

REFLECTION OF FABLE THEMES IN THE DRAMATIC HERITAGE OF IVAN A. KRYLOV

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Annotation: This article examines the thematic and stylistic continuity between Ivan A. Krylov's dramatic works and his fables. While Krylov is celebrated as Russia's greatest fabulist, his creative development began in the theatre, where he learned to shape character, dialogue, and social satire. The study argues that the moral, philosophical, and comic foundations of his fables were already established in his early comedies, such as *The Pie*, *The Fashion Shop*, and *The Post of Spirits*. By comparing both genres, the paper reveals how Krylov's fables condensed the dramatic structure into concise allegories while preserving their social realism and ethical intent. The unity of his dramatic and fable writing reflects a single satirical worldview grounded in moral clarity, folk wisdom, and philosophical irony.

Keywords: Krylov, fable, comedy, drama, satire, moral philosophy, allegory, Russian realism.

The literary heritage of Ivan Andreyevich Krylov reveals a remarkable unity between his early dramatic works and his later fables. Although Krylov is primarily known as the founder of the Russian national fable, his career began in the theater, where he developed his sense of dialogue, conflict, and social satire. His plays and fables share the same moral orientation, the same satirical humor, and a common philosophical foundation rooted in the moral wisdom of the people. Both genres serve as artistic forms of social reflection, differing only in scale and expression.

Krylov's early comedies, including *The Pie* (1807), *The Fashion Shop* (1806), *The Post of Spirits* (1802), and *The Lesson to Daughters* (1808), were created at a time when Russian drama was shifting from classical models toward realistic social satire. These comedies expose the hypocrisy, greed, and ignorance of the upper classes, employing humor as a form of moral judgment. The same motifs would later reappear in the fables that brought Krylov national fame. His artistic evolution therefore demonstrates not a change of worldview, but a concentration of form — a movement from the stage to the page without loss of dramatic tension or moral clarity [Gukovsky 1985].

Krylov's fables are miniature dramas. Their structure — exposition, dialogue, conflict, and moral resolution — mirrors the logic of the stage. In "The Quartet", for instance, four animals engage in a comic dialogue about music, each revealing their vanity and ignorance: "They got the music, bass, viola, and two fiddles / Sat down in the meadow by the linden tree — / To charm the world with their art." The story unfolds like a short farce, ending with the famous moral: "And you, my friends, no matter how you sit, you'll never be musicians." The dramatic quality of the dialogue and the precision of the moral reveal Krylov's theatrical instinct, which never left him even after he abandoned playwriting [Krylov, vol.1, p.172].

If the fable is a compressed play, then Krylov's comedies may be described as expanded fables. *The Fashion Shop* mocks the Russian nobility's fascination with everything foreign. Its heroine, obsessed with Parisian novelties, ridicules Russian taste and common sense — the same



blindness and vanity embodied in “The Monkey and the Glasses.” In both texts, imitation replaces understanding, and external glamour conceals inner emptiness. The Pie develops the fable-like motif of greed and moral blindness: a group of petty people quarrels over a pie, each guided by envy and self-interest. This recalls the psychological logic of fables such as “The Fox and the Grapes” and “The Wolf and the Shepherds,” where the characters justify weakness through false reasoning [Volpert 1999].

Even in the fantastic Post of Spirits, Krylov remains a realist at heart. Beneath the allegorical correspondence of ghosts lies a sharp critique of bureaucratic stupidity and moral decay. This combination of realism and allegory became the foundation of his mature fable style. His use of allegory is not ornamental but cognitive: it transforms moral reflection into a universal image. The same typological method that animates the talking animals of the fables shapes the merchants, officials, and noblemen of the plays. Both categories of characters embody human vices rather than individual personalities, and both serve the same didactic function — to reveal folly through laughter [Lotman 1972].

The moral conclusion of a Krylov fable is explicit, usually condensed into an aphorism; in the comedies, it is dramatized through action. In *The Pie*, the characters’ greed leads them into absurdity, exposing their hypocrisy before the audience. The moral lesson thus arises naturally from the plot rather than being pronounced at the end. In this sense, Krylov’s comedies and fables operate according to a single ethical principle: laughter as judgment, humor as moral philosophy [Ginzburg 1974]. Language plays a crucial role in establishing this unity. Krylov’s dialogue, whether in plays or fables, relies on the rhythm and tone of living speech. He introduced colloquial vocabulary, proverbs, and folk idioms into literature, transforming oral expression into an artistic principle. His characters speak in voices recognizable to the Russian audience of his time, filled with irony, mockery, and common sense. This stylistic realism influenced later masters of Russian satire, including Griboedov, Gogol, and Saltykov-Shchedrin [Belinsky 1955].

Humor in Krylov’s world is never cruel; it is corrective. His laughter is not directed at individuals but at universal weaknesses — vanity, ignorance, pretension, and moral laziness. “There is no malice in his laughter, but there is truth,” wrote Belinsky [Belinsky 1955, p.145]. The aim of his satire is moral restoration: to awaken reason and conscience through ridicule. This makes Krylov a moralist in the deepest sense, though he never preaches directly. His irony operates through examples rather than sermons.

Krylov’s moral ideal is grounded in common sense, work ethic, and integrity. His satires target not abstract evil but the everyday stupidity of society — the distance between what people say and what they do. In “The Elephant and the Pug,” the small dog barks at the elephant not out of courage but vanity, mistaking noise for strength. This same motif of empty pride recurs in his comedies, where minor figures believe themselves important simply because they talk loudly. Both the fable and the play thus dramatize the same moral equation: ignorance multiplied by self-love equals absurdity.

Krylov’s philosophical outlook combines folk ethics with Enlightenment rationalism. His works consistently affirm the superiority of moral reason over social pretense. The fable, with its brevity and allegorical precision, allowed him to elevate everyday behavior to the level of philosophical reflection. The drama, in turn, provided the experiential ground for this



transformation. Each genre fed the other: the stage gave him structure and dialogue; the fable gave him synthesis and moral resonance.

In stylistic and conceptual terms, Krylov created a unified satirical model that transcended genre boundaries. His dramatic experience enabled him to compress human conflict into the scale of fable, while his fables retained the rhythm and dynamism of the stage. This synthesis became a foundation of Russian comic art, influencing not only the fable tradition but also the broader development of realism. Krylov's laughter, balancing between irony and compassion, reveals a moral optimism rare for his age — a belief that ridicule, if grounded in truth, can lead to reform.

Thus, the continuity between Krylov's comedies and fables reflects the coherence of his moral and aesthetic vision. His creative method transforms the social observation of the playwright into the philosophical parable of the fabulist. The theater taught him to listen to human speech; the fable taught him to distill human folly into timeless allegory. In both, he exposes the same unchanging truth: human foolishness wears many masks, but wisdom always speaks in the same voice.

Krylov's legacy therefore unites the stage and the moral tale into a single form of national satire. His works mark the beginning of a truly Russian comic tradition — one that combines realism, allegory, and moral intelligence. His fables remain miniature plays about the eternal comedy of human nature, and his comedies remain extended fables about the same inexhaustible subject: the contradiction between reason and vanity.

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