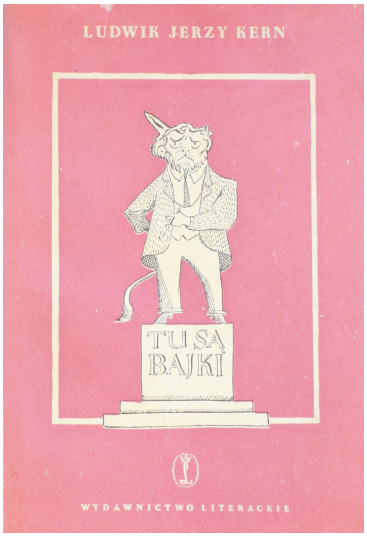
Summary: Tomasz Królak, Analysis: Marta Pszczolińska, "Entry on: Here Are the Fables [Tu są bajki] by Ludwik Jerzy Kern", peer-reviewed by Katarzyna Marciniak and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1218. Entry version as of July 12, 2026.

Ludwik Jerzy Kern

Here Are the Fables [Tu są bajki]

Poland (1953)

TAGS: Aesop Aesop's Fables



Cover design by Daniel Mróz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1953), courtesy of the publisher.

General information	
Title of the work	Here Are the Fables [Tu są bajki]
Country of the First Edition	Poland
Country/countries of popularity	Poland
Original Language	Polish
First Edition Date	1953
First Edition Details	Ludwik Jerzy Kern, *Tu są bajki*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1953, 134 pp.
Genre	Fables
Target Audience	Crossover (Children, teenagers, young adults)
Author of the Entry	Summary: Tomasz Królak, University of Warsaw, tomasz.krolak@student.uw.edu.pl Analysis: Marta Pszczolińska, University of Warsaw, m.pszczolinska@al.uw.edu.pl
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Creators

Photograph by Mariusz Kubik, retrieved from Wikimedia Commons.

Ludwik Jerzy Kern , 1920 - 2010
(Author)

Writer, poet, journalist, satirist, one of the best-known children's writers in Polish literature, author of song lyrics and translator of such authors as Roald Dahl, Uri Orlev, Claude Aveline and Isaac Bashevis Singer. Served in the Polish Army during the September Campaign of 1939. A few years after WW2 settled permanently and until the end of his life in Cracow. For over half a century (1948–2002) he wrote for the popular Polish weekly "Przekrój" (his satirical poems and articles published there were widely read), at the same time publishing in other periodicals, including children's magazines such as "Płomyk" and "Płomyczek." Kern was awarded the Order of the Smile, an international award given by children for pro-children activities, and became the Vice-Chancellor of the International Chapter of the Order. He received also several other decorations and prizes, including *Polonia Restituta*, 4th class, one of the highest Polish orders, awarded for outstanding achieve- ments in one of a number of fields, from literature and culture to economy and diplomacy; the medal of the Polish Section of IBBY and the literary award of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage. His most important book for children was *Ferdynand Wspaniały* [Ferdinand the Magnificent], 1963, the story of a dog that wanted to be human, translated into many languages including Armenian, Bulgarian, Czech, Estonian, French, Hebrew, Hungarian, Japanese, Slovakian, Spanish, Russian. His other important children's books include *Proszę słonia* [Dear Mr. Elephant], 1964 (later adapted into a cartoon series), and many collections of poems.

Sources:

Janusz R. Kowalczyk, "Ludwik Jerzy Kern", culture.pl/ (accessed: June 11, 2021)

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Additional information

Summary

Based on: Katarzyna Marciniak, Elżbieta Olechowska, Joanna Kłos, Michał Kucharski (eds.), *Polish Literature for Children & Young Adults Inspired by Classical Antiquity: A Catalogue*, Faculty of "Artes Liberales", Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2013, 444 pp. (accessed: June 11, 2021), section by Tomasz Królak, 112–118.

The book is a collection of short fables in verse; some are adapted versions of Jean de La Fontaine's texts, others are the author's original creations, occasionally inspired by well-known motifs. Translations of the morals (if there is one – certain fables lack an explicitly stated moral) are included because these conclusions are often Kern's own. Many of the fables were first published in the weekly "Przekrój" between 1950 and 1953; the precise references are provided in the summaries. The target audience of Kern's fables is unclear; they were published in a weekly aimed mainly at an adult audience and were often considered satirical (which is obvious from the manner Kern introduced his changes). Certain fables, however, were also published in the editions of Kern's poems for children. In order of appearance, the collection published in the first edition contains the following fables:

Zając i żółw [The Hare and the Tortoise], (first publ. in "Przekrój" 344, 11.11.1951, p. 16) – A tortoise challenges a hare to a race. The hare decides he's got some time to spare and takes a nap. When he wakes up, the tortoise has already won. Moral: "One who doesn't begin right from the start will always fall behind."

Wilk, koza i koźlę [The Wolf, the Goat and the Kid] – A she-goat leaves her kid home alone and forbids him to open the door to people who do not know the password. A wolf eavesdrops on the conversation and uses the password. The smart kid orders him to show a goat's hoof. Moral: "When you are not completely sure, just check". [Or, as the Russian proverb popular in English goes, "Measure twice, cut once".

Mucha i mrówka [The Fly and the Ant], (first publ in: "Przekrój" 343, 04.11.1951, p. 16) – A fly tells an ant how great her life is, how full of pleasures and leisure, and mocks the ant's modest and arduous existence. The ant, not impressed, responds that people who live from day to day aren't worth much.

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Szczur samolub [The Selfish Rat] – A selfish rat lives alone in a wheel of a Dutch cheese pretending to be an eremite in order not to share with others. Moral: "Readers, do not count on egotistical people in times of need".

Mysz domowa i mysz polna [The House Mouse and the Field Mouse] – A house mouse invites her field cousin to a great feast. They are, however, interrupted by a noise – which they both interpret as a possible danger and run to hide in a hole. Afterwards, the field mouse says that there is much less food at her home, but there is also much less danger. Moral: "First, make sure that there is no danger from your enemies, and only then begin feasting."

Wyżlica i jej kuma [The Female Gun Dog and Her Crony] – A pregnant gun dog has no place to give birth to her puppies; another female dog lets her live in her own kennel. After some time, the gun dog expels her host. [Morals: "No good deed goes unpunished" or "Be careful of who you invite into your home"].

Lis i winogrona [The Fox and the Grapes] – A fox sees some grapes on a vine and wants to eat them, but as he cannot reach them, he tells himself that they must be unripe and sour. [Moral: "It's easy to despise what you cannot have. Nothing comes easy without hard work"].

Kogut, kot i myszka [The Rooster, the Cat and the Mouse], (first publ. in "Przekrój" 350/ 351, 24/31.12.1951, p. 16) – A young, frightened mouse comes back from a stroll to her mother. She says that she met two animals – one of them, a cat, was very nice, but the other one, a rooster, scared her so much with his loud voice that she ran back home. The mother mouse explains that although the rooster seemed more frightening, it was the cat that was dangerous. Moral: "Never judge by appearances."

Lis i bocian [The Fox and the Stork], (first publ. in "Przekrój" 348, 09.12.1951, p. 16) – A fox invites a stork for dinner. The meal, however, is served on a single plate for both of them – and the stork, with his long beak, can't eat fast enough to keep up with the fox who eats most of what was on the plate. The next time, the fox is invited to the stork's house for dinner, soup is served in a thin, high vase, entirely unsuitable for foxes. Thus the fox is justly punished. [Moral: "The golden rule for conduct is to do unto others what one would wish for oneself".

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Bitwa szczurów i łasic [The Battle of Rats and Weasels] – Rats full of excessive pride plan to conquer the world. Their army is, however, defeated by weasels. Moral: "Pride can be your undoing".

Wilk i chudy pies [The Wolf and the Lean Dog], (first publ. in "Przekrój" 363, 23.03.1952, p. 16) – A wolf catches a lean dog and wants to eat him. The dog persuades the wolf to let him go – the following Sunday, the dog owner prepares a wedding feast, and when the dog eats all the scraps from the wedding table, he is not lean anymore. However, when the wolf shows up after the wedding, the dog sends another big and dangerous dog after him. [Moral: "Do not depend on the promises of those whose interest it is to deceive you"].

Sójka i pawie pióra [The Jay and Peacock Feathers] – A vain she-jay finds some peacock feathers and uses them to pretend to be a peacock. She gets laughed at and bitten by peacocks, and her family rejects her as well. Moral: It is not only fine feathers that make fine birds. It is what you are on the inside that counts.

Małpa i lampart [The Monkey and the Leopard] – A leopard and a monkey perform at a county fair. The leopard shows his fur, and people get bored quickly, while the monkey entertains the public with an interesting pantomime. Moral: "One shines only because of the robe; the other has talent and does not need costumes."

Kania i słowik [The Kite and the Nightingale], (publ. first in "Przekrój" 360, 2.03.1952, p. 16) – The original version, found in Hesiod's Works and Days (vv. 202–211), features a hawk instead of a kite. A kite catches a nightingale and wants to eat it. The nightingale tries to bargain for his life, offering a beautiful song in return and arguing that he's too small to make a satisfying meal. The kite, however, is unimpressed and eats him anyway. Moral: "The value of the nightingale must be appreciated culturally." [Or… "An empty stomach has no ear" or "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush"].

Kot, łasica i królik [The Cat, the Weasel, and the Rabbit], ("Przekrój" 367, 18.04.1952, p. 16) – A rabbit and a weasel quarrel. However, when a cat appears and offers to judge their dispute, they prefer to run and hide. Moral: "A cat-shaped Themis will not dispense justice."

Wilk [The Wolf] – A wolf has remorse and decides to become a vegetarian until he sniffs a sheep. Moral: "A wolf rarely changes,

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unfortunately. I advise you not to forget it."

Lew i osioł na łowach [The Lion and the Ass go Hunting], (first publ. in "Przekrój" 355, 27.01.1952, p. 16) – A lion needs to hunt a lot of prey so that he can prepare a feast for his name's day. He asks an ass to stand at the edge of the forest and bray. All the animals scared by the noise run away from the ass – and into the lion's trap. Moral: "A silent killer is more dangerous than a loud yeller."

Dwie kozy [Two Goats], (first publ. in "Przekrój" 354, 20.01.1952, p. 16) – Two goats graze in two different fields on the opposite shores of a river. Each thinks that the grass on the other shore is greener and decides to cross the river. They meet in the middle of the bridge, and neither wants to let the other pass. So they start to fight – and end up falling off the bridge and drowning. [Moral: "Anger and ego lead to destruction"].

Kot i stary szczur [The Cat and the Old Rat] – A cat famous for his hunting skills fakes his death to incite mice to come out of their holes to celebrate and then hunts them down. Later, he tries another trick – he pretends to be a heap of flour – but an old rat sees through this disguise. Moral: "Be as vigilant as the rat, and no enemy will be able to get you."

Wilk pasterzem [The Wolf Turned Shepherd], (first publ. in "Przekrój" 353, 13.01.1952, p. 16) – A wolf decides to disguise himself as a shepherd to fool the sheep he wants to eat. However, he can't imitate the shepherd's voice, is discovered and killed. Moral: "A swindler will always be discovered."

Żaba i wół [The Frog and the Ox] – A frog sees an ox and decides that she wants to become just as big. She asks another frog to judge whether she can inflate herself to that size – but in the process, she swells too much and bursts into pieces. Moral: "Always aim high but do not attempt the impossible".

Kruk i lis [The Raven and the Fox] – A raven sits on a branch with cheese in its beak. A fox comes, compliments the raven and asks him to sing because he admires his allegedly beautiful voice. The raven is duped and opens his beak – the cheese falls down and is taken by the fox. Moral: "One shouldn't listen to flattery."

Konik polny i mrówka [The Grasshopper and the Ant] – A

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grasshopper spends the whole summer playing around, and when the fall comes, he has nothing to eat. He begs an ant to give him food, but after learning that he wasted the whole summer, she refuses. [Moral: "Work today, and you can reap the benefits tomorrow"].

Łasica w spiżarni [The Weasel in the Pantry] – A skinny weasel manages to get into the pantry through a keyhole. It eats too much and is unable to squeeze back through the keyhole. Moral: "The cause of undoing always lies in greed."

Lis i indyki [The Fox and the Turkeys] – A rafter of turkeys decide to hide from a fox in a sycamore. The fox sees them there but is unable to climb up the tree. He jumps around the tree and catches their attention with various tricks preventing them from roosting; when they tire and become sleepy, they fall down from the branches. Moral: "Who fears the danger too much, will fall right into it."

Lis i wilk [The Fox and the Wolf] – A fox mistakes the moon's reflection in a well for a wheel of cheese, gets down and is trapped; he tricks a wolf in order to get out. [Moral: "Everybody is ready to believe the thing he fears and the thing he desires"].

Osioł w lwiej skórze [The Donkey in Lion's Skin] – A donkey steals a lion's skin and puts it on to scare people. Eventually, somebody notices a donkey's ear emerging from a hole in the skin and, with a whip and a shout, tames the "king of all animals." Moral: "If you look closely at the dignitaries, you'll often see a donkey's ear showing through cracks in their skin."

Analysis

The book is divided into two parts. The first is *W porozumieniu z Lafontainem* [In agreement with La Fontaine], the second contains fables created by Kern himself. All listed fables are contained in the first part. Despite the fact that the author indicates the French fabulist as his direct inspiration and simply translates the French text without any changes, he uses well-known motifs that La Fontaine adapted from classical antiquity via Phaedrus' fables or directly from Aesop. He retells the most popular of Aesop's fables, such as *The Tortoise and the Hare*, *The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse*, *The Fox and the Grapes*, *The Vainglorious Jackdaw and the Peacock*, *The Raven and the Fox* or *The Grasshopper and the Ant*, but he also includes those less known and retells them in his recognizable

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satirical style. Kern maintains La Fontaine's structure and way of composing, using the same witty and ironical manner; he opts for a vocabulary adjusted to his times and location, including familiar species of animal protagonists.

La Fontaine changed Aesop's short and essential fables into witty little scenes full of live detail (usually contemporary). Stories told by Kern mainly keep the later version, rather than adhering faithfully to the Greek originals. Firstly, Kern usually maintains the same species of the animals proposed by La Fontaine, not by Aesop. Turkeys were unknown in ancient Greece and were absent in fables; Aesop also does not name dogs' races. Such a change in animal occurs, for example, in *Małpa i lampart* [The Monkey and the Leopard]. In the French version *Le Singe et le Léopard** [The Monkey and the Leopard] the protagonist is a monkey, not a fox, like in Aesop's *Ἀλώπηξ καὶ πάρδαλις*** [The Fox and the Leopard]. Greek animals discuss their beauty and superiority throughout a dialogue in a more philosophical way. They use arguments and do not compete to gain attention, so they do not need the others as judges. The moral lesson is short and general: *Ὁ λόγος δηλοῖ ὅτι τοῦ σωματικοῦ κάλλους ἀμείνων ἐστὶν ὁ τῆς διανοίας κόσμος*. [The fable shows that a good disposition of one's mind has more value than the beauty of the body]. La Fontaine paints a whole scene, evoking some contemporary terms, and his moral lesson is less general as it is addressed directly to grand lords resembling a leopard: *Ô! que de grands Seigneurs, au Léopard semblables, / N'ont que l'habit pour tous talents!* Kern puts the action in his time and place, but the local details are not as many as in French. His moral is similar: *One shines only because of his robe, the other has talent and does not need [shining] garments*.

Changes in animals compared to Aesop can also be found in *Łasica w spiżarni* [The Weasel in a Pantry]. It translates the French title *La Belette entrée dans un grenier****, but in the Greek original, *Ἀλώπηξ εξογκωθείσα τὴν γαστέρα*****, there is a fox instead of a weasel. La Fontaine again adjusted ancient Greek background to his contemporary French reality, changing a simple tree hollow, in which shepherds left some bread and meat, into a pantry rich in various delicacies in which a weasel spends five or six days eating before it gets trapped. Instead of another fox telling the main character to wait until it recovers its previous fitness level, La Fontaine selects a rat as an advisor. Kern maintains witty lines of French description of the weasel's stay in the loft, but the end slightly differs – there is no advisor at all. The moral lesson changes as well. Aesop's "Ὁ λόγος

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δῆλοι ὅτι τὰ χαλεπὰ τῶν πραγμάτων ὁ χρόνος διαλύει" [The fable shows that time resolves difficult issues] is completely different in the French version, as La Fontaine uses the fable to allude to the fall of the king's superintendent of finances Nicolas Fouquet and his arrest:

"Ce que je vous dis là, l'on le dit à bien d'autres.

Mais ne confondons point, par trop approfondir,

Leurs affaires avec les vôtres."

Kern states his own moral lesson suggesting that greed can be one's undoing, which is, in fact, much closer to Lafontaine's than Aesop's version.

Despite the similarities in plots and morals, Kern undoubtedly has his own writing style, which is easily noticeable as it enriches the Polish versions in humour. He adds some amusing details which make the fables more relatable to the reader. For example, in *The Fox and the Grapes* Aesop***** gives a simple example of a hungry fox, who wants to eat some grapes it saw, La Fontaine states that a Gascon fox, though others tell that it was a Normand one, was dying of hunger, Kern, however, goes a step further and describes a situation in which it was a fox, whose wife did not want to serve breakfast that day.

The example of the most extensive adaptation of a fable is Aesop's *Χελώνη καὶ λαγωὸς******* [the Hare and the Tortoise], which originally is very short, essential and condensed. La Fontaine's *Le lièvre et la tortue********* is, however, a detailed story in which every step and circumstance are described and commented on, so it takes 35 lines instead of two, as well as one, for the moral. Kern in *Zając i żółw* maintains the format of a little story with easy-to-remember rhymes, including a lively dialogue between the protagonists: he even mentions a plant species eaten by the hare.

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* See *Le Singe et le Léopard*, la-fontaine-ch-thierry.net (accessed: June 11, 2021).

** See el.wikisource.org (accessed: June 11, 2021).

*** See *La Belette entrée dans un grenier*, la-fontaine-ch-thierry.net

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(accessed: June 11, 2021).

**** See el.wikisource.org (accessed: June 11, 2021).

***** See el.wikisource.org (accessed: June 11, 2021).

****** See el.wikisource.org (accessed: June 11, 2021).

******* See *Le Lièvre et la Tortue*, la-fontaine-ch-thierry.net (accessed: June 11, 2021).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aesop Aesop's Fables
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Appearances Character traits Justice Morality Punishment Tricksters Values
Further Reading	Kowalczyk, J. R., "Ludwik Jerzy Kern", culture.pl/pl/tworca (accessed: June 11, 2021). Staniów, Bogumiła, "*Z uśmiechem przez wszystkie granice". Recepcja wydawnicza przekładów polskiej książki dla dzieci i młodzieży w latach 1945–1989*, Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis 2803, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2006, pp. 195, 206, 219, 221, 224, 228, 258, 271, 292.

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