Like a number of his contemporaries, Jules Larforgue (1860–87) was open to the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer and the latter’s disciple, Eduard von Hartmann. However, in Laforgue’s particular case, this double influence went far beyond the borrowing of a few concepts. The fact of reading these two authors intensively from the age of 20, and especially his predilection for Hartmann’s Die Philosophie des Unbewussten (Philosophy of the Unconscious), proved a truly formative influence. Indeed, Laforgue constructs his very Weltanschauung by combining the systems of both predecessors in his own particular way.

Small wonder, then, that Laforgue’s first collections of poetry are full of references to Schopenhauer and Hartmann. Yet it is in his prose works that such references acquire their most surprising and interesting form. His collection of novellas, Moralités légendaires (Moral Tales), is presented explicitly as a parody of great artistic and literary myths (Hamlet, Lohengrin, Salome, etc.). It can also be read on another level, as a rewriting of the two philosophers who have especially influenced him. The integration of a truly philosophical system within a work of fiction is striking in itself. But the main originality of the procedure consists in the fact that Laforgue’s parodic rewriting of myths is made possible and shaped by his reading of the philosophers in question (so that philosophy and myth are not simply co-present in the text). For Laforgue transforms various mythical figures into true disciples of Schopenhauer and Hartmann, as reflected in their actions as well as their precepts. He uses the thought of these philosophers as a prism through which he not only views the world but also reinterprets literature.
Below, we will show this complex intertextual practice at work in those novellas by Laforgue in which it is most strikingly deployed: ‘Hamlet ou les suites de la piété filiale’ (‘Hamlet or the Consequences of Filial Piety’), ‘Salomé’ (‘Salome’) and ‘Lohengrin, fils de Parsifal’ (‘Lohengrin, Son of Parzival’). However, first it is useful to establish, if briefly, the importance of Schopenhauer and Hartmann for Laforgue. In the relevant period, while Schopenhauer’s thought was being vulgarized by a number of writers (including Théodule Ribot), only parts of his work were available in French translation. Nevertheless, his thought had a wide impact. As for Hartmann’s summing-up of his key ideas, Die Philosophie des Unbewussten, it was translated into French in 1877, or several years before Laforgue began his writing career (circa 1880). At the age of 20, Laforgue was spending most of his time at the Bibliothèque Nationale, and very soon made both writers his intellectual guides.

This influence was not limited to the taking of notes, but was manifested in Laforgue’s earliest works, in the form of creative rewriting. Indeed, at 20, he began to write a novel based substantially on the thought of his two predecessors:

J’ai mon roman aussi. Un Chenavard disciple de Schopenhauer, qui se tue de se sentir devenir fou de ne pouvoir arriver à réaliser cette œuvre: l’épopée macabre de l’humanité (l’histoire et le XIXe siècle) en trois g[ran]ds cartons correspondant aux trois stades de l’Illusion de Hartmann.

(I also have a novel. [It portrays a certain] Chenavard, disciple of Schopenhauer, who kills himself because he senses he is losing his sanity when he fails to achieve his great work: a macabre epic of humanity [through history and the nineteenth century] in three great paintings corresponding to Hartmann’s three stages of Illusion.)

However, above all, it is in the Moralités légendaires, the collection of novellas published posthumously in 1887, that Laforgue’s reworking of philosophy is most fully manifest. The length of these texts allows him to deploy, in certain cases, a protocol that combines the rewriting of the ‘primary intertexts’ (as we might refer to the myths) with that of passages from Schopenhauer and Hartmann. (This creates, as explained above, a prism through which the original works are reinterpreted.) Of all the novellas, ‘Hamlet ou les suites de la piété filiale’ contains the greatest number of borrowings from the two philosophers, and in this