CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521025311 - The English Fable: Aesop and Literary Culture, 1651-1740
Jayne Elizabeth Lewis
Excerpt
More information

Introduction

The English fable

> In Fable, all Things hold discourse;
> Then Words, no doubt, must talk, of course.
> "Ay and No: A Fable" (1726)

During the turbulent decades that divided the English Civil Wars from the entrenchment of Georgian culture in the middle of the eighteenth century, a torrent of animal fables flooded England. Bred by native presses and imported from abroad, fables found their way into every pocket of contest and change. They proliferated in Whig pamphlets and in Tory periodicals, in the ideal syllabi of education reformers and in grammar school textbooks steeped in humanist tradition. Countless popular collections gathered up the apologues attributed to the ancient slave Aesop, then farmed them out to the pages of high neoclassical poetry. The libertine heroes of Restoration comedy tendered fables as tokens of wit; the distressed heroines of sentimental fiction turned them into emblems of domestic horror. Late Stuart censors and Whig clergymen, satirists and scholars, dancing masters and deans, Grub Street hacks and men of eminently polite letters all found room for short, moralized speaking animal narratives in their own writing: 1697 even brought Aesop from Paris to the London stage.[1] So when in 1711 Joseph Addison's Mr. Spectator observed that fables have "been still highly valued, not only in times of the greatest Simplicity, but among the most polite Ages of Mankind," he simply transposed onto history their remarkable stability within the competing currencies of contemporary English culture.[2]

This book aims to account for that stability. It asks what about fables encouraged their survival, indeed their proliferation, in a contentious and transitional age. It asks what about that age, impatient with so many long-standing genres, disposed it so kindly toward Aesop's fables – the most ancient and, in their unvarying division between story and moral, the most rigid of symbolic forms. Such questions seem obvious ones to raise. But while Augustan literary critics always kept an eye on Aesop – even regarding his fables as prototypes of the "Epick Poem," and of every "legitimate Dramatick Poem, either of the Comick or the Tragick kind" – the fate of fable criticism since has been a sorry one.[3] Strangely subterranean and fragmented, Aesopian scholarship has survived mainly in unpublished doctoral disserta-

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521025311 - The English Fable: Aesop and Literary Culture, 1651-1740
Jayne Elizabeth Lewis
Excerpt
More information

tions and relatively brief critical essays.[4] At its most public, it has been swallowed up in sweeping overviews that either lump late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English fables with their continental counterparts or span millennia of Aesopian practice.[5] Occasionally, the English fable collection wins honorable mention as a source for canonical writers like John Dryden,[6] and a giant step toward rescuing it from obscurity is taken by Annabel Patterson's recent *Fables of Power*, which devotes more than a chapter to Aesop's involvement in Restoration and early eighteenth-century political history.[7] But on the whole, it has been remarkably easy to overlook fables as a significant presence in Augustan literature; critical interest instead has centered on innovations within established genres (pastoral, satire, epic) or on the emergence of allegedly new ones (the periodical essay, the novel).[8] Little altered from their original form, Aesop's fables could, and did, appear in all of these changing verbal contexts: as Patterson suggests, sometimes they are better understood as a "function" than as a genre.[9] But the English fable also has a life of its own, and it is one whose whole story has yet to be told.

My version of the story begins in 1651, the year of John Ogilby's *Fables of Æsop, Paraphras'd in Verse and Adorn'd with Sculptures*. It ends in 1740, the year that several fables decamped from Samuel Richardson's *Æsop's Fables* (1739) to take up residence in his first novel, *Pamela*. Throughout the intervening decades hundreds of imaginary animals quarrelled, inveigled, pontificated, and schemed in prose and verse, in English, French, and Latin, alongside supporting illustrations and unadorned. Not surprisingly, the years that divide Ogilby from Richardson were also dominated by the vigorous and incessant renegotiation of the terms of English social and political life – an invariably conflictual process whose improbable end, as historians like J.H. Plumb and W.A. Speck have shown, was the formation of modern England as a stable socio-linguistic entity.[10] As if to advertise fables" fitness for such a cultural battlefield, the two most popular of the many fable collections to materialize between 1651 and 1740 were Roger L'Estrange's Stuart-sympathizing *Fables of Æsop and Other Eminent Mythologists* (1692 and 1699) and Samuel Croxall's virulently Hanoverian *Fables of Æsop and Others* (1722). Likewise, the period's most trenchant articulation of the predations and paradoxes that secure a prosperous English modernity took the form of a fable – Bernard Mandeville's ever-expanding and endlessly reprinted *Fable of the Bees*.[11] I start with Ogilby because his half-tendentious, half-conciliatory collection, in its fifth edition by 1670, pushed Aesop's fables onto the track that they would follow for the next ninety years. I stop with Richardson because his self-conscious revision of the English fable collection set out to summarize the sociopolitical contests that had been waged between its covers.

In many ways, the story I want to tell follows from Patterson's, whose title, *Fables of Power*, reflects her argument that fables, in this period as in others,

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521025311 - The English Fable: Aesop and Literary Culture, 1651-1740
Jayne Elizabeth Lewis
Excerpt
More information

are a form of covert political criticism – one that may be traced back to ancient Greece, where Aesop himself was a slave obliged to cloak trenchant philosophical and political analysis in self-protective riddles. At the same time, the better to track Aesop through late Stuart and Williamite England, Patterson identifies more specific continuities with diverse Tudor and early Stuart fabulists. She thereby demonstrates the history of commonality that, at least in England, made fables available to virtually anyone anywhere in the political spectrum. In Patterson's analysis, those at the extremes of the spectrum seem to have resorted to fables more often than those at the center – as we might expect if fables did indeed originate as slave discourse. My own argument, however, emphasizes fables" aptitude for reactive mediation between opposing sides – an aptitude which the Augustans recognized and whose resulting irony they found hugely amusing. As obvious as it is covert, a fable hotly pursues a single, highly interested perspective at the same time that it invites appropriation by competing interests. Coupled with a perverse confidence in its own cultural usefulness, I suggest, it is its desire to dramatize such paradoxes – and the resulting convulsion of authority – in the empirically available space of the printed page that most consistently distinguishes the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English fable from its Aesopian ancestors and descendants.

In speaking of "the English fable," I risk flattening an amazingly diverse assortment of literary exercises undertaken in Aesop's name. So throughout this book, it will often be most fitting to speak of "fables" rather than of "the fable." Nonetheless, the idea of an *English* fable is always implicit, as it was for many Augustan fabulists. Twenty years ago, Mary Pritchard pointed out that the first major fabulist after the English Civil Wars, John Ogilby, was determined to make his long verse fables be about England – both about the Commonwealth that the disappointed Royalist saw around him and about the monarchy that he thought should be restored. Without presuming that all English fabulists after Ogilby (who was after all a Scot by birth) were up to the same thing, we can say that many of them did shoulder an explicitly and increasingly English task. Ubiquitous topical references to national and party politics are only the most obvious ways in which the fable was made "English": Aesop's fables were also used to teach English to English schoolchildren, and to wrestle other languages into line with English grammatical patterns. And many fabulists, posing as translators, self-consciously appropriated French fables by Jean de la Fontaine and Antoine Houdart de la Motte, among others; often this was to make an English fable more contentious, tentative and irregular than its "original." English fabulists were never as systematic as their French counterparts, and on the surface, their differences both from each other and from the neoclassical model that a few of them emulated belie a coherent cultural enterprise. But in fact, just as a fiction of opposition became legible as a sign of British liberty, thus a point

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521025311 - The English Fable: Aesop and Literary Culture, 1651-1740
Jayne Elizabeth Lewis
Excerpt
More information

of national pride, so diversity within the fable collection claimed that collection's contents for an emerging England.

Such claims were staked not only in individual fables and fable collections but also in a burgeoning commentary *about* fables – what they are, where they come from, what they ought to do. If Augustan writers were much exercised over the question of what makes a good fable, it was not least because, following the tropological crises of the Civil Wars that I describe more fully below, they were already notoriously worried about how figurative language itself should (or could) be used.[12] Few fabulists sent their collections into the marketplace without a lengthy prefatory statement of intent. My first two chapters lean heavily upon such prefaces, for these convey a new and significant determination to see fables in formal as well as functional terms – or, more accurately, to see Aesopian form as itself a culturally formative function. While Patterson's stimulating discussion of them is comprehensive, Chapter 3 treats the biographies of Aesop that also accompanied all the best fable collections as allegories of that function, and therefore as one opportunity that assorted fabulists took to venture their surprisingly convergent opinions as to how figurative language should work to make a coherent modern England.

To English writers after the Civil Wars, "modernity" often implied the presence of print culture. Practically speaking, the print explosion in the middle of the seventeenth century made the Aesop craze possible; historically speaking, it made possible modern English culture itself.[13] Fabulists from Ogilby to Richardson therefore naturally belabored their own fables" inescapably typographic dimensions. Prefaces to fable collections major and minor often stressed the physical features of the texts at hand. Fables themselves were wont to pun on their own typography: "Upon a magpye always look asquint," warned one Aesop of the 1670s, playing with the Latin word for crow. "Pica's a letter and puts things in print." Similarly, Francis Barlow's frontispiece to the popular and enduring *Æsop's Fables, with his Life* (1666, 1687) invited its readers to "See here how natures Book unclasped lies,/Whose pages Aesop reads with pearcing eyes." In my argument, then, Aesopian self-consciousness reflects not only contemporary thinking about figurative language but also an obsessive perception that figurative language is inseparable from the material forms (the very printed pages) that convey it. In turn, the relative, if superficial, egalitarianism of an increasingly book-based society demanded new constructions of political marginalization and opposition – the very situations that, as Patterson and others have shown, motivate Aesopian representation.

Hence this study ends with three poets – John Dryden, Anne Finch, and John Gay – who used Aesopian method to comment on contemporary politics of representation. As my early chapters suggest, those politics were permanently altered by the necessity of grounding and maintaining literary

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521025311 - The English Fable: Aesop and Literary Culture, 1651-1740
Jayne Elizabeth Lewis
Excerpt
More information

authority within the culturally constructive province of the page. Dryden, Finch, and Gay were all excluded from political culture, variously by virtue of Stuart loyalty (Dryden and Finch), religious faith (Dryden), gender (Finch), and party sympathy (Finch and Gay). Fables, however, allowed each of these writers to continue to participate in literary culture. And, as fabulists, all managed to pose the very questions about cultural authority that their political predicaments threatened to silence. These questions were legible because of the features (examined in my first three chapters) that contemporary fabulists, fable theorists, and biographers of Aesop had built into Aesopian style. By the time that Dryden, Finch, and Gay went Aesopian, that is, English readers were already trained (sometimes literally, by schools that used fables to teach reading) to interpret the self-reflexive performance of written signs as itself a most enlightening type of political commentary, and to judge sensible figures that proved capable of reactive mediation the most worthy bearers of cultural authority.

What did the Augustans consider a good fable? One that could "carry a double meaning," Charles Montagu and Matthew Prior maintained, but also one "conformable to [. . .] Nature."[14] One unsullied by "Frothy *Jests*, and jingling *Witticism*," declared Roger L'Estrange, but also one with an appended "Reflexion" that could expose its many layers of meaning.[15] ""Tis a feign'd or disguis'd Discourse," decided Richard Blackmore, even as his contemporaries held that "a whole Fable ought to be related in [. . .] common and general Circumstances."[16] A fable that earned its keep, apparently, had somehow to be at once plain and devious; it was honor-bound to teeter along the ledge separating the language of "common" things from a more intricate, less innocent, "Discourse."

While to the post-romantic ear such requirements can sound incompatible, England's peculiar linguistic climate after the Civil Wars easily sustained both of them. As Gerard Reedy has shown, extreme skepticism about the integrity of figurative language was one of the most important legacies of the Civil Wars of the 1640s. As Reedy explains, both the demythologizing Puritans and the Cavaliers in retaliation twisted and politicized most existing symbolic modes. A casualty of the wars was therefore the notion of plausible conjunction between "phenomenal" signs and "noumenal" meanings. One response to this figural crisis, epitomized in the linguistic endeavours of the Royal Society, was to attempt to build a reliable bridge, in Abraham Cowley's formulation, "from Words, which are but Pictures of the Thought,/ To Things, the Minds right Object."[17] Thomas Sprat's call for a verbal system made up of "larger, fairer and more moving Images" that could "represent *Truth*, cloth'd with Bodies, and [. . .] bring Knowledge back again to our very Senses, whence it was first derived" became the credo of modern scientific discourse.[18] Crusades for a universal character that would

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521025311 - The English Fable: Aesop and Literary Culture, 1651-1740
Jayne Elizabeth Lewis
Excerpt
More information

"immediately represent Things, and the Sources of Words,"[19] sense-based pedagogical reforms, and inquiries into the material and political origins of writing all labored to revise linguistic signs so that they might reclaim the cultural authority they had lost.[20] Meanwhile, throughout the later seventeenth century, works by the French theriophilists who had mobilized in reaction to Cartesian automatism were translated into English. Arguing that animals can reason and develop language, the theriophilists implicitly located the foundations of all human habits of representation in the sensible particulars that make up even animal cognition.[21] The same convincing particles resurface in Lockean epistemology as the grounds both of knowledge and of the words we use to convey it.

Not everyone, of course, reveled in the discrete sensible elements of human language, or even necessarily believed in them. Murray Cohen, for example, suggests that by the early eighteenth century, language philosophy itself had lost its "revolutionary fervor": an interest in "syntactical structures" and "logical universals" began to replace referential "correspondence theor[ies]" of the sign, just as poetic tastes wandered from the "discrete image-units" typical of Dryden and Cowley to the "excursion and verse paragraphs" we find in, say Pope.[22] At the same time, writers like Jonathan Swift were quick to snicker at contemporary quests for a language isomorphic with the phenomenal world.[23] Taken straight or held at a distance, a corporeal, even corpuscular, linguistic sensibility went hand in hand with a practical skepticism about how these elements might be combined to form authoritative meanings. This is why the Latin poet Lucretius's account of language's origins in the material world of jarring atoms and animal instincts was so often translated and remarked (albeit ambivalently) throughout the later seventeenth century.[24] As Richard Kroll has shown, because the rhetorical operations of Lucretius's own writing tended to exemplify proposed continuities between the natural world of colliding "Seeds" and the human world of differing signs, *De rerum natura* became the foundation of a new literary protocol, one bound to acknowledge the phenomenal nature of all writing. A similar protocol governed emerging literary forms that required reading to proceed naturalistically, by way of probabilistic inference from one discrete, graphic sign to another.[25] Highly legislated structures like emblem and allegory thus gave way to the composite and historically responsive literary models epitomized in Dryden's political poetry and in the pointedly ornamented actions of Restoration drama.[26] Even lofty genres like the epic began to be seen in atomistic and material terms, and, following the iconoclasms of the pugnacious classicist Richard Bentley, in terms also of their erratic passage through history: Henry Felton's *Dissertation on Reading the Classics* (1709) mocked the very popular theory that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were merely "loose, independent Pieces tacked together" and that these poems had "rise[n] in beautiful Order out of millions of Letters eternally

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521025311 - The English Fable: Aesop and Literary Culture, 1651-1740
Jayne Elizabeth Lewis
Excerpt
More information

shaken together."[27] Thomas Blackwell's *Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer* (1730) was less interested in admiring Homer's formal integrity than in analyzing the "Concourse of natural Causes [that] conspired to produce and cultivate his mighty Genius."[28]

Crucially, the emergence of probabilist and materialist linguistic values accompanied a growing preoccupation with textual representation – with the history of writing, with the evils of print culture, with the phenomenology of reading. While obviously print culture did not emerge *ex nihilo* after the English Civil Wars, it did flourish in England after 1650. And its efflorescence is wonderfully coherent with the contemporary supposition that language can be culturally constructive only as long as it is closely monitored, leashed to its roots in the sensible world. After all, pages – particularly the printed ones that can be bought and sold – manifestly turn words into material, fungible things. They allow readers to examine how meanings are constructed, and they seem to admit, indiscriminately, the arguments of opposing sides. Small wonder, then, that throughout our period more and more cultural authority should have come to lodge in books, or that the printed page should have shaped symbolic forms like drama and the visual arts.[29]

The shift to skeptical, sensible, and text-centered linguistic practices after the English Civil Wars inevitably provoked a search for new metaphors, for more empirical and evidentiary figures of speech. Accountable to the discrete, sensible, and presumably universal grounds of human experience, these new tropes would need to be accountable, as well, to the page on which they appeared. At the same time, a stubborn suspicion of language demanded that verbal *forms* confess their own artifice. Evidently a good fable fit this new, if paradoxical, cultural bill. Aesopian collections never pretended to contain anything other than "loose, independent Pieces" and thus fables themselves seemed to possess a grubby integrity that other genres lacked. Together with their use of animal actors and their simple grammatical structure, fables' appeal to readers of all stages and walks of life made them the figures of choice in a culture officially hostile to figuration. Typically, the title of one popular collection of 1720 boasted contents suitable "for all Degrees of Men, and Circumstances of Life."

At the same time, though, fabulists and theorists of fable found ways to expose such boasts as empty ones, to demonstrate the artifice and interestedness of even the most modest symbolic structures. Fables finally harbor little reverence toward their own pretense that signs naturally point to a single meaning, that there can be pure bonds between words and things, that such bonds would be particularly equitable or reassuring if they did exist. Material signs ultimately commanded unanimous consent only when the way they became meaningful was made evident as well. More than their superficial invocation of the sensible world, it is fables' demonstration of their own contingency – of the ways meaning is made – that, in Augustan eyes, invested

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521025311 - The English Fable: Aesop and Literary Culture, 1651-1740
Jayne Elizabeth Lewis
Excerpt
More information

them with something akin to natural authority. Indeed, fables' thematic preoccupation with the phenomenal world may be seen as a trope for the concrete acts of meaning-making that they perform structurally. More than their actual invocation of sensible things, it was this complex materiality that made fables antidotes to a figural crisis that was also a political and cultural one.

For example, the average fable went like this:

> The Crow with laden beak to tree retires,
> The Fox to gette her prey her forme admires,
> While she to show her gratitude not small,
> Offering to give her thanks, her prize lets fall.
>
> Morall
>
> Shun faithless flatters, Harlots, jilting tars,
> They are fooles hopes and youths deceitefull snares.[30]

In such fables, as any child will know, "Things hold discourse."[31] Foxes and crows, lambs and wolves, oxen and toads, haystacks and nettles, tulips and hens all exchange words. Words themselves thus prove their continuity with things: they acquire a reassuring solidity, one only confirmed when fables are "illustrated with proper Pictures." Thus when a hungry fox spies a crow with a piece of cheese in her beak and flatters her into opening her mouth to sing for him, it is not a word but a thing – the cheese – that tumbles out, to land between the fox's waiting jaws. Such transactions may not be equally agreeable to both individuals involved, but they do verify a symbolic economy in which objects are demonstrably equivalent to verbal signs, and *vice versa*. And all of the elements of a fable, its animal characters included, work to confirm this equivalence.

On the other hand, Aesopian conversations themselves are seldom amicable. They usually end with one party's murder or discomfiture by the other: indeed, a fable is the only literary form in which the principal characters regularly devour one another. Aesopian debates thus visibly ground language not only in the material world to which its elements correspond, one-to-one, but also in the realm of frequently brutal power relations. And thereby fables weld together the material, the political, and the symbolic. However turbulent or unreliable any one of these registers might seem to be in and of itself, the enduring point of a fable is that none can be isolated from the others. Fables themselves are thus not only referential verbal forms; they are also performative, actively bringing different modes of reference to bear upon one another. And because they do so consistently and predictably, they initiated generations of English readers into a common understanding of symbolic practice. This shared symbology in turn may be seen as the foundation of the other figural structures that began to alter or appear during the Augustan period.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521025311 - The English Fable: Aesop and Literary Culture, 1651-1740
Jayne Elizabeth Lewis
Excerpt
More information

Likewise, fables' visceral plots always generate explicit morals – interpretations that turn the preceding stories into convincing figures for home truths: "Do not trust any body"; "it is a sentence of law, we may keep off force by force"; "it is better to live with like"; "thou shalt have equal dealings with thy equals."[32] Thematically such morals advise how to negotiate a ravenous and capricious world. Structurally, though, the very presence of a moral signals each fable's membership within a stable set of symbolic conventions, one in which concrete examples instill socially relevant precepts. It makes double sense, then, that fables should have thrived during a period of self-conscious and often strife-ridden cultural construction. As they close gaps between tangible matter and culturally constitutive signs, they promise to resolve seemingly irreconcilable differences within a single set of assumptions about signification.

Since fables guide symbolic action back to its manifest origins in the physical world, they naturally require a reader to attend to their own material ground, that is, to the page that harbors them. And indeed English fabulists from Ogilby to Richardson proved almost preternaturally conscious of fables' graphic and typographic dimensions. For such writers, exploring the figural potential of the printed page went hand in hand with using speaking animals to align language with the sensible world, to press political arguments or to inculcate codes of social and cognitive behavior. Often visibly driven by a combative sociopolitical context, and by a determination to confer on words the status of objects, this textual self-consciousness perfectly suited Aesop's fables to the cultural climate of Augustan England. Their explicit textuality meant that fables very concretely satisfied a contemporary hunger to know the sensible origins of culturally constitutive signs. It is what helped them truly quench a post-Civil War thirst for a symbolic form that could accommodate competing sociopolitical positions. In Augustan culture the status of the book ultimately conditioned that of the fable, which at its simplest taught children how to read English, and thus how to inhabit, and eventually reproduce, a text-centered culture. At their most complex, fables challenged the foundations of literary authority, boldly dramatizing its extreme contingency. But instead of undermining a literate model of cultural authority, such dramatizations only verified its appropriateness to a nation whose political identity was already visibly constituted – visibly defined by and through negotiation.[33]

Classicists like Jack Winkler and Gregory Nagy have shown how, from their origins in earliest antiquity forward, fables have always grounded symbolic structures in the world of tangible things.[34] Romantic and post-romantic philosophers as diverse as Georg Hegel and Roland Barthes have identified fables with the beginnings of myth,[35] while literary scholars like Patterson and H.P. Blackham have explored their ability to encode subterranean narratives that speak to and for politically disadvantaged

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521025311 - The English Fable: Aesop and Literary Culture, 1651-1740
Jayne Elizabeth Lewis
Excerpt
More information

groups.[36] And no observer has ignored fables' primacy both in western habits of representation and in the symbolic experience of individuals, who typically encounter them in early childhood.[37] Between 1651 and 1740 English fabulists brought all of these native traits to bear upon an investigation of the signifying potential of books, which they increasingly perceived as the arbiters of potentially catastrophic sociopolitical differences. Even when Addison recalled Plato's famous story about how Socrates told a fable on the morning of his execution, he had the antique philosopher first imagine how "a Man of good Genius for a Fable" would "represent the Nature of Pleasure and Pain in that way of Writing."[38] To Addison and his fellow Augustans, fables were a "way of Writing" with special ties to the unwritten world. The syllogism that provides the quotation which heads this introduction, then, was practically a foregone conclusion by the time it appeared, anonymously, in 1726. If in fables all things hold discourse, then in a world where authoritative language itself increasingly takes the form of tangible and portable things ("Writing," letters), words too "must talk of course." And their conversation is necessarily an integral part of any meaning put forward on the surface of the page. Aesop's fables continually enact this recognition. Their official employment in English schools only literalizes their primary function. Simply put, that function was to inculcate a text-based set of assumptions and cognitive strategies which, if shared, could actively create a coherent modern community of readers. In my view, their common stock in the formation of this community frames, and thereby forces us to reconsider, the political critiques and apparent subversions so openly at play in English fables written between 1651 and 1740.

A word, finally, about the boundaries of this book. First, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the term "fable" was polyvalent. It could signify a lie, any "feign'd or devis'd discourse," a plot, a hieroglyph, a parable, a myth.[39] Here, I treat mainly short, moralized speaking animal narratives, many of which were conspicuously attributed to Aesop. Though often hailed as "the First who purposely made use of this Mode of Writing," Aesop was not the only figure that English writers identified with fables.[40] The Brahmin philosopher Pilpay (a.k.a. Bidpai and Doni) had several volumes of "instructive and entertaining" fables to his credit by the mid-eighteenth century.[41] Persian tales, particularly those of Scheherazade, remained popular throughout the century,[42] and in 1711, Mr. Spectator announced that the French fabulist Jean de la Fontaine had "come more into Vogue than any other Writer of our Time."[43] Above all, the Latin poet Phaedrus, whom La Fontaine himself mentioned admiringly in his own fables, achieved considerable eminence among the Augustans. Matthew Prior and William Somerfield translated some of his fables. Philip Ayres and Roger L'Estrange included him in their fable collections; translations of his fables were published in 1646, 1651, and 1710, and in Christopher Smart's

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org