

Stith Thompson - The folktale - pp 63-64

In one story at least, the horse renders his most efficient service after his death. This tale is best known from the German version of Grimm, *The Goose Girl* (Type 533). A princess is accompanied on her way to marry a prince by a servant girl. Before setting out, the princess has received from her mother some costly gifts, including the wonderful speaking horse Falada and certain magic objects. On her way the princess becomes thirsty and asks for a drink, but the servant girl makes her get down and drink from the brook. The horse speaks and says, "If your mother knew about this, her heart would break." And the magic objects also speak. Three times the princess stops for water, and finally the servant girl compels her to exchange clothes with her and to swear to keep the matter secret. The servant girl mounts the princess's horse and, when she reaches the palace, claims to be the princess. The heroine herself is made to watch the geese. Meantime, the false princess, fearing that the speaking horse may betray her, has it killed and has its head set up over the castle gate. The little goose girl has miraculous power over animals and over the weather and wind. One day she is combing her hair and the servant boy who is with her sees that it is of gold. He tries to take some of the golden strands from her, but she asks the wind to carry off the boy's hat, so that he runs away after it. In the evening as she drives her geese home, she sees the head of her slaughtered horse. She weeps, and the horse answers, "If your mother knew about this, her heart would break." When all of this happens a second day, the boy goes to the king and tells him what he has seen and heard. The next day the king follows the boy, over hears everything, and learns the true state of affairs. The treacherous servant girl is executed and the princess marries the prince.

In some versions the princess is blinded, and it is later necessary to buy back her eyes from the person who has blinded her. In addition to the speaking horse-head, other means are sometimes employed for bringing the truth to light. Her magic objects may speak, or she may sing a song into a stove which she must take care of.

This tale has not been found in any great multitude of versions. Liungman study (19) is based upon fourteen variants, all of them European, extending from France to Russia, except a single one among the Kabyle of North Africa. Besides this list, he cites several central African tales with a similar plot but lacking some of the principal characteristics. It is problematical whether all tales in which a servant girl replaces a princess on the way to marry a prince should be thought of as having an organic connection with this story of *The Goose Girl*.

Liungman's conclusion as to its origin and dissemination is that it seems to have developed somewhere on the upper Danube, but that the German versions have been of greatest influence in its subsequent distribution. This tale has so much in common with several other stories of false brides that it has frequently become confused with them, particularly with *The Black and The White Bride* (Type 403).

The tales of helpful animals which we have just reviewed are those best known in Europe and western Asia, but there are, of course, many other stories in which animals aid their human masters and mistresses. Some of these are legends, such as that of *Llewellyn and His Dog*, and some of them are more elaborate folktales much like the European stories we have been studying but current entirely among some primitive group such as the American Indians.(20) Although scholars of two generations ago tended to find connection between the stories of helpful beasts and the Hindu attitude toward animals,(21) stories with this motif have been found in so many parts of the world as to show that it is a natural development in story-telling which may take place anywhere.

(18). See p. 275, below.

(19). *Tva Folkminnesundersökningar*.

(20). For *Llewellyn and His Dog*, see Motif B331.2.

(21). See A. Marx, *Griechische Märchen von dankbaren Tieren* (Stuttgart, 1889).