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Impact of Fables on English Literature

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Abstract

Fables have played a pivotal role in shaping English Literature, serving as a foundational genre that imparts moral lessons through allegorical storytelling. Originating from ancient traditions, notably Aesop's fables, these narratives often feature anthropomorphized animals and mythical creatures to highlight human virtues and vices. The simplicity and universality of fables have allowed them to transcend cultural and temporal boundaries, making them a timeless tool for education and moral instruction. In English literature, fables have influenced a wide range of genres, from children's literature to political satire. Notable authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer, John Dryden and George Orwell have drawn inspiration from fables to craft works that critique societal norms and human behavior. The enduring appeal of fables lies in their ability to engage readers' imaginations while delivering profound ethical messages, thus cementing their place as a significant literary form.

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Introduction

Definition of Fables

The word "Fable" is derived from the Latin word "Fibula", which means a story, "and a derivative of the word "Fari", which means "Speak.

- Fables are short stories, typically featuring animals as characters that convey moral lessons.
- Originating from ancient oral traditions fables have been influential in various cultures, including Greek Roman and eventually England.

Fable is a literary genre defined as a succinct fictional story, in prose or verse, the features like animals, legendary creatures, plants, inanimate objects or forces of nature that are anthropomorphized, and that illustrate or leads to a particular moral lesson, which may latter added explicitly as a concise maxim or saying.

In other words, it may be stated that fable is a short fictional story and its main objective is to transport any moral lesson.

Types of Fables in Literature: Often, we assume fables all the same but they may be classified in following way:

Animal's Fables: These fables feature animals' with human characteristics and often convey moral lessons through their behavior. Example: Aesop's "The Tortoise and the Hare" and "The Fox and the Grapes".

Object Fables: These fables involve inanimate objects that exhibit human-like behaviors or qualities. They are less common but still serve to illustrate a moral. For instance, a fable might involve a pair of shoes that argue about which is more important.

Human Fables: In such fables, human-beings are the protagonists of the story. Here humans are related to other human-beings, inert-beings, Gods and animals. These stories often focus on human interactions and societal behaviors, such as those found in many of Jean de La Fontaine's fables.

Nature Fables: These fables incorporate natural elements or setting to illustrate their moral. They might focus on the interplay between different elements of nature or the natural world's response to human behavior. In such fables, plants, and flowers are the protagonists. They represent traits more focused on humans, such as moving, talking, dancing, thinking, enjoying etc.

Etiological Fables: These fables focus to historical situations. In such fables events are more important than the characters. These events are portrayed in such a way that they make the story more entertaining.

Mythological Fables: These fables incorporate mythological creatures or Gods and are rooted in ancient traditions. They use mythological settings and characters to explore human nature and ethics.

Agonal Fables: These fables contain the opposing characters, means, there is a protagonist and an antagonist and the end of the fable leads us to praise the one who did well and punish the other. The main focus is laid in terms of rewarding the good and punishing the bad.

Each type of fable uses different methods and characters to deliver a moral lesson, but they all share the common goal of providing insight into human-beings.

Historical Context of Fables

Early Beginnings: Originating in ancient Greece, with Aesop, fables were designed to teach moral lessons through simple, engaging narratives. Fables were passed down through oral traditions before being recorded in written form.

Roman Contributions: Roman writer like Phaedrus adapted and expanded on Aesop's Fables, influencing their transmission to medieval Europe.

Medieval & Renaissance Adaptations: In medieval-England, Fables were incorporated into educational texts & moral tales, often used to teach both children and adults. Renaissance writers revitalized interest in classical fables, emphasizing their moral & educational value.

Influence of Fables on Early English Literature

Geoffrey Chaucer's use of fables: Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" includes fable like elements, blending moral lessons with narrative story telling. Chaucer's fable influenced tales helped to establish the use of allegory in English literature.

John Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress: Bunyan's work reflects fable like qualities through allegory and moral instruction, demonstrating how fable traditions influenced narrative techniques and religious themes.

Prominent Fable Writer and Their Impact

John Gay (1685-1732): The writer was known for adapting traditional fables to reflect contemporary issues, using satire to comment on society and politics..... 18 Century Developments: The 18 century witnessed a significant development in use of fables, particularly through the works of authors like Jonathan Swift and John Gay. Swift's "Gulliver's Travels" (1726) incorporated fable like elements, using politics of his time. Although not fables in traditional sense, Swift's work utilized allegory and moral lessons similar to those found in fables.

John Gay's 'fables' (1727) is another key work from this period. Gay's fables were direct adaptations of Aesopian tales, rendered wit and satirical edge. His collection was notable for its literary quality and for the way it engaged with contemporary issues through the lense of fable. Gay's fables were instrumental in show, casting how fables were instrumental in showcasing how the form could be adapted to address modern concern while retaining its traditional moral function. 19 Century Innovations: The 19 century brought further innovation in the use of fables, as writers began to experiment with the form and integrate it into various genres. The most significant contribution came from the poet and the author William Blake, whose works often incorporated fable-

like allegory. Blake's 'Song of Innocence and of Experience' (1789-1794) was symbolic and allegorical language to explore themes of morality and human nature, reflecting the influence of fable traditions.

Additionally, the fable genre was expanded by the works of authors such as George Orwell. Orwell's "Animal Farm" (1945) is seminal example of how fable like allegory can be employed to critique political systems and ideologies. Orwell's use of animal characters to represent political figures and ideologies demonstrate the enduring relevance of fables as a tool for social and political commentary.

20th and 21st Century Trends: In the 20th and 21st century, the influence of fables continues to be evident in various forms of English Literature. Contemporary authors have reimagined the fable-traditions, blending it with modern themes and styles. For instance modern children's literature often incorporates fable-like elements to impart moral lessons in a way that resonates with contemporary readers.

Authors such as Roald Dahl and Dr. Seuss have used fable-like storytelling to address moral and ethical themes in their books for children. Dahl's "The Big" and Suess' "The Lorax" are examples of how fable-like narratives can be adapted to engage young readers while delivering important messages about environmentalism' kindness and social justice.

The influence of fables is also evident in the realm of graphic novels and animated films. Works like "Zootopia" and "The Lion King" draw on the fable tradition of story-telling by using animal characters to explore complex themes of identity, justice and community. These modern adaptations demonstrate the flexibility of the fable form and its continued relevance in contemporary storytelling.

Conclusion

The impact of fables on English Literature is profound and far reaching. From their origins in ancient Greece to their modern adaptations, fables have served as a powerful medium for conveying moral and philosophical lessons. They have influenced a wide range of literary forms, from early transitions and adaptations to modern children's literature and multimedia story telling. Fables have not only shaped the development of English Literature but also reflected and addressed the ethical and social concerns of different eras. Their enduring appeal lies in their ability to distil complex ideas into accessible and engaging narratives making them a vital component of the literary tradition. As English literature continues to evolve, the legacy of fables remains a testament to the power of storytelling in exploring and understanding the human condition. Furthermore, the use of allegory and symbolism has allowed authors to explore human behaviors and societal norms in a simple but powerful manner. From Aesop's ancient tales to the works of Jean de La Fontaine, fables have influenced a Wide range of literature and even modern novels like George Orwell's "Animal Farm".

The enduring appeal of fables lies in their universality and ability to transcend cultural and temporal boundaries. They continue to captivate readers with their imaginative storytelling and relatable moral lessons, making them vital part of literary tradition. Through their concise and engaging narratives, fable have not only entertained but also educated generations, reinforcing values and encouraging critical thinking.

In conclusion, the impact of fables on English literature is both significant and enduring, highlighting their role in shaping literary forms and imparting timeless wisdom.

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