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Animal Fables of Contemplation

Paul J. Smith

There is little room for contemplation in Aesopian fables.¹ The world of the fable is ruled by the law of the strongest (“The Wolf and the Lamb”) or the most cunning (“The Raven and the Fox”). The moral is practical: unworldly philosophers end badly – they fall into a well or they die from a snake bite because they are not watching where they are putting their feet. And in La Fontaine’s fable “Le Rat qui s’est retiré du monde”² (The Rat who has withdrawn from the world), retirement from the world is even explicitly denounced. Yet there are a few moments of contemplation in fable literature, especially in the emblematic fables of the so-called Gheeraerts filiation.

1 Emblematic Fables and the Gheeraerts Filiation

Bearing in mind that not every reader may be familiar with the notion of emblematic fable and the Gheeraerts filiation, I will begin this chapter with a brief preliminary. The term “emblematic fable” was coined by Barbara Tiemann³ to designate a new, hybrid form between the traditional Aesopian fable and the emblem, which had been “invented” not long before Gheeraerts by the Italian humanist Andrea Alciato (1492–1550).⁴ This hybrid form was created by the French humanist and printer Gilles Corrozet (1510–1568), who, in his *Fables d’Esopé* (1542), systematically placed every fable in a two-page format – the left page laid out according to the three-fold emblematic format (*inscriptio-pictura-subscriptio*), and the opposite page, which contains the two-part fable text, consisting of the fable narration and the moral. The first

1 By “Aesopian fables” I mean not only fables attributed to the mythical figure Aesop, but also early modern fables that are based on these fables.

2 *Fables* VII, 3.

3 Tiemann B., *Fabel und Emblem. Gilles Corrozet und die französische Renaissance-Fabel* (Munich: 1974).

4 Alciato’s *Emblematum liber* (1531) is generally considered the first emblem book. For a recent discussion of this invention, see Enenkel K.A.E., *The Invention of the Emblem Book and the Transmission of Knowledge, ca. 1510–1610* (Leiden – Boston: 2019).

fable book to imitate Corrozet's innovative disposition was *De Warachtighe fabulen der dieren* (1567),⁵ a collection of 107 fables, conceived in close collaboration by two Brugeans: the artist Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder (ca. 1520–ca. 1590), instigator, financier, and illustrator of the collection, and the poet Eduard de Dene (ca. 1505–ca. 1578), who provided the texts in poetic form. The printer Pieter de Clerck (ca. 1537–1577) highlighted the different parts by using different fonts: roman for the left page (*inscriptio* and *subscriptio*), bastard-gothic for the narrative part of the fable, and italics for the moral. Compared to Corrozet's fable book,⁶ this collection is innovative in many respects – including Gheeraerts' use of the etching technique – but two innovations are particularly important for my argument. First: the quatrain that served as a *subscriptio* in Corrozet's fables was replaced by a biblical quote. Curiously, two different bibles were quoted:⁷ De Dene used the Catholic Vorsterman Bible from 1528,⁸ and Gheeraerts used the Baptist Biestkens Bible from 1560.⁹ The second innovation important for my argument lies in the use of sources: while all Corrozet's fables can be called Aesopian, this is not the case for the *Warachtighe fabulen*, as we shall see.

The *Warachtighe fabulen* stands at the basis of a corpus of fable books¹⁰ known as the “Gheeraerts filiation” because they all contain either Gheeraerts' etchings or direct imitations of them. This Gheeraerts filiation numbers, depending on the criteria adopted for the determination of this corpus, about 15 collections of fables, in Dutch (5x), French (5x), Latin (1x), German (1x), English (1x), and even Russian (1x) and Japanese (1x). Besides the *Warachtighe*

5 De Dene Eduard – Gheeraerts Marcus, *De warachtighe fabulen der dieren* (Bruges, Pieter de Clerck for Marcus Gheeraerts: 1567).

6 The edition used for the *Warachtighe fabulen* is most likely: Corrozet Gilles, *Les fables d'Esoppe Phrygien, mises en Ryme françoise [...]* (Lyon, Jean de Tournes – Guillaume Gazeau: 1547). The woodcuts of this edition are attributed to Bernard Salomon (1606/1610–ca. 1561).

7 See Geirnaert D. – Smith P.J., “The Sources of the Emblematic Fable Book *De warachtighe fabulen der dieren* (1567)”, in Manning J. – Porteman K. – Van Vaeck M. (eds.), *The Emblem Tradition and the Low Countries* (Turnhout: 1999) 23–38 (here: 25–27).

8 *De Bibel. Tgeheele Oude ende Nieuwe Testament* (Antwerp, Willem Vorsterman: 1528).

9 *Den Bibel. Inhoudende dat Oude ende Nieuwe Testament* (s.l., Nicolaes Biestkens van Diest: 1560). For the time being, there is no satisfactory explanation for the curious mixture of biblical versions.

10 The following introductory overview of the corpus is largely taken from my article “Title Prints and Paratexts in the Emblematic Fable Books of the Gheeraerts Filiation (1567–1617)”, in Bossier P. – Scheffer R. (eds.), *Soglie testuali. Funzioni del paratesto nel secondo Cinquecento e oltre / Textual Thresholds. Function of Paratexts in the Late Sixteenth Century and Beyond* (Rome: 2010) 157–200 (here 159–160).

fabulen, three fable books from the beginning of the Gheeraerts filiation are important for my argument. The first is the anonymous French-language collection *Esbatement moral des animaux* (1578),¹¹ consisting of 125 fables, that is, all the fables illustrated by Gheeraerts from the *Warachtighe fabulen*, plus 18 new fables, which he also illustrated. De Dene's texts have been adapted into French sonnets – this is the first time the sonnet form has been used for a collection of fables. The Bible quotes are also chosen differently: in contrast to the *Warachtighe fabulen*, only one Bible is used in the *Esbatement moral*: the Catholic *La Sainte Bible*, published by Plantin (Antwerp, 1578).¹²

The French *Esbatement moral* was translated into Latin by the humanist Arnoldus Freitag (ca. 1560–1605), under the title *Mythologia ethica* (1579).¹³ The major change of this adaptation consists in the use of prose, instead of the poetic forms of the *Warachtighe fabulen* and the *Esbatement moral*. The Latin Bible quotations coincide with the French ones of the *Esbatement moral* – they are all taken from the Latin Louvain Vulgate (1572). Freitag's collection was translated into English by Arthur Golding (ca. 1536–ca. 1605). This translation, certainly meant for publication, was not illustrated. It has not been printed before the 20th-century edition by Nora Rooche Field,¹⁴ and the translation into modern English by Richard G. Barnes¹⁵ – it is this last edition which I shall use extensively to quote Freitag's *Mythologia ethica*.

The third fable book that is important for my argumentation is the German *Theatrum morum* (1608).¹⁶ An anonymous author, probably Aegidius Sadeler (ca. 1570–1629), who wrote the book's preface, translated the French sonnets of the *Esbatement moral* into short German poems. He also made (or had made) reverse copies of Gheeraerts' illustrations. Moreover, he wrote 15 new fables of his own, illustrated by his own etchings. The Bible quotes disappear and are replaced by short prose quotes from mostly secular authors.

11 *Esbat[e]ment moral des animaux* [...] (Antwerp, Gerard Smits for Philips Galle: 1578).

12 *La Sainte Bible* [...] (Antwerp, Christopher Plantin: 1578). See Voorwinden M.E., "Les citations bibliques dans les fables emblématiques (1542–1632)" (unpublished bachelor's thesis, Leiden University, 2010) 55.

13 Freitag(ius) Arnoldus, *Mythologia ethica* [...] (Antwerp, Christopher Plantin for Philips Galle: 1579).

14 Field N.R., *Arthur Golding's A Morall Fabletalk: An Annotated Edition* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Columbia University, New York, 1979) 106.

15 Golding A., *A Moral Fable-Talk*, ed. R.G. Barnes (San Francisco: 1987).

16 [Aegidius Sadeler], *Theatrum morum. Artliche gesprach der thier* [...] (Prague, Paul Sesse: 1608).

2 *De Warachtighe fabulen: Three Contemplative Fables*

Let us return to the beginning of the Gheeraerts filiation. The *Warachtighe fabulen* contains three fables that have religious contemplation as their subject, namely “Zwane ende Hovare” (“The Swan and the Stork”, fable 99), “Van den voghel Phenix” (“The Phoenix”, fable 103), and the book’s final one, fable 107,¹⁷ which is untitled but which I refer to here as “The Stork and Its Nestlings”. It is no coincidence that these three fables, whose main theme is contemplation, do not belong to the ancient Aesopian tradition. In the fable of “The Swan and the Stork”, the stork asks why the swan sings when he is dying, and the swan replies that he is glad that he will soon be free from earthly torments. This motif is pre-Christian: the swan song was already mentioned by Aristotle. However, the first time this story appears in a fable book, and is given a Christian moral in the form of a dialogue between characters – swan and stork – is recent: as far as I know, this embedding takes place for the first time in an early modern Latin fable, “De cygno in morte canente reprehensio a ciconia”,¹⁸ which De Dene and Gheeraerts probably had read in a Plantin fable edition of 1560.¹⁹ The Christian embedding of this story of non-Christian origin is given extra relief in the form of a poetic paraphrase of a biblical quote from the Catholic Vorsterman Bible. In the following quote I indicate by means of italics the words in which De Dene’s paraphrase and the Vosterman Bible correspond – for verification I add the text of the Biestken Bible in the third column, which De Dene clearly did not have before him.

<i>Warachtighe fabulen</i>	Vorsterman Bible ^a	Biestkens Bible ^b
<i>O Doodt hoe bitter es v ghedijncken Den mensche die vrede heeft in zyn goedt Den gherusten man wiens weghen gheschiedt blijncken, Ende die mach weidelick eten en drijncken</i>	<i>O Doot, hoe bitter is v ghedenckenisse den mensche die vreede in zyn goet heuet, den gherusten man, ende wiens wegghen wel gheschiedt zijn in allen, ende die</i>	<i>O doot, hoe bit- ter zijt ghy, als een mensche op v ghedenct, die goede daghen ende genoech heeft, ende sonder sorghe leeft, ende dient wel gaet</i>

17 The numbering followed here is that of Scharpé L., “Van De Dene tot Vondel”, *Leuvense Bijdragen* 4 (1900) 5–63.

18 Originally in Aesopus, *Fabulae* [...] (Lyon, Sebastien Gryphius: 1536) 313 (= Laurentius Abstemius, *Fabulae*, no. 13).

19 *Aesopus, Fabulae* [...] (Antwerp, Christopher Plantin: 1560) fol. 71r.

(cont.)

<i>Warachtighe fabulen</i>	Vorsterman Bible ^a	Biestkens Bible ^b
O doodt, die maect ghy bitter zijn hertsen bloedt Maer den <i>behouueden</i> vul noodts flau ghemoedt Vul zoorghen, van <i>oudtheyt</i> versuft, crepel, en blent, Ende wiens ketijuch leuen, es al ieghenspoedt: O doodt, dien es v oordeel al goet ontrent, Naer v verblijdende tot inden eyndt	noch spijs mach ontfaen. O doot uwe oordeel is goet den <i>behoeuenden</i> mensche, ende die ghemindert wort van crachten, ende ghebrekende van <i>outheyt</i> , ende die van allen sorghe heeft, ende den ongeloouelijken, die de wijsheyt verliest.	in allen dinghen, ende noch wel eten mach. O doot, hoe wel doet ghy byden nootdruftigen, die daer swack ende oudt is, die in alle sorgen steect, ende niet beters te hopen, noch te verwachten en heeft.

a My quotations are from the digitized transcription published by DBNL (Digital Library for Dutch Literature): https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_vor003vors01_01/_vor003vors01_01_0806.php (last consultation: 6 December 2022).

b My quotations are from the digitized transcription published by DBNL: https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_bie002bies01_01/_bie002bies01_01_1046.php (last consultation: 6 December 2022).

The second fable, “The Phoenix”, has a very early Christological embedding, although it is not Aesopian in origin. The first embedding can already be found in the *Physiologus* (2nd century AD). In the case of the *Warachtighe fabulen*, a direct source can be identified. This source is quite unexpected: word-for-word similarities show that this is the Dutch-language 13th-century encyclopaedic work *Der Naturen Bloeme* (The Flower of Nature) by Jacob van Maerlant (ca. 1230/1235–ca. 1288/1300).²⁰ As *Der Naturen Bloeme* never appeared in print in the early modern period, De Dene must have worked with a huge medieval

20 The discovery of this source belongs to Dirk Geirnaert. I thank him for his communication on this.

manuscript before him on his desk, which is quite surprising for a poet who in other cases seems to prefer the most recent published sources. In the following quotations I have indicated the lexical similarities in italics:

Jacob van Maerlant, *Der Naturen Bloeme*^a

dese neuet gheen ghenoot
 ende naden aren es hi groot
.ccc. ende viertech iaer
 pleghet hi te *leuene* ouerwaer
 ghehouet geasselt es hi mede
 [...]
 also fenixe doude gaet an
 so *kieset* hi enen sconen *boem*
dan
hoghe staende up ene fonteine
 [...]
also die sonne heete scijnt
 so waiet hi danne ende pijnt
 dat hi also *ontsteket dat out*
 dat soete roke gheuet
 menechfout
 dant *ualt hi selue int soete vier*
 ende wert *te asschen* dus lese-
 men hier
 jn arde *corter* tijt dar naer
 werdet .i. worem in dasschen
 daer

Eduard de Dene, “Vanden voghel Phenix”,
Warachtighe fabulen, fable 107

DEn Phoenix eeghin voghel niet zijnde
 ghepartuert
 Als hy langhe heeft gheduert
 Moghende *drie hondert veertich iaren leuen*
 Ende oudt gheworden / *kieset* ende willecuert
Een Boom staende ontrent een Fonteyne
verheuen
 Ende (als zoo wt propre natuere ghegheuen)
Maecter op een Nest / van menigherhande
 Riekende Boom-tacken / hem brijnghende
 beneuen
 Ghenouch in Arabien / binnen zijnen Lande
 Dan *als de Zonne schijnt* alder *heetst* in huer
 rande /
Waeyt hy met zyn vlercken ouer t’nest daer
 Om een nieuwe moghen worden / stelt hy
 t’lijf te pande:
 Eyndelick *t’hout ontsteeckt* / midts der zon-
 nen cracht / claer /
 Dat barnende / so *valt hy int vier* openbaer
 Verbrant hem zeluen *tot asschen* / waer wt
zeer cort /

a I quote *Der Naturen Bloeme* in the transcription published by the Instituut voor Nederlandse Lexicologie, Cd-rom *Middelnedderlands* (The Hague – Antwerp: 1998). This transcription is made available by DBNL: https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/maer002dern02_01/colofon.php (last consultation: 7 December 2022).

(cont.)

Jacob van Maerlant, <i>Der Naturen Bloeme</i>^a	Eduard de Dene, “Vanden voghel Phenix”, <i>Warachtighe fabulen, fable</i> 107
die cortelike te woreme diet dus werdet fenix uerniet ^b	Een woormkin wast / daer af als voorwaer Wederomme een nieu ander voghel Phoenix wort. ^c

- b Translation: ‘This animal has no equal in the whole world. He is the same size as the eagle and he lives to be three hundred and forty years old. [...] When the phoenix starts to feel old, it chooses a nice tall tree near a clean, pure spring. [...] When the sun is at its greatest strength, it flaps its wings and tries to ignite the sweet-smelling wood. Then he falls into the sweet-smelling fire and is burned to ashes, as we read. Very soon after this, a worm grows in those ashes, which in a very short time grows into a bird: thus the phoenix is reborn.’
- c Translation: ‘When the phoenix – a special bird, for which there is no counterpart – has lived long (it can reach an age of 340 years) and when it has grown old, it seeks and chooses in its land Arabia a tall tree, which a spring stands nearby, and on that tree it makes a nest (prompted by his own nature) of many fragrant branches of trees with which it surrounds himself completely. Then, when the sun shines hottest in its surface, it flaps its wings over the nest there. In order to be renewed, it gives its body as a pledge. Finally the wood catches fire, entirely by the power of the sun. While that burns, it falls into the fire for all who can see and burns itself to ashes, from which very shortly afterwards a worm comes forth, from which once again, verily, a new, different Bird Phoenix arises.’ I thank Dirk Geirnaert for help with this translation.

The atypical specification of the lifespan of the phoenix – 340 years – is a particularly convincing piece of evidence of De Dene’s borrowing from Maerlant: it only occurs in one of Maerlant’s sources, namely Albertus Magnus,²¹ who, by the way, unlike Maerlant,²² does not explain the number 340. De Dene does

21 For references and discussion, see Nigg J., *The Phoenix: An Unnatural Biography of a Mythical Beast* (Chicago: 2016) 150. Nigg does not mention Maerlant.

22 Maerlant gives the following explanation:

dat fenix heuet .ccc. iaer
ende .xl. eri werdet so swaer
meent dat ihesus in arderike
.xxxiiij. iaer leuede sekerlike
van dat hi ghebodescapt was
tote dat hi starf sijt seker das
ouer een iaer slaet elke .x.
so vintment waer inden besiene.

not do this either, but in his case it is probably because of a lack of space – all information must be given on one page.

Furthermore, in comparison with the fable of “The Swan and the Stork”, it is remarkable that for the biblical *subscriptio*, it was not the Catholic Vorsterman Bible that was used, but the Anabaptist Biestkens Bible.

The last fable, number 107, “The Stork and Its Nestlings”, differs in form and layout from all other fables of the *Warachtighe fabulen*, because here De Dene and Gheeraerts dispose, for text and illustration, not of two pages, but only one. The actual fable therefore consists of a single sentence: ‘Volght t’voorbewijs vanden Houaere bescreuen,/ Die van zijn nest-ionghen, ierlicx thiende gheeft’ (Follow the stork’s example (as it can be found written), every year giving his tithe, drawing on his own nestlings). The text De Dene refers to is found in an anonymous Dutch compilation on natural history, *Der Dieren Palley*s (The Castle of the Animals), published in Antwerp in 1520:²³

Si werpen wt eenen van haren ionghen als hi volwassen en ghepluimet is voor een tribuyt den heere daer si nestelen. En somighe segghen dat si god den ionghen gheven voor haer tiende.²⁴

When their young are fully grown and well provided with plumage, the storks always throw one out of their nest, meaning this to be a tribute to the lord of the area where they nest. Some say that by acting this way, they give their young to God, regarding this as the payment of the tithe, levied by Him.

The further text of De Dene invites us to contemplate this example from nature – contemplation highlighted by the biblical quotation, which is very short because of the space available on the page: ‘Vreest God, houd zijn gebod, int vulbrijnghe / Dits t’eynde en t’slot, van allen dijngen’ (Fear God, keep His commandment, in doing / This is the end and the conclusion of all things).²⁵

Translation: The fact that the phoenix lives three hundred and forty years before becoming old and sick means that Jesus lived on earth for thirty-four years, from the announcement of His birth until His death. Calculate ten years for every year and you will see that it is true.

23 Geirnaert – Smith, “The Sources of the Emblematic Fable Book” 29.

24 *Der Dieren Palley*s (Antwerp, Jan van Doesborch: 1520) ch. 27.

25 The reference given is: ‘Eccles. 12. int. laetste’ (Ecclesiastes 12 in fine). The second line does not come directly from Ecclesiastes but has an autoreferential meaning, referring to the end of the *Warachtighe fabulen*.

Unlike the other two contemplative fables, it is impossible to determine which Bible is being quoted.

Although these three contemplative fables form a unity thematically, and are in close proximity in the latter part of the *Warachtighe fabulen*, they are not placed directly next to each other. This has to do with the deliberately arbitrary structure of the *Warachtighe fabulen*, based on the principle of the *docta varietas*; unlike most other early modern fable books, the *Warachtighe fabulen* has no *dispositio* based on the content of the fables (for example: all fables with a lion as a principal character are put together) or the moral: among the 107 fables that make up the *Warachtighe fabulen*, no animal appears in two consecutive fables, which are never linked by their moral either.²⁶ And regarding the three contemplative fables: their thematic cohesion is broken through fables that are not contemplative.

3 *Esbatement moral*, Freitag's *Mythologia ethica*, and Vondel's *Vorstellicke Warande*

In the *Esbatement moral*, which is arranged much more thematically than the *Warachtighe fabulen*, the three contemplative fables are placed next to each other at the very end of the book, in the following order: "The Swan and the Stork", "The Phoenix", and "The Stork and Its Nestlings". And in Arnoldus Freitag's *Mythologia ethica*, the transition from one fable to another is made explicit and explained.²⁷ In the opening lines of "The Swan and the Stork", the moral of all preceding fables is, as it were, summarized – a summary on which "The Swan and the Stork" builds:

What is to be done or left in our life, we have learned already by the example of many living Creatures. Now forasmuch as the path of virtue is steep, and on night abideth for all men, so as one time or other they must tread the way of death: let us learn of the Swan, with what mind to receive this night coming upon us.²⁸

26 For an overview of the different possible orderings in fable books, see my "Bornons ici cette carrière ... La fin du Premier Recueil et les pratiques sérielles dans les fabliers pré-lafontainiens", in Pelckmans P. (ed.), *La Fontaine en séries* (Leiden – Boston: 2018) 40–52.

27 On this transition from one fable to the other, see my "Arnold Freitag's *Mythologia ethica* (1579) and the Tradition of the Emblematic Fable", in Enenkel K.A.E. – Visser A.S.Q. (eds.), *Mundus emblematicus. Studies in Neo-Latin Emblem Books* (Turnhout: 2003) 173–200.

28 Freitag translated by Golding, *A Moral Fable-Talk* 292.

After the other fables with practical life lessons, it is now time for a *meditatio mortis*, which gives peace in life and liberates from earthly existence. Or, as Michel de Montaigne puts it in the same period (i.e. 1580): ‘La premeditation de la mort est, premeditation de la liberté. [...] Le sçavoir mourir nous affranchit de toute subjection et contraincte’²⁹ (To practice death is to practice freedom. [...] Knowing how to die gives us freedom from subjection and constraint).³⁰

The argumentative connection between the three fables is further emphasized by Freitag through two images taken from the world of the theatre: the fable as a theatrical play, and man’s life as a theatre or stage. The first image is visualized most clearly in the illustrated title page of the *Esbatement moral*, on which Freitag seems to base his stage metaphor: the word “esbatement” refers to a short comedy play, and the illustrated title page of the *Esbatement moral* shows a stage on which the animals perform a play for a large human audience. This stage metaphor is used by Freitag in the fable of “The Phoenix” to tie in with the previous fable:

To the intent that our manner of philosophy, which we have begun at the crabbed labor and toils of man’s life, may be seasoned with some sweetness of rest: let me bring forth the sole Phoenix, to end the art of this play with a gladsome winding up, such as comedies ought to have.³¹

And finally, introducing the fable of “The Stork and Its Nestlings”:

The Phoenix had almost put me to silence, and the flourishing hope of the blessed and endless life had shup up the doors of my Theater; but that after that last farewell, the religiousness of the Stork had willed me to add this short admonition.³²

The religious meditation is built up step by step. While in “The Swan and the Stork” the religious element remains implicit both in the fable story and in the moral, this element is explicitly mentioned in the moral of “The Phoenix”, which begins thus: ‘The Phoenix beareth the figure of our Savior Christ resurrection’. And finally, in “The Stork and Its Nestlings” fable story and morality coincide, and with that the Christian element is already mentioned in the beginning of the fable text.

29 Montaigne Michel de, “Que Philosopher, c’est apprendre à mourir”, in *Les Essais*, eds. J. Balsamo – M. Magnien – C. Magnien-Simonin (Paris: 2007) 88–89.

30 Montaigne Michel de, *The Essays*, transl. and ed. M.A. Screech (Harmondsworth: 1991) 96.

31 Freitag translated by Golding, *A Moral Fable-Talk* 294.

32 Freitag translated by Golding, *A Moral Fable-Talk* 296.

The meditation advocated by the three fables takes place not so much through the reading of traditional Aesopian fables, but rather through contemplation of the wonderful things of nature – indeed, the last three fables do not belong to the traditional Aesopian corpus. Through the contemplation focused on the things of nature, the three fables fit in seamlessly with the essence of contemplative meditation, as described by Walter Melion and Karl Enenkel, quoting from Louis Richeome's (1544–1625) *Pelerin de Lorete* (1604):

Contemplation is a regard of the eyes of the soule fastened attentively upon some object, as if after having meditated of the creation, she should set her eye of her understanding fast and fixed upon the greatness of God, upon the beauty of the Heavens [...].³³

Within the Gheeraerts filiation, the three final fables of the *Mythologia ethica* form a meditative climax, which would only be matched by the *Vorsteliicke warande der dieren* (1617), the influential fable book by the Dutch poet Joost van de Vondel (1587–1679). In this collection, which is a Dutch adaptation of the *Esbatement moral*, illustrated with the same copper etchings by Gheeraerts, Vondel adds a fourth to the last three meditative fables, namely “The Old Stork”. This fable is the fifth after the last fable in the *Esbatement moral*: that is, Vondel placed the fourth after the last fable of the *Esbatement moral* elsewhere in his collection, so that the fable “The Old Stork”³⁴ forms one whole with the three final meditative fables and is, together with these fables, embedded in a religious context, which, in the case of Vondel in 1617, is Mennonistic.³⁵

Epilogue

After Vondel, this meditative whole crumbles. This is already evident in Sadeler's German *Theatrum morum* and becomes even clearer in the French

33 Enenkel K.A.E. – Melion W.S., “Introduction: Types and Functions of Meditation in the Transition from Late Medieval to Early Modern Intellectual Culture”, in idem, *Meditatio – Refashioning the Self* (Leiden – Boston: 2011) 1–23 (here 15).

34 The stork takes care of its nestlings, so that they will take care of the parents when they are old. This originally non-meditative fable is spiritualized by Vondel: the stork raises its nestlings in ‘Godsdienst’ (religion) and ‘Godzaligheyd’ (godliness), so that the young can pass this education on to their offspring. Implicit in Vondel's concept of “religion” is the fifth of the Ten Commandments: ‘Honour thy father and thy mother.’

35 For example, the emphasis in the final fable “The Stork and Its Nestlings” on avoiding lust is typical of Mennonite thought. This emphasis is absent in the other fable books of the Gheeraerts filiation.

fable books derived from this work. In the *Theatrum morum*, the fable “The Stork and Its Nestlings” disappears and is replaced by a new fable by Sadeler, which is by no means meditative, namely “Vom gefangnen Knecht und Esel” (The Imprisoned Servant and the Donkey).³⁶ It is true that the two remaining meditative fables remain combined, but they are given a different place in the collection: “The Swan and the Stork” becomes fable 112, “The Phoenix” fable 111.

Sadeler’s copper plates end up in France via an unknown route, and they are republished with French prose adaptations of Sadeler’s German text. The first prose adaptation (1659)³⁷ is by Trichet du Fresne (1611–?). The two meditative fables are separated from each other but remain in close proximity³⁸ because in this collection all fables with birds as protagonists are placed together. In “The Phoenix” the Christological-meditative meaning is somewhat preserved: ‘C’est ainsi que le Chrestien doit esperer’ (This is what the Christian should hope). However, this meaning completely disappears in “The Swan and the Stork”, and it is replaced by a profane philosophical moral: ‘Les belles ames ne craignent jamais la mort’ (Great spirits never fear death). In the anonymous prose adaptation of 1689³⁹ both fables remain unchanged, both in placement⁴⁰ and in meaning.

However, the meditative element disappears altogether from the third French prose adaptation of 1743, an anonymous fable book, the texts of which are probably by Henri-François d’Aguesseau (1668–1751).⁴¹ The term “prose adaptation” is actually incorrect because the editor Aguesseau did not have the original German text by Sadeler in mind, and probably only very superficially looked at one of the two French adaptations of 1659 and 1689. This is evident in his “adaptation” of “The Swan and the Stork”, which is labelled with the comment ‘Auteur inconnu’. “The Phoenix”, labelled ‘Emblême, et non Fable’, is now completely stripped of its Christological meaning: the author even doubts the existence of the renewing phoenix: ‘chose merveilleuse, et à laquelle on

36 This is the summary of this non-meditative fable: A servant condemned to death promises to teach a donkey to read within seven years, if he is released. His master agrees. The smart servant’s consideration is that it is probable that in seven years’ time either the donkey, the master, or he himself will be dead. Time solves everything.

37 [Trichet du Fresne Raphaël], *Figures diverses tirées des Fables d’Esopé et d’autres et expliquée par R. D. F* (Paris, Claude Cramoisy: 1659).

38 “The Swan and the Stork” becomes fable 122, and “The Phoenix” becomes fable 124.

39 Anon., *Fables d’Esopé avec les figures de Sadeler. Traduction nouvelle* (Paris, Pierre Aubouyn – Pierre Emery – Charles Clouzie: 1689).

40 In this fable book, these are fables 112 and 114.

41 [Aguesseau Henri-François d’], *Les Fables d’Esopé, gravées par Sadeler. Avec un discours préliminaire et les Sens Moraux en Distiques. Edition différente de la première* (Paris, Thiboust: 1743).

a grande raison de se recrier⁴² (which is a marvellous thing, which we have great reason to doubt loudly). And he adds an ironic distichon: ‘Partage trop charmant, à qui tout feroit fête, / Helas ! pourquoi n’es-tu, que celui d’une bête⁴³ (You sharing [i.e. the property to renew itself] too charming, which would be applauded by everyone, / Alas! why are you only that of a beast). This is the final blow that Aguesseau, influenced by the early Enlightenment, deals to the meditative fables in the Gheeraerts filiation. Times have changed forever.

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