

Harelip

(수궁가, 토끼전)

A Play with Songs, in Three Acts
by John Holstein
Songs by Gary Rector

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Scenes and Songs

ACT ONE

Scene 1 The Dragon King's Sea Palace
 "The Wonder Workers' Song"
 "The Goddess's Song"

ACT TWO

Scene One: Land
 "Green"

Scene Two: The Sea Palace
 "They Just Want to Get in"

ACT THREE

Scene One: Land

Scene Two: The Sea Palace
 "Rx: Wisdom and Good Humor"

Running Time:
60 minutes (without intermission)

Cast of Characters

DRAGON KING	the sick, ten thousand-year-old King of the East Sea
TORTOISE	the Dragon King's loyal thousand-year-old Chief Minister
HARE	a brash young hare whose liver is the only thing that can save the life of the Dragon King
MINISTER OCTOPUS	in the Court of the Sea Palace
MINISTER LOBSTER	in the Court of the Sea Palace
MINISTER CLAM	in the Court of the Sea Palace
WONDER WORKER 1	renowned doctor from China
WONDER WORKER 2	renowned doctor from China
WONDER WORKER 3	renowned doctor from China
GODDESS OF GODLINESS	the Dragon King's close friend
BADGER	Hare's friend
JAILER 1 (GUARD)	in the Sea Palace
JAILER 2 (GUARD)	in the Sea Palace
MESSENGER	in the Sea Palace

Harelip

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Down, down, deep down, where the sun does not shine and never has, and nary a cloud has run, in another world, another time, down, deep down in the lowest depths of the East Sea where the Dragon King rules his realm, grief now rules his subjects' hearts.

The Dragon King is in bed, sick — dying, as a matter of fact, though he does not know it yet. He is propped up on pillows, facing the audience, but we can hardly see him because he is almost hidden by three Ministers of his court surrounding his bed in anxious attendance. They are taking his pulse, listening to his heart, pulling and poking, and with each pull and poke the King's feet wiggle, or twitch, or kick.

KING: *(in pain)* O-w-w! ... Ouch! *(tickled)* Ha-ha-ha! *(in pain)* Ah! *(in pleasure)* Ah-h-h, try there again! *(in pain)* Ouch! Not there!

The Ministers collectively heave a big sigh, then walk off to huddle to one side, shaking their heads and gesturing the hopelessness of this desperate situation. While they are busy clicking and clucking with worry and grief, the King sneaks out a porcelain bottle of soju from under his bed and takes a swig. Soon the Ministers return to the King, but not before he is able to slip the bottle back under his bed, ever ready for its next opportunity to comfort an ailing liver.

MINISTER LOBSTER: Your majesty, our examination reveals to us something less than we had hoped. You see, your liver, for example, is dead tired...

MINISTER OCTOPUS: ...your kidneys have expired...

MINISTER CLAM: ...your bladder's gone green...

MINISTER LOBSTER: ...though less than your spleen.

MINISTER OCTOPUS: Your stomach is dying...

MINISTER CLAM: ...even its ulcers are drying...

MINISTER LOBSTER: ...up. And your upper intestine, seems to me...

MINISTER OCTOPUS: ...is where the lower wants to be.

MINISTER CLAM: And vice-versa.

MINISTER LOBSTER: Your diaphragm's sagging...

MINISTER OCTOPUS: Your lungs are gagging...

MINISTER CLAM: And your pulse doesn't show...

MINISTER LOBSTER: ...because your blood doesn't flow...

MINISTER OCTOPUS: ...because your vessels are blocked...

MINISTER CLAM: ...so your heart's all but stopped.

MINISTER LOBSTER: And your... Your... Was that all, Ministers?

KING: "All"?! I should think all that would be quite enough.

MINISTER LOBSTER: Oh yes! And your brain, poor thing...

KING: My brain *what* thing?

MINISTER LOBSTER: Is... Well...

KING: "Well" is right, and don't you forget it. So, Ministers, what in this roundabout way of yours are you trying to tell me?

All the Ministers look uncomfortably at each other, then heave a collective sigh.

MINISTER LOBSTER: Your highness, it appears that your glorious 10,000-year reign is about to expire.

Silence.

KING: About to expire, is it? And me with it, I presume? Well, I am not ready to expire. I do not choose to expire. Maybe if you'd stop all this pinching and poking and try to find a medicine that doesn't just taste bad...

MINISTER CLAM: But we've tried them all, your majesty! Every last...!

MINISTER OCTOPUS: Oh, to be sure, we've done our very most loyal best...

A Messenger enters, approaches Minister Octopus deferentially, and whispers in his ear.

MINISTER CLAM: *(to illustrate their claim, counting off on his fingers, chanting)* Barks and roots and blossoms and fruits, from weeds and trees and bushes and shoots...

MINISTER LOBSTER: ...horns and spleens and skins and you-know-where from dog, deer, sea lion, snake and bear. *(throwing up his hands in exasperation)* Sire, we have exhausted the medicinal resources of the world, but...

MINISTER OCTOPUS: What? The Wonder Workers! Here?

MINISTER CLAM: *(eyes narrowing to slits, in a cool but murderous tone)* Who had the gall to send for those foreign scoundrels? *(The Messenger whispers in Octopus's ear, and Octopus winces and slaps his head, sidles up to Clam to somehow shut him up.)* Such impertinent meddling. Such outrageous *(Octopus tugs on his sleeve)* disregard of our competence. *(Octopus kicks Clam in the ankle)* Ouch! Stop it! Now, where was I? Oh yes, deserves the most ignominious *(Octopus gives up and openly whispers in his ear)* death, slow as can be, as excruciatingly pain- — ... What? *(He looks uncomfortably back at Octopus, at the King, at Lobster, at the King...)*

KING: *(Laughs.)* Forgive my meddling, Minister Clam.

The King laughs again, which brings on a coughing spasm. The Ministers rush forward. One covers the King's mouth, the other pinches his nose, one grabs his throat. The King writhes a few moments more, then passes out and stops coughing. The Ministers slap each other on the back and shake each other's hands, congratulating each other on having stopped the King's coughing fit. Then they administer smelling salts. The King revives, and the Ministers again congratulate themselves.

KING: Thank you, Ministers. That cough is going to kill me one day... So, where were we?

MINISTER CLAM: You were begging us to forgive your meddling.

KING: Meddling?

MINISTER LOBSTER: Exactly. Inviting those three scoundrels.

KING: Scoundrels... Ah, yes. Forgive me, but after ten years in bed like this, you know, I... *(The door bursts open and the Wonder Workers saunter in, looking down their noses at the Ministers.)* Ah, gentlemen! Welcome! So good of you to come — and from so far!

WONDER WORKER 1: Think nothing of it, Sire. Entirely our pleasure.

WONDER WORKER 2: By all means! I mean, you did promise us something really special?

KING: Yes, we've got a good one for you here. Seems nothing — and no one *(eyeing the Ministers)* — can fix me.

WONDER WORKER 3: You look awful. Wonderful! Shall we take a closer look, then?

WONDER WORKER 1 approaches the King's bed and grabs the cover to pull it back. Lobster rushes forward and grabs the cover too. They glare at each other.

MINISTER LOBSTER: It's our patient, thank you.

KING: 'It'?

WONDER WORKER 1: *(Ignoring the King, he tugs back on the cover, but is met with equal resistance by Lobster.)* Your patient, Minister, is still a patient, after all your attendance. Now, he's mine. *(He pulls hard on 'mine.')*

KING: Now, now, gentlemen...

MINISTER LOBSTER: Ours!

Lobster counters his rival's attempt with an upward jerk on the cover when Wonder Worker 1 suddenly lets go, and Lobster's fist smashes the King in the jaw. The King groans, swoons. Now the others rush to the bed, and a big melee breaks out. Soon, in the midst of all this commotion, the King slips out of bed and starts crawling weakly away. Guards rush in to break up the fight, then carry the King back to his bed.

KING: *(to the Guards)* I think you may go now. But not too far! Well, gentlemen, as we were saying...?

All of them start speaking excitedly at once, and the King dives under his covers. They soon regain their composure, and the King comes back up cautiously, peeking first to make sure it is safe.

WONDER WORKER 1: But sire, these incompetent...

KING: Al-l-l *right!* (*ripping off his covers*) There now! Examine me, will you?

WONDER WORKER 1: (*feels the King's pulse*) Whoo—whee! (*He examines other parts, and gives a delighted chuckle at the challenge he finds with almost every organ.*) Awful! ... Hopeless! ... Oh my! (*He motions the other Wonder Workers over; they check the pulse, heart, lungs, and cluck and chuckle in great appreciation.*)

WONDER WORKER 2: You're dying, all right...!

MINISTER CLAM: That's what we told him time and time again! But he wouldn't...!

WONDER WORKER 3: But how did you ever manage to hang on so long?

KING: (*not as impressed*) Strong will.

WONDER WORKER 1: Apparently! And that is just what's killing you — an extraordinarily strong will for wine and women. (*MUSIC: "The Wonder Workers' Song"*)

WONDER WORKER 1: (*Sings*)

Too much fun between the sheets.
Loads of alcoholic treats.
And your willfulness defeats the treatment.
You should have taken better care of yourself.

MINISTERS: (*Sing*)

Just what we said!

WORKER 2: (*Sings*)

I'm afraid your liver's shot,
and your stomach's gone to pot.
Magic cures I haven't got. So sorry!
You should have exercised a little self-control.

MINISTERS: (*Sing*)

Some self-control!

WORKER 3: (*Sings*)

Yes, the party's over now for you, sire.

Your case is dire. You're about to expire.

WORKER 1: (*Sings*)

Blood count's at an all-time low,

WORKER 2: (*Sings*)

and your heart's about to blow.

MINISTERS: (*Sing*)

Hate to say we told you so, but now you know.

WORKERS AND MINISTERS: (*Sing*)

You should have taken better care of yourself.

WONDER WORKER 1: Still, an absolutely marvelous specimen! After ten thousand years of such wanton self-indulgence! An ordinary creature couldn't stand a year of the way you've been enjoying yourself.

MINISTER LOBSTER: We have been telling him all along he ought to go easy...

MINISTER CLAM: And then all that wine...!

MINISTER OCTOPUS: ...and all those exquisite ladies...!

KING: (*nostalgically*) Ah yes. The wine. The dear, dear ladies!

ENTER the Goddess of Godliness, striding grandly.

GODDESS: So, I'm not the only lady in your life!

KING: My dearest Goddess of Godliness! What a sight for these sore eyes!

GODDESS: Your eyes aren't the only thing sore about you, King. You look awful!

KING: And you look beautiful...as ever!

GODDESS: But you *still* look awful. You need a hare's liver — and fast!

All the others look at the Goddess, stunned. Then each vies to get the King's ear.

WONDER WORKER 1: Now that's just...

MINISTER CLAM: ...what I...

WONDER WORKER 2: ...was going...

MINISTER OCTOPUS: ...to say.

WONDER WORKER 3: You need...

MINISTERS AND WONDER WORKERS: ...a hare's liver!

GODDESS: Thank you, gentlemen. Now, I'll handle the technical part. You see, your yin-yang equilibrium is shot. Too much yang. Which explains why you're great at controlling everyone else but can't control yourself...

KING: I used to, but after a couple thousand years it all got to be such a bore...

GODDESS: And (*indicating the bed with a gesture*) this is what you call fun, is it? But the hare, as I was saying, he's got a perfect balance of yin and yang. And it's all in his liver. So that hare's liver is all we need to get you back on your feet! (*MUSIC: "The Goddess's Song."*)

Sings

Though these guys may say you're done,
they just want to spoil your fun.
There's a cure, and I'm the one
who knows it.
You shouldn't ever give up on yourself.

WONDER WORKERS AND MINISTERS: (*Sing*)

No, don't give up.

GODDESS: (*Sings*)

Though it's quite a fix you're in,
there's a thick for every thin,
there's a yang for every yin.
Believe me.
No, never ever give up on yourself.

WONDER WORKERS AND MINISTERS: (*Sing*)

Things aren't so bad.

GODDESS: (*Sings*)

And just when you think the tunnel's darkest,
you can depend on that light at the end.
So I tell you, don't despair.
Wipe away that frown you wear,
for the liver of a hare
can save you.
You shouldn't ever give up on yourself.

(*Speaks*) So, simple as can be: You and the hare were made for each other. You the great yin lord of the sea, and Hare's land yang can't be beat. Your yin and his yang, the Dragon King and the hare — what a pair!

KING: But this hare... You mean that thing with the big funny ears that flop as he hops, and that cotton-ball tail that bumps as he jumps?

GODDESS: That's him! And that cuddly fur that sets your fingers astir...

MINISTER CLAM: And that split upper lip that needs some kind of clip...

WONDER WORKER 3: (*pointing out the difficulty of catching the hare*) And those soft brown eyes that make truth of lies...

All grow increasingly despondent as their description continues.

MINISTER OCTOPUS: (*dejected*) And that lickety-split wit that just won't quit...

WONDER WORKER 2: And those fast legs...that make him absolutely, hopelessly impossible to catch...ever...

A collective sigh of absolute and utter despair.

GODDESS: Nonsense. Where there's a will, there's a way! I mean, with these loyal ministers of yours...

Everyone looks at the Ministers expectantly. The Ministers scramble to hide in back of each other, and Lobster ends up in front.

WONDER WORKER 1: Loyal Minister Lobster here, for example. First in line to serve his King.

MINISTER LOBSTER: Certainly. I live only for my King. This cumbersome tail of mine, however, would drag so I would never be able to keep up with anything as fast as a hare. So sorry, your majesty. (*He sneaks around in back of Clam, which leaves Octopus, already squirming.*)

WONDER WORKER 2: But our Minister Octopus has no tail to hold him back. And look how eager he is to be on his way.

MINISTER OCTOPUS: (*managing somehow to draw himself up into a gallant pose*) Yes, I am on my way! You will have your hare's liver as soon as... Oh my! In my eagerness to serve I failed to consider one essential factor: My delicate skin would succumb to that burning, broiling sun up there. I could not move with such a burn. I do so wish I could go! (*He sags, then slithers round and in back of Lobster, exposing Clam, whose shells are already click-clacking in fear..*)

WONDER WORKER 3: So the King's best hope — and his very last hope! — is Minister Clam, with skin thick as iron and courage twice that.

MINISTER CLAM: To be sure, and with a love for my King *thrice* that! Alas, though, it is said those savage humans on earth enjoy the taste of the clam, and a fully digested clam brings back no hare. (*He presents a regretful smile and scurries in back of Octopus.*)

GODDESS: Hmm... Looks like a diet of seaweed isn't all that great for the backbone.

MINISTER LOBSTER: Whatever you may be suggesting, Goddess, it does not apply to us. We denizens of the sea simply cannot function on land.

KING: He's right. Even Shih Hwang-ti, he couldn't find his longevity elixir with 500 loyal subjects searching the world for it. So how could a nobody like me ever expect to...?

GODDESS: You a nobody? You're ruler of the whole East Sea.

KING: A puddle. A mere drop. Besides, what good would even the seven seas do me six feet under Bukmang Mountain, with the worms chewing away at my flesh and the termites gnawing at my bones? (*After a forlorn silence, he makes up his mind.*) I therefore decree, with all pre-posthumous urgency: He who brings me the liver of the hare ... can have my throne.

MINISTER LOBSTER: Lord, your devoted servant Lobster — at your service, and on his way! (*He starts walking out.*)

WONDER WORKER 1: What happened to your tail, Minister Lobster?

MINISTER OCTOPUS: Certainly! And would the hare be stupid enough to fall for any scheme you might have behind those greedy, beady red eyes of yours? Eyes so small they could not recognize a hare — even were such hare to offer the Minister his liver on a platter.

The Wonder Workers and Goddess applaud.

MINISTER LOBSTER: (*displaying his pincers*) With equipment like this, who requires a scheme, or even to see? (*He snaps them in Octopus's face.*)

MINISTER CLAM: Moreover, you are forever moving backwards. You would be back here ten times before you arrived there even once! (*to the King*) Sire, it is I that will obtain your hare's liver.

Tortoise ENTERS quietly, makes his way old and slow as a glacier toward the King. No one notices him.

MINISTER OCTOPUS: And what are you going to do for legs? Now, I have enough legs to ascend four mountains at once. (*He shows off his legs. The Wonder Workers notice and sidle up to Octopus, eyeing his legs.*) And take due note of these powerful suckers!

MINISTER CLAM: Yes, oh yes! I have never seen such *suc-culent suc-kers*! You might ask our Wonder Workers here. And that delectably chewy flesh of yours! No doubt about it, Minister Octopus — you will be broiling at one of their barbarous beach barbecues before those seductive suckers of yours ever touch their first grain of sand.

Octopus looks at the Wonder Workers, sniffs defiantly at them, and backs off.

WONDER WORKER 2: Might be a bit tough, though, so old...

WONDER WORKER 3: ...and the cholesterol in all that fat!

The King, Goddess and Wonder Workers all find the childish squabbling hilarious, but the King kindly tries to hide his laughter.

MINISTER CLAM: Attention...! Thank you. Now then, your majesty, imagine anyone trying to sink his teeth into *(knocking twice on his shell)* this! The mere thought! Moreover, having no legs, I have nothing to suggest to anyone the idea of diverting me from my noble mission. Furthermore, and in consummately convincing conclusion, what eyes have I to...?

GODDESS: Which, in conclusive conclusion, makes you even slower and blinder than — our amphibious friend Chief Minister Tortoise!

Stunned silence.

KING: Tortoise, of course! *(reconsidering)* But Tortoise, how old is he now anyway...? Didn't we just have his thousandth birthday party a month ago?

MINISTER LOBSTER: Ensuingly thus, how could the venerable Chief Minister, as loyal and wise as he is, ever catch a creature as fast as the hare?

Tortoise arrives at the King's bedside just as Lobster says "hare."

TORTOISE: *(slowly, with all the weight of his thousand years)* The hare? Yes, I have heard reference... Said to be endowed with a marvelous liver! Although in all my trips to land I do not recall actually having seen the creature...

LIGHTS down. All except the King and Tortoise exit. LIGHTS up, and Tortoise is standing at the King's bedside.

KING: I don't know, Tortoise, maybe it's not such a good idea after all. You're getting on in years... And for all your wisdom, they say the hare is very smart, and very quick.

TORTOISE: Your majesty, did you ever hear of a thousand-year-old hare? Even a hundred-year-old hare?

KING: Well, no, can't say as I have, but...

TORTOISE: Which means that as smart as the hare may be, and as quick as he may be, sooner or later — and usually much sooner than later — the hare gets caught. And, as you see, in a thousand years no one has yet caught me.

KING: *(considers this a moment)* Tortoise, you know all the danger awaiting you there, where the Hare lives?

TORTOISE: Danger...danger... Ah yes, that best of all synonyms for adventure! *(Tortoise sniffs the air, shows a puzzled expression, then starts walking slowly around toward the head of the King's bed.)* I would welcome one last adventure before I am no longer able to...

KING: But what would you eat, so far away from the sea?

TORTOISE: They will certainly have ramyon there, your highness, and... *(reaching under the bed, pulling out the soju, then shaking his finger at the King)* ...soju, to wash it down! *(Tortoise takes a long swig.)* Ah-h-h!

KING: *(shocked)* But how...? *(Laughs.)* All right, Tortoise, you sure got me there!

TORTOISE: (*kneels at the King's side, grabs the King's hands, then vows earnestly*) As — hiccup! — I will get the hare!

KING: (*putting his hand on Tortoise's shoulder*) No doubt. You've never let me down. For almost a thousand years now you've been the most loyal advisor and (*pulling Tortoise to him in an embrace, Tortoise's head naturally ending up on the King's chest*) truest friend any king could hope to have (*Tortoise, drunk from the swig of soju, drops off to sleep*) and I don't ever want to lose you. However, as you do insist... So, go then, (*releasing Tortoise, who doesn't move*) Tortoise. (*Tortoise lets out a loud snore.*) Tortoise? (*The King shakes him, and Tortoise stirs awake, lifts his head and looks at the King.*) Yes, Tortoise, go then, and bless you. But please, my dearest friend, do be careful! (*Tortoise is nodding off to sleep again.*) Don't take any chances. And be especially careful of those dreadful creatures they call people! (*Tortoise lets out another loud snore.*)

LIGHTS down abruptly.

CURTAIN

Afterword

How to Turn a Monkey into a Hare, and a Crocodile into a Dragon

The Korean story of the hare and the tortoise is a tale which, in its origin and venerable age, in its incorporation of values and symbols from disparate cultures and simultaneous modification of these to its host culture, reflects the evolution of a great many of the world's folk tales.

"Sometimes a [Korean] story begins with Confucianism, drifts into Buddhism, and thence into Shamanism or even pure animism, and then by devious courses comes back to its original Confucian type."¹ The original Koreans brought Shamanism with them from the northwest when they began to inhabit the peninsula more than 30,000 years ago. Rudimentary forms of the most ancient elements of Chinese thought (yin and yang, the five modes of action, the zodiac) probably entered the peninsula before the first millennium B.C.² Their more developed forms came with Confucianism around the third century B.C. Buddhism followed, also from China, towards the early part of the first millenium A.D.

We know that the tale that gave us Harelip existed about 2,500 years ago, in India, not long after the birth of Buddhism. (And we can assume that the Buddhist story was inspired by a Hindu story that had already been in existence for many generations.) A monkey and his adversary, a crocodile trying to get the monkey's heart to feed to his mate, are the original characters in the basic tale in which the crocodile deceives the monkey, who then outwits the crocodile. Three versions of the tale are jatakas, instructive fables the Buddha told his disciples about his former lives — he can remember over "ninety-one times 432 million years"³ (These jatakas are in the Sutrapitaka, the second of three "baskets" of writings in the Tripitaka, compiled around the third century B.C.) Another version of the tale is found in the Panchatantra, a secular collection of fables with such disparate estimates of age as between the fourth and first centuries B.C. and between the first century B.C. and fifth century A.D. Though we do not know exactly when the Panchatantra was compiled, the estimates show there is only a slight possibility that it was compiled before the Tripitaka; so we can probably consider the jatakas as the origin of our story.

Buddhism entered China during the Later Han dynasty, in the first century A.D. Our story was translated into Chinese by the fourth century at the latest. The crocodile couple turns into a turtle couple in the Chinese versions of two of the jatakas, and in the other version the crocodile couple are dragons.⁴ The crocodiles of the Indian story were probably changed to turtles because the crocodile was not familiar to the Chinese (though

the dragon “in something of its characteristic serpent or crocodile form is of great importance in China...”⁵) The clever monkey was retained; he was already a major character in Chinese mythology and cosmology.

The Chinese brought Buddhism and our story into the Korean peninsula (before the three kingdoms there were united into one) over one of three routes: in the mid fourth century from China’s Ch’in dynasty to the peninsula through the Korean state of Koguryo; from Eastern Chin to Baekje; or in the sixth century from Li-ang to Shilla. Since the Koreans were already using Chinese characters for writing, the Buddhist Tripitaka needed no translation.

There is no surviving documentation of our story in Korea from before the twelfth century, over six centuries after its arrival. The first we can see of it is in *The Story of Turtle and Hare (kwit’ojiso’l)*, in the *History of Three Kingdoms*. This History was written in the Koryo dynasty (918-1392) about the earlier states of Baekje, Koguryo, and Shilla, using as its sources the three states’ chronicles extant at that time. In this very simple story the turtle is still a turtle, but he deals with a hare; and he is in the service not of a mate but of the Dragon King of the Sea Kingdom, whose daughter is dangerously ill. And the monkey’s heart is now Hare’s liver.

From the story in *History of Three Kingdoms* on to the twentieth-century stories the Korean heroes continue as Turtle (or Tortoise) and Hare. Development of the story, though, begins to vary substantially in its details. The next currently extant version of the story did not appear until the mid-nineteenth century. During seven centuries, from the twelfth to the nineteenth, our story was passed on orally, from monks to their followers, grandmothers to their grandchildren, and also through the story teller in groups of roving entertainers (*kwangdae*); this variety of conveyers will explain the great number of variations appearing in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century stories.

There were few, if any (none have been discovered), written versions of the story during all those years because commoners did not have the wherewithal to learn the difficult Chinese ideograms used by the literati until the easier phonetic hangul script was introduced in the fifteenth century. Little was written in hangul because this script was regarded as fit only for women and the lower classes, most of whom did not read. Another reason the stories did not appear in written form is that folk tales, for all their value as entertainment and moral instruction, were considered unworthy of the attention of the aristocrat literati, who disdained Buddhism and anything derived from the oral medium and concerned themselves with “fine” literature (mainly, books on Confucian thought, history, and the poetry enjoyed by their corresponding mandarin class in China).

By the nineteenth century the characters in our story, previously limited to two main characters and a couple minor characters, have expanded to between twenty and sixty (depending on the pansori version), and the less minor characters are richly developed with human personalities. Now it is no longer the Dragon King’s daughter who is sick, but the Dragon King himself⁶ (representing, according to some, the later Yi dynasty kings weakened by court intrigue), who can find no support in his dilemma from his ministers (the corrupt and factions-ridden court). Hare, whom they want to exploit, represents the commoner with all his innocence and basic human vanity, and at this point the cheeky side of his Western counterpart appears. These works, and the prose versions which followed, now boast a sophisticated blending of vulgar burlesque and elegant references to classical Chinese and Korean literature and history. An example of this concoction is Hare’s explanation of how he takes his liver out and puts it back in through his “third bottom orifice” and then elaborates on this feat with arcane terms referring to yin-yang and the five agents.⁷ In fact, there are so many of these references that one might suspect the scripts were written more for the entertainment of the aristocrat literati than for the commoners.

If, as stated before, the aristocrats held common culture in contempt, why would there be so many references for their benefit in the pansori performance?

Although Chosun officials had no interest in popular culture, they did have a use for popular entertainers. As was the case in earlier periods, the Chosun court sponsored periodic and occasional entertainments for which they employed such variety performers as masked dancers, musicians, singers, jugglers, rope-walkers, acrobats, tumblers, magicians, comedians, and puppeteers. The Chosun court and aristocracy served as an unintentional catalyst in the transformation of folk entertainments into extended and refined works of oral narrative... Korea [developed] a practical and necessary system of linkage involving the royal court, local officialdom, literati, and rural entertainers. Through this mechanism, which developed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, erstwhile outcast singers and actors came to perform in the capital, gain access to forbidden precincts of the palace, absorb elements of aristocratic liter-

ary culture, compete with their colleagues, and exchange materials with performers from other parts of the country. Thus, the professional singer of tales, the kwangdae, was able to gain exposure to the lettered world.⁸

From pansori our story developed into substantial prose versions, a whole genre in Korean literature now called pansori prose or pansori novella because the stories developed from pansori. (One or more prose versions of our story might have appeared before the currently extant pansori versions.) It is stated in most studies of the pansori prose tales that this form was often used to promote such Confucian principles as loyal submission of lower to higher (young to elderly, subject to ruler, female to male), though this writer did not find a noticeable shift in emphasis to these points from the pansori Song of the Water Palace (*Sugungga*) to a major pansori prose version of Hare's Tale (*Tokgijeon*). There are about fifteen extant versions of our pansori prose story, though; some of these versions do, in fact, conclude with Tortoise or his lord the Dragon King victorious — or poised for victory — over Hare, which would promote the Confucian value of loyalty.

The plot's evolution from the jatakas to the twentieth century

The general plot from the very beginning of our tale is of one animal who schemes to seize a vital organ of another animal but is outwitted by its intended victim.

The Indian stories

In all four Indian tales the wife of Crocodile wants to eat Monkey's heart, Crocodile tries to get it for her, and Monkey outwits Crocodile. In two jatakas⁹ and the Panchatantra story¹⁰ Crocodile initially deceives Monkey. In the jatakas he offers Monkey a ride across the river to where there is more and better fruit for him to eat; in the Panchatantra he ("Ugly-Mug") tells his close friend Monkey ("Red-Face") that his wife (who is actually jealous of their close friendship and has threatened she will starve herself if he does not bring her Monkey's heart) wants to invite him to their home for dinner. In these three stories he discloses his intention to Monkey while Monkey is riding on his back across the water and Monkey tells Crocodile that he left his heart back on land, so Crocodile takes him back to get it and Monkey escapes. In the other jataka¹¹ Crocodile ambushes Monkey in the middle of the river, which Monkey crosses every day to get fruit on the other side; Crocodile tells Monkey he needs his heart, and Monkey, knowing that a crocodile's eyes close when he opens his mouth, says, "Okay, open up wide!" (In each jataka the Buddha precludes the story with mention of how he has outwitted the King Devadatta, who has been trying to eliminate him.)

The Chinese translations of the jatakas

The crocodile couple are replaced by a turtle couple in two translations and by a dragon in the other. There are no changes in the plot of the story.

The Korean tales

The "Story of Turtle and Hare" in *History of Three Kingdoms*: The Dragon King's daughter, in the Water Kingdom under the sea, is sick and needs a medicinal brew of the Hare's liver. Turtle goes to land and meets Hare, whom he tells about an island paradise in the sea where he can eat all he wants and never worry about bad weather or his natural enemies; and he offers Hare a ride there on his back. On the way there Turtle tells Hare the bitter facts, and Hare exclaims, "Oh no! Why didn't you tell me before we left? When I feel like I take out my five viscera and wash them nice and fresh — and I left my liver under a rock! I don't really need it, but I do want to get to that island, so let's do each other a favor and go back and get it." So the turtle takes him back to get it and returns to the Sea Kingdom empty-handed.

The pansori "Story of the Water Palace" and the pansori prose "Hare's Tale": It is impossible in this limited space to present the many tremendously entertaining embellishments of the plots of these two stories. In short, the dying Dragon King can recover only if he eats the liver of a hare. Turtle (*ko'buk* in one, and Tortoise, or *jara*, in the other; in Song of the Water Palace, Turtle becomes Tortoise when he gets on land) dutifully says he will get it. Turtle meets Hare and beguiles him with tales about the Water Kingdom, where Hare will be given a high and mighty position and all the perks that go with it. Hare, after wise hesitation, at last not so wisely agrees to go; then Fox (or Badger or friend Rabbit) tries unsuccessfully to stop the "vain creature." When they get to the Water Kingdom, Hare is told what is going to happen to him. Hare claims he left his liver hanging in a tree, and the King, after serious misgivings, finally tells Tortoise to take him back to get it.

There are too many differences in details to relate here, but I do want to present a few examples of the many different endings. These conclusions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century stories are said to be good indication of the purpose (e.g., social satire or instruction in Confucian morals) of the writer. After Hare sets foot on dry land and tells Tortoise what a fool he is...

- no more is heard of Tortoise or the King; Hare goes off and gets caught by Eagle, whom he also outwits.¹²
- Hare deceptively recognizes Tortoise's devotion to his King and tells him how to make a medicine, which the King takes and recovers; Hare lands in a hunter's trap and is almost cooked by some kids, but delivers himself out of their clutches — right into the clutches of Eagle, whom he also outwits.¹³
- Hare tricks the Tortoise by giving him three of his turds and telling him they are medicine.
- Tortoise, in his grief at not being able to save his King, commits suicide.
- Tortoise, in his shame, never returns to the Water Kingdom.
- Tortoise reports back to the King and the King sends an army to land, where they prepare to catch Hare.¹⁴
- a Taoist immortal appears on the beach and, in recognition of Tortoise's devotion to his King, provides him with a magic medicine.
- The English language play "Harelip" is an attempt at a combination of several of the pansori and pansori prose versions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with some representation of later twentieth-century Korean society.

Characters in the play

The major characters in Harelip are also major characters in Korea's pantheon of supernatural beings in Buddhism, Taoism, Shamanism and Confucianism.¹⁵

Hare. The fourth animal in the zodiac cycle, the hare is a composite of yin and yang and the five agents (fire, wood, metal, water, earth). One of the many legends about the hare tells us that it possesses the secret recipe for the elixir of immortality.

Tortoise. One of the ten symbols of longevity and good luck, so we can see him in paintings and screens of the ten symbols of immortality. The tortoise is also protector against evil from the north.

The Goddess. She is probably So' Wang Mo (Shi Wang-mu in Chinese), Taoist Queen of the West, goddess of love, beauty and immortality. This beautiful lady "was especially famous in the Shantung Peninsula, a center of Taoism for 25 centuries or more," though her traditional abode is Western China. She appears in many paintings of the ten symbols of longevity, holding a basket of the herb that is one of the ten symbols. Murals of her at Haeinsa and Bongweonsa (temples in Korea) show her acceptance in Buddhism.

The Dragon King.¹⁶ In the West we associate the dragon with the serpent and evil, but in the East it's just the opposite — the dragon is a heavenly creature, fifth creature in the zodiac. Etchings on 1500 B.C. oracle bones show him to be the most important yang animal. Taoism, Buddhism, Shamanism, Confucianism all pay the highest respect to the dragon. The dragon belongs to two sets of deities: the four protectors against evil (he protects against evil from the east and begins our day for us) and the four providers of good fortune. In the zodiac. "...there are many individual dragons at work... but all are responsible to the Dragon King." His residence — the Yellow Sea, the East Sea, the South Sea — depends on which coast's denizen you ask. Commonly, this royal creature has "the head of a camel, the horns of a deer, eyes of a rabbit, ears of a cow, neck of a snake, belly of a frog, scales of a carp and palm of a tiger." The painting of the dragon king at Haeinsa and other temples shows him in human form, but there is always a dragon separately portrayed in the painting. In some versions of the hare's tale the Jade Emperor (who appears in The Gourds' Rewards) was the King of the Sea Palace; lay Buddhists and Taoists and believers in Shamanism often do not distinguish between the Dragon King and Jade Emperor. In *Records of the Three Kingdoms (Samgukyusa)* Queen Suro (the Indian wife of Kim Suro, who ruled the minor state Kaya in the first century A.D.) was kidnapped by the Dragon King and brought to his sea palace; when she was returned, she reported that the gorgeous palace was made entirely of mother-of-pearl and gems, the food was great, and there were fragrant scents.

Notes

1. Hulbert.
2. This is conjecture, based on:

- a) the age of these ideas: “The system [of divination] probably goes back even further than three millennia, but our earliest hard evidence for its use comes from inscriptions of oracle bones dating from the Shang Dynasty (c. 1766 - c. 1122 BC).” Rector.
- b) early Chinese influences already present in Korea at the beginning of the first millennium B.C.: “...comb-marked pottery in coastal areas in the southwest, possibly showing water-borne influences from coastal China, and plain, reddish brown pottery widely spread through the peninsula and clearly of overland provenance.” Fairbanks, p. 278.
3. Foucher, p.16.
 4. According to the Chinese character dictionary (*Songmunsa*), the radical for the character used for this dragon is the insect. An archaic word for dragon in northern Europe and the English Isles was also an insect, the worm, such as the Orcadian Mester Stoorworm. Briggs, p. 443.
 5. *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 19, p. 314:2a.
 6. The meaning intended in this transfer of illness from the Dragon King’s daughter to the Dragon King (representing the nation’s king) is expressed well in the Doctrine of the Mean: “When a nation or family is about to perish, there are sure to be unlucky omens.” Chan, p. 108.
 7. Yu Song-jun. 1983. *Song of the Water Palace*. Tr. into modern Korean by Chong Ul-byong. In *Korean Classical Literature Collection*, Vol. 10. P. 268. Seoul: So-yong Publishers.
 8. Pihl, p. 4.
 9. Cowell, Vol. III, p. 87.
 10. This story is much more fully developed in both plot and characters than the jatakas. Ryder, p. 381.
 11. Jataka 57 (Vanarinda-jataka). Cowell, Vol. I, p. 142.
 12. Chung, Eul-byeong, p. 177.
 13. Chung, Eul-byeong, p. 270.
 14. This ending and the three endings listed immediately before it are reported in In, 1988, p. 409.
 15. Unless otherwise noted, the information about our play’s characters comes from Covell, Alan.
 16. Our description of the Dragon King comes from Covell, Alan. According to Lai, the Chinese dragon has evolved over the centuries since it became an imperial symbol used by the first Han emperor (206 B.C.); it has since evolved into its current form with nine features, those presented above along with “the claws of a hawk...and body of a serpent with a jagged spine and long tail.”