



HORACE WALPOLE

The Castle of Otranto
and
Hieroglyphic Tales

Edited by

ROBERT L. MACK

Assistant Professor in the Department of English
Vanderbilt University

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PREFACE

As the invaluable present I am making to the world may not please all tastes, from the gravity of the matter, the solidity of the reasoning, and the deep learning contained in the ensuing sheets, it is necessary to make some apology for producing this work in so trifling an age, when nothing will go down but temporary politics, personal satire, and idle romances. The true reason then for my surmounting all these objections was singly this: I was apprehensive lest the work should be lost to posterity; and though it may be condemned at present, I can have no doubt but it will be treated with due reverence some hundred ages hence, when wisdom and learning shall have gained their proper ascendant over mankind, and when men shall only read for instruction and improvement of their minds. As I shall print an hundred thousand copies, some, it may be hoped, will escape the havoc that is made of moral works, and then this jewel will shine forth in its genuine lustre. I was in the greater hurry to consign this work to the press, as I foresee that the art of printing will ere long be totally lost, like other useful discoveries well known to the ancients. Such were the art of dissolving rocks with hot vinegar, of teaching elephants to dance on the slack rope, of making malleable glass, of writing epic poems that any body would read after they had been published a month, and the stupendous invention of new religions, a secret of which illiterate Mahometⁿ was the last person possessed.

Notwithstanding this my zeal for good letters, and the ardour of my universal citizenship (for I declare I design this present for all nations), there are some small difficulties in the way, that prevent my conferring this my great benefaction on the world

completely and all at once. I am obliged to produce it in small portions, and therefore beg the prayers of all good and wise men that my life may be prolonged to me, till I shall be able to publish the whole work, no man else being capable of executing the charge so well as myself, for reasons that my modesty will not permit me to specify. In the mean time, as it is the duty of an editor to acquaint the world with what relates to himself as well as his author, I think it right to mention the causes that compel me to publish this work in numbers. The common reason of such proceedings is to make a book dearer for the ease of the purchasers, it being supposed that most people had rather give twenty shillings by sixpence a fortnight, than pay ten shillings once for all. Public-spirited as this proceeding is, I must confess my reasons are more and merely personal. As my circumstances are very moderate, and barely sufficient to maintain decently a gentleman of my abilities and learning, I cannot afford to print at once an hundred thousand copies of two volumes in folio, for that will be the whole mass of Hieroglyphic Tales when the work is perfected. In the next place, being very asthmatic, and requiring a free communication of air, I lodge in the uppermost story of a house in an alley not far from St Mary Axe;" and as a great deal of good company lodges in the same mansion, it was by a considerable favour that I could obtain a single chamber to myself; which chamber is by no means large enough to contain the whole impression, for I design to vend the copies myself, and, according to the practice of other great men, shall sign the first sheet myself with my own hand.

Desirous as I am of acquainting the world with many more circumstances relative to myself, some private considerations prevent my indulging their curiosity any farther at present; but I shall take care to leave so minute an account of myself to some public library, that the future commentators and editors of this work shall not be deprived of all necessary lights. In the mean time I beg the reader to accept the temporary compensation of an account of the author whose work I am publishing.

The Hieroglyphic Tales were undoubtedly written a little before the creation of the world, and have ever since been preserved, by oral tradition, in the mountains of Crampcraggiri,

an uninhabited island, not yet discovered. Of these few facts we could have the most authentic attestations of several clergymen, who remember to have heard them repeated by old men long before they, the said clergymen, were born. We do not trouble the reader with these attestations, as we are sure every body will believe them as much as if they had seen them. It is more difficult to ascertain the true author. We might ascribe them with great probability to *Kemanlegorpikos*, son of *Quat*; but besides that we are not certain that any such person ever existed, it is not clear that he ever wrote any thing but a book of cookery, and that in heroic verse. Others give them to *Quat's* nurse, and a few to *Hermes Trismegistus*," though there is a passage in the latter's treatise on the harpsichord which directly contradicts the account of the first volcano in the 114th of the Hieroglyphic Tales. As *Trismegistus's* work is lost, it is impossible to decide now, whether the discordance mentioned is so positive as has been asserted by many learned men, who only guess at the opinion of *Hermes* from other passages in his writings, and who indeed are not sure whether he was speaking of volcanos or cheesecakes; for he drew so ill, that his hieroglyphics may often be taken for the most opposite things in nature; and as there is no subject which he has not treated, it is not precisely known what he was discussing in any one of them.

This is the nearest we can come to any certainty with regard to the author. But whether he wrote the Tales six thousand years ago, as we believe, or whether they were written for him within these ten years, they are incontestably the most ancient work in the world; and though there is little imagination, and still less invention in them, yet there are so many passages in them exactly resembling *Homer*, that any man living would conclude they were imitated from that great poet, if it was not certain that *Homer* borrowed from them, which I shall prove two ways: first, by giving *Homer's* parallel passages at the bottom of the page; and secondly, by translating *Homer* himself into prose, which shall make him so unlike himself, that nobody will think he could be an original writer: and when he is become totally lifeless and insipid, it will be impossible but these Tales should be preferred to the *Iliad*; especially as I design to put

them into a kind of style that shall be neither verse nor prose; a diction lately much used in tragedies and heroic poems, the former of which are really heroic poems from want of probability, as an antico-moderno epic poem is in fact a mere tragedy, having little or no change of scene, no incidents but a ghost and a storm, and no events but the deaths of the principal actors.

I will not detain the reader longer from the perusal of this invaluable work; but I must beseech the public to be expeditious in taking off the whole impression, as fast as I can get it printed; because I must inform them that I have a more precious work in contemplation; namely, a new Roman history, in which I mean to ridicule, detect and expose all ancient virtue and patriotism, and show from original papers which I am going to write, and which I shall afterwards bury in the ruins of Carthage and then dig up, that it appears by the letters of Hanno the Punic ambassador at Rome, that Scipio was in the pay of Hannibal, and that the dilatoriness of Fabius proceeded from his being a pensioner of the same general.^o I own this discovery will pierce my heart; but as morality is best taught by showing how little effect it had on the best of men, I will sacrifice the most virtuous names for the instruction of the present wicked generation; and I cannot doubt but when once they have learnt to detest the favourite heroes of antiquity, they will become good subjects of the most pious king that ever lived since David, who expelled the established royal family, and then sung psalms to the memory of Jonathan, to whose prejudice he had succeeded to the throne.^o

TALE 1

A new Arabian Night's Entertainment^o

At the foot of the great mountain Hirgonqûu was anciently situated the kingdom of Larbidel. Geographers, who are not apt to make such just comparisons, said it resembled a football just going to be kicked away: and so it happened; for the mountain kicked the kingdom into the ocean, and it has never been heard of since.

One day a young princess had climbed up to the top of the mountain to gather goat's eggs, the whites of which are excellent for taking off freckles. — Goat's eggs! — Yes — naturalists hold that all beings are conceived in an egg. The goats of Hirgonqûu might be oviparous,^o and lay their eggs to be hatched by the sun. This is my supposition; no matter whether I believe it myself or not. I will write against and abuse any man that opposes my hypothesis. It would be fine indeed if learned men were obliged to believe what they assert.

The other side of the mountain was inhabited by a nation of whom the Larbidellians knew no more than the French nobility do of Great Britain, which they think is an island that some how or other may be approached by land. The princess had strayed into the confines of Cucurucu, when she suddenly found herself seized by the guards of the prince that reigned in that country. They told her in few words that she must be conveyed to the capital, and married to the giant their lord and emperor. The giant, it seems, was fond of having a new wife every night, who was to tell him a story that would last till morning, and then have her head cut off — Such odd ways have some folks of passing their wedding-nights!^o The princess modestly asked, why their master loved such long stories? The captain of the guard

replied, his majesty did not sleep well. – Well! said she, and if he does not? – Not but I believe I can tell as long stories as any princess in Asia. Nay, I can repeat Leonidasⁿ by heart; and your emperor must be wakeful indeed if he can hold out against that.

By this time they were arrived at the palace. To the great surprise of the princess, the emperor, so far from being a giant, was but five feet one inch in height; but being two inches taller than any of his predecessors, the flattery of his courtiers had bestowed the name of *giant* on him; and he affected to look down upon any man above his own stature. The princess was immediately undressed and put to bed, his majesty being impatient to hear a new story.

Light of my eyes, said the emperor, what is your name? I call myself the princess Gronovia, replied she; but my real appellation is the frow Gronow. And what is the use of a name, said his majesty, but to be called by it? And why do you pretend to be a princess, if you are not? My turn is romantic, answered she, and I have ever had an ambition of being the heroine of a novel. Now there are but two conditions that entitle one to that rank; one must be a shepherdess or a princess. Well, content yourself, said the giant; you will die an empress, without being either the one or the other! – But what sublime reason had you for lengthening your name so unaccountably? It is a custom in my family, said she: all my ancestors were learned men, who wrote about the Romans. It sounded more classic, and gave a higher opinion of their literature, to put a Latin termination to their names. All this is Japonese to me, said the emperor; but your ancestors seem to have been a parcel of mountebanks. Does one understand any thing the better for corrupting one's name? Oh, said the princess, but it showed taste too. There was a time when in Italy the learned carried this still farther; and a man with a large forehead, who was born on the fifth of January, called himself Quintus Januarius Fronto. More and more absurd, said the emperor. You seem to have a great deal of impertinent knowledge about a great many impertinent people; but proceed in your story: whence came you? Mynheer, said she, I was born in Holland – The deuce you was? said the emperor, and where is that? It was no where, replied the

princess spritelily, till my countrymen gained it from the sea. – Indeed, moppet! said his majesty; and pray who were your countrymen, before you had any country? Your majesty asks a very shrewd question, said she, which I cannot resolve on a sudden; but I will step home to my library, and consult five or six thousand volumes of modern history, an hundred or two dictionaries, and an abridgement of geography in forty volumes in folio, and be back in an instant. Not so fast, my life, said the emperor, you must not rise till you go to execution: it is now one in the morning, and you have not begun your story.

My great grandfather, continued the princess, was a Dutch merchant, who passed many years in Japan – On what account? said the emperor. He went thither to abjure his religion, said she, that he might get money enough to return and defend it against Philip II.ⁿ You are a pleasant family, said the emperor; but though I love fables, I hate genealogies. I know in all families, by their own account, there never was any thing but good and great men from father to son; a sort of fiction that does not at all amuse me. In my dominions there is no nobility but flattery. Whoever flatters me best is created a great lord, and the titles I confer are synonymous to their merits. There is Kiss-my-breech-Can, my favourite; Adulation-Can, lord treasurer; Prerogative-Can, head of the law; and Blasphemy-Can, high-priest. Whoever speaks truth corrupts his blood, and is ipso facto degraded. In Europe you allow a man to be noble because one of his ancestors was a flatterer. But every thing degenerates, the farther it is removed from its source. I will not hear a word of any of your race before your father: what was he?

It was in the height of the contests about the bull Unigenitusⁿ – I tell you, interrupted the emperor, I will not be plagued with any more of those people with Latin names: they were a parcel of coxcombs, and seem to have infected you with their folly. I am sorry, replied Gronovia, that your sublime highness is so little acquainted with the state of Europe, as to take a papal ordinance for a person. Unigenitus is Latin for the Jesuits – And who the devil are the Jesuits? said the giant. You explain one nonsensical term by another, and wonder I am never the wiser. Sir, said the princess, if you will permit me to give you a short

account of the troubles that have agitated Europe for these last two hundred years, on the doctrines of grace, free-will, predestination, reprobation, justification, &c. you will be more entertained, and will believe less, than if I told your majesty a long story of fairies and goblins. You are an eternal prater, said the emperor, and very self-sufficient; but talk your fill, and upon what subject you like, till to-morrow morning: but I swear by the soul of the holy Jirigi, who rode to heaven on the tail of a magpie, as soon as the clock strikes eight, you are a dead woman. Well, who was the Jesuit Unigenitus?

The novel doctrines that had sprung up in Germany, said Gronovia, made it necessary for the church to look about her. The disciples of Loyola – Of whom? said the emperor, yawning – Ignatius Loyola," the founder of the Jesuits, replied Gronovia, was – A writer of Roman history, I suppose, interrupted the emperor: what the devil were the Romans to you, that you trouble your head so much about them? The empire of Rome and the church of Rome are two distinct things, said the princess; and yet, as one may say, the one depends upon the other, as the new testament does on the old. One destroyed the other, and yet pretends a right to its inheritance. The temporalities of the church – What's o'clock, said the emperor to the chief eunuch? It cannot sure be far from eight – This woman has gossiped at least seven hours. Do you hear, my to-morrow night's wife shall be dumb – Cut her tongue out before you bring her to our bed. Madam, said the eunuch, his sublime highness, whose erudition passes the sands of the sea, is too well acquainted with all human sciences to require information. It is therefore that his exalted wisdom prefers accounts of what never happened, to any relation either in history or divinity – You lie, said the emperor; when I exclude truth, I certainly do not mean to forbid divinity – How many divinities have you in Europe, woman? The council of Trent," replied Gronovia, has decided – The emperor began to snore – I mean, continued Gronovia, that notwithstanding all father Paul has asserted, cardinal Palavicini affirms that in the three first sessions of that council – The emperor was now fast asleep; which the princess and the chief eunuch perceiving, clapped several pillows upon his face, and

held them there till he expired. As soon as they were convinced he was dead, the princess, putting on every mark of despair and concern, issued to the divan, where she was immediately proclaimed empress. The emperor, it was given out, had died of an hemorrhoidal colic; but to show her regard for his memory, her imperial majesty declared she would strictly adhere to the maxims by which he had governed. Accordingly she espoused a new husband every night, but dispensed with their telling her stories, and was graciously pleased also, upon their good behaviour, to remit the subsequent execution. She sent presents to all the learned men in Asia; and they in return did not fail to cry her up as a pattern of clemency, wisdom, and virtue: and though the panegyrics of the learned are generally as clumsy as they are fulsome, they ventured to assure her that their writings would be as durable as brass, and that the memory of her glorious reign would reach to the latest posterity.

TALE 2

The King and his three Daughters

There was formerly a king, who had three daughters – that is, he would have had three, if he had had one more – but some how or other the eldest never was born. She was extremely handsome, had a great deal of wit, and spoke French in perfection, as all the authors of that age affirm, and yet none of them pretend that she ever existed. It is very certain that the two other princesses were far from beauties; the second had a strong Yorkshire dialect, and the youngest had bad teeth and but one leg, which occasioned her dancing very ill.

As it was not probable that his majesty would have any more children, being eighty-seven years two months and thirteen days old when his queen died, the states of the kingdom were very anxious to have the princesses married. But there was one great obstacle to this settlement, though so important to the peace of the kingdom. The king insisted that his eldest daughter should be married first; and as there was no such person, it was very difficult to fix upon a proper husband for her. The courtiers all approved his majesty's resolution; but, as under the best princes there will always be a number of discontented, the nation was torn into different factions, the grumblers or patriots insisting that the second princess was the eldest, and ought to be declared heiress apparent to the crown. Many pamphlets were written pro and con; but the ministerial party pretended that the chancellor's argument was unanswerable, who affirmed, that the second princess could not be the eldest, as no princess-royal ever had a Yorkshire accent. A few persons who were attached to the youngest princess took advantage of this plea for whispering that *her* royal highness's pretensions to the crown were the

best of all; for, as there was no eldest princess, and as the second must be the first if there was no first, and as she could not be the second if she was the first, and as the chancellor had proved that she could not be the first, it followed plainly by every idea of law that she could be nobody at all; and then the consequence followed of course, that the youngest must be the eldest, if she had no elder sister.

It is inconceivable what animosities and mischiefs arose from these different titles; and each faction endeavoured to strengthen itself by foreign alliances. The court party, having no real object for their attachment, were the most attached of all, and made up by warmth for the want of foundation in their principles. The clergy in general were devoted to this, which was styled *the first party*. The physicians embraced the second; and the lawyers declared for the third, or the faction of the youngest princess, because it seemed best calculated to admit of doubts and endless litigation.

While the nation was in this distracted situation, there arrived the prince of Quifferiquimini, who would have been the most accomplished hero of the age, if he had not been dead, and had spoken any language but the Egyptian, and had not had three legs. Notwithstanding these blemishes, the eyes of the whole nation were immediately turned upon him, and each party wished to see him married to the princess whose cause they espoused.

The old king received him with the most distinguished honours; the senate made the most fulsome addresses to him; the princesses were so taken with him, that they grew more bitter enemies than ever; and the court ladies and *petit-maitres* invented a thousand new fashions upon his account – Every thing was to be à la Quifferiquimini. Both men and women of fashion left off rouge, to look the more cadaverous; their clothes were embroidered with hieroglyphics, and all the ugly characters they could gather from Egyptian antiquities, with which they were forced to be contented, it being impossible to learn a language that is lost; and all tables, chairs, stools, cabinets and couches were made with only three legs: the last, however, soon went out of fashion, as being very inconvenient.

The prince, who, ever since his death, had had but a weakly constitution, was a little fatigued with this excess of attentions, and would often wish himself at home in his coffin. But his greatest difficulty of all was to get rid of the youngest princess, who kept hopping after him wherever he went, and was so full of admiration of his three legs, and so modest about having but one herself, and so inquisitive to know how his three legs were set on, that, being the best-natured man in the world, it went to his heart whenever in a fit of peevishness he happened to drop an impatient word, which never failed to throw her into an agony of tears; and then she looked so ugly that it was impossible for him to be tolerably civil to her. He was not much more inclined to the second princess – In truth, it was the eldest who made the conquest of his affections: and so violently did his passion increase one Tuesday morning, that, breaking through all prudential considerations (for there were many reasons which ought to have determined his choice in favour of either of the other sisters), he hurried to the old king, acquainted him with his love, and demanded the eldest princess in marriage. Nothing could equal the joy of the good old monarch, who wished for nothing but to live to see the consummation of this match. Throwing his arms about the prince skeleton's neck, and watering his hollow cheeks with warm tears, he granted his request, and added, that he would immediately resign his crown to him and his favourite daughter.

I am forced for want of room to pass over many circumstances that would add greatly to the beauty of this history, and am sorry I must dash the reader's impatience by acquainting him, that notwithstanding the eagerness of the old king and youthful ardour of the prince, the nuptials were obliged to be postponed; the archbishop declaring that it was essentially necessary to have a dispensation from the pope, the parties being related within the forbidden degrees; "a woman that never was, and a man that had been, being deemed first cousins in the eye of the canon law.

Hence arose a new difficulty. The religion of the Quifferiquimians was totally opposite to that of the papists. The former believed in nothing but grace; and they had a high-priest of their own, who pretended that he was master of the whole fee-

simple" of grace, and by that possession could cause every thing to have been that never had been, and could prevent every thing that had been from ever having been. 'We have nothing to do,' said the prince to the king, 'but to send a solemn embassy to the high-priest of grace, with a present of a hundred thousand million of ingots, and he will cause your charming no-daughter to have been, and will prevent my having died, and then there will be no occasion for a dispensation from your old fool at Rome.' – How! thou impious, atheistical bag of drybones, cried the old king; dost thou profane our holy religion? Thou shalt have no daughter of mine, thou three-legged skeleton – Go and be buried and be damned, as thou must be; for, as thou art dead, thou art past repentance: I would sooner give my child to a baboon, who has one leg more than thou hast, than bestow her on such a reprobate corpse. – You had better give your one-legged infanta to the baboon, said the prince; they are fitter for one another. As much a corpse as I am, I am preferable to nobody; and who the devil would have married your no-daughter, but a dead body? For my religion, I lived and died in it, and it is not in my power to change it now if I would. – But for your part – A great shout interrupted this dialogue; and the captain of the guard, rushing into the royal closet, acquainted his majesty, that the second princess, in revenge of the prince's neglect, had given her hand to a drysalter, who was a common-councilman; and that the city, in consideration of the match, had proclaimed them king and queen, allowing his majesty to retain the title for his life, which they had fixed for the term of six months; and ordering, in respect of his royal birth, that the prince should immediately lie in state and have a pompous funeral.

This revolution was so sudden and so universal, that all parties approved, or were forced to seem to approve it. The old king died the next day, as the courtiers said, for joy; the prince of Quifferiquimini was buried in spite of his appeal to the law of nations; and the youngest princess went distracted, and was shut up in a madhouse, calling out day and night for a husband with three legs.