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Pancatantra and Aesop's Fables:
A Look In to Teaching Morality and Social Conduct

There are similarities to be found in different works of literature from many different times as well as different cultures from all over the world. One of the easiest recognizable similarities in some of these works is the use of animals to teach sound morals and lessons on conduct. The use of anthropomorphized animals give these stories a less threatening tone while still teaching listeners a lesson. Many cultures throughout history, as well as in current times, have used and continue to use the idea of personified animals to instruct others. Two fables from the world's vast collection of works that seem to be extremely comparable are: "The Blue Jackal" from *Pancatantra* and "The Ass in Lion's Skin" from *Aesop's Fables*. In Visnuserman's *Pancatantra* (a collection of Indian fables written anywhere from 300 to 101 BCE) and *Aesop's Fables* (a collection of fables accredited to an ancient Greek who lived from 620 to 560 BCE), the use of anthropomorphized animals to teach moral values and lessons about how one should act is seen repeatedly. Both fables tell a story of an animal disguising himself to fool others, while trying to teach the lesson that pretending to be something you are not will almost always end badly.

It is possible that writers, such as Visnuserman and Aesop, used animals with human traits in their fables to not only give the stories an entertaining feel but to

also disconnect the listener from the story, helping them to learn without seeing traits they have in any of the characters within the story. Disconnecting a listener or a reader from a story can help them view it from a less critical angle and perhaps make them more susceptible to its message; the misdirection found in the personification of animals accomplishes that, leading readers or listeners to believe that they are experiencing a simple fairytale and not a serious lesson.

Visnuserman in the “The Blue Jackal” found in his work Pancatantra, writes about a jackal named Fierce-Howl who is died Indigo and is mistaken by the other animals as some sort of mystical creature. Fierce-Howl uses this misconception to rule over the other animals and drives all of the other jackals out of his kingdom. He writes, “Come, come you wild things! Why do you flee in terror at sight of me? For Indra ‘(king of the gods)’ realizing that the forest creatures have no monarch, anointed me—my name is Fierce-Howl—as your king” (Simon 1258). Later in the story, after he has made himself king, Fierce-Howl hears the howls of other jackals and cannot resist the urge to howl along with them. When he howls the other animals realize Fierce-Howl is a jackal. Upon fleeing Fierce-Howl is caught and “torn to bits” by a tiger (Simon 1258). Because animals are generally seen as inferior to humans in most cultures, through the personification of Fierce-Howl Visnuserman is able to give a less serious tone to his readers or listeners. If it was a human who fooled his kinsman and was killed, a different response can be expected.

In similar fashion to Visnuserman’s “The Blue Jackal”, Aesop’s fable “The Ass in Lion’s skin” depicts an animal pretending to be something he is not, and who in the end meets consequences because of it. Aesop writes the story of an ass that has

found a lion's skin left behind by hunters. The ass puts on the skin and walks into town, which causes both humans and animals to flee in terror. Aesop describes the ass reveling in his newfound power and writes, "and he was a proud ass that day" ("Aesop's Fables Online Collection"). The ass, due to excitement, lifted his voice and brayed causing everyone to recognize him as the ass. When the people realize he is not a lion his owner gives him a solid beating ("Aesop's Fables Online Collection"). At the end of the fable Aesop writes, "Fine clothes may disguise, but silly words will disclose a fool" ("Aesop's Fables Online Collection"). Akin to Visnuserman's fable "The Blue Jackal", Aesop uses the personification of animals to form a less serious tone for his readers and listeners. Although he is still able to convey a message and give a moral, it is in disguise of silly animals doing silly things.

The correlation between these two fables can show us (as students of literature) the emphasis that many cultures had, and continue to have, on sound morals and good conduct. The use of anthropomorphized animals to teach lessons on morality and conduct, because of their less sincere tone, can be an adequate tool to teach both children and adults. This idea is not exclusively Indian and Greek but has been, and still is, used in many cultures today; from the Native Americans, the tribes of Sub Saharan Africa, and even the Vikings. People have always taken great care to teach morality and proper social conduct through fables such as these. Whether it is a lesson on not pretending to be something you're not in order to make personal gains or a simple lesson on not stealing, these teachings are welcomed easier when the reader or listener is detached from the story.

Works Cited

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