

Aesop<sup>1</sup> and the Ass<sup>2</sup>

Animals in beast fables<sup>3</sup> talk and behave like humans. They are given distinctive qualities:<sup>4</sup> for example, the "dumb ass," the "meek sheep," the "rapacious<sup>5</sup> wolf," the "sly fox," the "formidable<sup>6</sup> lion and tiger, " the "ruthless<sup>7</sup> hawk," the "proud peacock," and so on. Beast fables are in fact about the hu-man world, in which people tend to label<sup>8</sup> other people as dumb, meek, rapacious, sly, proud (etc.), and call them by the names of these animals correspondingly.<sup>9</sup> In Aesop's Fables, the ass is always portrayed<sup>10</sup> as extremely unintelligent.<sup>11</sup> Ae-sop writes:

An Ass undertook to run a race with the Horse.

The result was as might have been expected,

and the Ass got laughed at. "I now see what was

the matter with me," said the Ass; "I ran a thorn

into my foot<sup>12</sup> some months ago, and it still pains

me. "

-"The Ass and the Race-Horse"

Animals are stereotyped<sup>13</sup> in Aesop's stories to moralize about<sup>14</sup> human nature, and the stereotypes persist<sup>15</sup> today. In the English language, an "ass" means a fool. In Chinese, likewise, a fool has come to be called ch'un-lu (蠢驢). Lessing,<sup>16</sup> however, makes fun of Aesop in his adaptation<sup>17</sup> of the story:

"The next time you write a fable about me," said the Ass to Aesop,

"make me say something wise and sensible."<sup>18</sup>

&quot;Something sensible from you!&quot; exclaimed Aesop; &quot;what

would the world think? People would call you the Moralist<sup>19</sup> and me the Ass!&quot;

-&quot;Aesop and the Ass&quot;

Since there is no way for an ass to trade<sup>20</sup> his role with Aesop's, the ass will most likely remain a stupid animal for a very long time to come.

註釋：

1. Aesop: 伊索 (620? --560? B.C.)，希臘寓言集Aesop's Tables (《伊索寓言》) 的作者。
2. ass: 驢，又稱donkey。
3. beast fables: 動物寓言。
4. distinctive qualities: 特性。
5. rapacious: 貪婪的。
6. formidable: 可怕的，難對付的。
7. ruthless: 殘忍的，無情的。
8. to label: 貼標籤，把人稱為... (as)。
9. correspondingly: 對應地。
10. to be portrayed as: 被描繪為...。
11. unintelligent: 不聰明的，為intelligent的相反詞。
12. to run a thorn

into one's foot: 腳被荊棘刺傷。13. to be stereotyped: 被刻板印象化。14. to moralize about: 就…說道理【通常一則寓言的結尾都有個寓意，英文叫moral，動詞是moralize】。15. to persist: 持續。16. Lessing: 萊興（Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 1729-1781），德國批評家及戲劇家。17. adaptation: 改編。18. sensible: 明智的，有見識的。19. moralist: 道德家，說教者。20. trade: v. 交換。

動物寓言是人類社會的投影，故事中形形色色的動物各具個性，單純固定。《伊索寓言》中有凶猛的獅和虎、柔弱的羊、貪婪的狼、狡猾的狐狸和驕傲的孔雀等，都是大家熟悉的動物造型。另外一種動物-驢子-也經常出現在故事中，總是因為行為愚蠢，缺乏自知之明，而淪為讀者取笑的對象。伊索的動物眾生相已成了經典，融入了讀者的意識型態和語言之中。萊興對「驢子」的刻板形象進行反思，認為人類（伊索）以筆為利劍，「謀殺」手無寸鐵的動物的形象，將驢子塑造成亙古不變的「蠢驢」。驢子為自然界的生物之一，在生態體系中自有牠的一席之地，本不需人類的褒或貶。萊興的反思，受益者其實是人類自己，學習謙恭自省，才能免於自大。

2010/09/27