or to devour him, Kuzunoha genuinely falls in love with her human husband (Smyers 130), and is exposed not while in the act of seducing her lover but while participating in regular household activities (Bathgate 50).

The earliest known variant of *The Fox-Wife of Shinoda* was a legend from the Izumi region, and the evolution of its narrative illustrates all three variants of the fox-wife narrative. In
the original iteration of the narrative, the protagonist – usually a young noble – saves the life of a white-furred fox while hunting in Shinoda Forest, returning home to find a beautiful woman waiting for him. They marry and live happily together for several years, but the woman suddenly vanishes, writing a farewell poem instructing him to search for her in Shinoda forest. The samurai searches for her and finds the body of the white-furred fox he had saved – his wife in her true form – having committed suicide out of heartbreak (Poulton 143). The characters of the narrative went unnamed until the anonymously-written 1662 prose story *Abe no Seimei monogatari* and its 1674 puppet-theatre adaptation *The Shinoda Wife* by Ki no Kaion, which heavily expanded the narrative. Importantly from a cultural-historical standpoint, *Abe no Seimei monogatari* and *The Shinoda Wife* integrated the narrative of the Shinoda Fox-Wife into the origin story of the legendary *onmyōji* Abe-no-Seimei (Goff 172; Foster 38, 180), a historical figure who lived during the Heian Period between 921 and 1005 and who served as an advisor and astrologer for the Imperial government. Abe-no-Seimei has been mythologized in folklore and literature as a sorcerer with powerful supernatural abilities, occupying a similar niche to Merlin from the medieval European Arthurian Cycle. As such, Ki no Kaion’s version and the iterations derived from it are examples of the “kikimimi variant” (Bathgate 36). The *kitsune* was given the name Kuzunoha, and her husband was given the name Abe-no-Yasuna; and in this expanded iteration, Abe-no-Yasuna saves a white fox and returns home to find a beautiful woman named Kuzunoha waiting for him. They fall in love and are married; with their son growing up to be Abe-no-Seimei himself, inheriting his famous supernatural abilities from his mother (Poulton 143; Smyers 104). Furthermore, the *kitsune* does not commit suicide, but is instead forced to return to the forest upon having her true form discovered by her son, later reappearing before her son and husband and revealing herself as a divine fox-spirit in service to
Inari. The scene wherein Kuzunoha writes a farewell poem while transforming into a fox is one of the most famous parts of the narrative, and has been represented by many artists; and in theatrical productions of the narrative, the scene required a great deal of technical trickery and skill to pull off successfully. The thematic motif of loss is also prevalent within the narrative and is best highlighted by Kuzunoha’s farewell poem – from which she gets her name, after the Japanese name for the arrowroot plant:

“If you miss me come and search
Shinoda forest in Izumi among the wistful arrowroot leaves
(Koishikuba tazunete miyo Izumi naru Shinoda no mori no urami kuzunoha)” (Smyers 131)

In the late seventeenth century, the narrative was adapted into a 5-act kabuki play entitled A Courtly Mirror of Ashiya Dōman by playwright Takeda Izumo II, which was first performed in 1734. The narrative of Kuzunoha was adapted into the play’s fourth act, which expanded and further altered the narrative into the “double-wife variant” wherein Kuzunoha is the play’s protagonist Abe-no-Yasuna’s human love interest, and is impersonated by the kitsune in order to seduce and marry him. When the original Kuzunoha – who for most of the play is presumed deceased – resurfaces, the kitsune’s ruse is exposed and she is forced to return to the forest. Their son, Dōji, is taught the secrets of onmyōdō by his father’s rival – the titular Ashiya Dōman – and grows up to become the legendary Abe-no-Seimei (Poulton 142 – 143). As with the prior iteration of the narrative, Kuzunoha does not kill herself; but continues watching over her family from afar as a tutelary deity, “attaining a kind of domestication that [she] never achieved as wife or mother” (Bathgate 66). Kuzunoha’s benevolence is a stark contrast to most other kitsune
narratives, which feature mischievous or malevolent nogitsune. It also serves as a rebuttal to the notion that kitsune narratives in general are comparable to the classic Reynard Cycle – though Reynard himself has been depicted as a loving parent. Kuzunoha’s connection to the kami Inari is also a striking parallel to Reynard’s connection to Satan from a Christian perspective – though this similarity is coincidental.
The most infamous and prominent evil *kitsune* in Japanese literature is Tamamo-no-Mae, who first appeared in *otogizōshi* during the Kamakura period (1185 – 1333). Like the narrative of Kuzunoha, the tale of Tamamo-no-Mae is a variant of the Fox-Wife motif and ends in tragedy (Bathgate 3 – 5), though the titular *kitsune* is a malevolent and anarchistic figure far more comparable to Reynard the Fox than Kuzunoha and even other *kitsune*. Tamamo-no-Mae’s narrative was expanded upon during the Muromachi period (1336 – 1603), and proved so
popular that it has over a dozen variants and has been reproduced and retold “in virtually every
genre and medium from the fifteenth century until the nineteenth” (Bathgate; quoted in Nüffer 629), continuing to influence the portrayal of malevolent kitsune in modern Japanese media. The cultural historical significance of Tamamo-no-Mae’s importance to Japanese popular culture may have been to reinforce patriarchal norms through the vilification of intelligent and learned women; and has been speculated to re-enforce a sense of Japanese nationalism and superiority over other East Asian nations, Japan having vanquished a deific monster that had terrorized the other two nations in the Sangoku trinity with impunity (Nüffer 629 – 630). Scenes from Tamamo-no-Mae’s narrative have been illustrated in works such as the eighteenth century Konjaku Hyakki Shūi bestiaries by Toriyama Sekien, and one of the most famous renditions of Tamamo’s tale is by the renowned nineteenth century artist Katsushika Hokusai.

The titular character, Tamamo-no-Mae, is a malicious fox-spirit described as having a white face and golden fur, either two or nine tails, and being “seven arm-spans in length” (Nüffer 649, 660); taking on the form of an unnaturally beautiful woman to seduce and manipulate her victims. A “monster with god-like powers” (Nüffer 651), Tamamo-no-Mae is a figure of great cultural-historical importance as she is repudiated as one of Japan’s Three Great Evil Yōkai alongside Shuten-dōji the oni (a yōkai resembling an ogre or a demon) and the onryō (vengeful spirit) of Emperor Sutoku – all of whom are accredited with causing or contributing to the political and social destabilization of Japan that occurred at the end of the Heian period, bringing about the downfall of the Imperial Court and the rise to power of the samurai and Shogunate (Nüffer 629 – 630; Bathgate 7). Tamamo-no-Mae is particularly notable for her subversion of the social and gender norms of the time, possessing unparalleled eloquence and an uncanny degree of knowledge in all matters of philosophy and theology (Nüffer 631). Posing as a human girl
named Mikuzume (Meyer, “Tamamo no Mae”), the evil *kitsune* becomes a concubine of the retired Emperor Toba and earns the moniker “Tamamo-no-Mae” after a display of her mystical abilities (Bathgate 3). Tamamo-no-Mae manipulates Emperor Toba in order to seize control of the country and sow chaos (Smyers 129), eventually attempting to assassinate him and his son Emperor Konoe; but her ruse is exposed by the *onmyōji* Abe-no-Yasunari, a descendant of Abe-no-Seimei and thereby the benevolent kitsune Kuzunoha (Bathgate 66). Exorcized, Tamamo-no-Mae flees northeast – a direction associated with evil in Japanese spirituality – to the moors of Nasu and is hunted down by an army led by the heroic archers Miura-no-suke and Kazusa-no-suke. Tamamo-no-Mae evades the hunters for 108 days – a number of spiritual significance in Buddhism and Taoism – before being killed with the divine aid of Shinto *kami* and Buddhist *bodhisattva* (Nüffer 629). Tamamo-no-Mae’s appearance before Miura-no-suke in a dream to beg for her life and the final battle between her and the two heroic archers became two of the most popular scenes among artists during the Edo Period; and they have been depicted by numerous woodblock print artists such as Yashima Gakutei in 1821, Utagawa Kuniyoshi in 1834, and Utagawa Kunihisa II in 1858.

As a result of shifting cultural attitudes and interests, the narrative of Tamamo-no-Mae evolved significantly across the Sengoku (1467 – app. 1600) and Edo Periods. The original iterations of the narrative – as told in the ~1470 *Tamamo no Mae monogatari* and Nishida Shōhei’s 1653 *Tamamo no sōshi* – end with Tamamo-no-Mae’s corpse being taken back to the Imperial Palace by Miura-no-suke and Kazusa-no-suke, and miraculous treasures such as a gold jar containing a relic of the Buddha, a glowing white jewel, and a pair of luck-granting needles being extracted from her body (Nüffer 655 – 656). Further cementing the narrative’s cultural-historical importance, these sacred treasures play a role in enabling Miura-no-suke’s descendant
Minamoto-no-Yoritomo to “[mount] a rebellion and [chastise] the Taira,” ending the Genpei War (1180 – 1185) and giving rise to the Shogunate, the Kamakura Period (1185 – 1333), and the rise to power of the samurai (Nüffer 656, 661). In some iterations of the narrative the onmyōji who exposes Tamamo-no-Mae is Abe-no-Seimei himself, though in most versions it is a descendent of his who possesses many of the same mystical qualities (Nüffer 642, 659). From a cultural-historical viewpoint, the narrative of Tamamo-no-Mae as told by Edo Period artists such as Hokusai reinforces the concept of sangoku – the cultural ties between India, China, and Japan – in order to convey a sentiment of Japanese nationalism (Nüffer 629). By this time, the narrative of Tamamo-no-Mae had been conflated with the similar Chinese legends of Daji/Dakki and Bao Si/Hōji – both historical figures reputed to have been sadistic fox-spirits who used seduction to bring about an end to the Chinese Zhō and Yin dynasties, respectively – and with an adaptation of the Hindu legend of Prince Kalmashapada, also known as Prince Hanzoku in Japan (Nüffer 644; Ferguson 3).

The nō theatre adaptation Sesshōseki alters the narrative’s ending (Ferguson 4), appending a coda wherein Tamamo-no-Mae’s corpse is petrified into the Sesshōseki or Killing Stone, which was haunted by her onryō and radiated a miasma that killed anyone who approached it (Ferguson 3). After some time, a Sōtō Zen Buddhist monk named Gennō came across the Sesshōseki and encountered Tamamo’s ghost – who expressed remorse for her misdeeds and a desire to repent by converting to Buddhism – and exorcized her. This addition contrasts sharply with her portrayal as an “enemy of Buddha” in the original narrative, and is believed to have been added in response to the growing prevalence and popularity of Zen Buddhism within Japan. In some later versions originating in the Kantō region, shards of the shattered Sesshōseki were scattered across Japan and reborn as kudagitsune, osaki, and inugami.
(dog *yōkai*) that were captured and tamed by *tsukimono-mochi* (Bathgate 122; Natsuhiko 298). While this iteration is the only one to portray Tamamo-no-Mae in a repentant light, it proved popular enough that, according to scholars like Michael Bathgate, Tamamo-no-Mae came to be worshipped as a minor goddess called Sasahara Inari (Bathgate 3), tying the tale into the worship of Inari and transforming Tamamo-no-Mae into a *myōbu*. This narrative of redemption would have served to promote Buddhism as a religion, as even an evil demon-fox can achieve Nirvana – and would have also re-enforced the popularity of Inari as a deity. However, this ending was discarded by later developments, and to this day Tamamo-no-Mae remains best-known for her malevolence.
Figure 6: Sesshōseki by Toriyama Sekien
Produced during the nineteenth century, in the late Edo period, *Ito guruma kyūbi no kitsune* (*The Spinning Wheel and the Nine-Tailed Fox*) by Santō Kyōden is a gōkan – a genre of novels developed during the Edo Period – that serves as a sequel to the traditional narrative of Tamamo-no-Mae. *Ito guruma kyūbi no kitsune* discards the appended Buddhist ending in favour of returning Tamamo-no-Mae to her original portrayal as a malicious onryō hellbent on revenge on the Miura clan, descendants of the samurai who killed her; and has her team up with the old hag from another famous *otogizōshi*, *Adachi ga hara* (Ferguson 19). *Ito guruma kyūbi no kitsune* fits into the katakiuchi or revenge narrative genre, which emerged and grew in popularity over the course of the Edo Period as increasing censorship and control on the part of the government placed limitations on the topics that could be portrayed in theatrical productions and literature (Ferguson 25). *Katakiuchi* narratives were played out in both gōkan and kabuki theatre, and resulted in the archetypes of the femme fatale, the akuba (evil woman), and the dokufu (poisonous wife) becoming popular – and remaining popular to this day in Japanese media. As a character, Tamamo-no-Mae fits into all three archetypes, being an enemy of Buddhism who uses seduction to sow chaos and overthrow any government that practises the religion. However, her knowledge and wisdom serve not only as a warning to beware of beguiling and overly-knowledgeable women; but as a means of legitimizing the authority of the warrior caste’s shogunate over the Emperor and the aristocratic court at Kyoto, as well as expressing a generalized sentiment of Japanese superiority (Nüffer 630).

The evolution of Tamamo-no-Mae’s narrative and character in some ways parallel those of Reynard the Fox, and they reflect shifting mores and attitudes in Japanese society. Unlike Reynard the Fox, the evolution of Tamamo-no-Mae’s character was shaped less by the attitudes and opinions of the various authors and artists who adapted and expanded the narratives, and
more upon the shifting cultural and social attitudes. Additionally, there are few if any references to Tamamo-no-Mae’s narrative specifically having impacted how foxes were seen in Japanese society, as most of the scholarly literature focuses on dissecting her character and its influence on Japanese society and media; making it difficult to analyze her narrative from an anthrozoological standpoint. Early iterations of the narrative are difficult to locate, as the version told during the late Edo Period is the most popular and widespread, and thus the one most-written about. Set in the Heian Period, the narrative portrays her as an enemy of Buddhism, which at the time was growing in influence both within the Japanese government and among the general populace; and which had peaked in popularity by the Muromachi period, when the narrative was first recorded.

The epilogue appended in Sesshōseki reflects the ubiquitous influence of Zen Buddhism on Japanese society and literature, and serves to affirm the superiority of Buddhism over Taoist onmyōdō by having a Buddhist monk be the one to redeem and exorcize Tamamo-no-Mae’s onryō. Nevertheless, this addendum also furthers the cultural concept of sangoku as Chinese-developed Taoism, Japanese-developed Shintoism, and Indian-developed Buddhism all play important roles in Tamamo-no-Mae’s ultimate defeat (Nüffer 653). Tamamo-no-Mae’s reversion into villainy towards the end of the Edo Period came about not as a rebuttal against Buddhism, but to make the character fit into the akuba archetype of the popular katakiuchi genre, a development that ensured her continued popularity into the modern era. Like Reynard, it is the portrayal of Tamamo as an unrepentant malevolent figure rather than a redeemed antagonist that has endured into modern times. Tamamo-no-Mae’s status as one of the Three Great Evil Yōkai parallels Reynard’s Christian connection to Satan; though while Reynard existed to challenge and criticize the status quo, Tamamo-no-Mae existed to overthrow and destroy it – a degree of anarchy which none of the Reynard Cycle’s authors seemed willing to contemplate.
The flexibility of the *kitsune* – its ability to be good, evil, both, and neither – has contributed to its longevity as a figure both in traditional folklore and modern media. In particular, the motif of the Taoist yin-yang can be applied to dualism of Tamamo-no-Mae and Kuzunoha. Kuzunoha is a benevolent servant of the deity Inari and a devoted wife, but in one iteration impersonates her husband’s human love interest to woo him. Conversely, Tamamo-no-Mae is a sadistic, evil monster who sought to spread chaos and destruction throughout multiple countries; but in one version posthumously converts to Buddhism and ascends to serve Inari. The flexibility of *kitsune* within Japanese culture is similar in some respects to the plasticity of Reynard’s portrayals within the Reynard Cycle, but serves a fundamentally different purpose. While both were derived from spiritualized depictions of foxes as malevolent and cunning, Reynard’s secular importance eclipsed any religious importance he might have had in western European society; while *kitsune* were co-opted into figures of great religious importance to Japanese society, in addition to serving a secular role as characters in popular literature and media.

Both Kuzunoha and Tamamo-no-Mae serve as source material for depictions of *kitsune* in modern media. Kuzunoha’s primary claim to fame is her association with Abe no Seimei, and modern media depictions of Kuzunoha and *kitsune* based on her are uncommon compared to representations of generic *kitsune* or representations of Tamamo-no-Mae, even in light of her connection to a historical and legendary figure as famous as Abe-no-Seimei. The manga *Sengoku Yōko* by Satoshi Mizukami presents one of the rare malevolent depictions of Kuzunoha (Mizukami, *Sengoku Yōko* Vol. 6 Ch. 21–22), a licentious nine-tailed fox more in line with traditional depictions of Tamamo-no-Mae – who also appears as Kuzunoha’s benevolent pacifist daughter (Mizukami, *Sengoku Yōko* Vol. 6 Ch. 37.5, Ch. 39). While named after Reynard, the
kitsune ninja Renamon from the Digimon franchise draws from the narrative of Kuzunoha’s strong association between kitsune and Taoism, with her most powerful transformations – Taomon, Doumon, Sakuyamon, and Kuzuhamon – being onmyōji; the latter even being directly named after Kuzunoha. Sakuyamon and Kuzuhamon also reference the onmyōdō practise of kitsune-tsunai through their use of kudagitsune as weapons. Manga such as Ga-Rei by Hajime Segawa, Ushio and Tora by Kazuhiro Fujita, and Sengoku Yōko by Satoshi Mizukami; and video-games such as Capcom’s Ōkami and TYPE-MOON’s Fate/Extra series all have kitsune characters based on Tamamo-no-Mae. These depictions of Tamamo-no-Mae and kitsune based on her greatly outnumber representations based on Kuzunoha and often adhere to her depiction in folklore, in several cases treating her as a living natural disaster or goddess of destruction. However, some depictions of Tamamo-no-Mae – like those in Sengoku Yōko and the Fate series – are benevolent, and depict her as either being innocent of or repentant for the crimes she committed in folklore. While it would be easy to assume that these depictions are feminist in nature, they more likely came about out of an authorial desire to subvert the traditional narrative. Possible reasons for humanizing her characterization in this regard could be making her a more sympathetic, endearing, or attractive character that can be supported as a love-interest for the protagonists, as well as integrating modern character archetypes to make her more appealing to a modern audience. These latter depictions in some ways resemble the nineteenth century family-man and modern heroic portrayals of Reynard the Fox, though the processes of their development were fundamentally different, making the similarities intriguing but superficial.

The polyvalent roles that kitsune came to play in both secular and spiritual aspects of Japanese culture in some ways parallels the evolving symbolism behind Reynard the Fox in European folklore, though a key difference is that while Reynard lost his religious signification
over time the *kitsune* acquired religious signification. The close connection between *kitsune* and Inari-worship highlights the anthrozoological role that foxes have played in Japanese culture from the twelfth century onward, while the narratives of Kuzunoha and Tamamo-no-Mae serve as examples of the *kitsune*’s cultural and historical importance to Japanese culture given the former’s close relation to a mythologized historical figure and the latter being cited as one of the causes of the downfall of the Imperial Court and the war that led to the establishment of the *shogunate*. 
Conclusion

The archetype of the sneaky, malicious fox is ancient, manifesting in disparate cultures around the world. In examining how two prominent cultures have utilized this trope – and continue to do so – it is my hope to invite further cross-cultural discourse on the matter. In a time where the relationships between humans and non-human animals are being critically examined, Reynard has – perhaps falsely – been accredited with negatively shaping the perception of foxes in Western European and North American societies over the last nine centuries; when it is more probable that he is a symptom of the perception of foxes by agrarian cultures as serious threats to livestock and survival. While the postmodern trend of subverting and deconstructing stereotypes has led to more benevolent modern adaptations and offshoots, this has done little to mitigate his legacy as an archetypical villain. Likewise, as Japanese culture permeates the world through anime, manga, video games, and other media, the equally archetypical Tamamo-no-Mae’s status and legacy as the ultimate embodiment of the seductive assassin and anarchist are being both continued and subverted by her numerous modern iterations – both good and evil – which serve to evolve her narrative for modern audiences. While these characters epitomize the anthropozoological stereotypes of foxes as cunning tricksters, modern adaptations of both of these figures often downplay or even outright remove their villainous traits so as to make them more palatable for younger audiences, or to act as subversions to the stereotypical portrayals. Rather than signifying a true realignment of the relationship between humans and foxes, this reflects a general unwillingness to subject children to unedifying stories – reflected in modern moralistic debates over the content of media such as video-games and anime, as well as a general lack of competition between post-agrarian societies and wildlife for food resources.
While portrayals of Reynard are rare in media outside of France, Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands, the nations where the Reynard Cycle originated, he remains a relatively common figure therein. Some examples of twentieth century depictions of Reynard include the 1937 animated movie *The Tale of the Fox* – an early animated film adaptation of Goethe’s *Reineke Fuchs*; the 1930 puppet-animated adaptation of *Le Roman de Renard*; and *Moi Renart*, a 1985 French animated series which uniquely portrays the characters as humans with animal heads and is set in 1980s Paris. While not directly depicting Reynard, even indirect portrayals like Don Bluth’s *Rock-a-Doodle* and Disney’s *Robin Hood* present the dichotomy of portraying him as a villain or an antihero – reflecting the evolution of his character across the medieval and early modern periods. Portrayals of kitsune in modern Japanese media are far more common and run the gamut from benevolent servants of Inari, as in *The Helpful Fox Senko-san* by Rimukoro – where an 800-year-old kitsune appearing as a young girl is sent to live with a miserable and overworked salaryman, acting as his “wife and mother” to alleviate his stress; to mischievous troublemakers, as in *Kitsune no Yomeiri* by Takagi Satoshi – wherein an unlucky teenage boy who witnesses a sun-shower while walking home from school finds a kitsune appearing as a beautiful teenage girl at his house claiming to now be his wife, with comedic hijinks ensuing; to sadistic incarnations of destruction, as in *Ushio to Tora* by Kazuhiro Fujita – where the main antagonist is a godlike kitsune called Hakumen no Mono, who feeds off negative emotions and thus seeks to cause as much pain and destruction as possible. Notably, many portrayals of kitsune in modern media – including the aforementioned three examples – are sexualized to varying degrees, in reference to their folkloric ability to appear as beautiful women and drain the vitality of men through sex.
Without the ability to trace the evolution of beast-fables though time, it is impossible to definitively state whether or not the kitsune narratives of Japan and the Reynard Cycle of Europe are derived from a common narrative – though it is probable that they are independent manifestations of the perception of foxes as a threat to agrarian societies that have been refracted through radically different religious and philosophical prisms. While there are some at times striking similarities, even at their most basic levels the Reynard Cycle is divorced from the Japanese kitsune by the fundamental differences in how animals are regarded by European society versus how they are regarded by Japanese society, and by the fundamental differences between Japanese Shintoism and European Christianity. While it is true that both Reynard and Tamamo-no-Mae have been represented as violent and murderously sadistic anarchists, this connection is likewise superficial as the roles they play within the cultural and societal context are completely different. Furthermore, Reynard is a singular masculine figure whose countercultural and villainous status – stemming from Greek philosophy and the Christian association of foxes with Satan – enabled him to serve as a mouthpiece for various authors’ grievances; while there are countless kitsune, which are predominantly depicted as being morally ambiguous and female. Reynard originated as a disgruntled monk’s political satire – with one tale in particular eclipsing the others in popularity – before ultimately fading into relative obscurity as the role animal narratives played in Western European society diminished. To make the claim that Reynard influences depictions of foxes in Western media is arguably a flawed assessment, as the Reynard Cycle was a manifestation of pre-existing negative attitudes towards foxes likely stemming from their competition with agrarian human society. Nevertheless, the ambivalence and plasticity of Reynard’s characterization enabled him to diversify into a variety of roles ranging from a heroic antihero to a deplorable villain. Likewise, the Tale of Kuzunoha
was one of many permutations of the theme of the fox-wife, but achieved such a degree of fame
and success through its multiple adaptations that its popularity has lasted centuries and endures
to this day. The Tale of Tamamo-no-Mae has been reiterated and retold as a Buddhist religious
polemic and revenge-thriller – adapting to changing tastes and cultural mores; and this
adaptability has enabled it to endure for centuries and its protagonist to play a variety of roles
ranging from innocent victim to a genuine heroine to a living natural disaster. Overall, the
proclamations of similarities between kitsune and the Reynard Cycle are superficial at best, being
based around their nature as trickster figures who happen to be foxes, and ultimately there are
more differences than similarities.

This thesis has shown that the fundamental differences in how animals are regarded in
European and Japanese culture and society are almost insurmountable, and that the mode of
interpretation they invite may therefore differ too. In western Europe and much of North
America, Christian theology and the mechanism of René Descartes have strongly impacted how
animals are viewed (Thomas 60). Historically, European anthrozoological relations have tended
towards the allegorical and the satirical, and firmly rejected their spiritualization as heretical and
blasphemous (Thomas 62). However, medieval and early modern European theology and
literature freely utilized beasts as symbols, allegories, and metaphors for aspects of human
society and nature – especially for traits seen as undesirable and counter-productive to society
(Thomas 67 – 70). Within Western European literature, animal characters were – and still are –
imbued with human characteristics to primarily serve as a satire of human society, usually its
worst aspects. Perhaps ironically, the growth and proliferation of animal rights activism in
European-derived societies would likely not have occurred – at least not in the manner it did –
without the indifference towards animal cruelty of the Cartesian worldview. In contrast, many
other cultures—such as those of the First Nations and other indigenous peoples, and the
cultural spiritual and religious beliefs of the Japanese—treat animals not only allegorically and
metaphorically, but spiritually; embracing the unironic amalgamation of humans and animals as
being part of their system of being, although this spiritual valuation does not necessarily imply
kind treatment. However, as Japanese and European cultures interact and exchange ideas, it is
possible that more similarities will appear as the narratives continue to evolve over time. The
Reynard Cycle’s philosophical and religious roots were supplanted by secular narratives that
have purportedly impacted how foxes were regarded by Western societies for generations, but
real foxes had little impact on the Reynard Cycle’s narratives. Japanese *kitsune* narratives
originated as moralistic warnings derived from Chinese folklore, but diversified into both
religious and secular narratives that simultaneously influenced and were influenced by how real
foxes were seen and treated by the villages, towns, and cities of feudal Japan. In fact, the greatest
similarity between the Reynard Cycle and the Japanese *kitsune* narratives is that they all
demonstrate the plasticity and adaptability of narratives, and how they change across time in
response to differing authorial intents and cultural-historical events.

Conducting a thorough assessment of Europe’s Reynard Cycle and Japan’s *kitsune*
narratives is a task far beyond the scope of a thesis paper, made more difficult by many of the
narratives and the scholarly analysis conducted on them being kept in an untranslated state. A
logical next step for this line of research would be to collaborate with the scholars and folklorists
who have studied the narratives, both European and Japanese, not yet available to the broader
global academic community in order to provide translations for the purpose of cross-cultural
studies. A wealth of relatively untapped resources exists that is only available in the authors’
native languages, and to have those resources available to the broader academic community.
would greatly facilitate cross-cultural analyses such as this thesis. Another possible tract of research could be to examine the various fox-wife *kitsune* narratives and their modern counterparts from a feminist perspective, as has been done with some iterations of the Reynard Cycle.
Works Cited


http://rsbl.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/roybiolett/7/3/355.full.pdf


Meyer, Matthew.

“Kiko.” *Yokai.com: the online database of Japanese ghosts and monsters.*

“Kūko.” *Yokai.com: the online database of Japanese ghosts and monsters.*

“Myoubu.” *Yokai.com: the online database of Japanese ghosts and monsters.*

“Tamamo no Mae.” *Yokai.com: the online database of Japanese ghosts and monsters.*


Müller, Fredrick Max. 1881. “On the Migration of Fables (from *Chips from a German Workshop*)” in *A Library of the World's Best Literature - Ancient and Modern - Vol.XXVI*


Severs, J. Burke “Chaucer’s Originality in the ‘Nun’s Priest’s Tale’,” *Studies in Philology* 43(1), 1946, pp. 22 – 41.


