

{ AT670} The Animal Languages.

A man learns animal languages. His wife wants to discover his secret. The advice of the cock. Cf. Types 517, 671.

I. The Gift of the Snake.

A man receives from a grateful snake the power of understanding animal languages. He is not to reveal this secret.

II. The Curious Wife.

- (a) He hears animals talking and laughs,
- (b) His wife demands that he tell her what he laughed at.
- (c) She threatens him with death.

III. The Speech of the Cock.

- (a) As he is about to submit to death he hears the cock tell how easily he rules his many wives, while the man cannot rule his one wife,
- (b) The man keeps his secret and withstands his wife.

Motifs:

I.

[B350] Grateful animal.

[B491.1] Helpful serpent.

[B165.1] Animal languages learned from serpent (not eaten).

[B216] Knowledge of animal languages. Person understands them.

[C425] Tabu: revealing knowledge of animal languages.

II.

[N456] Enigmatic smile (laugh) reveals secret knowledge.

[T252.3] Wife threatens husband with death if he will not tell secrets.

[T253.1] Nagging wife drives husband to prepare for suicide.

[K2213] Treacherous wife.

III.

[N451] Secrets overheard from animal (demon) conversation.

[B469.5] Helpful cock.

[T252.2] Cock shows browbeaten husband how to rule his wife.

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Estonian 22;

Livonian 3;

Lithuanian 34;

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German 7;

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Rumanian 7;

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West Indies (Negro) 4.

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African 17.

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Literary Treatment: Chavannes 500 Contes I 382 No. 112.

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{AT670A} The Woman Who Understood Animal Languages.

I. The Ring and the Corpse.

A newly married bride hears jackals, etc., talking and learns that a corpse floating in the river has on its finger a valuable ring [N547] . She pulls the corpse from the river and removes the ring,

(a) In order to remove the ring she has to bite off the finger. Her husband sees her, believes her to be a cannibal ogress [N342.6] , and decides to return her to her family.

II. Reconciliation.

En route she overhears animals (birds) telling where a treasure is hidden. Her husband learns the truth and they are reconciled.

(a) The husband stays to guard the treasure and the wife returns for her father-in-law. He sees her coming back alone, believes she has killed his son and is returning to kill him, and slays her before she has a chance to speak.

Bibliography :

India 8.

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{AT670B*} changed to 67IB*.

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