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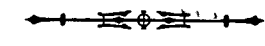
Early Modern Europe

Pauline Yu

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED SOCIETIES

China

The Longman Anthology of World Literature



David Damrosch

General Editor

VOLUME E

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Marshall Brown

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with contributions by

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❖ CROSSCURRENTS ❖

The Folk and Their Tales

Folk song, folktale, folkways, folk legend, folk belief, folk saying, folk wisdom. These have existed, of course, ever since there were people to share them. But only in the later eighteenth century did Europeans feel enough distance from "the folk" to stand back and admire. Indeed, it was only then that these very phrases were coined and entered our language. The first modern collection of folk songs was Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (1765), which mixed popular ballads with well-known poems from the last three centuries. In England Percy was followed notably by the young Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-1803), which pursued the association of folk writing with rural and regional cultures. But it was especially in the politically fragmented and culturally backward Germany that the search for roots and commonalities fueled a compelling interest in folk materials. In 1778 and 1779 Johann Gottfried Herder, a friend of Goethe's and a prolific literary critic, philosopher, world historian, preacher, theologian, educator, poet, and translator, issued *Folksongs*, a collection with the newly minted word as its title and with a novel arrangement by regions and cultural groups; mostly European but ending with a section entitled "Songs of the Savages." For Herder, folk literature was the authentic expression of original cultures: "It cannot be doubted that poetry and especially song were originally entirely popular ["volksartig"], i.e., light, simple, from objects and in the language of the crowd as well as of nature's richness and universal feeling. Song loves the crowd, the concord of many. . . . The whole world and its languages, particularly the oldest, gray orient, provides a host of traces of this origin."

Other popular traditions long preceded folk songs. From antiquity came beast fables, and the magical tales of *The Thousand and One Nights* were translated into French in the seventeenth century, riding a wave of fascination with the Near and Far East. All these currents came together in another German collection that has surely become one of the most widely read of books, the *Children's and Domestic Tales* of the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (1812, 1815), more often known by some version of the title *German Folktales*. The Grimms collected their tales from informants, then adapted them into a distinctive mix of sentimental propriety with a sometimes gory notion of primitive purity. An essay written in 1816 by Wilhelm Grimm reflects the idealization of folkways that emerged out of the combined interests in ballad, magic, and exoticism:

A good angel is granted to man from his homeland and accompanies him on his journey through life as a companion; he who does not feel the benefits that he reaps thereby may well feel them when he crosses the borders of his fatherland, where the angel abandons him. This benevolent companionship is the inexhaustible reward of fairy tales, legends, and story, which, together, strive to bring us ever after into proximity with the fresh and enlivening spirit of primitive times.

Especially in its German form (*Volk*, pronounced "folk" with an audible *V*), the term "folk" has sometimes been corrupted by modern racism and genocide. But a fruit may be wholesome before it rots. The fables of Aesop and their French imitations were long used as school texts on account of their accessible simplicity, their palatable morality, and (in La Fontaine's case) their wry humor. After Herder and Grimm, literature for children came to be understood as the literature of childhood, representing both individual development and the early stages of society. A new interest in different cultures and different stages of life made folk documents into powerful sources of inspiration and understanding. Some degree of condescension toward "primitives" and "savages" remained and was inseparable from the dawning apprehension of their contributions to humanity; it is hard to learn from children, to respect them, and to teach them all at the same time, and the complexity increases when it becomes an issue

of regional cultures, alien civilizations, and the dark reaches of the psyche. In the tales and in their telling it is worth the effort of sorting out and understanding all these intricate motivations beneath the fascinating surface.

← — — — — →

Aesop's Fables

c. 6th century B.C.E.

Aesop's fables were popular in ancient Athens. Their author and exact nature remain a mystery. The name Aesop is attached to a sixth century B.C.E. slave. It is said that he was very ugly and that the citizens of Delphi threw him off a cliff for nonpayment of a charity; the gods punished them with a plague. Written fables survive only from centuries after the time of the supposed author, originally in prose, later in verse. The best-known collection consists of ninety-seven fables in easy but not childish Latin verse written by a freed slave named Phaëdrus in the first century B.C.E. These were perennially used as introductory readings for students learning Latin, as all educated European men (but few women) did throughout the nineteenth century. Given here are several fables in an anonymous prose translation typical of the more childlike versions of the nineteenth century, in which the fables are both charming in style and pointed in their conclusions.

The Wolf and the Lamb

Once upon a time a Wolf was lapping at a spring on a hillside, when, looking up, what should he see but a Lamb just beginning to drink a little lower down. "There's my supper," thought he, "if only I can find some excuse to seize it." Then he called out to the Lamb, "How dare you muddle the water from which I am drinking?"

"Nay, master, nay," said the Lamb; "if the water be muddy up there, I cannot be the cause of it, for it runs down from you to me."

"Well, then," said the Wolf, "why did you call me bad names this time last year?"

"That cannot be," said the Lamb; "I am only six months old."

"I don't care," snarled the Wolf; "if it wasn't you it was your father," and with that he rushed upon the poor little Lamb and

WARRA WARRA WARRA WARRA WARRÁ—

ate her all up. But before she died she gasped out—

"ANY EXCUSE WILL SERVE A TYRANT."

The Lion's Share

The Lion went once a-hunting along with the Fox, the Jackal, and the Wolf. They hunted and they hunted till at last they surprised a Stag, and soon took its life. Then came the question how the spoil should be divided. "Quarter me this Stag," roared the Lion; so the other animals skinned it and cut it into four parts. Then the Lion took his stand in front of the carcass, and pronounced judgment: "The first quarter is for me in my capacity as King of Beasts; the second is mine as arbiter; another share comes to me for my part in the chase; and as for the fourth quarter, well, as for that, I should like to see which of you will dare to lay a paw upon it."

"Humph," grumbled the Fox as he walked away with his tail between his legs; but he spoke in a low growl—

"YOU MAY SHARE THE LABOURS OF THE GREAT, BUT YOU WILL NOT SHARE THE SPOIL."

The pair of geese brought a stick and said to the turtle: "Now, hold on to the middle of this stick firmly with your teeth. We will then take hold of the ends and carry you through the air to a large lake far away."

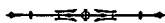
So they did this, and as the turtle was being flown over a town near that lake, the town's people saw this and caused a commotion, shouting: "What is that pair of birds carrying in the air? It looks like a cart wheel."

When the turtle, whose end was near, heard this, he let go of the stick and asked: "What is the commotion?"

The words were no sooner out of his mouth than he lost his grip on the stick, fell to the ground, and was killed. As soon as he fell down, people eager for his flesh cut him up into pieces with sharp knives.

The lady sandpiper continued: "Therefore I say:

When a man does not heed the words of friends . . ."



Jean de La Fontaine

1621-1695

The French poet and dramatist Jean de La Fontaine made his career in Paris, where he was supported by noble patrons who were charmed by his wit even though they were often unsettled by his religious skepticism and easy-going morality. The raciness of some of his tales drew the disapproval of King Louis XIV, but the purity and grace of his style led to his election to the Académie Française, the group of forty leading writers charged with protecting and perfecting the French language. La Fontaine is best known for his witty, ambiguous *Fables*, published in several series between 1668 and 1692. The first series was modeled on Aesop, but then La Fontaine turned to oriental sources. He knew the *Panchatantra* tales from a French translation of a Persian or Arabic translation ascribed to Pilpay (the name derives ultimately from the Indian sobriquet, Vidyapati, "Lord of knowledge"), of the Sanskrit original. That La Fontaine should have found the work so pertinent to the perilous world of Absolutist France, with which he was intimately familiar as a client of the courtly nobility, is testament not only to the enduring value of a good story but also to the enduring need for understanding the small ways of getting ahead, or getting away—knowing how to use your wits and, above all, when to bite your tongue.

The Turtle and the Two Ducks¹

A turtle, none too quick of mind,
And tiring of her hole, was quite inclined
To roam the world and visit lands far-flung.

(A common wish, especially among

The lame, or slow of limb, confined

To lodgings that they come to hate,

Such as our tortoise friend.) At any rate,

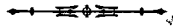
Two ducks she prattled to of her ambition

Assured her they could bring it to fruition:

1. Translated by N. R. Shapiro.

20 A simple stick. Each bites one end: "Now, there!"
 They say. "You bite the middle." She complies.
 The ducks advise: "Hold tight! Take care!"
 And up they rise, high in the air,
 Much to the wonder and surprise
 25 Of those below, who see her, house and all,
 Hanging between two ducks! "Come look!" they call.
 "A miracle! The Turtle Queen is flying
 Heavenward!" "Queen!" she boasts. "There's no denying . . ."
 Those words would be her last. Poor fool! She should
 30 Have kept her big mouth shut! Instead,
 She opened it, and now it's shut for good,
 As she lies—dashed to pieces—proud, but dead.

A babbling tongue, vain curiosity,
 And witlessness: one family!
 35 All of a kind, all kith and kin—
 And all of them; in time, will do you in.



The Pali Jātakas
 early centuries B.C.E.

It is not easy to conceive of two worlds more distant from each other in time, space, and mentality than that of the Buddhists of India in the last centuries B.C.E., and of African-American slaves of the antebellum South. Yet, in an even more remarkable episode in the global circulation of stories than the one just noted, some connections between them seem possible to trace. In the early stages of their discipline, folklorists vigorously debated whether an identical folk motif can be independently invented in several places (what is called *polygenesis*), or whether a motif is invented once only and disseminated from its place of origin (*monogenesis*, or diffusion theory). Often the peculiarity of the motif—and a sticky adversary is certainly peculiar—was thought to be significant for a judgment of monogenesis, and the next task was to figure out the exact route of diffusion.

The tale of Prince Five-Weapons is preserved in a story collection in the Pali Canon of Buddhist scripture, containing several hundred *jātakas*—stories told by the Buddha of his former births in the course of the vast cycle of transmigration. In each birth-story the Bodhisattva, or future Buddha, exemplifies some moral attainment of the Middle Path. Like the *Panchātantra*, the tale of Prince Five-Weapons along with other birth stories was translated into Persian and from Persian into Arabic. Arabs may then have passed along the stories to Africans who came within their ambit in the course of the Atlantic slave trade.

Two broader implications can be drawn from studying this kind of circulation. What is so often represented as the unique genius of a given folk and their authentic cultural property—everything from tales to musical motifs to textile patterns—often turns out to have been borrowed from another folk, who borrowed it from yet another, and so on indefinitely. Identifying any link in the chain as the ultimate source is therefore only to admit that historical research can take us no further; in fact, culture can be seen to flow through the world like water or air. That said, however, different folk clearly make different uses of the pieces of culture they acquire. For the early Buddhists the tale of the sticky adversary would afford an opportunity to reflect