

Moral Themes in Three Versions of the Bidpai Collection : A Study of Literary Adaptation

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In the present work, I intend to study and compare the moral themes in the frame story of "The Lion and the Bull" in the following versions of the Bidpai fables :

- 1) *The Panchatantra* 200 B. C.
- 2) *Kalilah Wa Dimnah* 750 A. D.
- 3) Sir Thomas North's *The Morall Philosophie of Doni* 1570, the first English vesion of the Bidpai collection.

"The Lion and the Bull" is the longest tale, and from an artistic viewpoint it is often considered the best narrative in the Bidpai collection. It constitutes Book One of *The Panchatantra*, which itself makes up about one half of the whole collection. In *Kalilah wa Dimnah* the story and a continuation of it added by the Arab translator occur in chapters 5 and 6; it is the longest frame tale in the book. In *The Morall Philosophie of Doni* "The Lion and the Bull" and its Arabic complementary part make up the major bulk of North's work.

Except for some very brief reviews of the 1888 edition and some contemporary comments, *The Morall Philasophie of Doni* has not been the subject of critical attention. *The Pachatantra* itself has not been the subject of any comprehensive analytical study in English. Scholarship on the Bidpai collection seems to be concerned with its history rather than its artistry. The need for analytical and comparative studies aimed at deeper understanding and appreciation of the tales themselves becomes evident. This study attempts to answer that need. After presenting some important historical facts, I will show how, over a period of about eighteen centuries, the Bidpai collection underwent changes in the Hindu, Islamic, and christian lands.

A study of the variations in the Bidpai fables will lead us to some of the elements which survived the process of many adaptations and translations

along the route of the fables' journey to Europe, I hope this research will add to our understanding of literary adaptation and literary translation -- especially in the eighth and sixteenth centuries. I will also analyze social, religious, political, and cultural concepts which were superimposed upon the Bidpai collection for didactic purposes at two major stations on the way from India to the West across the Arab lands.

Historical and Textual Consideration

Ibn al-Muqaffac translated "The Lion and the Bull" among other *Panchatantra* frame tales from a Pehlevi version rendered directly from Sanskrit. Since this version is now lost we cannot speak of its influence on the Arabic version, but it is clear that the Arab translator dropped some stories in which Hindu deities or teachings were given important roles such as the tale of "The Weaver Who Loved a Princess". Others he adapted by eliminating the Hindu elements, as in "The Plover Who Fought the Ocean".

The Morall Philosophie may be viewed as the end product of several Western versions rather than the work of North as such. Joseph Jacobs describes its descent as follows ;

It is the English version of an Italian adaptation of a Spanish translation of a Latin version of a Hebrew translation of an Arabic adaptation of the Pehlevi version of the Indian original.¹

It is clear from Jacob's words that *The Morall Philosophie* is seven times removed from the original. It reflects numerous changes in content, theme, and structure which the tale of "The Lion and the Bull" underwent under various hands in the West. Factors similar to those which influenced the Arab translator of the Bidpai fables influenced as well in one way or another, the Western translators who contributed to *The Morall Philosophie of Doni*.² I will therefore deal with North's text as a representative of what happened to the implied moral structure of the Bidpai collection in the West, while "The Lion and the Bull" in *Kalilah wa Dimnah* will serve to demonstrate what happened to the same text in the Arab East around eight centuries earlier.

Moral Themes in The Panchatantra Version

To understand the structure of moral values in "The Lion and the Bull" in *Kalilah wa Dimnah* and in *The Morall Philosophie* the world view

and system of values in the same tale as they occur in *The Panchatantra* must first be considered.

In *The Panchatantra*, "The Lion and the Bull" takes place in the court of a lion king in the midst of a forest whose laws and logic are like those of humans. The lion king is supported by a retinue of animals which consists of four classes called 'The circle of Four'. The Circle of four clearly reflects the Hindu caste system according to which society is strictly divided into hierarchical classes to which individuals are tied from birth. It is not possible according to this system for an individual from a lower class to move into a higher one.

The plot of "The Lion and the Bull"³ revolves around a jackal called Victor,⁴ a member of the second circle in the lion king's retinue. Victor is presumptuous and aspires to rank and distinction in the court. He even desires to influence the lion king himself. Seen in Hindu terms, he is a rebellious member of his caste. Being intelligent, he has a good eye for opportunities. One day a bull named Lively⁵ arrives near the forest where the lion Rusty⁶ lives. When Victor notices the lion's fear of the bull's loud bellowing he uses the occasion to approach him. Victor holds counsel with his fellow jackal Cheek⁷ who recommends that Victor not meddle in the matter since his low condition would not qualify him to exert any influence on the lion.

The self-willed Victor rejects Cheek's advice and holds strongly to his principle that the intelligent should always search for distinction rather than food. Then he goes to meet the lion king and offers his services to him. Noticing Victor's intelligence the lion sends him to discover the source of the bellowing. Finding the bull, Victor reports the news to the lion; after journeying back and forth he convinces Lively to go to meet the lion king by providing him with a royal safe-conduct. The lion receives the bull and the two very soon become intimate friends. The bull holds sway over the dull lion's mind and courage; as a result the other animals are neglected by the lion and the two jackals are not even allowed to meet with him. The situation deteriorates when the animals start to suffer hunger since "they lacked the lion's prowess" (pp. 55-56).

What the narrator presents up to this point is an allegory of Hindu society in which certain factors are disrupting its caste system and order, and consequently endangering peace and happiness. At the head there is a lion king, whose dullness provides the proof of his insufficiency to run his

court properly as one of his class should. His "qualifications" for kingship are presented ironically as power, ruthlessness, pride, and haughtiness. As a result of Victor's intrigue, the lion finally kills the bull although he soon regrets it. This chaos of badly performed roles in the two upper castes is clearly contrary to the Hindu ideal of organized society.

While the narrator alludes through Cheek's words to the Hindu concept of the ideal society in which each member functions within his fixed place in the caste to serve the well being of society as a whole he in no way intends to present any ideal image of the world. On the contrary, he presents a dark view of it far from the ideal, in which presumptuous individuals such as the jackal Victor care for nothing except self interest; where an ignorant tyrant such as the lion king is always liable through ignorance -- synonymous with vice in the story--to bring disorder, violence, and starvation to his people. The narrator attributes to human society as a whole the manners of the forest beasts whose major interest is survival at the expense of the others (pp. 55-7).

"The Lion and the Bull" in *The Panchatantra* does not condone surrender. It offers instead the counsel of wise living. Prudence is the proper defense against external aggression; it is favored in fact over force. Prudence is presented as the key to power and happiness. The morality which the tale as a whole preaches is not primarily religious but it is ruled by social standards. Victor's intrigue is condemned as a cause of disorder in society rather than as a sin to be punished by some supernatural power.

Moral Themes in the Arabic and in the English Versions

I will address myself to two major points in each version : the overall worldview and the narrator's attitude towards the problem of good and evil.

The narrator of "The Lion and the Bull" in *Kalilah wa Dimnah* presents an image of a world not quite so dark as the one found in *The Panchatantra* version. On the contrary, the man who instructs his sons at the beginning of the tale in *Kalilah wa Dimnah* establishes for them the basic concepts of honorable living which corresponds to Islamic idea of balance between fulfilling our worldly needs and providing a provision for the hereafter, between the physical and the spiritual in our life. According to him, the goals of one's life should be riches, dignity, and an appropriate provision for the life to come. To realize these goals, he thinks, one should earn money legally, control and invest it properly, and spend it on one's needs, on things that would please family and friends, and on whatever contributes

to charity.⁸ The concept of the hereafter is introduced as a substitute for the Hindu concept of a cyclic series of lifetimes. The hereafter in Islam, as in Christianity, is an end in itself, which is determined by the individual's actions in this life. The Hindu concept of cyclic time is changed into linear time. The principles cited above are among those which the Qur' an establishes for Moslems.⁹

In *Kalilah wa Dimnah*, the king's court is not a reflection of Hindu hierarchical society. Dimnah's guilt, therefore, is interpreted in terms of his low condition and vicious nature rather than as a result of a break with hierarchical structure in the lion king's society. Although, when first introduced in the tale, the lion king is described as "conceited, haughty, detached and contented with his own opinion" (p. 46), he does not rule within a rigid class system as does his counterpart in *The Panchatantra*. Presenting the lion's court in this way the narrator prepares the way for his own addition to the tale in the Arabic "The Investigation of the Conduct of Dimnah" where the image of the lion and his court recalls the Moslem ideal of society. From the beginning of the tale, therefore, the narrator insists on bestowing upon the lion king a more dignified character. Dimnah does not presume to ridicule him as his counterpart does in *The Panchatantra*. By declining to stress his dullness and arrogance, the narrator of the tale in *Kalilah wa Dimnah* reserves the right to change the lion's character in his own version.

In the part of the tale entitled "The Investigation of the Conduct of Dimnah" not only does the lion feel sorry for murdering shanzabah and realize that his action was both hasty and mistaken but he also seeks justice by asking his counsel to investigate the crime of Dimnah. The narrator shows how human society can and should be a place where justice reigns where good is rewarded and evil is punished, where humans are not ruled by the forest law of the survival of the fittest in mutual self-prey, an impression which looms large in *The Panchatantra*.

What image of the world do we find in *The Morall Philosophie*? In the prologue to the tale the narrator presents a somber world view the tale reflects. He superimposes on the work a gloom not found in the *Kalilah wa Dimnah* version.¹⁰ His view of the world recalls that of Christianity. He writes ;

Surely reader, this book shall be a looking

glasse for thee, wherin thou shalt most lively behold the daylie and present daungers and deceytes of mans most miserable lyfe, and the eyes of thy underrstanding shall be made open to discerne the flatteries of disceytfull men, and the wisdom of this most guileful worlde : by meanes wherof yee may easily blotte out many malignant effects of this (alas) our crooked age. (p. 14)

One means used by the narrator of *The Morall Philosophie* to support his view of the frame tale as an illustration of a dark and evil world is to make the vicious mule (who stands here for the jackal Dimnah in the Arabic) ironically condemn the world as evil. In following such a plan, the narrator wants to present evil as self-condemned. In his introductory words to the bull the mule sees only evil in the world : "Truly faith hath left hir habitation on the earth, and bountie reigneth no more in any land" (p. 146).

The Morall Philosophie is set as an image of what the narrator labels in the respective titles of its three major parts as ". . . the wonderful abuses of this wretched world," ". . . the great treason of the Court of this World," and ". . . the end of the treason and miseries of the Court of this World."

As seen by the lionking's mother in the Arabic version, who does not appear in *The Panchatntra* version, Dimnah's intrigue is a betrayal of the lion king, which harms him and the public as well. She thinks that unless such a crime is punished other vicious individuals may feel tempted to commit other crimes. To protect the community from similar crimes the lion's mother insists that it is the lion king's duty to put Dimnah to death and thus rid the court of evil.

The mother's reasoning is in fact a paraphrase of the Quranic verse :

In the Law of Equality
 There is (saving of) Life
 To you, O ye men of understanding ;
 That ye may
 Restrain yourselves.¹¹

according to which a murderer should receive the death penalty unless the aggrieved family gives remission. The application of this religious law is

considered necessary to prevent further bloodshed and to protect society from continued violence. The sense of injustice we feel at the end of "The Lion and the Bull" in *The Panchatantra* because Victor's intrigue goes unpunished is the major force behind Ibn al-Muqaffac's addition of "The Investigation of the Conduct of Dimnah" to the original tale. The lion orders a court to look into Dimnah's crime. The court applies Islamic laws : it convicts Dimnah only after two witnesses bear testimony against him, and thereupon he is executed by the order of the king.

In "The Investigation of the Conduct of Dimnah" Ibn al-Muqaffac introduces another Islamic element clearly lacking in the original Sanskrit -- that is the theological nature of Dimnah's guilt. Dimnah's intrigue is seen by Kalilah his brother, not only as a social vice which brings disruption to the lion king's court but also as a sin that must be punished in the hereafter. As Kalilah reprimands Dimnah in jail for never listening to his moral instruction he ends up by telling him that he should repent his sin :

I advise you to admit your crime and to acknowledge your sin for you are dying inevitably. And to be executed for what you have done is better than to be tormented in the hereafter, with sinners and profligates (p. 112).

The narrator in *The Morall Philosophie* stresses the theological aspect of the mule's intrigue even more than his counterpart in the Arabic. He associates the punishment with divine justice. When the leopard overhears the ass' reproof of the mule and his condemnation of the intrigue he immediately realizes that if he were allowed to overhear such a reproof it was because God wanted it to be so. And he figures that the mule should be punished by the wrathful lion, "and that he should dearely buye the Princes grieve, falling into that snare he had layde for many others" (pp. 222-23).

The narrator in *The Morall Philosophie*, unlike his counterpart in the Arabic, tries to present the nature and inner struggle of evil characters in his attempt to shape our attitude towards evil in general. Rejecting the world, in the narrator's terms, becomes in fact equivalent to struggling against evil. He presents the conflicts in the soul of a vicious character such as the mule in order to arouse the reader's disgust at evil, and to instruct him on the motivations of evil characters. After the mule's loss of his prestige in the lion king's court, following the arrival of the bull, he loses his temper and falls into a state of psychological disorder. His anger at the bull runs

rampant—a situation which leads him to intrigue his intrigue between the lion and the bull. The conflict in the mule's feelings on this occasion is clearly evident in his speech to the ass (p. 112).

After discussing the treatment of plot in the Arabic and in the English versions of "The Lion and the Bull" and the moral issues related to it, it would be worthwhile to investigate whether or not they share a common attitude as to how one should live.

Kalilah wa Dimnah recognizes the existence of evil in the world. It also assumes that man is doomed by fate—a theme illustrated in 'The Story of the Man Who Escaped from the Wolf.' But it does not call on man to surrender to evil powers nor to become morally perfect. While it does accept the Islamic principles of fate, charity, and the laws of reward and punishment in the hereafter, and integrates some of these principles in the tale, it urges man to use his reason properly in the first place; it does not see prudence as inconsistent with being a good Moslem. Man is an intelligent being and he should use prudence to protect himself against evil. The narrator of the Arabic version by no means renounces the world; his version praises a moderate style of living in which the spiritual and the physical needs of man are fulfilled.

The narrator in *The Morall Philosophie*, on the other hand, presents a theological attitude towards the problem of evil in the world. While magnifying the image of evil he often admonishes the reader against it (p. 128). He calls on him to see the world as inherently evil. Therefore, he thinks that one should reject evil and be upright in word and in deed to avoid God's punishment and to gain heaven's reward. It should be mentioned, however, that many parenthetical stories and fables in *The Morall Philosophie* illustrate man's need for prudence in order to defend himself against the evil powers around him; but the narrator tends to derive from them moral rather than practical lessons. An action for him is classified as either good or evil rather than prudent or imprudent. To live prudently for him is equivalent to living uprightly. Such morality is opposed to that of *Kalilah wa Dimnah* which is mainly practical and only secondarily theological.¹²

In dealing with moral themes in the frame tale of "The Lion and the Bull" in *The Panchatantra*, in *Kalilah wa Dimnah* and in *The Morall Philosophie of Doni* we have discovered three different moral systems, influenced by the respective religious values of Hinduism, Islam, and medieval

Christianity. The moral themes in *The Panchatantra* version are influenced by the negative Hindu view of the material world and by the Hindu rejection of the human body's attraction to concrete and material surroundings--which Hindus call 'prakriti.' The dark image of the world in *The Panchatantra* version of "The Lion and the Bull" is a result of these Hindu concepts. In addition to this, the narrator implicitly suggests that the symbolic society in the tale is vicious because its members do not perform the proper and peaceful roles assigned to them within the caste into which they are born. From the Hindu perspective evil arises when individuals break away from the teachings of 'Karma,' and 'Samsara.'²⁸ The solution of the problem of evil in the story as Cheek says to Victor is for the individual to perform his role peacefully and prudently within his caste. This is not to minimize the apparent emphasis of the work as a whole on prudence as a way of life. The Hindu concepts and morality in the tale are not at odds with prudence.

In the Arabic version the somber image of the world is not exaggerated. The fact that Islam, as a religion, speaks to both the spiritual and worldly needs of man influences the plot of the story in *Kalilah wa Dimnah*. The crime of Dimnah is not seen as a reflection of an innately evil and remediless world but as a sin punishable by the religious laws of Islam, not only in the hereafter, but on earth as well. Such punishment is considered necessary, as we have seen, for the protection and well being of society. The narrator adds Islamic concepts to the story such as the law of Equality, laying out the basis for prosperous living at the outset of the story, the preparation for the hereafter, the frequent reference to God, and the details of how to fulfil justice. However, he does not neglect the original *panchatantra* emphasis on the importance of prudence as a way of protecting oneself against aggression in this world, and as a way of doing what is wise on the right occasion in order to realize a worldly happiness which does not contradict one's spiritual fulfillment. And this is why there is a great deal of discussion of questions related to practical life and ethics as such, the elimination of which would not detract from the literary unity of the tale.

In *The Morall Philosophie of Doni* the narrator superimposes on the Arabic text a somber world view which, as we said, is identical with that of Christianity. He lays emphasis on the theological consequences of vices and virtues rather than on reasoning and the value of prudence. He does, however, retain the Arabic version's treatment of the theme of the theme of crime and how it must be punished. While the work as a whole

still illustrates the importance of prudence as a way of life, the narrator constantly emphasizes the necessity of the rejection of evil and urges the reader to live uprightly.

The changes of the Bidpai tradition in the Arabic and English versions explored in this study are many; the nature and number of these changes may justify describing the two versions as examples of literary adaptation. The concept of faithful translation is represented by neither. Although the term adaptation was not used in the eighth and sixteenth centuries in its modern sense, the literary form it denotes is represented by both *Kalilah wa Dimnah* and *The Morall Philosophie*. Ibn al-Muqaffac was aware throughout his reworking of the Bidpai narrative of the need to adapt the Sanskrit material which he drew from his pehlevi sources to the needs and tastes of his Arab Moslem readers; the Western translators who contributed to *The Morall Philosophie*, on the other hand, adapted that same tradition to Christian tastes. The introduction of the Bidpai narrative into these different cultures meant the superimposition upon the work of new social, political, religious, and cultural concepts and the elimination of some original ones. But all in all the three texts which have formed the basis of our thesis reveal that, regardless of country and creed, fundamental human truths are expressed in these animal fables. Beyond translation and adaptation, the tales survive with surprising vigor to our own day.

Notes and References

¹Introduction by Joseph Jacobs in Sir Thomas North, *Fables of Bidpai, The Morall Philosophie of Doni*, ed. Joseph Jacobs (London: David Nutt, 1888), p. xi. page references to this book will hereafter be cited in the text.

²Since there were many translators who contributed to the work I will not refer to any specific one among them as I proceed to discuss the text; I will rather refer to the narrator as such. I will refer, however, to Ibn al Muqaffac as the author of at least a part of the tale we are dealing with, since the Arabic version is clearly his alone.

³For my study of the original Sanskrit text I have used *The Panchatantra* as translated from the Sanskrit by Arthur Ryder (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1964) Ryder's source is the purnabhadra version (1199 A.D.) which Johannes Hertel edited and published in 1908; it is the most authentic text of the original *Panchatantra*. Page references to Ryder's translation will hereafter be cited in the text.

⁴This name in the original Sanskrit is 'Damanaka.'

⁵The bull's name in the original is 'Nandaka.'

⁶'Pingalaka' is the lion king's name in the Sanskrit version.

⁷'Karataka' is the name in the Sanskrit version.

⁸See *Kalilah wa Dimnah*. Trans. from Peblevi by 'Abdallah Ibn al-Muqaffac, ed. Taha Husayn and 'Abd al-Wahhab Azzam (Cairo: Matbac at al-Mac arif, 1941), pp. 43-44. This edition is deemed by critics as the most dependable of all Arabic editions of Ibn al-Muqaffac's work. Page references to this book will hereafter be cited in the text. The quotations from the book are given in my own translation.

⁹See Qur'an, S. II., 177.

¹⁰This somber world view, however, is counterbalanced in the English version by a good deal of humor in the treatment of the evil character of the mule, which gives the text both liveliness and vigor.

¹¹Qur'an, S. II, 179.

¹²See Ahmad Amin, *Duha al-Islam*, 6th ed. (Cairo, Maktabat al-Nahdah al-Misriyyah, 1961), p. 227. Amin refers to the morality of Ibn al-Muqaffac in *Kalilah wa Dimnah* as one based on philosophy rather than on religion. He mentions, however, that such morality does not contradict the spirit of religion. Islamic

spirit in *Kallih wa Dimnah*, however, has been discussed by other Arab scholars who often identify statements scattered throughout the book which reflect ideas found in the Qur' an or in the tradition of prophet Muhammad.

¹³For the meaning of these terms see David R. Kinsley, *Hinduism A Cultural perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice - Hall, Inc., 1982, pp. 84 - 85). Here, Kinsley

writes :

'Kharma,' the moral law of cause and affect by which one reaps what one sows, and 'samsara,' rebirth, combine to teach that the particular caste into which one is born is determined by one's past actions and that the caste that one will be born into in the future is being determined in the present by how one acts.