

The Cultural Significance of “Jack and the Beanstalk”

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INTRODUCTION

For the majority of humanity’s existence, oral history has been the only way of preserving events and passing stories on to future generations. Long before reading and writing became forms of human communication, oral history was the only way to make events survive beyond oneself. From these oral histories come many of the most popular stories, whose existences have long outlived their medium. These stories, or folktales, have spawned archetypes that stretch throughout cultures and through time. One notable example of this is the trickster story. As explained by the *Encyclopedia of African-American Writing*, “[i]n all cases, trickster

characters are wily, charming, and mischievous, and they almost invariably come into conflict with characters who are physically larger and more powerful than they are, so they must use their craftiness to trick these more powerful adversaries” (“Trickster Tales”). Examples of this type of character date back thousands of years. Some of the most well-known are David from his Biblical battle against Goliath, Br’er Rabbit from African-American slave stories, Loki from Norse mythology, and of course, Jack from “Jack and the Beanstalk,” which has continued to be a popular story even to this day. However, the version examined here comes from a 1907 publication of the 1890 *Red Fairy Book* by Andrew Lang. At the time of the publication of Lang’s

ABSTRACT

“Jack and the Beanstalk” is a widely known fairy tale with a longstanding tradition of rewrites to fit the cultural norm. Andrew Lang’s version from 1890 is just another such version of the classic story. However, his version has distinct influence from the culture around him at the time, namely those of Marxism and British imperialism mindsets, which were wildly influential at the time. It is within these cultural ideologies that Lang’s Jack exists, as Jack the oppressor and Jack the oppressed. Along with other artifacts of the time, this paper seeks to position Lang’s version against the Marxist and British imperialist influences to paint a full picture of the cultural significance of “Jack and the Beanstalk.”



edition of “Jack and the Beanstalk”, two of the primary rhetorical lenses through which society was viewed were class distinctions (famously analyzed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their work *The Communist Manifesto*), and the British Imperialist mindset. The duality between these two mindsets creates the framework through which one can understand the cultural implications of the story. It is within this cultural duality that Jack exists, both as Jack the oppressor and Jack the oppressed.

While the story has been around in many forms across many centuries, the story and its themes became widely popular around the early nineteenth to early twentieth centuries (“Jack Tales”). Our version, from 1907, fits perfectly within this timeframe. In this time, issues of class and wealth disparity were very much in the focus of society. Marx and Engels’s *The Communist Manifesto* both perfectly summarizes and embodies this shift in the understanding of social differences. The document, originally published in 1842, was relatively obscure to an English-speaking audience because it was not translated into English until the 1880s. However, in the 1870s, the pamphlet rose to become one of the most important political documents of its time (“Marxism”).

What was most striking about *The Communist Manifesto* was Marx and Engels’s observations on class systems. Marx and Engels argue that classes, groups of people loosely connected by their access to the means of production, have always existed as a form of oppression. Specifically addressing issues of the mid-to-late nineteenth century, Marx and Engels say, “The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, and new forms of struggle in place of the old ones” (485). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines bourgeois as “a person who upholds the interests of capitalism, or who is considered to be an exploiter of the proletariat, typically through ownership of the means of production” (“bourgeois”). These words about class disparity and the antagonism between social groups have had a profound impact on the world and have influenced every aspect of society, going all the way down to the stories told to children before bed.

At the same time as Marx and Engels’s *The Communist Manifesto*, the ideas of Manifest Destiny and British imperialism were at their strongest. The concept of social classes may well have resurfaced in the minds of many people throughout societies at the time, but ideas of imperialism were almost subconscious at that point. For clarification, imperialism “is widely used as an emotive—and more rarely as a theoretical—term to denote specific forms of aggressive behavior on the part of certain states against others” (“Imperialism”). Imperialism is also about the power



of an empire, specifically the act of exerting said power over another group in the interest of strengthening the empire's control and influence around the world. In this time period, imperialism was not seen as bad thing. In fact, quite the opposite was true: it was seen as a necessary procedure to allow Westernized societies to elevate other, "lesser" societies to their level. This idea that it was the white man's burden to lift other cultures up from their supposed barbarism is expressed in a Rudyard Kipling poem of the same name and is best illustrated by Victor Gillam in the political cartoon appropriately titled *The White Man's Burden (Apologies to Rudyard Kipling)*. This illustration will be further discussed later in this paper, but what matters for now is to understand that it represents the view that it was seen as the responsibility of the British and Americans to raise other cultures to what they considered a civilized standard at that time.

The part of this duality which is most emphasized in Lang's version itself is Jack as the oppressed. Trickster tales, such as this one, are almost universally used to craft a narrative around the small character fighting against the larger, usually oppressive, character. In this regard, it makes perfect sense to look at Jack's trickster story in the context of monster scholar Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" to understand the cultural implications of what Jack's monster, the Giant, means. As Cohen states in his first thesis, "[t]he monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment—of a time, a feeling, and a place" (4). This is to say that to understand the monster's purpose, we must understand what it is doing and why Jack is afraid of it.

To that end, we must understand what makes the Giant a monster, both in the general sense and in regards to Jack specifically. It is first relevant to understand what a giant is, in terms of the history of folklore. According to *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature*, "[i]n world mythologies, however, giants are generally colossal figures of evil disposition, enemies of gods and mortals, and frequently exhibiting an unusual trait such as breathing fire, having multiple heads, or engaging in cannibalism" (Nagar 32). While this specific retelling of the Jack story leaves out such absurd qualities, it certainly has its own unique characteristics, which are best understood through the grotesque. As described by Kelly Hurley, who references M. M. Bakhtin — a Russian literary critic whose work has been widely influential to the field of literary theory — the grotesque deals with "the human body in all its coarse, clumsy earthiness and changeful mortality, focusing on the material thingness of the human subject rather than intellect or spirit" (138). This is to say that the grotesque breaks humanity down to an excess of earthly body, lacking in spirituality, and this is something which is seen with the Giant. Specifically, this Giant's unique characteristics are an excess

of size and weight and an uncanny gluttony to match. The Giant is described as eating elephant steaks in this version, which is particularly monstrous when one considers that the townspeople are all starving below his castle (Lang 138). This emphasis on weight also falls in line with a long-running association between upper-class people and weight. Throughout history, until the twentieth century, the wealthy were often portrayed as massive beings, thus creating a direct comparison between the disparity in weight and the disparity of class (“Fat Bias”). Put simply, the aristocratic class is viewed as both physically big and economically oppressive in relation to the lower classes. As can be seen below in Joseph Keppler’s “The Bosses of the Senate,” the rich trust members who are portrayed as running everything (in a negative way) are physically very similar to the Giant: large, overweight, and certainly gigantic.

Importantly, the story is told from the perspective of a young man who is not only poor but also is without a father and in drastic need of food. With this in mind, it makes sense for Jack to be contrasted with the Giant. As Cohen says, what we fear in monsters is really what we desire: “The same creatures who terrify and interdict can evoke potent



escapist fantasies; the linking of monstrosity with the forbidden makes the monster even more appealing as a temporary egress from constraint” (17). For instance, the Giant is alone with a motherly figure, his wife, and is also shown to not be very intelligent, as his wife easily convinces him that Jack is not there. However, what is important is the contrast between the two: Jack is small and poor while the Giant is gluttonous and wealthy, his size a literal reflection of his status. The things that make him monstrous— his size, his imposing nature, and his excessive greed— are all things that Jack openly envies.

More telling of the time is the ending, in which, after the Giant is slain (unintentional as the death may have been), the people of the local village rally behind Jack, charge the castle to overthrow the Giantess, and take back the land for Jack and the people (Lang 145-146). This ending is oozing with a Marxist aura, both with the rallying of the lower class to overthrow the upper class and with the peasants arguing that it is their duty to fight for their land. All of these Marxist undertones relate to portraying Jack as a trickster because he must use charisma

and wit to take down the oppressive, threatening creature attacking him in order to make it out alive.

However, what can be revealed upon closer inspection is the fact that this piece reinforces the narrative of the white man's burden, completely absolving Jack of any wrongdoing and, in this version, even rewarding him and outright stating that his invasion of the Giant's home and his robbery of the Giant's possessions is a birthright. Something important to note is that this piece does not humanize the Giant. Both the Giant and the Giantess are only referred to as that: Giant and Giantess. The audience does not even know their names; the giants are only referred to by their species, something very telling of the times.

Additionally, Lang's version of "Jack and the Beanstalk" goes out of its way to show the audience that Jack did nothing wrong. In fact, the story makes Jack a hero for his actions. This may seem strange to a contemporary audience, but, at the time, the attitude that some groups of people were inferior to others made perfect sense. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the ideas of Manifest Destiny and imperialism were very prominent in the minds of the people. In the cartoon shown here, John Gast's *American Progress*, one can see this mindset represented.

What this image shows is a woman, representing Western culture, leading a group of citizens onward into the "uncivilized" land, towards the natives and the animals. Ahead of them, the land is dark, and the woman is bringing forth a holy light with her to illuminate the lives of the natives. This represents the mindset that Western cultures were justified and morally obligated to elevate the cultures of the rest of the world. While this specific painting is about America's idea of Manifest Destiny, it also very much portrays the British mindset. Through the perspective of this picture, one can see why Jack's questionable actions are shown in a positive light in the story: he is acting out this idea of imperialism on the Giant.

The Giant himself makes it clear that he is of a different species than Jack. He makes the distinction by saying that he can smell that Jack's breath is that of an Englishman, implying that the Giant himself is not (Lang 139). Something to keep in mind is that Lang's version is unique because it portrays Jack's family as the original rulers of the castle until the Giant stole Jack's father's land, murdered his





siblings, and cast him and his mother out. More importantly, Jack has a birthright to steal the hen which lays golden eggs, and ultimately the castle itself, because of who he is; i.e., a representative of Manifest Destiny. The Giant invades Jack's lands and takes the belongings of Jack's ancestors. Thus it becomes Jack's duty to take everything back.

The Giant represents a fear of imperialism inverted, as portrayed by Patrick Brantlinger, a professor of English at Indiana University, in *Rule of Darkness*. Brantlinger says, "Imperial Gothic expresses anxieties about the waning of religious orthodoxy, but even more clearly it expresses anxieties about the ease with which civilization can revert to barbarism or savagery and thus about the weakening of Britain's imperial hegemony" (229). This fear that another culture might one day take over the empire and revert it to barbarism was an idea that was prolific throughout the late nineteenth century. Jack, through this lens, stands to reassure the readers. Even if another culture has people of unfathomable size and strength, it is the duty of the crafty British boy to win the day. Because he is doing what is perceived as right, he will always win, thus reaffirming his place at the top of the cultural ladder.

It is between these two influential ideologies of the late nineteenth century that Lang's version of "Jack and the Beanstalk" rests. Jack is at once an oppressor and the oppressed. The reading of the text must then reflect this notion, viewing Jack as neither exclusively the hero Lang intended, nor the conquering imperialist that the subtext reveals, but rather a combination of both of these ideologies, fused into one cultural entity.

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

Jack Sells the Cow

Once upon a time there was a poor widow who lived in a little cottage with her only son Jack¹. Jack was a giddy, thoughtless boy, but very kind-hearted and affectionate. There had been a hard winter, and after it the poor woman had suffered from fever and ague. Jack did no work as yet, and by degrees they grew dreadfully poor. The widow saw that there was no means of keeping Jack and herself from starvation but by selling her cow; so one morning she said to her son,

`I am too weak to go myself, Jack, so you must take the cow to market for

¹ This is an example of some of the oppression that Jack faces. For this time, one would have to be poor to face the living conditions Jack and his mother do, making them members of the proletariat. The proletariat is defined as "[w]age earners collectively, esp. those who have no capital and who depend for subsistence on their daily labour; the working classes. The lowest class in society; the poor, the masses" ("proletariat").



me, and sell her.'

Jack liked going to market to sell the cow very much; but as he was on the way, he met a butcher who had some beautiful beans in his hand. Jack stopped to look at them, and the butcher told the boy that they were of great value, and persuaded the silly lad to sell the cow for these beans². When he brought them home to his mother instead of the money she expected for her nice cow, she was very vexed and shed many tears, scolding Jack for his folly. He was very sorry, and mother and son went to bed very sadly that night; their last hope seemed gone. At daybreak Jack rose and went out into the garden.

'At least,' he thought, 'I will sow the wonderful beans. Mother says that they are just common scarlet-runners, and nothing else; but I may as well sow them.'

So he took a piece of stick, and made some holes in the ground, and put in the beans. That day they had very little dinner, and went sadly to bed, knowing that for the next day there would be none and Jack, unable to sleep from grief and vexation, got up at day-dawn and went out into the garden. What was his amazement to find that the beans had grown up in the night, and climbed up and up till they covered the high cliff that sheltered the cottage, and disappeared above it! The stalks had twined and twisted themselves together till they formed quite a ladder.

'It would be easy to climb it,' thought Jack. And, having thought of the experiment, he at once resolved to carry it out, for Jack was a good climber. However, after his late mistake about the cow, he thought he had better consult his mother first.

Wonderful Growth of The Beanstalk

So Jack called his mother, and they both gazed in silent wonder at the Beanstalk, which was not only of great height, but was thick enough to bear Jack's weight.

'I wonder where it ends,' said Jack to his mother; 'I think I will climb up and see.'

His mother wished him not to venture up this strange ladder, but Jack coaxed her to give her consent to the attempt, for he was certain there must be something wonderful in the Beanstalk; so at last she yielded to his wishes. Jack instantly began to climb, and went up and up on the ladder-like bean till everything he had left behind him--the cottage, the village, and even the tall church tower--

² This could be perceived as a way of controlling the working classes by pitting them against one another. Jack is trusting that the butcher will not cheat him in a deal, but, instead of giving Jack (who is an impressionable child) money, he gives him "magical beans." It does not appear to be a fair deal, and it seems that the older, smarter, working man is taking advantage of a poor child within his same social standing in order to get ahead.



-looked quite little, and still he could not see the top of the Beanstalk. Jack felt a little tired, and thought for a moment that he would go back again; but he was a very persevering boy, and he knew that the way to succeed in anything is not to give up. So after resting for a moment he went on. After climbing higher and higher, till he grew afraid to look down for fear he should be giddy, Jack at last reached the top of the Beanstalk, and found himself in a beautiful country, finely wooded, with beautiful meadows covered with sheep. A crystal stream ran through the pastures; not far from the place where he had got off the Beanstalk stood a fine, strong castle. Jack wondered very much that he had never heard of or seen this castle before; but when he reflected on the subject, he saw that it was as much separated from the village by the perpendicular rock on which it stood as if it were in another land. While Jack was standing looking at the castle, a very strange-looking woman came out of the wood, and advanced towards him. She wore a pointed cap of quilted red satin turned up with ermine, her hair streamed loose over her shoulders, and she walked with a staff. Jack took off his cap and made her a bow.

‘If you please, ma’am,’ said he, ‘is this your house?’

‘No,’ said the old lady. ‘Listen, and I will tell you the story of that castle.’

‘Once upon a time there was a noble knight, who lived in this castle, which is on the borders of Fairyland. He had a fair and beloved wife and several lovely children: and as his neighbours, the little people, were very friendly towards him, they bestowed on him many excellent and precious gifts. Rumour whispered of these treasures; and a monstrous giant, who lived at no great distance, and who was a very wicked being, resolved to obtain possession of them.’

‘So he bribed a false servant to let him inside the castle, when the knight was in bed and asleep, and he killed him as he lay. Then he went to the part of the castle which was the nursery, and also killed all the poor little ones he found there. Happily for her, the lady was not to be found. She had gone with her infant son, who was only two or three months old, to visit her old nurse, who lived in the valley; and she had been detained all night there by a storm.’

‘The next morning, as soon as it was light, one of the servants at the castle, who had managed to escape, came to tell the poor lady of the sad fate of her husband and her pretty babes. She could scarcely believe him at first, and was eager at once to go back and share the fate of her dear ones; but the old nurse, with many tears, besought her to remember that she had still a child, and that it was her duty to preserve her life for the sake of the poor innocent. The lady yielded to this reasoning, and consented to remain at her nurse’s house as the best place of concealment; for the servant told her that the giant had vowed, if he could find her, he would kill both her and her baby. Years rolled on. The old nurse died, leaving her cottage and the few articles of furniture it contained to her poor lady, who dwelt in



it, working as a peasant for her daily bread. Her spinning-wheel and the milk of a cow, which she had purchased with the little money she had with her, sufficed for the scanty subsistence of herself and her little son. There was a nice little garden attached to the cottage, in which they cultivated peas, beans, and cabbages, and the lady was not ashamed to go out at harvest time, and glean in the fields to supply her little son's wants.

`Jack, that poor lady is your mother. This castle was once your father's, and must again be yours³.'

Jack uttered a cry of surprise.

`My mother! oh, madam, what ought I to do? My poor father! My dear mother!'

`Your duty requires you to win it back for your mother. But the task is a very difficult one, and full of peril, Jack. Have you courage to undertake it?'

`I fear nothing when I am doing right,' said Jack⁴.

`Then,' said the lady in the red cap, 'you are one of those who slay giants. You must get into the castle, and if possible possess yourself of a hen that lays golden eggs, and a harp that talks. Remember, all the giant possesses is really yours⁵.' As she ceased speaking, the lady of the red hat suddenly disappeared, and of course Jack knew she was a fairy.

Jack determined at once to attempt the adventure; so he advanced, and blew the horn which hung at the castle portal. The door was opened in a minute or two by a frightful giantess, with one great eye in the middle of her forehead. As soon as Jack saw her he turned to run away, but she caught him, and dragged him into the castle.

`Ho, ho!' she laughed terribly. 'You didn't expect to see me here, that is clear! No, I shan't let you go again. I am weary of my life. I am so overworked, and I don't see why I should not have a page as well as other ladies. And you shall be my boy. You shall clean the knives, and black the boots, and make the fires, and help me generally when the giant is out. When he is at home I must hide you, for he has eaten up all my pages hitherto, and you would be a dainty morsel, my little

³ On one hand the giant is the oppressor, but this is also reminiscent of the stories and mindsets settlers had when it came to the natives—Settlers felt that it was their destiny to discover new worlds and that they were entitled to the land. They justified this behavior by making the natives seem evil and savage (Kipling).

⁴ This is an example of the mindset the settlers had (that the settlers were saving the natives from themselves)—the settlers believe it to be their moral obligation to civilize who and what they perceive as "uncivil." This can be seen in "The White Man's Burden," as the settlers saw it as their duty to make "civilized men" out of "savages" (Kipling).

⁵ This is the mindset of entitlement the settlers possessed as they entered new lands. It also reflects the entitlement of the bourgeoisie, defined as "the capitalist class who own most of society's wealth and means of production, typically with reference to its perceived materialistic values or conventional attitudes" ("bourgeois").



lad.' While she spoke she dragged Jack right into the castle. The poor boy was very much frightened, as I am sure you and I would have been in his place. But he remembered that fear disgraces a man; so he struggled to be brave and make the best of things.

'I am quite ready to help you, and do all I can to serve you, madam,' he said, 'only I beg you will be good enough to hide me from your husband, for I should not like to be eaten at all.'

'That's a good boy,' said the Giantess, nodding her head; 'it is lucky for you that you did not scream out when you saw me, as the other boys who have been here did, for if you had done so my husband would have awakened and have eaten you, as he did them, for breakfast. Come here, child; go into my wardrobe: he never ventures to open THAT; you will be safe there.'

And she opened a huge wardrobe which stood in the great hall, and shut him into it. But the keyhole was so large that it admitted plenty of air, and he could see everything that took place through it. By-and-by he heard a heavy tramp on the stairs, like the lumbering along of a great cannon, and then a voice like thunder cried out;

'Fe, fa, fi-fo-fum, I smell the breath of an Englishman. Let him be alive or let him be dead, I'll grind his bones to make my bread⁶.'

'Wife,' cried the Giant, 'there is a man in the castle. Let me have him for breakfast.'

'You are grown old and stupid,' cried the lady in her loud tones. 'It is only a nice fresh steak off an elephant, that I have cooked for you, which you smell. There, sit down and make a good breakfast.' And she placed a huge dish before him of savoury steaming meat, which greatly pleased him, and made him forget his idea of an Englishman being in the castle. When he had breakfasted he went out for a walk; and then the Giantess opened the door, and made Jack come out to help her. He helped her all day. She fed him well, and when evening came put him back in the wardrobe.

The Hen That Lays Golden Eggs.

The Giant came in to supper. Jack watched him through the keyhole, and

⁶ This is an example of the assumed savagery of the native, demonstrated by their inability to speak English. The use of "Englishman" could be perceived as reflecting how the settlers felt attacked by the "uncivilized" natives that they invaded, which we see when the Giant is searching for the intruding Jack. On the other hand, from a more satirical standpoint, as shown in the political cartoon "The Bosses of the Senate" (in the Introduction), the Giant is the bourgeois oppressor instead of the oppressed.



was amazed to see him pick a wolf's bone, and put half a fowl at a time into his capacious mouth. When the supper was ended he bade his wife bring him his hen that laid the golden eggs.

'It lays as well as it did when it belonged to that paltry knight,' he said; 'indeed I think the eggs are heavier than ever.' The Giantess went away, and soon returned with a little brown hen, which she placed on the table before her husband.

'And now, my dear,' she said, 'I am going for a walk, if you don't want me any longer.'

'Go,' said the Giant; 'I shall be glad to have a nap by-and-by.' Then he took up the brown hen and said to her: 'Lay!' And she instantly laid a golden egg. 'Lay!' said the Giant again. And she laid another. 'Lay!' he repeated the third time. And again a golden egg lay on the table. Now Jack was sure this hen was that of which the fairy had spoken. By-and-by the Giant put the hen down on the floor, and soon after went fast asleep, snoring so loud that it sounded like thunder.

Directly Jack perceived that the Giant was fast asleep, he pushed open the door of the wardrobe and crept out; very softly he stole across the room, and, picking up the hen, made haste to quit the apartment⁷. He knew the way to the kitchen, the door of which he found was left ajar; he opened it, shut and locked it after him, and flew back to the Beanstalk, which he descended as fast as his feet would move. When his mother saw him enter the house she wept for joy, for she had feared that the fairies had carried him away, or that the Giant had found him. But Jack put the brown hen down before her, and told her how he had been in the Giant's castle, and all his adventures. She was very glad to see the hen, which would make them rich once more.

The Money Bags.

Jack made another journey up the Beanstalk to the Giant's castle one day while his mother had gone to market; but first he dyed his hair and disguised himself. The old woman did not know him again, and dragged him in as she had done before, to help her to do the work; but she heard her husband coming, and hid him in the wardrobe, not thinking that it was the same boy who had stolen the hen. She bade him stay quite still there, or the Giant would eat him.

Then the Giant came in saying: 'Fe, fa, fi-fo-fum, I smell the breath of an Englishman. Let him be alive or let him be dead, I'll grind his bones to make my

⁷ This is another example of Jack stealing what he believes to be his and what he believes he has a right to. This is what keeps Jack in this dual category of how settlers saw the natives and their land, as well as how the bourgeoisie treated the proletariat.



bread.’

‘Nonsense!’ said the wife, ‘it is only a roasted bullock⁸ that I thought would be a tit-bit for your supper; sit down and I will bring it up at once.’ The Giant sat down, and soon his wife brought up a roasted bullock on a large dish, and they began their supper. Jack was amazed to see them pick the bones of the bullock as if it had been a lark.

As soon as they had finished their meal, the Giantess rose and said: ‘Now, my dear, with your leave I am going up to my room to finish the story I am reading. If you want me call for me.’

‘First,’ answered the Giant, ‘bring me my money bags, that I may count my golden pieces before I sleep⁹.’ The Giantess obeyed. She went and soon returned with two large bags over her shoulders, which she put down by her husband.

‘There,’ she said; ‘that is all that is left of the knight’s money. When you have spent it you must go and take another baron’s castle.’

‘That he shan’t, if I can help it,’ thought Jack. The Giant, when his wife was gone, took out heaps and heaps of golden pieces, and counted them, and put them in piles, till he was tired of the amusement. Then he swept them all back into their bags, and leaning back in his chair fell fast asleep, snoring so loud that no other sound was audible. Jack stole softly out of the wardrobe, and taking up the bags of money (which were his very own, because the Giant had stolen them from his father¹⁰), he ran off, and with great difficulty descending the Beanstalk, laid the bags of gold on his mother’s table. She had just returned from town, and was crying at not finding Jack.

‘There, mother, I have brought you the gold that my father lost.’

‘Oh, Jack! you are a very good boy, but I wish you would not risk your precious life in the Giant’s castle. Tell me how you came to go there again.’ And Jack told her all about it. Jack’s mother was very glad to get the money, but she did not like him to run any risk for her. But after a time Jack made up his mind to go again to the Giant’s castle.

⁸ Bullock is an term for steer (“bullock”).

⁹ In lore, Giants also have a history of being perceived as either rich or stealing riches from others and claiming it as their own. This is the entitlement the settlers had and how the bourgeoisie was also perceived. Andrew Teverson discusses this perception in his essay “Giants Have Trampled the Earth’: Colonialism and the English Tale in Samuel Selvon’s *Turn Again Tiger*.”

¹⁰ This, once again, is an example of Jack taking what he believes is his. He thinks and believes, just like the settlers, that it is his birthright to take these things. This is also an example of Jack being a trickster, described further in “Jack Tales.”

The Talking Harp

So he climbed the Beanstalk once more, and blew the horn at the Giant's gate. The Giantess soon opened the door; she was very stupid, and did not know him again, but she stopped a minute before she took him in. She feared another robbery; but Jack's fresh face looked so innocent that she could not resist him, and so she bade him come in, and again hid him away in the wardrobe.

By-and-by the Giant came home, and as soon as he had crossed the threshold he roared out: 'Fe, fa, fi-fo-fum, I smell the breath of an Englishman. Let him be alive or let him be dead, I'll grind his bones to make my bread.'

'You stupid old Giant,' said his wife, 'you only smell a nice sheep, which I have grilled for your dinner.' And the Giant sat down, and his wife brought up a whole sheep for his dinner.

When he had eaten it all up, he said: 'Now bring me my harp, and I will have a little music while you take your walk.' The Giantess obeyed, and returned with a beautiful harp. The framework was all sparkling with diamonds and rubies, and the strings were all of gold.

'This is one of the nicest things I took from the knight,' said the Giant. 'I am very fond of music, and my harp is a faithful servant.'

So he drew the harp towards him, and said: 'Play!' And the harp played a very soft, sad air.

'Play something merrier!' said the Giant. And the harp played a merry tune.

'Now play me a lullaby,' roared the Giant; and the harp played a sweet lullaby, to the sound of which its master fell asleep.

Then Jack stole softly out of the wardrobe, and went into the huge kitchen to see if the Giantess had gone out; he found no one there, so he went to the door and opened it softly, for he thought he could not do so with the harp in his hand.

Then he entered the Giant's room and seized the harp and ran away with it; but as he jumped over the threshold the harp called out: 'MASTER! MASTER!'

And the Giant woke up. With a tremendous roar he sprang from his seat, and in two strides had reached the door. But Jack was very nimble. He fled like lightning with the harp, talking to it as he went (for he saw it was a fairy), and telling it he was the son of its old master, the knight. Still the Giant came on so fast that he was quite close to poor Jack, and had stretched out his great hand to catch him. But, luckily, just at that moment he stepped upon a loose stone, stumbled, and fell flat on the ground, where he lay at his full length. This accident gave Jack time to get on the Beanstalk and hasten down it; but just as he reached their own garden he beheld the Giant descending after him.

'Mother I mother!' cried Jack, 'make haste and give me the axe.' His mother



ran to him with a hatchet in her hand, and Jack with one tremendous blow cut through all the Beanstalks except one.

‘Now, mother, stand out of the way!’ said he.

The Giant Breaks His Neck.

Jack’s mother shrank back, and it was well she did so, for just as the Giant took hold of the last branch of the Beanstalk, Jack cut the stem quite through and darted from the spot. Down came the Giant with a terrible crash, and as he fell on his head, he broke his neck, and lay dead¹¹ at the feet of the woman he had so much injured. Before Jack and his mother had recovered from their alarm and agitation, a beautiful lady stood before them.

‘Jack,’ said she, ‘you have acted like a brave knight’s son, and deserve to have your inheritance restored to you. Dig a grave and bury the Giant, and then go and kill the Giantess.’

‘But,’ said Jack, ‘I could not kill anyone unless I were fighting with him; and I could not draw my sword upon a woman. Moreover, the Giantess was very kind to me.’ The Fairy smiled on Jack.

‘I am very much pleased with your generous feeling,’ she said. ‘Nevertheless, return to the castle, and act as you will find needful.’ Jack asked the Fairy if she would show him the way to the castle, as the Beanstalk was now down. She told him that she would drive him there in her chariot, which was drawn by two peacocks. Jack thanked her, and sat down in the chariot with her.

The Fairy drove him a long distance round, till they reached a village which lay at the bottom of the hill. Here they found a number of miserable-looking men assembled.

The Fairy stopped her carriage and addressed them: ‘My friends,’ said she, ‘the cruel giant who oppressed you and ate up all your flocks and herds is dead, and this young gentleman was the means of your being delivered from him, and is the son of your kind old master, the knight.’

The men gave a loud cheer at these words, and pressed forward to say that they would serve Jack as faithfully as they had served his father. The Fairy bade

¹¹ With the giant dead, the question at hand is, “Did Jack slay those he oppressed or did he conquer his oppressors?” The Giant’s death can be seen as the oppressed finally defeating their oppressors (bourgeoisie being taken down by the proletariat), but it is also a metaphor for the settlers killing, robbing, and conquering the native people. With the two narratives being simultaneously told in this story, on one hand Jack is the poor, proletariat boy who has taken back what was rightfully his, defeated his oppressor, and appears to be the moral hero; on the other, Jack is a young settler who comes to a foreign land, stealing riches he believes to be his birthright as he kills the native who he views a savage. This is also an example of the trickster winning in the end after he has outsmarted the giant and taken back what is “rightfully” his.



them follow her to the castle, and they marched thither in a body, and Jack blew the horn and demanded admittance. The old Giantess saw them coming from the turret loop-hole. She was very much frightened, for she guessed that something had happened to her husband; and as she came downstairs very fast she caught her foot in her dress, and fell from the top to the bottom and broke her neck. When the people outside found that the door was not opened to them, they took crowbars and forced the portal. Nobody was to be seen, but on leaving the hall they found the body of the Giantess at the foot of the stairs.

Thus Jack took possession of the castle. The Fairy went and brought his mother to him, with the hen and the harp. He had the Giantess buried, and endeavoured as much as lay in his power to do right to those whom the Giant had robbed. Before her departure for fairyland, the Fairy explained to Jack that she had sent the butcher to meet him with the beans, in order to try what sort of lad he was. 'If you had looked at the gigantic Beanstalk and only stupidly wondered about it,' she said, 'I should have left you where misfortune had placed you, only restoring her cow to your mother. But you showed an inquiring mind, and great courage and enterprise, therefore you deserve to rise; and when you mounted the Beanstalk you climbed the Ladder of Fortune.' She then took her leave of Jack and his mother.

INTRODUCTION TO "TOBIT AND JACK THE GIANT-KILLER"

The name "Jack" was used in many trickster stories. This larger narrative makes the character of Jack in "Jack and the Beanstalk" both a unique character and a common example of this genre of "folk lore" ("Jack Tales"). In "Tobit and Jack the Giant-Killer," a short story published in 1898, Jack is a cunning warrior who has become renowned for his agility and swiftness as a giant slayer. After being captured for his actions, Jack serves as a loyal servant at the hands of the prince, who has earned Jack's services after showing a grand gesture of generosity. These services occur prior to Jack's death at the hands of the law.

The prince's life is endangered multiple times throughout this tale, and, each time, Jack uses his trickery, special gifts, and warrior's will to save the prince from death's clutches. The prince is in love with a fair maiden and desires her hand in marriage. She will accept if he completes two (impossible) tasks given to him. With Jack's cunning and swiftness, Jack helps the prince to complete these tasks. At the end, readers find out the devil has bewitched the maiden. By completing these tasks, Jack and the prince finally trick Lucifer and successfully cut off his head. This act releases the maiden from his power and allows the maiden to be with the prince.

This story gives the reader a sense of why Jack's trickery is thought to be



acceptable. Jack uses his skills and cunning behavior to keep the prince alive, and it is in the same way that Jack is able to steal from the Giant and eventually slay the him. Another connection that can be made is Jack's ability to slay another person yet be perceived as a hero. This is only possible if the being he slayed was a monster of a sort. Similar to the Giant, Lucifer is also seen as a grotesque and evil monster, who Jack must kill to ensure the safety of the people he cares about. The murder seems justified because the threat is personal to Jack. Also, because Lucifer is perceived as the monster in this story, his actions are perceived as immoral. Overall, this story reinforces the idea that anyone can become great—even a young peasant boy. "Tobit and Jack the Giant-Killer" simply gives a greater sense as to why Jack is considered a hero: Jack illustrates to the reader through his actions that one is able to succeed in any act with enough mental ability, will power, and strength.

"TOBIT AND JACK THE GIANT-KILLER" EXCERPT¹²

Now it happened in these days that King Arthur's only son asked his father to give him a large sum of money in order that he might go and seek his fortune in Wales, where lived a beautiful lady possessed with seven evil spirits. The king did his best to dissuade his son, but in vain, so at last gave way; and the prince set out off with two horses, one loaded with money, the other for himself to ride upon. Now, after several days' travel, he came to a market-town in Wales where he beheld a vast crowd of people gathered together. The prince asked the reason of it, and was told that they had arrested a corpse for several large sums of money which the deceased owed when he died. The prince replied that it was a pity creditors should be so cruel, and said: 'Go, bury the dead, and let his creditors come to my lodging, and there their debts shall be paid.'

They came in such great numbers that before night he had only twopence left for himself. Now Jack the Giant-Killer, coming that way, was so taken with the generosity of the prince that he desired to be his servant. This being agreed upon, the next morning they set forward on their journey together, when, as they were riding out of the town, an old woman called after the prince, saying: 'He has owed me twopence these seven years; pray, pay me as well as the rest.'

Putting his hand to his pocket the prince gave the woman all he had left, so that after their day's food, which cost what small spell Jack had by him, they were without a penny between them . . . [T]hey quickly arrived at the house of the lady the prince sought, who, finding the prince to be a suitor, prepared a splendid banquet for him. After the repast was concluded she told him she had a task for

¹² (Groome 226-244)



him. She wiped his mouth with a handkerchief, saying: 'You must show me that handkerchief to-morrow morning or else you will lose your head.' With that she put it in her bosom.

The prince went to bed in great sorrow, but Jack's cap of knowledge informed him how it was to be obtained. In the middle of the night she called upon her familiar spirit to carry her to Lucifer. But Jack put on his coat of darkness and his shoes of swiftness, and was there as soon as she was. When she entered the place of the Old One she gave the handkerchief to old Lucifer, who laid it upon a shelf, whence Jack took it and brought it to his master, who showed it to the lady next day, and so saved his life. On that day she gave the prince a kiss, and told him he must show her the lips to-morrow morning that she kissed last night or lose his head.

'Oh!' he replied, 'if you kiss none but mine, I will.'

'That is neither here nor there,' said she. 'If you do not, death's your portion.'

At midnight she went as before, and was angry with old Lucifer for letting the handkerchief go. 'But now,' quoth she, 'I will be too hard for the king's son, for I will kiss thee, and he is to show me thy lips.'

Which she did, and Jack, when she was not standing by, cut off Lucifer's head, and brought it under his invisible coat to his master, who the next morning pulled it out by the horns before the lady. This broke the enchantment, and the evil spirit left her, and she appeared in all her beauty. They were married the next morning.

INTRODUCTION TO "MOTHER GOOSE AND THE GOLDEN EGG"

"Mother Goose and the Golden Egg," published circa 1850, is a children's poem many grew up hearing and reading. In this poem, Jack tries to sell a golden egg that came from his goose, but a "rogue Jew"— an ethnic stereotype — tries to take advantage of him and refuses to pay the price Jack has asked for the golden egg. When Jack comes to the realization that the Jew is trying to swindle him, Jack goes for help. The Jew then comes back and surprises Jack, stealing from Jack once again.

This Jack story echoes the two themes from "Jack and the Beanstalk." First, it pits poor Jack against a rich man who cheats him, just as the wealthy Giant had robbed the peasants in "Jack and the Beanstalk." Second, whereas the Giant symbolized another race, in this case, Jack's opponent is an actual member of an ethnic minority, who is portrayed in a stereotypical and stigmatizing manner as greedy and untrustworthy. According to *Learning about the Holocaust: A Student's Guide*, in Europe between 1870 and 1944, Jews often served as "scapegoat[s]"



("Antisemitism"). Thus, while this story tries to teach a lesson through the way Jack deals with the upper-class gentleman who attempts to cheat him in a deal, Jack still oppresses the minority, the Jew.

"MOTHER GOOSE AND THE GOLDEN EGG" EXCERPT¹³

Mother Goose had a house,
'Twas built in a wood,
Where an owl at the door,
For sentinel stood.
This is her son Jack,
A plain looking lad,
He is not very good,
Nor yet very bad.
She sent him to market,
A live goose he bought,
Here, mother, says he,
It will not go for naught.
Jack's goose and her gander,
Grew very fond,
They'd both eat together,
Or swim in one pond.
Jack found one morning,
As I have been told,
His goose had laid him,
An egg of pure gold.
Jack rode to his mother,
The news for to tell,
She called him a good boy,
And said it was well.
Jack sold his gold egg,
To a rogue of a Jew,
Who cheated him out of
The half of his due.
Then Jack went a courting,
A lady so gay,
As fair as the filly,

¹³ ("Mother Goose" 2-8)



And sweet as the May,
The Jew and the Squire,
Came behind his back,
And began to belabour,
The sides of Poor Jack.
Then Old Mother Goose,
That instant came in,
And turned her son Jack,
Into fam'd Harlequin.
The Jew got the goose,
Which he vow'd he would kill,
Resolving at once, His pockets to fill.
Jack's mother came in,
And caught the goose soon,
And mounted it's back,
Flew up to the moon.

INTRODUCTION TO *THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO*

The Communist Manifesto had a profound impact on the culture of the mid-to-late nineteenth century in Britain and the United States. This is because the fears to which *The Communist Manifesto* appeals were common throughout society and ones which Marx and Engels were simply putting to words. With this in mind, while one cannot say that Lang's "Jack and the Beanstalk" was specifically influenced by Marx and Engels's piece, it is clear that both works are reacting in different ways to similar fears of class oppression. Specifically, Jack and his mother and their abhorrent living conditions could represent the proletariat and their oppression by the bourgeoisie. The Giant, of course, could then be the bourgeoisie, hoarding all the communal wealth for himself.

Most tellingly, the ending of Lang's edition of "Jack and the Beanstalk" has an almost uncanny similarity to the revolutions that would take place in Russia in the early twentieth century. This depiction has Jack rallying the common people, reflective of the proletariat masses of which Marx and Engels speak, to rise against the oppressive Giant, or the bourgeoisie, so that they can take back the wealth that is rightfully theirs. In other words, Jack is motivating the people by saying that they have nothing to lose but their chains of oppression and have everything to win, which is what Marx and Engels argue as a form of motivation and justification for communism.

THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO EXCERPT¹⁴

The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other — Bourgeoisie and Proletariat. From the serfs of the Middle Ages sprang the chartered burghers of the earliest towns. From these burgesses the first elements of the bourgeoisie were developed.

The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development.

The feudal system of industry, in which industrial production was monopolised by closed guilds, now no longer sufficed for the growing wants of the new markets. The manufacturing system took its place. The guild-masters were pushed on one side by the manufacturing middle class; division of labour between the different corporate guilds vanished in the face of division of labour in each single workshop.

¹⁴ (Engels and Marx 482-485)

INTRODUCTION TO “THE WHITE MAN’S BURDEN (APOLOGIES TO RUDYARD KIPLING)”

“The White Man’s Burden (Apologies to Rudyard Kipling)” is an illustration, based on a poem by Rudyard Kipling, depicting British John Bull and American Uncle Sam carrying offensive caricatures of those ostracized by the dominant, white European culture. Both carry the burdens of those whom they are bringing up and into the light of “civilization.” This is reflected in “Jack and the Beanstalk” because the Giant is a foreigner, and Jack’s family are nobles.

Jack’s father is burdened with elevating the Giant, a foreigner, to the point where it ultimately leads to the destruction of his family and personal wealth. After gaining the father’s trust, the Giant eats Jack’s siblings and his father, leaving only Jack and his mother to fend for themselves. Jack’s father is ultimately the reason for this cruel finale of the family, as well.

In this sense, the reader perceives that Jack is completely justified when he begins to steal from the Giant, as the Giant’s possessions are all truly Jack’s. By killing the Giant, Jack is alleviating himself and his mother of the burden of not living up to the father’s desires, one which has been laying upon their shoulders for so long. Therefore, when viewed through the social environment of the time, Jack’s murders and thefts are simply his successes in freeing himself of the white man’s burden.

THE WHITE MAN’S BURDEN (APOLOGIES TO RUDYARD KIPLING)



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