



Surprise! One Collector's Fabulous Adventure

Rev. Gregory I. Carlson, S.J.

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1. In summer of 1982, a thirty-three year old Jesuit priest professor of Classics faced a challenge. The annual national convention of Classics professors, the American Philological Association, was coming up in December. The deadline for papers submitted to be delivered at the convention was fast approaching. He had given papers at this convention and others like it, especially on Virgil, Homer, Horace, and Catullus. He had recently received tenure from a second university, Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska, as he had earlier from the College of Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. The changes in his life that had brought him from Worcester to Omaha had kept him at this point from having at hand an ongoing research project with some findings ready to put into a conference paper. The chief change was this: he still taught his usual courses in Classics, but he had added the responsibility of overseeing young Jesuit seminarians in the humanities program at Creighton, a program he had helped to create. This involvement in younger Jesuits' formation consumed a great deal of his time.

He hit upon an idea. A slightly crazy thing had been going on in his life. As a lover of books and of short literature, he had collected some cheap copies of Aesop's fables. The diversity in presentation of fables amazed him. Such different ways of telling the same basic story! Such different ways of understanding its moral! Such different ways of illustrating it! Might a paper on the diversity of these three aspects of fables be helpful at the convention? He worked in that pre-computer age with creative artists in Creighton's media presentation team to provide helpful slides for a visual presentation. To his surprise, the APA accepted his paper!

I was that younger Jesuit professor, and that was a major turning point in my fascinating adventure of collecting books and objects that present fables. That acceptance opened a door. I could enjoy a hobby of collecting fables and presenting what I found, and it could fit into my

professional and scholarly life. I still have the key slide in that illustrated lecture and it still represents the fascinating diversity I find in fables.



Slide from APA lecture "Aesop's Varied Progeny." 1982.

Now, some 38 years later, I look back fondly on those first moments. To my surprise it is not easy now to reconstruct the early facts. I was nowhere near as careful then as I try to be now about how I acquired a specific book or object. I suspect there is a first insight here into collecting: we happen – we may even blunder – into its first steps. We take these steps neither carefully nor deliberately. Circumstances encourage us or permit us to notice and hold onto one sort of thing, and we become more conscious of it, more focused.

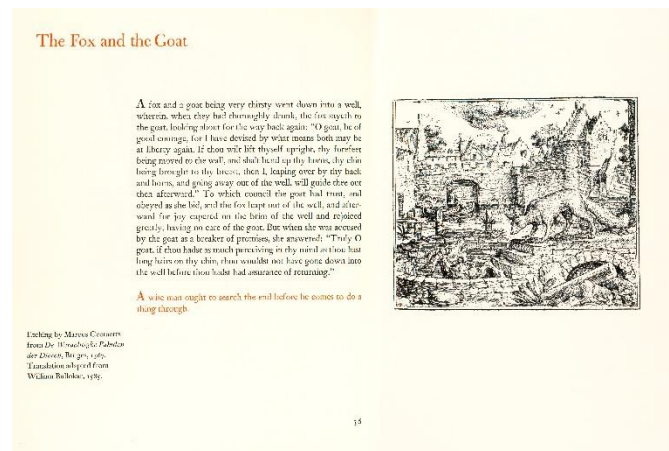
The Carlson Fable Collection

The Carlson Fable Collection is a gathering of primary fable materials owned by and housed among the Special Collections of the Libraries of Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. The Collection was given to Creighton University by the Wisconsin Province of the Society of Jesus in early 1996. It grew out of the personal collection of fable materials gathered since about 1980 by the Jesuit priest, Reverend Gregory I. Carlson, S.J. The collection emphasizes primary materials, i.e. books and other objects presenting fables, rather than secondary materials written about fables. Fr. Carlson remains the collection's Development Agent. The University has continued to expand the collection. As of summer, 2020, there are now more than 9,800 unique books, 1,650 duplicates, and perhaps 6,000 objects in the collection. Contributions of fable books and objects are welcome! The average cost of a book is just over \$20. The collection has a very large website, including hundreds of illustrations: www.Creighton.edu/Aesop.

Later we may be documenting, cataloguing, authenticating. In the early steps, it is more as though things find their way into our hands.

This article is followed by three appendices that may be particularly enjoyable for readers, for they lay out, in word and image, favorite editions, unusual objects in the collection, and curious paper ephemera. In this article itself, I set out ten other surprising adventures which I have had along the way in these 40 years of collecting. Each of these surprising moments opened avenues for the collection to develop. My method will follow the same pattern as above: I will tell a story and then offer a collector's comment, almost like telling a fable and then specifying one of its morals. Along the way I offer sidebars of specific information and images of things in the collection.

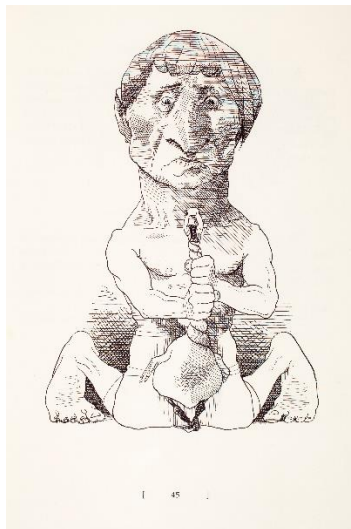
2. One moment preceded the door-opening experience described above. Among those first inexpensive books, two opened my eyes.



Pages 36-37 of John McKendry, *Aesop*, including Marcus Geeraerts' etching

The first was an exhibit catalogue from a 1964 show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: *Aesop: Five Centuries of Illustrated Fables*, selected by John J. McKendry. The book selects forty fables and, for each fable, joins a text with an illustration from the period, as exemplified just

above. As I visited and revisited these pages, I could not help but wonder at the creative array of approaches to simple stories! I was hooked!



David Levine, *The Fables of Aesop*.

"The Goose That Laid the Golden Egg."

David Levine's *The Fables of Aesop* in 1975, with texts by Justina and Patrick Gregory, offered the other first stimulus. This book showed me a visual artist having fun with story after story. Who could see Levine's image and not laugh at the idiot silly enough to kill the goose who had been laying golden eggs? Levine was the longtime caricaturist for the *New York Review of Books*. His fifty illustrations in this volume reveal someone taking genuine delight in the fables. If a person does not have fun reading this book, there is something wrong!

Collector's Comment: I suspect many of our collecting habits have been touched by one book or one experience. The good news comes when that first enrapturing experience gets repeated in some form and further encouraged. McKendry's catalogue has been followed by others, like Anne Stevenson Hobbs' *Aesop*, Ulrike Bodemann's *Fabula Docet*, Justin Schiller's *Realms of Childhood*, and the two-volume bible of fable collectors, *Das Illustrierte Fabelbuch*. As to the successors of David Levine, they are too many to mention. My hat is off to those

Rev. Gregory I. Carlson, S.J., has enjoyed a rich and varied life in his 79 years. Born the son of the manager of a toy department and a handy craftswoman, he entered the Jesuit religious order at the age of 17 and received a classical education in the order. He received a classical master's degree from St. Louis University (1966) and a doctorate in Greek, Latin, and Philosophy from the University of Heidelberg (summa cum laude) in 1972. He was ordained a Catholic Priest in 1974. He taught at and was given tenure at both Holy Cross College and Creighton University. He has also taught at Marquette University while superior of the religious community there and in the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley while superior of the Jesuit Community there. He has directed Honors Programs at two of his universities and been a department chair. He has held "The Jesuit Chair" at Georgetown University and at John Carroll University in Cleveland and has been a trustee at Loyola University Chicago and Gonzaga University in Spokane. Except for three sabbatical interruptions, he has taught every semester since 1974, ranging in his teaching through Latin and Greek literature, World Literature, Fable Literature, Synoptic Gospels, St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, and Jesuit History and Spirituality, as well as specialized courses in Honors and Graduate Programs.

creative artists that keep returning to Aesop, Jean de La Fontaine, Ivan Krylov and others, to find new sources of insight and humor, new sources of fun!

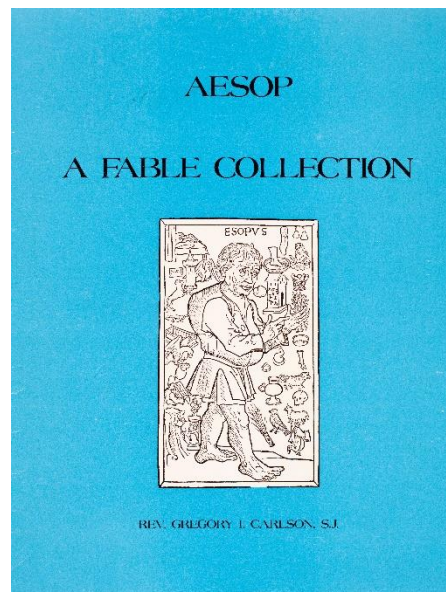
That mention of fun touches on my attraction for fables. I believe that fables pulled on various threads of my early life and even pulled those threads together. First, I am a player. My father ran the toy department in the biggest department store in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I and my siblings had happy childhoods! Though I

was also a serious young man, I have learned, particularly through my father's generosity and occupation, to play. I still play. Fables play. As we engage them, we play our way into understanding. The delight I found in those fables in the 1980's remains these days, largely because the telling, moralizing, and illustrating of fables continues to be creatively diverse. Fables and I were made for each other.

Secondly, I have particularly enjoyed short literature. My doctoral dissertation at Heidelberg under Viktor Poeschl compared Vergil's similes in the *Aeneid* with those of Homer in

the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. During my seminary studies, I was particularly taken with the parables in the gospels. Friends tease me that I have a short attention span! Again, fables and I were made for each other.

3. A next step came on a warm evening in New Orleans. A friend listening to my talk about fables – and perhaps sick of it! – suggested that I keep a list of each book and where I got it. Good idea! I am surprised now that it took someone's suggestion to help me think of keeping a record, of creating a list. The researcher in me has gone back to look for those early lists, put together before the time when each of us had a computer and printer. The lists grew larger and larger lists. The oldest list I can find, from 1985, describes 92 books and mentions also five postcards, a play script, a calendar, a set of playing cards, and ten objects. For comparison, the "cards"



Catalogue, 6th Edition, 1991. Georgetown University, with Heinrich Steinhöwel's Title-Page Woodcut

section of the collection now contains some 3500 cards. The collection has come a long way!

Collector's comment: Those printed lists evolved into a series of printed catalogues, which mark stages in the collection's development. One can find them mentioned in the collection's website, about which I will say more in a moment. The first printed catalogue in 1989 uses 153 pages to catalogue 744 books. The fourth in 1991 uses 195 pages to catalogue 957 books. The seventh in 1994 uses 434 pages to catalogue 1907 books.

The computer age helped facilitate the printing of these catalogues. By now the collection was something to be proud of, something that existed in its own right. More than I may have realized, the catalogues helped make people, especially fellow collectors and scholars, aware of the collection. Of course, there is the experience every author dreads: I have found catalogues which I gave to people offered for a few dollars in used bookshops!

Other than through those catalogues, it has not been easy to go back and see how fast the collection expanded. Articles about the collection that I have recovered tell me that there were 5400 books in the collection by 2006 and 6789 by December of 2011.

4. I was adding to the collection steadily and even seeing to the creation of catalogues. I was finding more and more surprising objects illustrating fables.

Some Quick Highlights Among the Book Collection

Earliest book:

Historia Vitae Fortunaequae Aesopi, cum Fabulis Illius by Joachim Camerarius in 1544.

Most expensive multi-volume work:

Fables de Jean de La Fontaine, illustrè par Marc Chagall. \$48,500.

Most expensive single book:

Aesop's Fables with his Life: in English, French, and Latin. Newly Translated. English by Thomas Philipott, French and Latin by Robert Codrington. Illustrated with one hundred and ten sculptures by Francis Barlow. 1666. \$4,000.

Languages: 66, along with 19 dialects. There are 45 bilingual combinations, 8 trilingual combinations, and 2 quadrilingual combinations among the books.



Damoiseau Cookie Can, from Buchinist H el ene Moncourt, Paris, 1997

I could hardly believe it then in 1989 when a good friend, also interested in fables, told me of a "Beast Fable Society"! I thought she was joking. An organization like that was for me a dream come true! This society had already met in Agadir, Morocco, and in Copenhagen, Denmark. Their meetings combined scholarly talks, including some by leading experts, with local cultural

What is a fable?

In an article "Fables Invite Perception," written for *Bestia*, Vol. 5 (1993), I reviewed the good work offered by scholars Ben Edwin Perry, Jan Ziolkowski, and Pack Carnes on defining fables, I offered this definition:

The upshot of reading Perry, Ziolkowski, and Carnes is that Aesopic fable is a short past-tense fictional narrative with a metaphoric or teaching purpose of some sort. For Perry, this purpose was "illustrating an ethical truth." For Ziolkowski, this is the purpose "beyond entertainment." For Carnes it is the "point" which fable is invariably called on to make. "What sort of purpose?" and "What sort of point?" are the questions I address here. In answer, the definition I have come to espouse is: **An Aesopic fable is a short past-tense fictional narrative that invites perception of a point about how to live life.** The definition I offer specifies the teaching character of fable by insisting that the story itself invites perception of a point about how to live life. A fable does not command perception or deliver it. Above all it does not specify entirely the point to be perceived. Its form is such that a hearer experiences being invited to learn something particular and definite about how to live.

presentations and more creative presentations by members. An entrepreneurial founder-

president, Ben
Bennani, from what is
now Truman State
University in Missouri,
managed to bring
together invitations
from local venues with
generous offers from
hotels and airlines to
create wonderful
experiences. I was
eager to join and to try
out ideas with
colleagues, and so I
traveled to Mayaguez
in Puerto Rico to take

A Sample of Articles and Other Writings of Mine:

Bestia:

"Horace's and Today's Town and Country Mice," *Bestia*, Vol. 4 (1992)

"Fables Invite Perception," *Bestia*, Vol. 5 (1993)

"A Ridiculous Bet?" *Bestia*, Vol. 8 (2001-2002)

Reinardus:

"Four American Aesopic Parodists: Bierce, Thurber, Zimler, and Eichenberg," *Reinardus* 10, 1997

Nine Great Moments in the History of Published Fable Illustration," *Les Actes du Colloque Renardien de Tokyo*, The Renard Society, January, 1998

The Classical Outlook:

Review of *The Complete Fables of Aesop* by Olivia Temple and Robert Temple, Vol. 76, Number 3, Spring 1999

Bryn Mawr Classical Review (online):

Review of Francisco Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable, Volume One: Introduction and from the Origins to the Hellenistic Age*. Mnemosyne Supplements 201. Leiden: Brill, 1999, April 1, 2001

Festschrift für Fritz-Heiner Mutschler zum 65. Geburtstag:

"Phaedrus, a Fable, and Fun," in Andreas Heil, Matthias Korn, and Jochen Sauer, editors, *Noctes Sinenses*. 2011. Kalliope – Studien zur griechischen und lateinischen Poesie, Band 11. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter.

part in their third conference. I was delighted there to meet established scholars who knew much more about fables than I did. And I found them welcoming what I was learning!

Collector's comment: This entry into scholarly interchange was a major turning point. I met, among others, Pack Carnes who soon became a mentor to me. Pack was the great bibliographer of editions and of fable scholarship, as I was on my way to becoming a serious collector of fable editions and objects. We attended meetings together and researched libraries together. I stayed with him at his Berkeley home. I submitted drafts for his helpful criticism. The Beast Fable Society would go on to hold seven more international conferences, and I was able to attend them all and offer a paper at each. I was asked to give the keynote address at the congress in Marrakesh, Morocco. I had three

A Sample of Other Formal Presentations I Have Made:

American Classical League: "The Last Five Years of Fables," Tufts University, June 28, 1991

Classical Association of the Middle-West and South: "Avianus Makes Fable History by Making Natural History into Fable," Nashville, April 12, 1996

Rettig Lecture, Xavier University, Cincinnati: "Aesop and the Classical Tradition in the U.S.A.," November 5, 2006

International Beast Fable Society:

"Beautifying the Beast: Disney's Domestication of Aesopic Fable." Seventh International Beast Fable Congress, October 14, 1994, Kirksville, Missouri

"'Always the Same and Always Different': Variety in the World of Fables." Keynote Address to the Eighth International Beast Fable Congress, Marrakesh, Morocco, July 6, 2001

"The Commonality of Rascality: Bitter Bierce," Tenth International Beast Fable Congress, Tampa, July 14, 2003

Renard Society

"How Some of Caxton's Fables Got To Be As They Are." 13th International Colloquium, International Renard Society, Poitiers, August 25, 1999

"From Phaedrus to Caxton, Part II: How Some More Favorite Fables Changed Shape." 14th International Colloquium, International Reynard Society, Hull, England, August 10, 2001

"What John Ogilby Did for Aesop." 23rd Colloquium of the International Renard Society. Prague, The Czech Republic, July 12, 2019.

articles published in their journal *Bestia*. What a gift to have knowledgeable colleagues eager to encourage and help! Travel to places like Glasgow and Caraccas for BFS conferences gave me more opportunities to visit used bookshops. When I arrived at administrative or professional

meetings, colleagues would ask "Where are the museums and best restaurants?" I would ask about antiquarian bookshops and flea markets!

It was through the unfortunately short-lived Beast Fable Society that I met members of the Renard Society. This group of mostly European scholars meets every other year for serious scholarly conferences centered on Renard the fox, especially in the medieval *Roman de Renard* but also in fables. I have enjoyed several conferences with them, most recently a year ago in Prague. Unfortunately, the European summer break often spills into the American fall semester, and so I have had to miss some of their meetings. I have also enjoyed contributing to their lovely journal, *Reinardus*. I never dreamed as I began to collect Aesopic fable books that it would introduce me to the world of scholarship surrounding these fascinating stories, and I am indebted to those who helped me learn from and contribute to that scholarly community.



One of two tapestries from Gay Wirth, Wirthmore Antiques, New Orleans

5. By now I had held a variety of academic and Jesuit administrative positions, and the direction of my future work as a Jesuit priest at age 50 was open to several avenues: academic administration, academic teaching, and administration within the Jesuit order. Georgetown University was a partner in some of the conversations concerning those possibilities. I was delighted that the conversations led in 1991-92 to Georgetown inviting me to occupy the "Jesuit Chair," a position reserved for a visiting Jesuit to teach courses for one year and to give a major public lecture. The Jesuit Community supported this position generously, including the costs of producing a new printed catalogue for the occasion and throwing a large party for the public

lecture. The event arrangers, to my surprise, insisted that my lecture be a full hour long. This was a great opportunity to put together all sorts of investigations into fables and to present, with the help of Georgetown's excellent professional

A Gift of Worth

Both business and friendship brought me several times in the 80's and 90's to New Orleans. There I visited, among other antiques stores, Wirthmore Antiques, specializing in French country antiques. I noticed two tapestries, about 18 inches across and perhaps ten feet long. Each tapestry was made up of rectangular presentations of La Fontaine's fables. I asked the owner, Gay Wirth, if she knew that these were representations of the fables of La Fontaine, and I identified the fables pictured there. Were the tapestries, I asked, for sale? "No," she answered. "They are for now part of our décor. But I will be happy to get in touch with you when we change the décor." I was happy to look forward to that day!

Several years later I was back and pointed to the tapestries. Ms. Wirth replied that they were "being saved for a priest from Chicago." In a happy interchange, I let her know that I was that priest and that I was from Omaha. Time went on and I heard nothing. Then in 2018, I happened to be visiting the same old friend who had suggested that I make a list of my fable books. In the midst of our enjoyable visit, I wondered whatever had happened to Wirthmore Antiques. It turned out that they still were in business, though they had moved from their original venue. I called, and Ms. Wirth was delighted that I did. "Oh, Father, we had lost your name. We still have the tapestries. Could you come tomorrow?" I came and she laid out those two beautiful tapestries that I had loved at first sight. As I was about to ask "And what might be the price of these two?" she volunteered that she had checked out the fable collection the night before on the web and wanted to give me the two tapestries! What a great gift! On the train ride home, when I needed to move to visit the dining car, I remember carrying the tapestries, nicely bundled at the antiques store, on my shoulder. I would not let them out of my sight!

media team, a worthy slide lecture to a large gathering. Georgetown gave the collection one more "boost." The Classics Department invited me to teach a course on fables! What a delight! That course would be the first of many.

Collector's comment: I am first of all priest and, secondly, teacher. Fable collecting touches particularly on the teacher in me. My experience at a Jesuit high school helped shape both the priest and the teacher, the latter particularly in its debate and public-speaking extracurriculars. From the earliest days of engaging fables, I have dreamed of being a speaker who could give people something wholesome and worthy of reflection by telling them good stories. The Georgetown year allowed me to give serious time, effort, and resources to collecting fables and teaching about them. Those efforts have resulted in many courses and many speaking engagements since. Collectors face the question "Why am I collecting these things?" As a collector, my first answer would be "Because they are so fascinating!" And a further answer? Others might develop collections in hopes that others would visit and enjoy them. I have thought more of engaging people with good stories. From formal scholarly presentations to informal storytelling in student dormitories or parish halls, wherever I have gone, I have enjoyed engaging people with fables! And I am delighted that people of all sorts have asked me to do just that. From student residence halls to Puget Sound University to a high school in Heidelberg to an Omaha Dentists' Club (more formally the "St. Apollonia Guild"), I have enjoyed engaging people in stories like those which Aesop once told. When I teach a course these days on the gospels, I start with an Aesopic fable, to help students see the many ways a fable – specifically "The Grasshopper and the Ant" – can be told and viewed. So it is with the gospels. We need to attend to context, shape of narrative, and the story's focus.

A year at Georgetown in Washington, DC, also brought the opportunity to get to know the many neighborhood used bookshops around the area. The time frame of my collecting has happened to coincide with the last days of many of these stores. I miss them! I met many veteran used book sellers who treasured books, looked for them for customers, knew and prized

their books. Changing economic circumstances and the growth of the online market have made life hard or impossible for these many dealers that I came to know in Washington and various places around the world. I mention one of them in particular in a sidebar on a strange episode of "a lost book."



"The Fox and the Rooster," in Pierre Barboutau, *Choix de Fables de La Fontaine, Illustrées par un Groupe des Meilleurs Artistes de Tokio, 1894*. Silver Spring book fair, Maryland, 1991

Being in a metropolitan center like Washington also brought me to wonderful used book fairs in Silver Spring and Baltimore. What a treat! I found one of my first big finds at the Silver Spring fair. I had read in Anne Stevenson Hobbs' *Aesop* of the Japanese edition done by Pierre Barboutau in 1894. Bartleby's Books from DC had the two volumes at the Silver Spring fair. The price was beyond my normal means but I pleaded with the seller not to sell while I managed to put together the money to buy them. I travelled to their shop several days later with the money in my hot little hand. What an exciting experience!

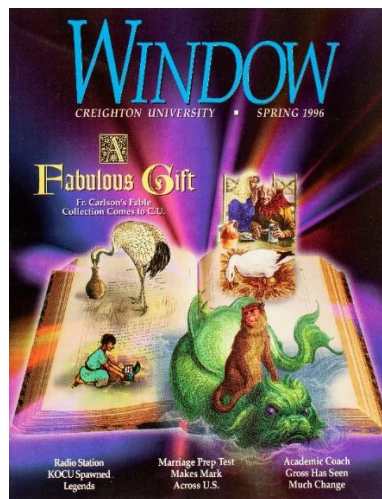
At the same fair, I found a first edition of Gustave Doré's splendid and massive edition of La Fontaine's fables, typically dark, as Doré is. The volume had just been rebound by loving bibliophiles at Blue Mountain Books in Catskill, NY. My experience is that booksellers are

happy to sell their books – and even to lower prices – to those who will make the books accessible to others. They give me and this collection a "break," and I appreciate it!



La Cigale et la Fourmi, Gustave Doré, 1868. Silver Spring Book Fair, 1991.

6. I returned from Georgetown to Creighton to be soon the chairman of the combined Departments of Classics and Modern Languages and to be the superior of the seminary which I had helped to found there twelve years earlier. This time brought an important turn in the road



Creighton's *Window* Magazine, Cover, Spring, 1996

for the collection. It was clearly bursting the limits of a "personal" collection. Among the many questions raised by the burgeoning size of a collection were questions about housing a collection in our old seminary building. Fire was one danger, but, as several "book people" warned me, the real enemy of books can be water. We faced the danger that a small fire in one part of the building would bring the fire department to douse the whole building! The deeper issue was that this collection belonged in a university or research library. Our Jesuit "province" offered it in the mid 90's to Creighton, and Creighton accepted happily and even began offering help in continuing to develop the collection. The University's magazine *Window* celebrated the gift as its cover story in the next issue. Now there were external resources to keep the collection growing. That addition brought new changes and new adventures! Not only did Creighton support the collection's development, but also people more easily found the collection as something to which they might contribute.



Spode Platter, "The Horse and the Mule." Gift of Barbara Markuson, 2010

Collector's comment: I had been proud through the first ten or twelve years of the collection that I spent relatively little on the collection. I tried to use the amount that a professor

might normally spend on professional books. In the 1991 catalogue, the average cost of a book was \$7.50. By 1994, the average cost per book was \$11.39. University financing opened up the possibility of adding to the collection significant earlier and more expensive volumes. Though the level of support has varied over the 25 years that it has

A Prized Gift

Barbara Markuson of Glenwood, Iowa, was downsizing in August of 2010 and had a possession rich in history. Some years earlier, her husband Stanley, working in Barbados, had seen there a Spode serving platter of considerable size, some 20" x 15", with a dramatic presentation of the fable "The Horse and the Loaded Ass." It was created in the 1830's as a part of a Spode series. He bought the platter and carried it in his lap on the plane ride back – because he knew that Barbara treasured beautiful things. The platter is done in the relatively rare black style. Now in 2010, as Barbara wondered to whom she might give this family heirloom, she found Creighton's fables website: www.Creighton.edu/Aesop. She called Michael LaCroix, the Director of Reinert Alumni Library, to ask "Is this Fr. Carlson person on the up-and-up?" Luckily, Director LaCroix was sufficiently positive in his response that I was allowed to make contact with Mrs. Markuson and to drive to Glenwood to receive this large platter. It was a most pleasant exchange, but the longest walk I have ever taken was the fifty feet from her living room to my car! Though she wrapped the platter carefully, I was so afraid that I would fall or drop it! I was proud to include the platter in the Joslyn Museum exhibit of the collection, about which I report shortly.

belonged to Creighton, I am grateful for the University's generosity, at first through its presidents and more recently, as part of the Library's budget. These administrators have encouraged me to watch for bargains and go after them, and I enjoying negotiating! A collector will always be facing questions of how much to invest in the collection. I am proud to have built a champagne-level collection on a beer budget!

7. Creighton also offered another turning point when I was nominated in 1997 to be a U.S. West Fellow, participating for a year in an intensive seminar to train faculty in using

A Lost Book

One of the great used book sellers of my experience was Peter Howard of Berkeley's Serendipity Books. A major figure in the literary Bay Area, Peter and his wife Alison ran the quintessential antiquarian bookshop: books everywhere, books in boxes on the floor, books stacked up. They knew of my interest in fables and honored it. My annual Christmas visit to my brother in San Francisco meant stopping by Serendipity. I would go straight to the special shelf in the back kept for fable books and me. Peter would say something like "I don't believe in religion, Father, but I'll give you 20% off if you'll pray for me!"

Prior to my Christmas visit in 2008 Peter notified me that he had found a real treasure, Joachim Camerarius' *Historia Vitae Fortunaequae Aesopi, cum Fabulis Illius* from 1544: "An Account of the Life and Destiny of Aesop, with His Fables." I knew of the edition and was excited to have it in my hand, though I paid little attention to the exact title. This expensive little book stood as a major achievement in the early printed publication of fables. It would rank as the earliest book in our collection. We negotiated and settled on \$2200, and I was thrilled to get the book! I hardly noticed that the spine of the book had just one word of that long Latin title: *Historia*.

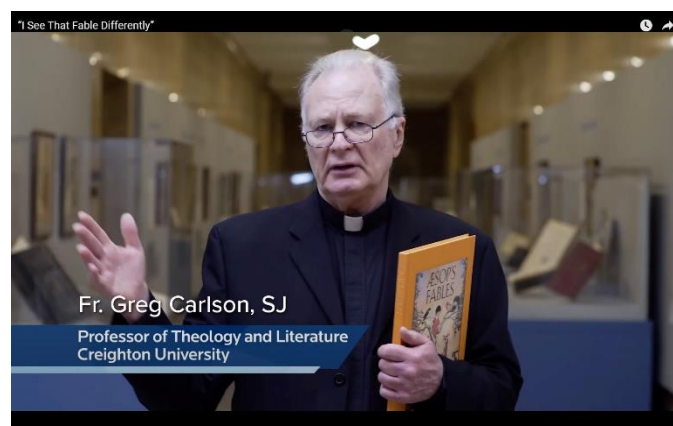
After further holiday travel to visit my sister on the other coast and after the flurry of activity of starting a semester, it was time to catalogue this important book. I could not find it! I looked everywhere. I was mortified to have lost so expensive a book. How careless of me! I called Peter: had I left it with them? "No" was his clear answer, but I wondered. In the meantime, Peter finally succumbed to a long battle with poor health, and his shop and stock were soon sold. I wondered if my Camerarius was gone forever, lost in his stock. When I visited my sister the next year, I even looked under the guest bed to see if I had lost the book there! I did in fact find a book of mine left under the bed, but not our Camerarius!

Housecleaning several months later, I needed to clear the shelves in my room, including what I thought was an old "history" book – *Historia* – that someone had given me. When I opened it, I realized that it, the Camerarius, had been sitting on my shelf the whole time! I was then like the woman in the gospel who throws a party when she finds her lost coin!

computers. There was little doubt – in my mind or that of the mentor who led the seminar – that my project for the year was to get our collection of books and objects beyond Word files and

make it available through the web. No more long printed catalogues! The project I undertook was to transcribe the collection's 2800 books from simpler word documents into strong databases and html documents. Experts recommended two databases, FileMaker Pro as user friendly and Access as powerful. I chose both and worked out ways – ways that I still use -- to catalogue in Access and transition the information into FileMaker Pro and from there into html and Word documents. I still find both FileMaker Pro and Access helpful. A collector in my shoes needs, for example, to be able in the middle of a bookstore to check whether a book is already in the collection.

This seminar gave me comfort and familiarity with trying things on the computer. As a teacher and presenter, I was also keenly aware of the need to make the process of finding information comfortable and engaging. I did not meet some goals, particularly that of making the whole collection easily searchable for visitors to the website. Still, I found several ways to give people access to our books and objects and to my assessment of them as helps to understanding and enjoying fables.



Youtube Video for Joslyn Fable Exhibit. January, 2018

A later follow-up seminar in 2008 introduced me to making videos of parts of the collection. Our mentor was unsparing in his insistence that we develop an in-home studio and produce our own videos. That experience led to YouTube videos on unusual fable objects and story blocks and on museum exhibits I will report on shortly.

If readers get a sense that I enjoy engaging new and different activities, they would be right. On YouTube one will find videos which I have made ranging from religious reflections to Greek tragedy to bucky balls to my extensive toy train. Video experience also made me more confident in serving as talent for several videos on fables produced by more professional videographers, one of which still graces the first page on our fables website.

So Many Objects! So Many Kinds of Objects!

I have been amazed not only by the diversity of *presentation* of fables but also by the surprising *kinds* of objects I have found and the *numbers* of them I have encountered. The pattern of my finding them tends to be the same: I did not know that they existed. Then I found one or two. I kept looking. Then I found many!

Here are some of the more surprising:

Cards: I have found over 3,500 cards. Most are postcards or trade cards. I have found sixteen other *kinds* of cards.

Tableware: I have found 8 manufacturers' series of fable-themed tableware, featuring some 80 plates, platters, cup, saucers, and serving dishes. Tableware objects not belonging to a manufacturer's series total another 196 objects, including 90 plates.

Stamps: I have found stamps presenting fables from 27 countries.

Blotters: I have found 111 blotters, advertising 37 different companies.

Matchboxes: We have 30 French, 18 Russian, and 5 British matchboxes.

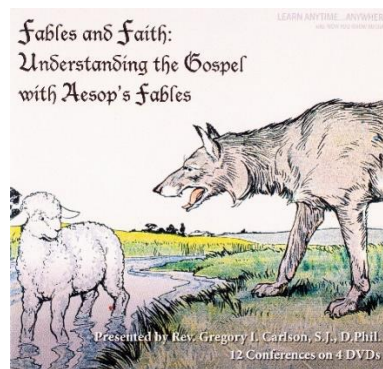
Buttons: I have found 21 different representations of fables on buttons, not counting the same representation in different sizes.

Tiles: I have found 7 different series of tiles, including 28 individual tiles.

Collector's Comment: This computer and video experience touches on a major question for a collector: How much – and how -- does the collector want to share the collection with others? As I look back now, I can see that I long limited myself too much to developing the collection. What would become of it from there, I had reasoned, was up to others. My own instincts as a teacher and communicator, in the course of time, pushed me beyond that view, as I see now looking back. One friend had visited the collection earlier and given me a long set of admonitions on how to promote the collection better. I had thrown them away. I was enjoying too much the collecting itself to worry much about the collection's use. In these later years, the collection's development and those communicative instincts, stimulated by the seminar experience, brought me into wider and wider circles of sharing the collection.

I had long enjoyed telling fables and engaging people in experiencing them. Now I was starting to look for ways to do that. I am particularly grateful to that seminar mentor, Wayne Young, for urging me to use creative ways to engage more people in enjoying fables. Growing interest in expanding the net of engagement outwards received a major impetus in 2012. A colleague had recommended me to "Now You Know Media," now known as "Learn25," a producer of high quality DVD videos exploring Roman Catholic theology and spirituality. Their CEO, Michael Bloom, contacted me and ask if I would want to contribute. When I demurred and said that he probably wanted higher ranking scholars, he pushed back and said that they also wanted good teachers. I do believe that I am that. Their format is challenging. They produce in their Rockville, Maryland, studios sets of 12 DVD conferences, each conference 25 minutes in length. The conferences are to be taught from notes, not read from a text. Michael asked me to think it over.

I asked my good Jesuit friend Fr. Larry Gillick, and he leapt at the chance to say "Greg, do it!" Larry had been urging me for some time to give a "fable retreat," and my usual response was "Fables are one thing and spirituality is another." I am glad that Fr. Larry encouraged me. When Michael and I next talked, I said that I could offer a typical Jesuit retreat enhanced by poetry and visual objects, or I could explore a contemporary spirituality through fables and parables. His answer was: "We'll take both." In one of the most strenuous work-weeks of my life, I videotaped 24 lectures in five days in their soundproof, temperature-controlled studio. By Friday evening, I was happily exhausted!



Now You Know Media DVD Set: *Fables and Faith:*

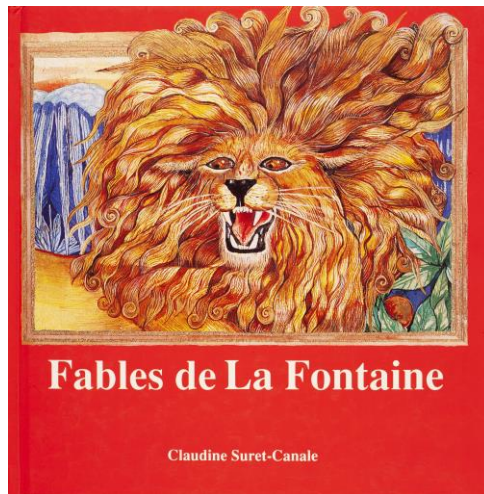
Understanding the Gospels with Aesop's Fables

Also happily, I was able to bring together two great loves of my life, Jesuit spirituality and fables. The "Now You Know" video helped me to integrate two major energies in my life: Christian spirituality and engagement with fables. I see as my deepest desire my wanting to be a Christian and a priest. And each of us, I believe, learns to live his or her calling his or her way. We each find – or at least seek – ways to integrate the energies of our lives. My energies had never conflicted, but now I was enjoying a way of finding them enhancing each other. That was a gift! I appreciate what Michael and Larry did in expanding my world yet again!

Use of the computer also marked for me another result of collecting. For those first 2800 books originally given to Creighton, I could remember individual books quite accurately. I might not remember exactly where a specific text or illustration originated, but I recognized them quickly. Since that time, sheer numbers and the inevitable memory slippage of aging have meant that, at times, I will now finish cataloguing a "new" book only to realize that we already have it! That is one source of the sizeable "duplicates" collection we have developed. Another large source is that friends have given me a number of books, some of which were already in the collection.

8. In 1999, a family reunion in Milwaukee occasioned an experience my mother, sister, brother and I all enjoyed. "Let's go to the flea market!" We all considered ourselves connoisseurs of toys. Several of us had lived for a

A Typical and Embarrassing Incident



In the midst of composing this article, I took a break one evening to catalogue some books found recently. One was *Fables de La Fontaine* from 1990 with strong, colorful illustrations by Claudine Suret-Canale. I did not recognize this artist and so checked on the web. I saw her described as a surrealist. I tried to learn more about her fable book. The first item to appear on Google for "Claudine Suret-Canale fables" was, to my surprise, Creighton's Carlson Fable Collection! I clicked on the link and found what I had catalogued not long ago, a set of calendar cards which this artist produced. A little checking showed that those calendar cards are the very illustrations in this book. Like Oedipus in Sophocles, I had searched and then had found what was right under my nose!

time in various parts of the world. We enjoyed finding old toys, especially foreign toys. And I was always on the lookout for fable books and frequently ran across them at flea markets.

In this flea market, I received a surprising answer from one of the vendors: "Check on Ebay." "What is Ebay?" I asked as the family got back together. Well, in these 21 years, I have learned what Ebay is!

Collector's comment: I am surprised even now, after so many years of collecting, at the different sorts of objects that people have used to present fables. Watching for "fable objects" on

Ebay is thus a regular source of delightful surprise. Consider these things found in the last few weeks:

A Spanish version of La Fontaine's fables from 1944.

Macau stamps from 2018 including "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" and other fables.

An embroidered pillow top depicting The Fox and the Crow."

Pamphlets of fables from Russia and the Philippines.

Cards from Nabisco "Shreddies" in Canada in English and French.

A bilingual book of fox fables in Croatian and English.

A Japanese catalogue of the fable work of Marc Chagall.

Silhouette drawings from 1923 for children to copy.

And the list goes on.

At about the same time, I became aware of and began to use two great used book exchanges, AbeBooks and ZVAB (Zentrales Verzeichnis Antiquarischer Bücher). They have been a regular source of wonderful finds. The internet has changed book selling, often for the worse, but it has certainly benefited this collector by making me aware of so many things available! As a collector, I find that nothing beats walking into a shop, but the internet experience has supplemented that most basic experience and enriched this collection.

By the way, in the first ten years or so of collecting, one experience was surprisingly frequent. Upon entering a shop, I would ask for fable books. If the answer was "I am afraid we will not have anything for you," that comment was followed in almost 100% of the cases by my finding a book of fables new to me! When by contrast owners said, "Oh, I have many things for you," those were generally things I had already found elsewhere! Unfortunately, as the number

of books in the collection has increased and the number of bookdealers has decreased, that correlation has changed. It has become more and more difficult to find books that we do not have as I scour bookdealers' shelves.

9. In the early 2000's I had another challenging administrative post within the Jesuit order in Berkeley California. Again, some of my fun was to enjoy this area's many bookshops and the bookshops I found in professional travels to the Philippines, Asia, and Africa.

A Lucky Find

In 2006, I came to know of a copy of Francis Barlow's rare original edition of *Aesop's Fables with his Life: in English, French, and Latin, Newly Translated*, published in 1666. Most copies vanished in the Great Fire of London. Barlow's one hundred and twelve vigorous compositions, which he etched himself, have stamped the tradition of fable illustration ever since. The volume brings together texts in Latin, French, and English. It also represents a moment in the history of printing, as printers struggled to bring together different techniques for printing texts and illustrations in separate phases on single pages.

A young California family had inherited this volume and wanted to see it find a good home. I happened to be living nearby. We negotiated over some time, and we were both happy to see this treasure come to this collection. Two historians of fable pay tribute to Barlow, who turned "fable illustrations from humorous pantomime or stylized morality plays into often moving domestic drama" (Edward Hodnett). He achieved "a sense of credibility that is the mark of distinguished illustration" (Anne Stevenson Hobbs). Barlow would go on years later to do a second edition that would include illustrations for a life of Aesop. That edition is much less rare than this original edition of 1666. I often look at an image in a new book and say "Yes, this view goes back to Barlow."



The wolf in sheep's clothing almost got away with it. It happened that the shepherd was hungry that evening and laid hold of the largest "sheep" in his fold for dinner. When he discovered the thief in disguise, he made a public example of him.

As I returned to Creighton, I was happy to have more time to give to the collection and to be close to it. I looked for more opportunities to invite people into my enjoyment of fables. One of those turned out to be particularly fruitful. Creighton offered and offers a series of Sunday afternoon lectures at the excellent Joslyn Art Museum just a few blocks from campus. Tours I had given students in my world literature courses made me aware of a fascinating painting there, Jean-George Vibert's "La Cigale et la Fourmi."



Jean-George Vibert, "La Cigale et la Fourmi." Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha

The more I came to know about French presentations of this fable, the more surprising this painting became. Just as La Fontaine changed the tradition of the fable, Vibert was changing its application. La Fontaine, I believe, presents the cicada as himself, the artist asking for recompense for enchanting anyone who will listen. Vibert presents the niggardly ant as a well fed monk, with game on his back and more on his horse, rejecting an artist's plea for a bit of food. He further transfers the scene from the normal household to a road, where the monk ant will leave him, as the good Samaritan did not, half-dead on the road. What a stroke of luck that our very Omaha art museum has this fascinating anti-clerical reinterpretation of a key fable!

In 2011, I offered one of those Sunday lectures. The curator asked afterward "Do you exhibit?" My reaction included a bit of surprise and more than a bit of desire. She cautioned

that the Joslyn was undergoing a change of directors. Would I wait and offer a proposal for an exhibit in the future? In the midst of a busy life, I noted the suggestion and went on.

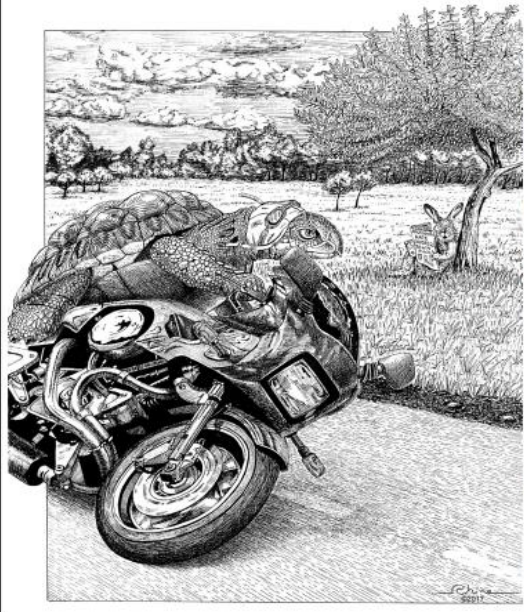
A few years later, the on-campus Lied Art Gallery in the Fine Arts building made an invitation that I consider offering a fable exhibit. I not only agreed. I went back to the Joslyn and made inquiries. In hopes of landing an exhibit, I offered a tutorial in 2016 to three outstanding fine arts students to have them work through the highly disorganized fable objects I had acquired and to make suggestions about what might make for good exhibits. Soon enough, we made an appointment with the director and curator from the Joslyn for a visit. The students and I laid out promising works. Our guests worked through them with interest and said they would get back to us. A few months later, the happy message came that the Joslyn would sponsor an exhibit. To my surprise, we were to do the bulk of the curating! I had not expected that! To my delight, we were able to synchronize and interrelate the exhibits at the Joslyn and on campus.

Spinning fables into art: Aesop inspires installations at Creighton, Joslyn

Creighton University Press Release Headline. January 10, 2018

Part of the luck in this turning point was that, at a good liberal arts school like Creighton, one can engage colleagues and honor students in fascinatingly creative endeavors. A colleague in Fine Arts and I taught a group of honors students a seminar in which they researched the Joslyn Exhibit, titled "I See That Fable Differently." Readers of this article will not be surprised that that is the title I chose! For each of some thirteen fables in the show, we offered at least two different presentations, along with different texts. At the same time, the honors students

themselves developed the on-campus show, titled "Thundering Tortoises and Horrified Hares: Aesop in Popular Culture." They chose the artifacts, prepared them for presentation, wrote the accompanying labels, and designed the layout of the show.



Community

**Thundering Tortoises and Horrified Hares:
Aesop in Popular Culture**
Lied Art Gallery Runs: January 12 - February 11
Lied Art Gallery Reception: Thursday, February 8, 5:00 - 6:30 p.m.
creighton.edu/Aesop

I See That Fable Differently
Joslyn Art Museum Runs: January 27 - April 29
Joslyn Reception: Thursday, February 8, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m. *cash bar
Lecture: "Why Artists Love Aesop" by **Fr. Greg Carlson, S.J.**
Sunday, February 11, 2:00 p.m. at Joslyn's Abbott Lecture Hall

JOSLYN Art Museum **KRIPKE CENTER**
for the Study of Religion & Society

Admission is free. Visitor parking is located west of the Lied Education Center for the Arts and is accessed from Cass Street.

This exhibition was made possible through the Ron Myer and Dorothy Kripke Center for the Study of Religion and Society Fund, McCormick Fund, the Grace Keenan Fund, the Department of Fine and Performing Arts, the Reinert Alumni Library, the Honors Program at Creighton University, the students of HRS 390, and other anonymous sources.

402.280.2290 | liedartgallery@creighton.edu
Facebook: [creightonuniversityliedartgallery](https://www.facebook.com/creightonuniversityliedartgallery)

Flier for Joslyn and Creighton Exhibits, using an Adam Rhine drawing featured in the show

Collector's Comment: It has certainly become this collector's dream to invite people to enjoy the things I have brought together. I put together a video introduction to the Joslyn exhibit and I narrated online tours of each exhibit, for it is my delight to help people see what creative artists have seen in these simple stories. I loved giving tours!

A Controversial Book

Histories of fable illustration often turn to one ephemeral edition for an example of the political use of fables: *Les Fables de La Fontaine et Hitler*, published with illustrations by J.-Y. Mass and D. Collot in 1939 before Hitler's invasion of France. The blurb on the back cover of a recent facsimile has it right: "Cet album, textes et dessins, dénonçait la férocité et la mégalomanie du chancelier allemand." The fables texts here are just as La Fontaine wrote them, but the biting satirical illustrations -- like this of the milkmaid dreaming of her future acquisitions -- make such a difference!



I had known of this book for years and despaired of ever finding a copy. That facsimile had only whetted my appetite. About a month before a summer trip to Europe in 2014, I said to my brother John and his wife Susie "This year I want to find this Hitler booklet!" I had never had it in my hand. Shortly thereafter, I was amazed to find the 1939 original being offered on eBay. I had not seen it offered before, there or elsewhere. The week between the beginning and end of the Ebay auction was a tense time for me! I immediately put down a bid that exceeded the minimum for the booklet, \$195.50. My rule of thumb as purchaser of old books has been and is "If you have not seen it before, you are not going to see it again. Buy it now!" How deeply was I willing to invest in this rarest of books? Surely Hitler would have destroyed every copy during the long occupation of France. (The copy up for auction on Ebay was in Portugal, which remained neutral during World War II.)

The auction would end around 3 A.M. one morning. Bidding on Ebay is usually fierce during the last minutes and seconds. I could not bear to sit at the computer at 3 A.M. and watch this book go to someone else! I bid well over \$1000 and went to bed several hours before the auction ended, expecting the worst, namely that I would get up to learn that someone had outbid me.

To my amazement, no one else had bid. I won, and for only the minimum bid! I had pleasant email conversations afterward with the seller, learning of his father's imprisonment during WWI. When he learned about the bidding history described above, he said, with good humor, "Oh, I wish I had put the minimum bid higher!" Though this is a treasured part of the collection, I have come to learn that it is also highly controversial. Directors of both exhibit venues warned me that the book could prompt negative reactions and would be better kept out of the exhibits. Their wise responses have taught me something about exhibits!

10. The collection was able to take a wonderful leap forward about three years ago. It is no secret that university finances have been difficult for some years. Creighton's support of this collection had been reduced over years of belt-tightening to being less than one third of what it had been. Soon after the collection became Creighton's, the University's development personnel had made attempts to garner support for the collection, but without much luck. This time, the Dillon Foundation in Lincoln, NE, came through in splendid fashion. They not only brought support of purchases up to the earlier annual level for each of the next five years, but they enabled a stunning major purchase.

When I am too tired late at night to do more that might be productive, I sometimes look over fable offerings on the favorite websites that I have mentioned: Ebay, ABE, and ZVAB. Sometimes, instead of starting with the cheapest, I will start from the most expensive. This night I was surprised. On ABE, there was a full edition of Chagall's 102 engravings of La Fontaine's fables selling for \$55,000. Our collection had been lucky enough to purchase two such engravings singly. Their cost is normally in the \$1500 to \$2000 range. I thought to myself: "If somebody had the money, this complete edition is a real bargain!" A few days later, our development team approached me to suggest that I make a proposal that they could bring to the Dillon Foundation. Why not, I wondered, include the purchase of a complete original Chagall edition of La Fontaine? Imagine my amazement when the foundation accepted our proposal!



Marc Chagall, "The Pig, Goat, and Sheep" etching. 1952

Chagall brings to La Fontaine often a kind of lyricism and even mysticism that is his own. He can also pierce to the pathos of a scene. He does that here as the goat and sheep go calmly to market in the farmer's cart, but the pig screams. The pig is well aware that the market wants not milk or fleece, as from the other two animals, but butchered meat. He has reason to be upset! And so does the farmer wanting him to quiet down.

Collector's Comment: The Dillon grant gave the collection a really major possession, one I could never have hoped for with our normal resources. It also buoyed up the collection's development for five years when universities across the world are finding their resources shrinking. The grant has of course also boosted my confidence. I suppose every collector, because the collecting passion is always particular, wonders whether he or she has "collected oneself into a corner." "Is this just my own madness?" I believe that saints may sometimes wonder the same thing. How lovely to have an outside group ratify the wisdom, beauty, or maybe just passion of one's choice!

A Gift from Our Own University

About 2018, various things succeeded in getting me to notice John Ogilby. A bookseller friend, Jeff Weber, had been contemplating making a "leaf book" edition of Ogilby's splendid 1668 landmark edition of Aesop's fables and had asked me to consider writing a foreword. Each copy of our book would include a page from a copy of the original edition now in abject condition. I had written a quick draft of a possible foreword to the book. And, back in 2000, our collection had acquired Ogilby's first publication of Aesop, less opulent than Ogilby's larger 1668 volume, but already a leap forward in English-language appreciation of Aesop. This book had excellent illustrations by Franz Klein. I had also been asked to be prepublication reviewer for a recent manuscript on Ogilby. In the midst of these activities, Creighton's archivist revealed to me that a careful inventory of Creighton's Rare Book Room had revealed three books that he thought belonged in the fable collection. I had actually made overtures to his predecessors for the most valuable of these books years earlier, but had received little response. It turns out that Creighton possesses, in very good condition, a copy of Ogilby's most ambitious undertaking, the very "elephant folio" of 1668 that the bookseller and I were considering. This book contains marvelous illustrations by Wenceslaus Hollar, Ogilby's revised verse "translations," and copious marginal notes printed in various languages. This gift to the collection came just as I was preparing for a paper, "What Ogilby Did for Aesop," to be read at the Renard Society's conference in Prague. It was a thrill to have in my hands two great books with which Ogilby, a fascinating entrepreneur, changed the worlds of translating, publishing, and marketing!



Here is Hollar's lovely rendition of the dog letting go of his piece of meat to snatch the piece of meat from the dog he sees in the water. What a lovely and timely gift!

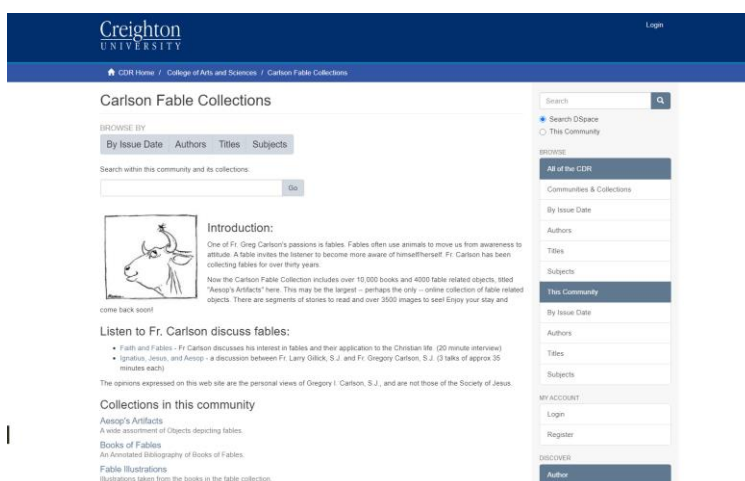
11. That gift of the Ogilby edition, described in the sidebar "A Gift from Our Own University," is one sign of what I see as more and more positive affirmation and development of this collection on behalf of Creighton University. As in the University's exhibit of the collection two years ago, I perceive the University finding ways to support and extend the collection. Many of these developments come through the enthusiastic support of the University's archivist David Crawford. These pleasant surprises from the University include providing better storage and working space, implementing a professional archival system for the collection's objects, acquiring a powerful new scanner perfect for older and more fragile books, scanning title-pages and tables of contents of every book in the collection, and offering many illustrations from the collection on the web. As the "A typical and embarrassing incident" sidebar above shows, the web sometimes surprises me in a search when it directs me to the Carlson Fable Collection! One more recent initiative delighted me when I started to write this article. Creighton's "Research and Development RaDLab Team" is creating a virtual museum of the Fable Collection, in which visitors online can manipulate fable objects to enjoy them from various angles. Photographer Chad Brocker has worked especially hard and successfully on this photogrammetry project.



Section of virtual Aesop's Fables Museum, populated with objects from the collection

Among Creighton's appropriation of the collection, another person deserves mention, for he was involved in several of them. Richard Jizba, a marvelously energetic colleague on the

library staff at Creighton, had fallen in love with the collection at the same time as he was developing uses of the "Creighton Digital Repository." I understand the CDR to be an attempt to escape the treadmill of serially obsolescent web content systems. A web creator need not reshape websites with each new generation of software, like FrontPage, DreamWeaver, Typo3, and Drupal. People advancing in age like me do not want to go back and create a website all over again! CDR allows for storage and presentation of all sorts of materials and so is a good fit for this collection and its databases, images, movies, powerpoints, recordings and more. Richard generously converted every one of the collection's almost 10,000 database book records into a CDR record and did the same for many of the objects in the collection. One result is that the collection now has precisely the search engine that it has long needed. It will pick up on any word in any part of any record. I use it myself to track references I made years ago. The CDR for the fable collection is available at <https://dspace2.creighton.edu/xmlui/handle/10504/72844>. Richard died suddenly a year ago, and the University is still discovering good projects he was pursuing.



Collector's comment: As I take note of Creighton's increasing help with the collection, I offer four comments: about one-person initiatives, about cataloguing a collection, about the future of this collection, and about helpers along the way.

I have been suspicious for years of any Jesuit priest who develops a ministry dependent upon him alone. Each of those ministries, I believe, tends to die with the "Lone Ranger" Jesuit who developed it. My enthusiasm for fables and my enjoyment of the process kept me from recognizing that I was becoming one such Jesuit. And so I face the question now: "Is this collection enough of a collective work that it will survive and continue to develop when I can no longer work with it?" I hope the answer is yes, since a significant group in the University sees its value. I regret that there is no single passionate "pusher" to pursue the collection's development. Richard was that kind of advocate, and I had counted on his interest to help carry the collection beyond my times.

About cataloguing a collection, I can say from the perspective of this later date: I wish I had been more careful along the way. About books I was careful. Access has proved to be a helpful database, and cataloguing more information rather than less proved to be a wise decision. The University library's painstaking cataloguer Jeanette Hilton tracked every one of those books on Access and added a Library of Congress catalogue number that made the collection's books locatable to people across the world.

I did not keep up cataloguing objects as carefully as the books. As much as I could in limited time, I got some description of them and an image onto the web, but there were busy periods where I was unable to do even that. I am delighted that the University is not only storing the objects carefully but is also using a professional archival system to catalogue them. My

Five Surprising, Lucky Moments Around the World

Friends tell me that I am lucky. Here are some of my luckier moments.

In summer of 1987, I stopped by a favorite neighborhood bookshop in my hometown, Milwaukee. There I happened upon, *Esops Fabler* in Swedish, a first edition with the illustrations of Ernst Griset. In 33 years, I have not found the book again, even in Stockholm!

In 1988, I was a missionary priest in Nigeria. One of my fellow Jesuits was showing me the country when we stopped in Ife for lunch. I noticed a bookshop. There I found Oxford University Press's pamphlet *The Father, his Son and their Donkey*, with Ibrahim and Ali appropriately presented for an African audience.

In 1990, I was in Bangkok with my brother and sister-in-law, and we visited the "Saturday Market." Among the many things being sold there were children's booklets. I addressed the bookseller with every version I knew of "Aesop," "Esopo," "Aisopus." A light finally came into the busy bookseller's eyes, and he dove into the mess of booklets before him. Soon he had come up with several Thai booklets featuring, for example, a lion and mouse on the cover.

In 2001, I had two nights with fellow Jesuits in Casablanca. Those Jesuits had urged me to be careful on the streets. They had heard that a fellow named Osama bin Laden wanted to capture an American hostage. In the first bookshop that I found, I noticed a copy of *Jean de La Fontaine: Fables* illustrated by Adolf Born for about \$20. I had not known of this this huge and impressive book. Morocco helped me to find this French book published in the Czech Republic.

My brother's family and I had an overnight in Trier in 2017. I broke away from them for an hour to scout several antiquarian bookshops. At Antiquariat am Dom, the bookseller indicated that he had at home the rare trilingual 1718 *Favole Scelte* by Johann Ulrich Krauss. By 10 o'clock the next morning we were ready to leave in the rain with me the happy owner of a new treasure.

ignorance of good cataloguing and my falling behind in the cataloguing of objects make us pay the price now. We have two different cataloguing systems and a number of objects for which we need to go back and retrieve as much information as we can.

My reflection is that the very dynamic process of growing a collection will often preclude knowing early how best to keep a good account of its objects. Perhaps the dynamic of collecting means that the collector needs to keep thinking how best to organize information about the collection. I wish I had had time and know-how to take that challenge on better than I have.

What is the future of this collection? The present challenges for higher education make that question all the more poignant. Creighton University, I would say, is on the way to claiming the collection. Creighton University is not a large research university. For a small or mid-sized university, it is unusually complex, since its central liberal arts undergraduate school is positioned among other, professional schools: medicine; dentistry; law; business; nursing; occupational therapy, physical therapy, and pharmacy. Though Creighton is a leader in undergraduate research and its professional schools are leaders in various areas of graduate research, we are not like large state research universities.

In this situation, the question "Does this collection belong here?" has naturally recurred. A good university is always graced by its special collections. But such collections are not its ordinary business. Library personnel here have championed the collection from the beginning, while others may have looked on it as "kid stuff" or a "strange hobby." Recent administrators have been wonderfully supportive of the collection and its development. Though I hope that the collection stays here, I believe that the question has not yet been definitively answered. An important part of the answer will be those who are passionate about what the collection has to offer. Institutions may not have passions, loyalties, or even memories, but people do.

Mention of "memories" brings me to my last comment, about helpers along the way. I hope readers will have noticed, as I have, that almost every one of the eleven surprising moments described here has happened at the instigation or with the help of good friends. They are for me heroes in this story. They have listened to fables, raised questions, made suggestions, found fable books for me, given me books, traded books with me, organized expeditions to look for books, driven me to bookstores in their cities, scoured dealers' bookshelves with me, waited patiently while I went through "just one more" shelf of books, reminded me of "Aesop and Son" and "Fractured Fables" from their childhood, made copies for me of old Aesop's Fables" cartoons (which are *not* Aesop's fables!), requested for me copies of Air France's fable menu jackets, researched cylindrical audio recordings and kniferests, and listened to tales of my seeking and finding books,. Preparing this reflection on my collecting has made me even more aware of how much this is their collection too!

And now it is time for the reader to enjoy, in picture and text, some more of the diversity of this collection stimulated by the various ways in which great artists have helped us enjoy fables. May those readers let themselves be happily surprised!

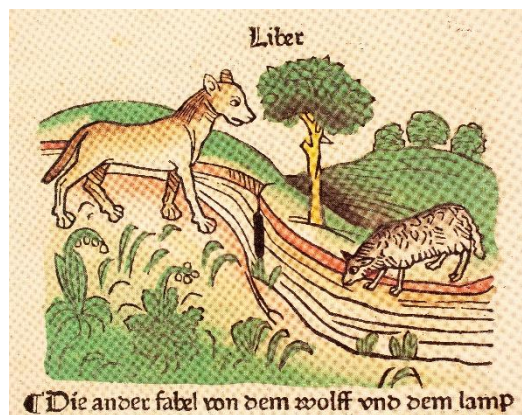
Appendix 1: Eleven Other Favorite Books in the Collection (August 2)

1. By 1455, Johannes Gutenberg had printed his bible, and the world was changed. Perhaps the first illustrated book was Ulrich Boner's *Der Edelstein* (the precious jewel), published in Bamberg in 1461. The title of this fable book is related to what was in medieval collections and in this book, a prominent first fable. A cock in a barnyard came across a jewel, pecked at it, and walked away, declaring the jewel worthless. He was after a piece of corn! The message was "Do not be as stupid as the cock, not to recognize this book as precious!" In 1972, Müller und Schindler in Stuttgart published a beautiful facsimile of this book. For a month in the summer of 2009 it became my bible as I prepared a paper for the Renard Society meeting. In each illustration, the recurring image of Aesop the teacher recurs, pointing to learning to be done from the story. It is believed that there is one copy extant of this precious jewel! Here we see the dog about to give up his prize to lunge at the "prize" he sees in the water. Of course that prize is only the image of his own. Grasp for more and you may lose what you have!



Boner, "Dog and His Image," 1461

2. In 1476, Heinrich Steinhoewel, a well educated medical doctor in Ulm, published a large book that would be the grandfather of northern European fable books. There are a handful of copies still extant around the world. In 1992, Libri Illustri in Ludwigsburg published a lovely facsimile of this book, including its breathtakingly beautiful simple woodcuts. The facsimile was made from a hand-colored copy and is exact right down to the wormholes in some pages! For a long time, I thought this treasure was beyond our means, and it was! I was delighted to find a copy that we could get for the collection. Texts of the fables are rendered, true to the Renaissance program of Steinhoewel, in Latin verse, Latin prose, and German. Might the excellent woodcuts come from the hand of a worker on the Ulm cathedral? Steinhoewel's title-page woodcut appears in the center of the cover of the Collection's Sixth Edition Catalogue pictured above. In the illustration just below, the wolf meets the lamb to accuse him. However unjust the accusations, we know how this trial will finish!



Steinhoewel, "Wolf and Lamb," 1476

3. Between 1755 and 1759, Jean-Baptist Oudry produced a four-volume edition of La Fontaine's 200 fables with lavish full-page engravings in volumes already of exceptionally large format. This huge edition is said to have bankrupted many who sponsored it. Oudry's engravings were apparently meant as models for Versailles tapestries. These engravings have continued to have a

strong influence on the subsequent French tradition of illustrating La Fontaine. Here the stork gets her revenge on the dastardly fox who had invited her to lunch but had served only a thin soup in shallow dishes. The clever stork gave no indication of anger over the joke he had just played on her, but she did invite him to her home for a meal. She served a thicker stew in long tall vases. Turnabout is fair play!



J.B. Oudry, "The Fox and the Stork." 1755

4. By the 1830's lithography had become quite sophisticated. J.J. Grandville was a trend-setter for French illustration with a whole volume of wonderfully executed anthropomorphic animals. His fables book in 1838 followed upon *Les Métamorphoses du jour* (1828–29), a series of seventy scenes in which individuals with human bodies and faces of animals play out human comedies. The drawings of *Metamorphoses* and Grandville's fable book demonstrate

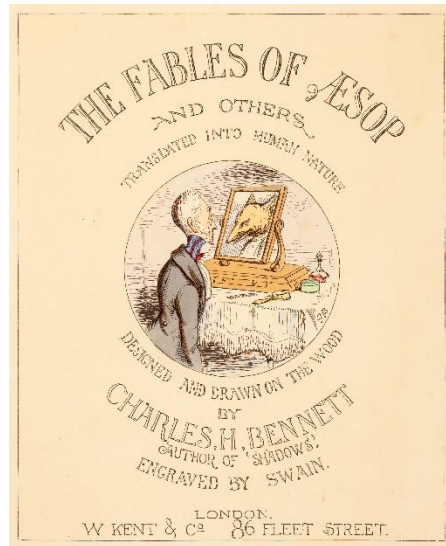
extraordinary skill in combining human and animal. I have been able to pick up first editions of Grandville in three different "states." The chief difference I see among the three is that the printer's designs surrounding the title of each fable become more elaborate in each succeeding state. Grandville's "Cicada and Ant" has become justly famous. As I mentioned a propos of Vibert's painting of this scene, La Fontaine had changed the polarity of this fable, I believe, to the benefit of the artist cicada, in whom La Fontaine saw himself. He made this fable the first in the first of his ultimately twelve books of fables. The ant, in previous versions the realist that knows that we have to work, has become a stingy bourgeois miser condemning the artist to death, an artist who happily sings for the pleasure of anyone passing by.



J.J. Grandville, *La Cigale et la Fourmi*. 1838

5. Charles Bennett's *The Fables of Aesop and Others Translated into Human Nature* in 1857 opens some fascinating doors. We now have printer/publishers offering both colored and non-colored editions, with different prices. Secondly, we have a fascinating approach to coloring: the printer/publisher hires people to hand-color the book before it goes on sale. Hand-coloring them at home seems also to have become a favorite pastime for women and children who were not interested in sewing! Thirdly, we have strong social satire as the avowed point of the fables,

well illustrated in the title-page picture of a man looking into a mirror and seeing himself as a wolf!



Bennett offers explicit social criticism, as in the image here of the fox that flattered the crow out of her precious cheese. Bennett titles his moral "Advice to rich widows." There are still foxes about asking old crows to sing, just so that these foxes can grab the treasure!



6. Historians of illustrated fable editions make a point of including Benjamin Rabier, probably best known for his cartoon of "The Laughing Cow" used on products from the popular dairy brand. I first saw a set of several volumes, apparently first editions, by Rabier at one of the Buchinists along the Seine. The price was then beyond our means. Little by little, I found excellent reproductions and then the originals. Rabier seems to have done all sorts of things, including knife-rests featured in the "Surprising Objects" appendix. He fashioned advertisements for many different firms, and I have enjoyed finding them! His presentations of La Fontaine regularly have a cartoonist's wit. Consider his presentation of the frog who tried to blow himself up to be as big as an ox. Rabier catches the absurdity of this blow-up, the fright of the other frogs, and the bemusement of the ox. How engaging!



Benjamin Rabier, "The Ox and the Frog." 1906

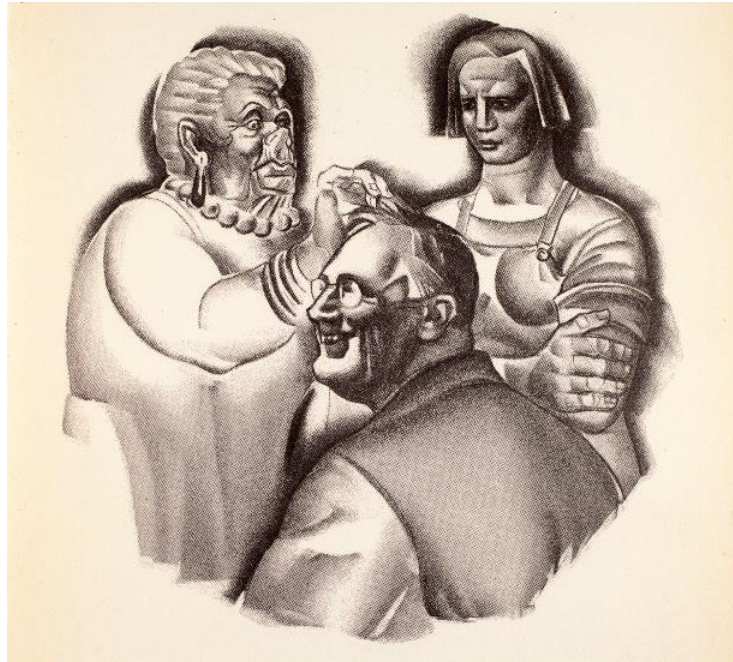
7. Many of the artists we have been considering bring together a bewildering complexity of technical achievements and artistic emphases. The Swiss André Hellé in illustrating La Fontaine in 1922 achieves a refreshing simplicity in letting the fables speak for themselves through simple, colorful forms. Fables often need two scenes to show a contrast. Hellé uses two images on facing pages to dramatize the story we have already seen of fox tricking stork and then stork answering fox. The use of form and color here is simply lovely!



André Hellé, "The Fox and the Stork." 1922

8. Hugo Gellert does not rank with the great artists mentioned in this list of favorites. Still, his biting book *Aesop Said So* in 1936 stands as a favorite of mine because it exemplifies dramatically the use of fable as political satire. Gellert applies fable after fable to controversial political figures and positions. A good example is his adaptation of the funny fable about a middle-aged man with two wives or two mistresses or two candidates for marriage, depending on the diverse ways the story is told. The older woman secretly plucks out his black hairs to keep him seeming to be her age. The younger woman keeps plucking out his gray hairs to keep him

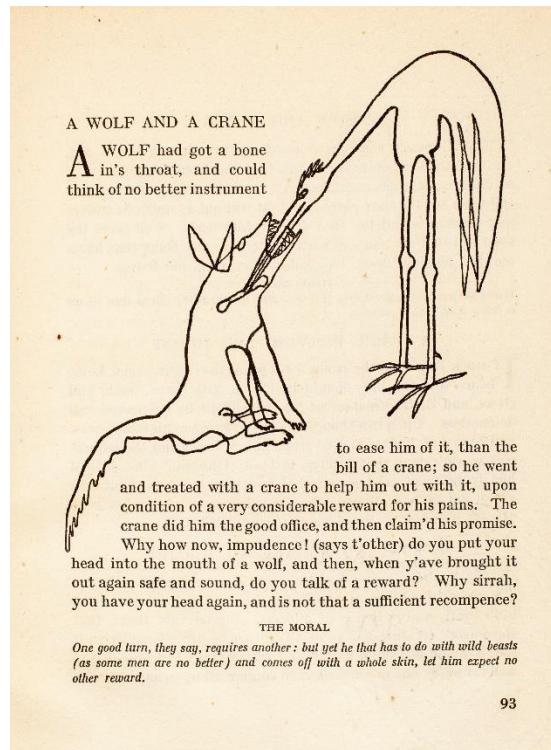
seeming to be her age. Between the two of them, the man goes bald! Gellert cleverly "applies" the fable to Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his much-rumoured relationship with a younger woman. Touché!



Hugo Gellert, *Aesop Said So*, "Roosevelt with His Two Wives," 1936

9. Alexander Calder in the 1930's and 1940's illustrated books of fables of both Aesop and La Fontaine, and both were among those early books that I had collected. Dover Press published excellent simple paperbacks, including Calder's ingenious line-drawings. Calder may be best remembered for popularizing the art form known as the mobile. He also created wire sculptures and ingenious operating circuses for his children. His fable drawings are of a piece with those other creations. They often present a kind of x-ray view inside and through things. They are unabashedly fun. Here Calder shows us a medical operation going on. The wolf had gobbled up a chicken so quickly that a bone was caught in his throat. He went through the woods pleading with every animal to remove the bone. He offered a huge reward. A crane stepped up and

performed the requested surgery – and then waited for her reward. The wolf snarled and said "You had your head between a wolf's jaws and got it out again. That is your reward!" Calder adds the fun of fitting text and image together on the page.



Alexander Calder, "A Wolf and a Crane." 1931

10. In a recent trip to Paris, as I walked along the stalls of the "Buchinists" along the Seine on the way to Notre Dame, I found a five-volume edition of both La Fontaine's fables and his short stories, illustrated with wonderful wit by Gaston Barret in 1950. I had not known of the work before. The price seemed to me high. Could we negotiate? "No." I came back later in the day and tried again. "No." In this case, prudence won out, and I moved along, disappointed and slightly haunted by my belief expressed earlier: if I see something I have not seen before, I will probably not see it again. I wandered toward the Jesuit Community along "St. André des Arts," surely one of the older, smaller, winding streets in Paris. I came by a used bookseller that I had

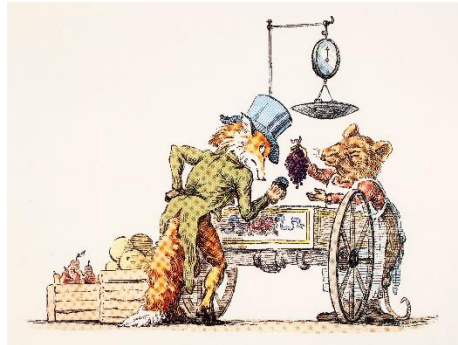
not remembered from previous visits, stopped in, and asked for fable books. The first offered me was the same five volumes, for something less than half the price of the other seller's copies. Magnifique! I have enjoyed Barret's strong interpretations of the fables. We included him twice in the Joslyn exhibit. Here is one of those. Recall "The Fox and the Stork" from above. The clever stork beats the fox at his own insulting, humiliating game. Here is Barret's delightful interpretation, underscoring the gender of the stork and the shame of the fox. The poses of both characters tell volumes!



Gaston Barret, "The Fox and the Stork." 1950

11. What I look for in the constant stream of new fable books being published these days is what I have always sought: fresh insight into what is going on in the stories. While I find many of the books disappointing, because they do not explore the stories, I am thrilled every year by the books that add to the creative diversity in the tradition. Barbara McClintock's adaptation and

illustration in *Animal Fables from Aesop*, published in 2000, is just such a book. One of the most repeated fables in the Aesopic repertoire is "The Fox and the Grapes." McClintock adds a sequel scene: the frustrated fox is buying grapes from the mouse vendor!



Barbara McClintock, "The Fox and the Grapes." 2000

The final revelation in McClintock's presentation is both surprising and excellent: the animals in these stories were being played by humans! The animal stories are, after all, about what humans do!



Barbara McClintock, Closing illustration. 2000

Creative artists like these eleven keep me eager to find ever more creative interpretations of these simple stories that were first told ages ago.

Appendix 2: Thirteen More Surprising Objects

Along the way in the narrative above, we have encountered a Damoiseau cookie tin, offered by Buchinist H el ene Moncourt in Paris. It had its own story, since it had served as her lunchbox when she was a pupil in elementary school. This cookie tin shows a different fable or two on each of its sides. It is the first in a long line of objects that have surprised me, objects which I had not expected to find employed to illustrate fables. We have also encountered French tapestries and a Spode platter from the 1830's. Here are thirteen more such objects. It is a testimony to fables' popularity that these artifacts come from seven different countries. Readers can find pictures and more details about the provenance of each object on the collection's website, <http://www.creighton.edu/Aesop>.

1. Italian Gioco delle Favole:



Il gioco delle favole by Enzo Mari. Seconda variante. Milan: Danese. 1967.

Enzo Mari in the 1960's developed a beautiful game consisting of a number of cards with slots to fit together. The game went through at least four editions, moving from smaller to larger cards and from black-and-white designs to colored designs.

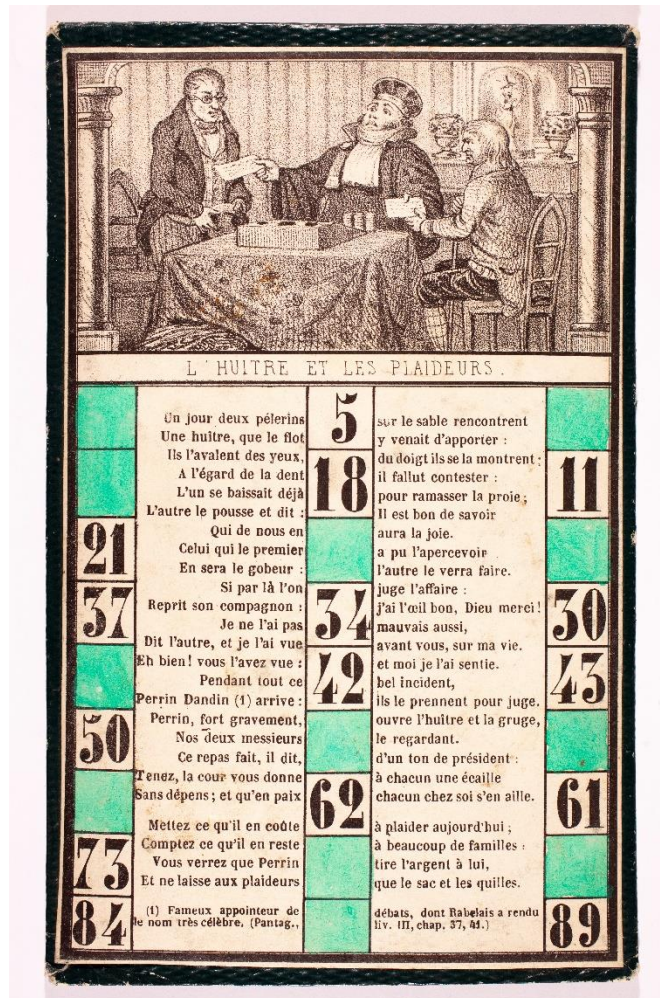


Il gioco delle favole by Enzo Mari. Quarta variante. Milan: Danese. 1985.

Mari's idea is ingenious! One recalls traditional fables, like that above involving fox and stork, and then one generates in surprising fashion new encounters and can be creative about the story that the conjunction of figures might create.

2. French Lotto Games:

The nineteenth century witnessed variations of lottery games, loosely like American bingo. At least three different sets in the collection present various adaptations. Cards with random numbers include each a fable illustration. In some versions, naming the fable and its moral becomes a way of making progress in the game.



Loto des Fables de LaFontaine. 24 cards. 1860?

Here pictured on such a card I found on Ebay twenty years ago is the fable of the two men who, respectively, saw and picked up an oyster on the beach. Each claimed it as his own. To judicate their claims, they asked a passerby to make a judgment. The passerby took the oyster, ate its meat, cracked the shell in two and gave each litigant an empty half shell. Watch out what happens when you go to court!

3. American Whiskey Decanter:

Who would have thought that whiskey decanters were the right place for fable illustrations? And who would have carried the conceit further to create reliefs of six different scenes and made

Aesop the cork-observer looking down on each scene? To finish off the creative mood, why not add a wind-up music box on the bottom of each decanter!



Hoffman Distilling, Lawrenceburg, KE, 1978

Here Aesop looks down on the boy who cried "Wolf!" once too often. This time there really is a wolf, and no one will believe the boy.

4. Japanese Tin Toy Locomotive

As the son of a toy department manager, I had plenty of experience of Japanese "tin toys" in the 1950's, often now highly prized collector's items. One sometimes found in these toys and other products coming out of Japan since then a creative, if confusing, adaptation of Western words and symbols. So it was when, on Ebay, I discovered this friction-driven railroad engine with "Aesop" clearly printed on its front fenders. I love trains, but what might Aesop have to do with trains? I still do not know. There are animals pictured on this engine, but none of the pairings fit with fables that I know. Life has its mysteries!



Japanese red tin toy steam locomotive with friction motor, marked "Aesop" at the front both left and right. 1957?

5. American Cigar Box:

Here is another surprising Ebay discovery. I have no idea why a cigar would be named after Aesop. This box remains utterly singular in my experience. I have found no other box like it and no mention of Aesop cigars anywhere that I have looked. Where might this attractive image of Aesop have come from?



Aesop Cigar Box. American. 1900?

6. Russian Matryoshka:

I have found several Russian nesting dolls, but one exemplar stands out: ten scenes on ten dolls take us through the story. This exemplar is a signed original about 11" high. Each successive doll is about an inch shorter than her older sister.



Ten Russian Nesting Dolls. Signed by L. Surko. 1993.

On Doll #8 we see all that is left after the unfortunate tit-for-tat encounter: a broken empty soup bowl and an empty vase. The last dolls' illustrations take us away to scenes without the two former friends. Who knows what we will find if we take apart a sad scene of trickery and revenge?



Doll #8

7. Russian Lacquer Box:

Ivan Krylov is generally acknowledged to be at the top rung of fabulists, along with Aesop and Jean de La Fontaine. This exquisite signed lacquer box from Palekh in Russia illustrates a

different Krylov fable on each of its exposed five sides. The top side shows "Trishkin's Caftan." Trishkin's long robe needed repair. The tailor kept taking other parts of the robe to repair and patch the troubled parts. Each repair meant that the robe got smaller. When Trishkin and the tailor finally had a worthy product again, it turned out to be no more than a vest!



Russian lacquer box from the village of Palekh illustrating five different stories by Ivan Krylov. 1980?

8. Russian Statue of the Cook and the Cat:

Another fine Krylov fable has a cook interrupt his preparation of a meal and then return, only to find the cat feasting on his entrée in the middle of the floor. Instead of rescuing the entrée, the silly cook lectures the cat on bad behavior! This statue about 12" high is another happy find on Ebay.



Russian porcelain. 1990?

9. East German Wood Carving:

One of the first objects donated to this collection was this clever wood carving 3" high. Like other lovely small carvings from the Erzgebirge region of the former German Democratic Republic, it is a standard production, repeated many times over. The fox can only look at the grapes; he is unable to reach them, and he will declare them sour. My sister Meg first found this for me in the early 1980's. The collection now has several exemplars.



East German wood carving. 1980?

10. Chinese Six-Sided Story Blocks:

Six-sided blocks forming six different pictures are an age-old toy. At last count, our collection includes eleven different sets. One particular variation is especially challenging and enjoyable, since its six pictures do not take a predictable rectangular form. Rather, the formation of the blocks follows the structure of the fable's image. Of course, a player's first challenge is to find which side of each block fits with each side of the other blocks. It is not easy!



Chinese "Picture Cubes". 1980?

It seems a cat and fox were travelling together. "How many ways do you have to evade attackers?" the clever fox asked the cat. "I ask because I have a million tricks!" The cat answered "I have only one trick: I run up a tree." Just then they heard hunting dogs barking and approaching. The cat immediately went up a tree. The fox started through his many evasions. After many of the fox's tricks, under the very tree where the cat remained safe, the relentless dogs caught and killed the fox. Better one trick that works than many that end up not working!

11. Russian Pendulum Toy:

Pendulum toys are another classic. A child uses arm motion to get a weight swinging under the toy's scene. The swinging weight moves a string, so that characters above perform engaging actions. In this version of "The Fox and the Crow," the crow bobs his head up and down as he listens to the fox. In the meantime, the fox's tail beats the ground with excitement. This was another loving gift from my deceased sister, who found it in Pasadena, CA, at a Rose Bowl Swap Meet around Christmas, 1992.



Russian pendulum toy representing "The Fox and the Crow." 1980?

12. French Kniferest:

I admit that I did not even know that such a thing as a "kniferest" existed. I have now found three French sets of kniferests with fable images. Most striking among them is a set of twelve

fable images made into kniferests including the signature of the artist, Benjamin Rabier, the same artist included in the appendix offering my favorite books. Each chrome kniferest includes a large horizontal surface for resting a knife. These are ingenious little incarnations of Rabier's wit!



Benjamin Rabier, signed chrome Kniferest. "The Fox and the Crow." 1925.

13. American Advertisement for Eyeglasses:

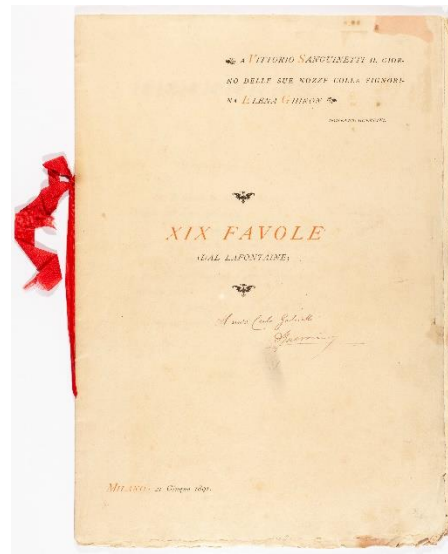
Advertisements remain a perennial source of surprise and fun for this collection. I would want to show so many! Let me choose just one and urge you to visit the website to enjoy many other surprises! In the meantime, this advertisement speaks for itself!



Advertisement for DOC Optique, Milwaukee, WI. 1980?

Appendix 3: Six Unusual Paper Ephemera

1. *XIX Favole (dal Lafontaine)* from 1891 was printed up as a wedding gift. Who ever thought of giving nineteen fables translated into Italian as a wedding gift? The author included a wish that the groom recipient not open the book now but wait until he had a circle of "good and pretty children around him clamoring for a story." I include a scan here, including the pretty ribbon used to hold it together!



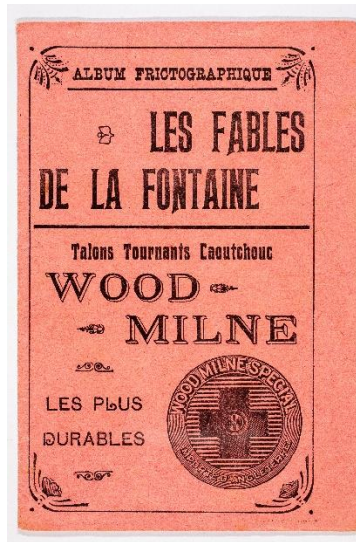
2. *The Fable of the Pig and the Boxcar*. This pamphlet given away by the Southern Pacific Railway in 1960 tells the story of a "monstrous pig shipper" who returned railroad cars stinking with "rubbish." Aesop is reported here to have said: "When you unload ... unload clean." (Somehow I do not find this statement in all my morals from Aesop....)

The fable
of the pig
and the
Boxcar

3. This French paper puzzle, woven from strips of paper, produces an image of "The Tortoise and Hare." About 1900. Weaving one of these pictures takes patience and determination!



4. "Les Albums Frictographique" of Wood Milne, makers of rubber heels for shoes around 1900, have apparently blank pages. When a page is rubbed with a coin, a fable illustration appears.



5. A complete set of 24 cigar labels from Verellen, Vieille Anvers, about 1960. Who would have thought of using cigar bands to illustrate fables?! The three pictured here are from James Thurber, 1001 Nights, and a Native American story about the wolf and the coyote.



6. The French yarn company DMC offered 20 of these cards as a set in about 1965. The graphics on the card let an eager sewer know what color thread to use and where to punch the needle through the card.

