Olivier Leplatre. *Les Fables du pouvoir: L'utopie poétique de La Fontaine*. Paris: Hermann, 2021. 486 pp. 45€. Review by Céline Zaepffel, Universiteit Leiden.

In this augmented edition of *Le Pouvoir et la Parole dans les* Fables *de La Fontaine* (first published in 2002 by the Presses Universitaires de Lyon), Olivier Leplatre focuses on the relationship between the fables of La Fontaine and the concept of power (*pouvoir*). He analyses the treatment of power as a motive within those texts. The concept of power has a double meaning since it could also refer to any political government. Thus, Leplatre shows that studying the link between fables and power also implies (re)questioning their relationship to the monarchy.

The introduction offers a condensed reminder of the previous academic studies that focus on topics related to the question of power in La Fontaine's work. This review is followed by Leplatre's hypothesis, which states that fables do not accurately portray La Fontaine's opinion on this topic. They allow the reader, rather, to experience an intimate form of power that is woven into a playful language. The book is divided into five sections. Each of them delves into a different aspect of this hypothesis by resorting to the stylistic analysis of a whole array of fables.

The first section of the book (chapters 1–3) explores how the literary genre of fables is closely linked to power. Indeed, Leplatre reminds us that fables depict a brief encounter between two protagonists who are not equal. According to him, the exchange describes a power struggle between both parties who are seeking domination. The dialogue between both characters makes this dynamic noticeable to the reader, but also to the characters themselves, one of whom will end up being a victim. It gives the dominant characters a hold over the weaker ones by reminding them of the established order: in the fables' world, speaking (to the victims) often comes with eating (them). Leplatre thus reports that "mouths" are heavily present in fables. They often represent traps and tools to exercise power. This phenomenon motivates Leplatre to reexplore the anthropomorphism underpinning fables: the power of speech allows animals to represent humans. However, because speech is used to exert violence, it is also what makes

them inhuman. Therefore, according to Leplatre, La Fontaine's *Fables* reveal that people's speaking ability is what makes human beings human but also what could cause them to lose their humanity.

In the second section of the book (chapters 4–7), Leplatre analyses the role of speech, appearing both as an attribute of power and as an instrument to increase it. Leplatre explores La Fontaine's *Fables* by studying the voices they feature (who speaks, how, by which means, and what tone is used). The dialogues they display never seem to reconcile the characters, who either play their part without listening to one another, or use language as a trap for each other. Hence, by means of language, strong characters force weak ones to reason, beg, and express feelings when the former have already made up their minds about the destiny of their victim. The stronger ones suddenly cut dialogue short, pronounce their sentence, and condemn weaker ones by eating them: "Sire loup parle, condamne, puis mange" (157). However, the cautious use of language can backfire against stronger characters who play a role that is not representative of their identity. This gives Leplatre the opportunity to remind the reader of the links La Fontaine draws with theatre.

In fables, speech is a medium that forces the characters to surrender and accept both strength and social order. For this reason, the third section of the book (chapters 8–10) demonstrates to the reader the judicial aspects to which powerful characters are entitled by simply considering and introducing themselves as authoritative. Leplatre emphasizes how symbols of power enforce obedience. For example, by the mean of speech, kings and lords exercise their title—and thus political power—against other characters by turning against them a so-called justice they have entirely made up. It is with conspicuous delight that prevailing characters put language at the service of their supremacy: "Les puissants sont ainsi les seuls à parler vraiment ; ils font et défont le langage, ils le dressent" (201). In their dialogue, strength and violence are made laws, and weakness is seen as proof of guilt. Leplatre highlights the occurrence of this phenomenon even though the victims' speeches are usually filled with truth, common sense, and fair judgment. This makes the victory of the powerful animals even more dazzling.

The fourth section (chapters 11–12) addresses the educational projects La Fontaine's *Fables* might conceal towards the monarchy: the education of the Dauphin and the criticism of absolutism. Leplatre reminds us of the political use of emblematic fables as instruments for social order, that highlight the power and strength of the king. Therefore, if La Fontaine wanted to approach the monarchy by the mean of his fables, Leplatre explains that the author must have deeply considered how to convey his messages. Yet, La Fontaine's playful, joyful language does not hide the close links his fables maintain with the monarchy. There is a balance between the political and the poetical aspects of the fables. Because they are pure fiction, each fable becomes a stage for power to be both displayed and investigated. Fables show that language can be turned into an instrument of power, but La Fontaine seems to refuse this shift in his work. To avoid that he, according to Leplatre, insists on the fictional nature of his texts, which do not carry any absolute truths. Instead, the fables should take the reader—and the writer—on a journey through the pleasures of childhood.

In the last section (chapters 13–16), Leplatre explores this pleasure, conveyed by the structure of fables, that is delaying their conclusion. He shows, by considering the metaliterary aspects of fables, that La Fontaine's poetry reinforces the power of fiction. It thus becomes a symbol of freedom, in contrast with the absolutism of the monarchy. Even though this fiction might lead to disillusion, Leplatre believes that reading La Fontaine's *Fables* results in exploring the human temptation for power.

In conclusion, Leplatre's body of research reminds us that fables are short stories featuring two protagonists whose encounter depicts an obvious power dynamic. But surprisingly, this isn't reflected in the often-violent story endings. Instead, it is expressed through the dialogues which convey to both the reader and victim of the fable that control and power could shift at any moment. This has to do with the close links La Fontaine draws between power of speech and pleasure. Leplatre remains unsure on the popular hypothesis which states that La Fontaine would have wanted to give the monarchs any lesson on power through his fables. La Fontaine's relationship to this motive seems quite mysterious, too. Nevertheless, he opened a space where the reader can experiment with power by reimagining it through the

playful aspects of fiction that come with childhood, imagination, and a deep exploration of language.

Leplatre's investigation is thus comprehensive and dense. It offers its reader both an extensive overview on the topics that are related to the motive of power, and a rich stylistic reading of many relevant fables. He renews formerly recognized analyses by condensing and completing them with original and unpublished ones, but also with historical considerations. Not only does Leplatre offer generous, convincing, and thorough studies of these texts, he deepens them sporadically by considering fables into their relationship with some famous illustrations (especially Chauveau's works), which has been somewhat neglected after Bassy's enormous study on this topic.

However, as is often the case with such extensive research, following Leplatre's reasoning might be sometimes arduous. We, for instance, regret the fact that there is no other entry into his work than its complete reading. The titles of the different sections and chapters of the book often lack clarity as to their content. The addition of an index of the fables the study refers to is helpful, nevertheless insufficient for a researcher who needs to find their way into one topic in particular. Fortunately for such a reader, the reading process is pleasant and certainly enriching. Especially for those whose curiosities might be aroused by a demonstration of La Fontaine's ability to transform the motive of power into a—once again—playful exploration of the language's infinite strengths.

Jessie Hock. *The Erotics of Materialism: Lucretius and Early Modern Poetics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021. 234 pp. $59.95. Review by Katherine Calloway, Baylor University.

Jessie Hock traces how Lucretius's poetics—not just his natural philosophy—shaped the work of five early modern poets: Pierre de Ronsard, Remy Belleau, John Donne, Lucy Hutchinson, and Margaret Cavendish. Hock's larger project is to deepen our understanding of Lucretius's recovery and reception in early modern Europe: surfacing in 1417, Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* failed to gain philosophical traction until Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655). What happened in the