Aesop's Fables

in Latin

Ancient Wit and Wisdom from the Animal Kingdom

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Fable 1.
DE LEAENA ET VULPE
(Barlow 32)

Introduction
The Lioness and The Fox

There are various versions of this Aesop's fable in which the animals debate about the quantity and the quality of their litters. Sometimes it is a pig who debates with the lioness, which makes sense because the sow is notorious for having many piglets in each of her litters. In this version of the fable, however, it is a fox who insults the lioness for the size of her litter. The fox is Aesop's favorite trickster, a character who is often a bit too sly for her own good. In this story, who do you think wins the debate: the fox or the lion?

For another story about the fox and her cubs, see the fable of the fox and the eagle (Fable 31), and for another story about an animal mother, see the fable of the sow in labor (Fable 26). For another encounter between a fox and a lion, see the fable of the lion in the cave (Fable 46).

Grammar Overview
Direct and Indirect Speech

You will see two different kinds of speech in this fable: direct and indirect. The words of the lioness are quoted directly, inside quotation marks. The words of the fox, however, are not quoted in quotation marks, but are reported indirectly. If the words of the fox were quoted directly, they would be, *"O Leaena, quolibet partu, unum dumtaxat catulum parturis!"* ("O Lioness, with each litter, you give birth to one cub only!"). As you read through the fables, pay attention to whether a given fable contains direct quoted speech, or whether it relies on indirect speech, or a mixture of both, as in this fable. How do you think storytellers decide between using direct and indirect speech when they craft a story? Why do you think it is the lioness who has the special distinction of being quoted directly in this fable, when the fox's words are reported only indirectly? (For more information about indirect speech in Latin, see the notes to Fable 7.)

Vocabulary

Nouns

catulus (**catuli,** *m.*): puppy, whelp
leaena (**leaenae,** *f.*): lioness
partus (**partus,** *m.*): birth, labor

Adjectives

quilibet, quaelibet, quodlibet (**cuiuslibet**): whatever, every

Verbs

exprobro (**exprobrare**): reproach, criticize
parturio (**parturire**): give birth, be in labor

Other

dumtaxat: only, precisely
pol: by Pollux, really!
quod: because, that
sane: truly, surely

Noli irritare leones.

DE LEAENA ET VULPE

Dramatis Personae

Leaena, the lioness, and *Vulpes*, the fox.

> Leaena, cum a Vulpe saepe exprobraretur quod, quolibet partu, unum dumtaxat catulum parturiret, respondit, "Unum sane, at pol Leonem!"

Grammar Notes

cum a vulpe exprobraretur. The subjunctive, introduced by **cum**, gives causal background information; this is why the lioness made her reply to the fox.

quod parturiret. The subjunctive, introduced by **quod** ("because"), gives causal background information; according to the fox, this is why the lioness should be criticized.

quolibet partu. The word **quolibet** is from **quilibet**, a compound of two words, **qui + libet,** of which only the first word declines (see Fable 3 and Fable 44 for similar compounds). The sense is "with each birth" or "every time she goes into labor."

unum sane. The accusative case implies a verb, which can be supplied from the verb **parturiret** in the preceding statement: **unum sane** (**parturio**).

Multum, non multa.

Canis, confestim sese erigens, tota voce elatravit.