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Ogilby, John. *The Fables of Aesop Paraphrased in Verse by John Ogilby and Adorned with Sculpture [by Francis Cleyn] (Franz Klein)*. Ed. Donald A. Beecher

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Ogilby, John.

*The Fables of Æsop Paraphrased in Verse by John Ogilby and Adorned with Sculpture [by Francis Cleyn] (Franz Klein)*. Ed. Donald A. Beecher.

Tudor and Stuart Texts 6. Toronto: Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2021. Pp. 579. ISBN 978-0-7727-2504-2 (paperback) \$37.95.

John Ogilby published editions of his *Fables of Æsop* in 1651, 1665, 1668, and 1673. Donald A. Beecher chose a first edition from the Carleton University Library as his copy text, taking care to replicate Ogilby's eye-catching lineation. Yet it is Beecher, not Ogilby, whose name appears on the book's spine. What may seem to be usurpation is justified by the work done: Beecher's introduction, commentary, notes, appendixes, bibliographies, and other apparatus account for more than 300 pages, Ogilby's fables occupy only 201; reproductions of Francis Cleyn's (Franz Klein's) illustrations fill another eighty. Beecher takes more pages than Ogilby to give Ogilby his due.

Beecher ranks Ogilby's *Fables* in the vanguard of English printing. He credits Ogilby for working to restore Aesop's reputation, no longer an author for children, but a sage whose fables admonish adults. If there is any reason to read Ogilby's *Fables of Æsop* then Beecher has found it. Ogilby was a "pioneer," a "visionary," a "cautious partisan," a "virtuoso," a printing entrepreneur, and occasional poet. His *Fables* is "a milestone in the history of the illustrated book in England" (16) and "the acknowledged culmination of a cultural industry" (19). Ogilby "managed to claim for his efforts the highest place of honour among the Aesopic translations of his entire age" (61). How so?

Beecher admires Ogilby's daring as a versifier—fables are told in a wide variety of forms, couplets usually, but also triplets and stanzas of his own devising—"for those with an eye to formal invention Ogilby offers a banquet" (24). Ogilby had fun with fables. In this sample from fable 54 a tortoise supplicates an eagle:

Most princely eagle, bear me through the sky  
 That I may measure the bright-spangled arch  
       Where great planets march,  
       And I will give thee gems  
 Such as do shine in princes' diadems,  
 With a huge pearl I in a scallop found

In the Hellespontic sound  
Thought worth nine-hundred-ninety-thousand pound.

The *Fables* is Ogilby's most ambitious original poetic work (he had earlier translated the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and complete works of Virgil), upon which his reputation as a poet rests. Once praised, Ogilby was ridiculed by Pope and Dryden, whose scorn triumphed thereafter. Beecher does what he can to reverse their verdict: "For variety and novelty," he says, seventeenth-century poetics "reached an apogee in Ogilby" (23).

Ogilby (1600–76) was "a prodigy" of learning and productivity, a man of many ventures for whom verse was only one. He understood that Aesop's fables had a market, a tradition, and practical usefulness, even in the highest places. The Aesop of legend told fables to address politics of his time; a loyal Royalist when Cromwell ruled, Ogilby turned his fables to the same purpose. Beecher points to his "Of the Frogs Desiring a King" (fable 12), "Of the Lion Grown Old" (fable 23), "The Parliament of Birds" (fable 40), and "Of the Rebellion of the Hands and Feet" (fable 57) for Ogilby's Aesopian politics.

Beecher finds Ogilby's originality in his *amplificatio*—added details and dialogues—by which Ogilby made the *Fables* his own while usually remaining true to traditional plots and morals. Ogilby's expansions made scenes more English and characters more personable; he added backstories and secondary episodes; and he linked fables to each other. He had the good business sense to add Cleyne's illustrations, enriching that strain of the Aesopic tradition.

Beecher's edition is equipped to assist students who need an introduction to fables, English literature and history, and the history of the book. Oddly, Beecher skimps descriptions of Ogilby's own editions and *Aesopics* (1668 and 1673). His notes define old words—for example, *copemates*, *glaive*, *glebe*, *grig*, *hogen-mogens*, *mammocks*, *ocastry*—which are helpful, then he overdoes it, annotating words readers are likely to know, such as *hark*, *ply*, *quaff*, *sensual*, *sullen*. He relegates Ogilby's marginal notes (added to the 1665 edition) to end-notes as a practical matter, notes that tie the fables to classics of Greek and Latin mythography, confer their dignity upon them, and meanwhile ostentate Ogilby's prodigious learning.

Ogilby's *Fables* has been hard to get for those who prefer pages to screens. No new printing has occurred since Earl Miner's photographic 1965 reprint of the 1668 edition. Thus scholars of fables and English poetry will be grateful for

Beecher's edition. It is trustworthy, affordable, and well printed. It is good to have it in hand.

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