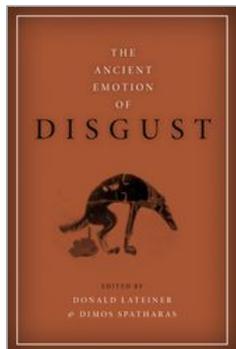


Monstrum in Fronte, Monstrum in Animo?

University Press Scholarship Online

Oxford Scholarship Online



The Ancient Emotion of Disgust

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Print publication date: 2016

Print ISBN-13: 9780190604110

Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: January 2017

DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190604110.001.0001

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Sublate Disgust and *Pharmakos* Logic in the Aesopic *Vitae*

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DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190604110.003.0013

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter analyzes the biographical traditions surrounding Aesop in terms of their focus on gross materiality, drawing upon Kelly's cognitive study of disgust as an element of human tribal formation and Korsmeyer's aesthetic concept of the sublate (an inversion of the sublime) to argue that the Aesopic narratives engage with but ultimately resist the pattern of scapegoating associated with the figure of the *pharmakos*. After focusing on several episodes from the Aesopic *vitae*, the chapter concludes by contrasting Aesop's and Homer's presentation of Thersites in *Iliad* 2.

Keywords: Aesop, Korsmeyer, Kelly, *pharmakos*, sublate, Thersites, vomit

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IN *TWILIGHT OF THE IDOLS* (1895), NIETZSCHE

SUGGESTED THAT Socrates exemplifies the criminal profile of being *monstrum in fronte, monstrum in animo*, “deviant of face, deviant of soul.” In this chapter I shift this physiognomic slogan into a question about Aesop. Far more hideous than Socrates—hideous to the point of eliciting disgust—Aesop’s biographical tradition emphasizes his monstrous, barely human appearance, yet when Aesop retools Alcibiades’ comment about Socrates and asks us to consider his soul rather than his face (*Vit. G* 26), we realize that Aesop’s appearance is designed as a challenge.¹ I suggest that Aesop’s disconcerting form participates in a discourse about disgusting bodies, behaviors, and materials in the Aesopic *vita* tradition that uses our disgust response as a springboard for personal and social transformation.

It is well established by now that the Aesopic *vitae* are not simply novelistic adventure tales or simple-minded folk traditions.² Although important matters remain open to debate such as the date and social provenance of the fullest accounts of Aesop’s life, *Vitae G* and *W*, some sort of serious cultural work is clearly at stake in this mish-mash of anecdotes about the legendary father of fables. Few commentators, however, have focused on how this work actually happens. Succinctly put: how does the Aesopic tradition undermine elite pretension and philosophical dogmatism? Much of this process (particularly in the early episodes, which are not connected to the figure of Ahiqar, and again at the end) relies on an intellectualized dimension of the disgust response.³ To (p.254) build my case, I start with a few theoretical issues relating to disgust, particularly around Korsmeyer’s idea of “the sublate” and Kelly’s theory about how disgust influences tribe formation, and then I work through some examples from the *vitae*. Finally, I compare the case of Aesop with that of Thersites to offer a contrasting model to the intellectually engaged reactions to Aesop in the *vitae*.

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Methods and Models

From recent cross-disciplinary publications on disgust, the work of two professors of philosophy are particularly relevant here.⁴ In *Savoring Disgust* Korsmeyer connects fascination and disgust, which combine most profoundly in what she calls “the sublate,” a term that she borrows from chemistry, where it refers to a substance that transforms from a gas to a solid without passing through a liquid state.⁵ A sublate substance, thus, is the opposite of a sublime one, which passes from a solid into a gas without ever being a liquid. In Korsmeyer’s aesthetic theory, the sublate inverts the sublime, as it has been understood in modern discussions. Kant and Burke emphasized that the sublime is the awe that one feels when, for whatever reason, fear is removed from an experience of overwhelming terror.⁶ Burke saw this especially in Milton’s Satan from *Paradise Lost*, and he suggested that we feel a kind of pleasure combined with muted terror in the experience of the sublime. Korsmeyer claims that the sublate works similarly but begins not with fear and terror but, rather, disgust. When one simply experiences disgust, as when biting into something that turns out to be rotten or encountering a nauseating odor, the reaction is an unpleasant and immediate autonomic spasm, but when one somehow goes beyond that response and considers the power or repellant allure of disgust, “The experience gives rise to an *apprehension*, a grasp of an idea that is so imbedded in affective response to the work that provokes it as to be virtually inseparable” (Korsmeyer 2011: 134).

(p.255) Korsmeyer’s examples clarify her core idea.

Dickinson’s “I heard a fly buzz” depicts a woman who, at the moment of her death, hears a fly buzzing and realizes that the vermin will soon be consuming her body. Two episodes in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (the First and Ninth Tales on the Fourth Day) build toward a climax in which a woman, presented with the heart of her treacherously murdered lover, willingly and knowingly eats or kisses the organ as a final form of intimacy. In these cases, Korsmeyer shows how each character responds in ways that are beyond the expected and predictable reactions of disgust at the thought of a fly on a fresh corpse or of eating the still-warm and bloody heart of one’s true love. Instead, these characters reflect on their own mortality, perhaps their own animality, with a critical distance,

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and they experience an intellectual or emotional, rather than a reflexive, encounter with what might otherwise elicit disgust (Korsmeyer 2011: 153–6).

Various ancient examples fit Korsmeyer’s model, such as the despondent cry of Sophocles’ Neoptolemus as he struggles to find a way out of the ethical crux of his conflicting duties and competing loyalties (*Ph.* 902–3), which is discussed in detail by Allen-Hornblower in this volume.⁷ When the young man begins to show audible signs of distress, Philoctetes, who sees Achilles’ son as his salvation after years of pain and isolation, worries that perhaps the *δυσχέρεια* (*Ph.* 900) of his condition has persuaded Neoptolemus not to help him. This word could imply the “foul smell” of Philoctetes’ ever-suppurating wound or more blandly the “vexation” of having to deal with a problematic person such as Philoctetes, whose pain hampers his every movement. But when Neoptolemus responds with the outburst “Everything is *δυσχέρεια* when you abandon your nature and do something that is unbecoming” (902–3), the word clearly implies something far more existential and self-loathing, such as “disgusting” or “shameful.” The combination of Philoctetes’ foul-smelling wound, his subhuman cries of pain, and Neoptolemus’ personal crisis come together in this expostulation in a way that soon leads the youth to a new intellectual and ethical clarity that typifies Korsmeyer’s assessment of the sublate.

Similarly, in *Parts of Animals*, Aristotle responds to claims that whereas human anatomy is obviously important, the study of non-human physiology is an unworthy (*atimon*) subject. Rather than initially emphasizing the value of the breadth of his biological studies, Aristotle first shows that even scientific evaluations of the human body necessarily involve unpleasant experiences. “It is impossible to look at the structures that constitute the human race, such as (p.256) blood, flesh, bones, vessels, and the rest, without a great deal of disgust” (*ἀνευ πολλῆς δυσχερείας*, *Part. an.* 645a28–30). As an assertion of the equal value of anatomical studies of humans and nonhumans, this suggests that scientists must overcome inevitable waves of disgust.⁸ Such a process, though more clinical than the previous examples, also fits with Korsmeyer’s theory of the sublate. In what follows, I use this idea of sublate disgust to suggest that a driving force in the sociocritical

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power of the Aesopic tradition comes from its emphasis on reflective, rather than reflexive, encounters with disgusting matter.

My second model, which I apply primarily to Aesop's place within a social hierarchy, comes from two linked theories put forward by Kelly in *Yuck!*, his aptly titled cognitive study of disgust. He first argues for an "entanglement theory" of disgust positing an evolutionary combination of originally separate response systems dealing with taste aversion and parasite avoidance (Kelly 2011: 43–60). The taste-aversion system controls our responses to ingesting food that seems to be rotten, and it exhibits a remarkably stable, cross-cultural, transhistorical response pattern in humans, including slight decreases in body temperature and heart rate and the "yuck face" that accompanies the involuntary movements of the tongue as it tries to expel what has been eaten.⁹ The parasite avoidance system encourages us to steer clear of things that threaten to make us sick, even when ingestion is not remotely at issue. The most common elicitors of this response are feces and corpses, but the triggering of the parasite avoidance system is as flexible as that of the taste aversion system is stable. Thus, every society, and indeed every individual, has a unique profile of parasite avoidance triggers. Both of these response systems can be observed in certain nonhuman animals, but Kelly shows that in humans these two systems have evolved into a single, hybrid system that represents a key element in our genetic-cultural coevolution that has allowed humans to live in virtually every region of the earth. This part of the disgust profile is typically called "core disgust," following the terminology of Rozin.¹⁰

With his "entanglement theory" in place, Kelly develops his "co-opt thesis," which shows how the entangled disgust system came to serve novel purposes, particularly related to group cohesion.¹¹ The disgust system, which originally (p.257) served to protect us from becoming sick or inadvertently poisoning ourselves, evolved to police social norms that distinguish in-groups from out-groups. Most simply put, our reflexive aversion to rotten meat or the smell of feces began to govern our reactions to certain groups of people and their characteristic behaviors. Co-opting the reflexive and virtually irresistible power of disgust to serve these new social, ethical, and moral purposes facilitated the development of strongly cohesive tribal identities. This extended range of

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disgust elicits what is typically called moral or sociomoral disgust.¹² Kelly's fully developed characterization of the human disgust system offers an evolutionary explanation of Lévi-Strauss' famous dictum (1952: 21) that humanity stops at the edge of the tribe. Those who exist outside the tribe may be *Homo sapiens*, but they are too disgusting and dangerous to participate in the humanity of the inner circle.

We can connect Kelly's theory about the link between disgust and in-group identity formation to Aesop via the logic of the Ionian *pharmakos* ritual, which can be understood in terms of its promotion of group cohesion through disgust avoidance.¹³ The network of poorly attested and regionally varied rituals that cluster around the figure of the *pharmakos*, or "scapegoat," is most often discussed in terms of the expulsion of impurity. This is surely correct, but it leaves the process looking too antiseptic and puritanical. As Graf emphasizes, the Athenian Thargelia festival, which included a *pharmakos* ritual, was part of the annual cycle of putting an end to the old year and ringing in the new, and this means that such purifications and expulsions need to be understood as marking transitions away from periods of license and carnivalesque inversion, during which time impurity, ugliness, and nonnormative behaviors were embraced. Thus, when the Athenians were driving out the *pharmakoi*, they were not simply purifying the city in some isolated sense but were specifically participating in the culmination of an annual cycle that included the licensed acceptance of impurity and impropriety. The city cohered, in ritual terms, partially through the expulsion of the *pharmakoi* and the reconfirmation of civic (p.258) unity—a process bookended by the scapegoat ritual of the Thargelia and the commemoration of Theseus' unification of Attica during the Synoikia festival on Hekatombaion 16.¹⁴

Bremmer has shown that the selection of *pharmakoi* was based on symbolically important criteria, which map onto my analysis of Aesop. Our sources describe the chosen people as "the ugliest" (δυσμορφότατον, Tze. *CGF* 7.532), "the least pleasant, those maimed by nature's design, and lame" (τὸν ἀηδέστατον καὶ παρὰ τῆς φύσεως ἐπιβεβουλευμένον πηρόν, χωλόν, Schol. Aesch. *Sept.* 680), those who are "exceedingly ignoble, poor, and useless" (λίαν ἀγεννεῖς καὶ πένητας καὶ ἀχρήστους, Schol. Ar. *Eq.* 1136) and "worthless and mistreated by nature" (φαύλους καὶ παρὰ τῆς φύσεως ἐπιβουλομένους,

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Schol. Ar. *Ran.* 730). *Pharmakoi* were selected from the dregs of society, a point already implicit in Hipponax's fragmentary comments about a *pharmakos* ritual. In a culture that prized beauty as a hallmark of social value, instantiated in the concept of being *kalokagathos*, "beautiful and noble," it is not surprising that ugliness and deformity accompany low social status. The Ionian *pharmakos* rituals promoted social cohesion through the expulsion of visibly objectionable people, a criterion that served as a shorthand for an overall lack of social value.¹⁵

Together with this emphasis on ugliness, poverty, and low social status, ancient sources describe scapegoat rituals in which the city provides victims with special food and clothing while housing them in the center of the city.¹⁶ Bremmer understands such treatment of historical *pharmakoi* as a ritualized form of status elevation that ultimately makes their expulsion more powerful (Bremmer 1983: 305), but I suspect that the sight of the scum of society sitting in the town hall, eating a fine meal and wearing fine clothes might be as much about aesthetic incompatibility and the violation of socioaesthetic boundaries as it is about imputing high status. If I am correct, then the *pharmakos* comes to represent the antinomy of normative values at the heart of the social space, and his expulsion represents not just a response to a particular crisis or the re-enactment of etiological narratives about figures such as Androgeus or *Pharmakos*;¹⁷ more specifically the removal (p.259) of aesthetically and socially worthless people knits society together by affirming its collective opposition to people like the *pharmakos*. Nearly all male characters in Greek literature who are portrayed in markedly ugly terms (such as Thersites, Hipponax, Socrates, and Aesop) respond in some way to this disgust-driven logic of the *pharmakos*. In a series of encounters, characters react to Aesop with disgust, but a process of sublation interrupts the *pharmakos* script and imagines a new mechanism of group formation that rejects any model predicated on an aesthetics of the body.¹⁸

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Aesop and Disgust

Both *Vita G* and *Vita W* open by describing Aesop as *biōphelestatos*, “the most salutary,”¹⁹ and then launch into an amazing description of Aesop’s hideously ugly, virtually subhuman body. “He’s a fatso with a bulging head, snub-nosed, dark, dwarfish, bent-legged, weasel-armed, squint-eyed, a portentous disaster.”²⁰ This image is completed with two negative adjectives: “In addition to these, he has an impediment even worse than his *amorphia*: his *aphōnia*” (G 1).²¹ These privative alphas show Aesop failing to fulfill a norm—he is *unshapely* and *unvoiced*—and they segue into a story of how the arch-fabulist communicated without words.

Aesop, a mute slave at the beginning of the tale, is framed by two fellow slaves, who plot to enjoy the master’s freshly picked figs and blame their disappearance on their silent companion. The master is furious when told that Aesop has eaten his figs and calls the supposed thief before him. Aesop begs to be allowed to chug some warm water, after which he sticks his fingers down his throat and vomits up nothing but the water he had just drunk.²² Vomit is gross, (p.260) but the next bit gets more graphic.²³ The master forces the perfidious slaves to follow Aesop’s lead, and as they put their fingers into their mouth they are overcome with bile and involuntarily puke up the figs swimming in warm bilious water.²⁴ The move from carefully self-induced vomit to an uncontrollable spasm of nausea and the graphic description of the contents of the stomach brings us to a natural intersection of Kelly’s taste-aversion system (since the guilty slaves have drunk so much warm water that their bodies involuntarily disgorge the contents of their bellies) and the parasite-avoidance system (as the narrative focuses on the regurgitated food). The inability to control one’s body and the outward revelation of the contents of the stomach through the mouth, which normally receives food, follow typical cross-cultural patterns of disgust inducers. Almost immediately, however, the narrative moves beyond disgust. The master orders the fig-pilfering slaves beaten, and the narrator concludes this vignette with the claim that the slaves learned a clear lesson, namely that anyone who plots against someone ends up paying the price himself.

Eventually Aesopic fables came to have ethical platitudes appended to them, but it is surprising that these slaves ultimately learned something rather than becoming

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embittered and intent on revenge. This panel could have concluded simply with the punishment rather than the intellectual transformation of the slaves, and that truncated tale would have left the vomit unredeemed. Instead, we get a moment of reflection, not simply prompted by, but predicated on, the disgusting intrusion of vomit, that claims, however flimsily, to have changed the ethical outlook of the two ne'er-do-wells.²⁵

This conclusion to the narrative responds to the theories of disgust set out above. Our first vision of Aesop marks him out to be the most obvious *pharmakos* of all time, since an ugly slave who cannot speak inverts three of the most pervasive ideals from antiquity (beauty, freedom, and verbal facility). We might expect, therefore, Aesop to lose out in this exchange and thereby confirm his low status, yet his victory paves the way for all manner of bottom-up surprises throughout the rest of the *vita*. Furthermore, the slaves, whose plan (p.261) seemed failsafe only moments ago and whose bodies have just been wracked by vomiting, undergo a sublate experience. Aesop's *aphōnia* (and their hunger) had prompted their underhanded scheme, but in the combination of bodily revolt and physical punishment that concludes their role in this drama, these slaves have achieved a new understanding of the world. As the *pharmakos* pattern begins to be undone, the bodily fluids that have involuntarily burst forth transform disgusting matter into something aesthetically and intellectually useful.

The themes of resisting the *pharmakos* pattern and finding sublate insights via confrontations with disgust remain prominent in the early sections of the *vitae*. Two scenes later, for example, Aesop, miraculously having gained the power to speak through the intervention of Isis, starts chastising Zenas, the overseer, for abusing a slave who had done nothing wrong. Shocked to hear the mute speak, Zenas rushes into the master's home and says that something *teratōdes* has just happened.²⁶ The master asks: "Did a tree bear fruit out of season? Or did an animal give birth to a humanoid (*anthrōpomorphon*)?" Zenas replies that no such thing has happened. The master then asks: "Then what is this thing you consider *teratōdes*?" Zenas tries to answer: "Well, that rotten (*sapros*) Aesop, whom I sent off into the fields to dig, that *progastōr* ..." ²⁷ At this point, the master interrupts and asks: "What did *he* whelp!?" Perhaps the word *progastōr*, "fatso," or

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“potbelly,” made the master assume that Aesop was pregnant, yet although this word would seem applicable to someone who is pregnant, it is not used in this way.²⁸ Instead it describes someone with a distended stomach, either from excessive eating or a medical problem, and in addition to appearing in the initial description of Aesop, it frequently appears in late depictions of Socrates as *simos*, “snub-nosed,” *phalakros*, “bald,” and *progastōr*, “fat.” Whatever exactly prompts the master’s interruption—and it may simply be concern for agrarian (p.262) fecundity—Zenas finally gets to finish his thought, and he explains that the mute Aesop has begun to speak.

The master is underwhelmed by this declaration and asks Zenas why he thinks that this is in any way *teratōdes*. His own opinion is that Aesop’s ability to speak must be a sign that the gods *had previously* been angry at Aesop for something but that they have now relented. Zenas persists in believing that it is *teratōdes*, because Aesop is now saying things that are *hyper anthrōpinên physin*, “beyond human limits,” and he adds that Aesop is slandering both Zenas and the master. At this point the master becomes concerned only with the issue of slander and tells Zenas to sell Aesop or, if he can’t find a buyer, to kill him.

This exchange articulates an interesting contrast of opinions. Zenas, we can assume, is primarily motivated by a desire to get rid of Aesop, but his ploy relies on his presentation of Aesop’s newfound ability to speak as a monstrosity. The master, by contrast, fears that an animal has given birth to a humanoid or that Aesop himself has given birth to something, but he ultimately rejects the idea that Aesop’s acquisition of speech is *teratōdes*. In contrast to Zenas’ attempts to present Aesop in subhuman terms, the master offers a more humane and ennobling perspective.²⁹

Again, resistance to *pharmakos* logic and sublimate insights interact here. Matters of disgust emerge both in Zenas’ focus on Aesop’s subhuman body that should not speak and in the master’s concern about unnatural births. Yet Zenas’ account fails to inspire any disgust in the master. One key element in all accounts of *pharmakos* rituals is the specifically communal responsibility of driving the victims away.³⁰ The master’s refusal to see Aesop’s newfound loquacity in negative terms means that no momentum for such communal rejection is

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generated. Paired with the discussion of the word *teratōdes*, the conclusion to this scene too comes as a surprise. The master has just granted Zenas the right to sell or kill Aesop, an opportunity to earn some profit for the master and skim some cash for himself or to take revenge on this troublesome slave. Yet instead he reflects that, since Aesop has never wronged him in any way, he ought not to kill him. Thus when Zenas hails a slave-dealer, his motivation is not greed or revenge but, rather, a stripped-down ethical decision that precisely mirrors the charge Aesop had initially made against Zenas. This episode moves from Aesop's accusation (p.263) that the overseer was committing unwarranted cruelty to Zenas' decision to spare Aesop because to do otherwise would be an act of unwarranted cruelty. Between these two moments, Zenas has undergone an intellectual and ethical shift from his shock at encountering a *teras* to his conversation about what is *teratōdes*. As with the plotting slaves in the first episode, it is hardly believable that an overseer worried about a slave's slanderous comments would have any scruples about how to treat Aesop, and his ethical deliberation emphasizes the transformational experience of confronting Aesop's disgusting body and power of speech.

Similar examples of the sublate could be adduced in which disgusting behaviors or objects lead to intellectual reflection. I explore just one network of such issues here that builds from a scene that Kurke has recently analyzed. Walking on a hot road, Aesop recoils in horror when Xanthus, his new master and a leading philosopher of Samos, hikes up his robes and begins to piss. Aesop begs to be sold immediately, since a master who does not pause to pee will surely expect his slave to "practically shit on the fly" (*pantōs petomenon xezein*, G 28). Kurke shows that this scene engages with the religious prohibition against urinating on the road preserved by Hesiod (*Op.* 727-32), and she argues that punctilious religious scruples are the privilege of the ruling class, compared to which the lowest social strata must make do as they can (Kurke 2011: 206-8).

This scene also participates in a network of issues about the ends of our digestive systems—those points of contact between our innards that caused even Aristotle to feel disgust—and the skin that envelopes and hides those innards. In the conclusion to the episode just described, Xanthus convinces Aesop that it is fine to piss while walking—the only time that

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Aesop learns from someone else, the only time that Xanthus says anything remotely clever, and the only time that his philosophical prattling attempts to explain a mundane topic. Later Xanthus warns his wife not to let Aesop catch her pissing or shitting, lest her behavior prompt the slave to scold her (32). This warning leads directly into Aesop's theoretical explanation of the truth value of dreams—a jump from gross materiality to ethereal psychology (33). In another episode, Aesop torments Xanthus by serving him and his students nothing but tongue for two days; Aesop does this to demonstrate that the tongue can be considered the best and worst of all things, but Xanthus' students, who had been delighted initially with this delicacy, are ultimately left complaining about the waves of diarrhea and nausea they experience (51–4). Finally, when Xanthus stands up from defecating, he asks Aesop why people look at their feces at such moments, to which Aesop provides an anecdote about a prince who shat away his wits—a fate we now fear (67).

(p.264) In each of these episodes, we encounter material that typically elicits disgust, threatens pollution, and, in literary terms, is extremely low-register, but two issues mitigate any autonomic disgust response in readers. One is the distancing of the aestheticized or vicarious experience—we do not see or smell this excrement except in our imagination; the other is that the characters turn interactions with excrement and their lower orifices into reflective moments. Aesop's shocked response to seeing and smelling his master's piss, prompts philosophical discussion; a comment about Aesop's reaction to excretion leads to an assessment of the truth value of dreams; a demonstration of the ambiguous powers of the tongue comes with gut-clutching groans of distress. So while I am persuaded by Kurke's Hesiodic connection with the religious prohibition of pissing on a road, these passages collectively offer intellectualized presentations of defecation and our excretory organs. The initial shock of disgust gives way to sublimate reflection.³¹ This combination, however funny or parodic it may be, is a driving force in the Aesopic *vita* tradition. Aesop pulls us back from esoteric or metaphysical issues and insists that we focus on our materiality and corporeality. These and other anecdotes that admit the disgusting aspects of humanity bring together disparate social groups by compelling us to

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consider the indecorous reality of our shared physiology, materiality, and mortality.

Conclusion

The mental processes that inform *pharmakos* rituals and the narratives about Aesop explored here appear already in the depiction of Thersites in *Iliad* 2, and this similarity makes it useful to conclude by comparing the differences between Aesop and Thersites. Aesop's ugliness regularly shocks, offends, and disgusts other characters, but that initial reaction leads to new insights through the influence of Aesop's words and behaviors. He wins characters to him in ways that establish new ethical horizons and overturn the logic of the *pharmakos*. It is this last point that allows his final demise at Delphi, which so neatly follows the *pharmakos* script, to be cast as inappropriate and unjust rather than as a positive and successful ritual of social cohesion.

On all these points, Aesop inverts the narrative trajectory of Homer's Thersites.³² Like the fabulist, Thersites receives neither patronymic nor toponym, (p.265) and Homer gives him a more detailed bodily description than any other character in the *Iliad*. From his "pointy" head (φοξός, 219) to "lame" foot (χωλός, 217), he is the "ugliest" Achaean (αἴσχιστος, 216), the "most hateful" to Achilles and Odysseus (ἔχθιστος, 220), and is "quarrelsome" (νεικεῖσκε, 221).³³ Like Aesop, he knows a great deal, but his knowledge is jumbled (ἀμετροεπής, ἄκοσμα, μάψ, οὐ κατὰ κόσμον, 213-5) and used to amuse the army (215-6). Also like Aesop, Thersites stands up to authority, and one of the most compelling aspects of his role in the *Iliad* is the manner in which his allegations against Agamemnon so closely follow those made by Achilles in book 1. Yet unlike Aesop, Thersites fails to win over anyone within the narrative. His body, like his words, is out of place among the beauty and nobility of the Achaean leadership, and as Odysseus beats him with the scepter that, in other circumstances, grants the privilege to speak in council, the army howls with laughter as welts rise on his back and tears in his eyes. This disgusting creature, made worse through Odysseus' thrashing of him, does not prompt anyone in the Achaean camp to reflect upon the situation, beyond the discussion of whether or not Odysseus had ever done anything so wonderful.

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Yet Thersites serves an important function through the logic of the *pharmakos*. At a moment when Agamemnon has so ineptly handled the troops that everyone is racing to the ships, eager to abandon the siege of Troy and return home, the beating of Thersites causes the army to reunite and rededicate themselves to the goal of capturing Helen. The war effort is thus saved by the degradation that Thersites experiences. From our perspective outside the narrative, Thersites may prompt us to wonder about Agamemnon's ability to lead the army or the validity of the entire war effort, but within the narrative, Homer makes it clear that no one sees in his bent and bruised frame some larger insight into the human condition.³⁴ Aesop and Thersites each seems to fit the Nietzschean bill of being *monstrum in fronte, monstrum in animo*, but whereas Homer leaves it to his audience to decide how to react to Thersites' role in the *Iliad*, the *vita* tradition around Aesop places the transformational power of the sublate squarely within the narrative. Where Homer has provided an interpretive possibility, the (p.266) *Life of Aesop* demands that we acknowledge the fabulist's socially revolutionary potency as a challenge to see the world differently.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank the editors for their thoughtful assistance throughout the process of publication and for welcoming my contribution into this exciting volume.

Notes:

(1.) This theme appears again when one of Xanthus' students, watching Aesop mouth off to Xanthus, says of Aesop: οἶα γὰρ ἡ μορφή, τοιάδε καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, "like body, like soul" (W 55, slightly varied at G 55).

(2.) The most thorough treatments of the *vitae* are Kurke 2011 and Jedrkiewicz 1989 and 1997. For a focused treatment of Aesop's ugliness, see Lefkowitz 2008.

(3.) Ahiqar is a semilegendary Near Eastern sage, whose biographical tradition influenced portions of the Aesopic *vita*. The connection between Ahiqar and Aesop is analyzed by Luzzato (1992) and Konstantakos (2008).

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(4.) The modern study of disgust begins with Darwin 1998, Kolnai 2004, and Angyal 1941. Fittingly, these scholars all approach the topic from markedly different disciplinary perspectives (biology, philosophy, and psychoanalytic psychology, respectively). More recently, a series of articles by psychologist Paul Rozin and others (now usefully summarized in Rozin et al. 2008) and an amazing book on disgusting smells in France by Corbin (1986) precipitated a spate of work, notably Miller 1997; Wilson 2002; Menninghaus 2003; Nussbaum 2004; Kelly 2011; and Korsmeyer 2011.

(5.) In emphasizing the positive, attractive, and pleasurable aspects of disgust, Korsmeyer turns away from totalizing models, such as that of Miller (1997), and advocates a more eclectic conceptualization of disgust, an idea also endorsed by Wilson (2002).

(6.) Korsmeyer (2011: 44–46) builds particularly on Burke 1968. Note that ancient discussions of the sublime, particularly ps.-Longinus' assessment of elevated or lofty (ὕψηλός) literature, differs significantly from modern analyses of sublimity.

(7.) Korsmeyer (2011: 40–43) begins her history of disgust with Plato's *Republic*, particularly the example of Leontius, who can't resist staring at a heap of corpses (4.439e–440a).

(8.) Lennox (2001: 172–74) explains that Aristotle's arguments here respond to the Parmenidean and Platonic traditions of valuing the eternal/intelligible over the physical/ephemeral. His assessment follows the pattern of sublation: "To the senses, blood is, perhaps, a disgusting object of study; but to study its causal role in cognition, in desire ... this elevates it to a marvelous and beautiful thing, the study of which should provide great pleasure to the philosophically inclined" (174).

(9.) For a more detailed list, see Kelly 2011: 15–17.

(10.) Kelly 2011: 17–21; Rozin et al. 2008. Rozin takes the term from Angyal (1941).

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(11.) Kelly 2011: 132-35 and 143-46. This co-optation was facilitated in part by the polluting power of disgust, which is often discussed as a kind of “sympathetic magic.” This magical potency has been demonstrated in a series of experiments by Rozin and his colleagues that show that many people will avoid, for example, trying on a sweater allegedly worn once by Hitler, eating fine pastries made to look like dog feces, or drinking juice stirred by a brand new and carefully sterilized flyswatter. Beck (2012) draws this magically defiling power of disgust into a fascinating discussion of contemporary Christianity.

(12.) For the idea of sociomoral disgust, see Rozin et al. 2008: 762-63. Kelly (2011: 128-32) confronts and rejects the argument that moral or sociomoral disgust is purely metaphorical. Electromyography and studies of muscular reactions in the mouth and nose indicate that many people react to topics such as tax policy or the high price of staple goods with real, rather than metaphorical, disgust.

(13.) The most recent thorough application of the *pharmakos* ritual to Greek literature is Compton 2006. Still foundational to any thinking about the *pharmakos* ritual is Bremmer 1983, now updated and expanded (though primarily in areas other than Greek culture, in Bremmer 2008).

(14.) I am grateful to Fritz Graf for sharing an early draft of a forthcoming article on festivals in Greece and Rome, upon which my comments in this paragraph rely.

(15.) For more details, see Bremmer 1983: 299-302. Of course ugliness was not an absolute impediment to high social standing. Pericles rose to the top despite his pointy head, a physical trait known to us through the bodily interests of fifth-century comic playwrights. Ogden (1997) shows how mythical narratives, particularly those involving males with injured or deformed lower extremities, can invert this historical preference for idealized physical forms.

(16.) Bremmer (1983: 300-3) assembles the evidence.

(17.) Androgeus and *Pharmakos* are mentioned by Helladius (*apud Photius Bibl.* 534a) and Harpocration (s.v. *pharmakos*), respectively. Plague is frequently mentioned as a reason for an

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extraordinary enactment of the ritual (as opposed to the regularized event at the Thargelia), e.g., Schol. Aesch. *Sept.* 680.

(18.) Aesop has been connected with the *pharmakos* pattern before, e.g., Nagy 1979: 301–8, and this seems all but explicit in the ancient sources. Aesop ends up being framed for stealing a cup of Apollo's, and it is upon this false charge that he is condemned to death by the Delphians. Harpocration (s.v. *pharmakos*) preserves the outlines of a story attributed to Istros about a figure named *Pharmakos*, who really did steal a cup of Apollo's and who was then killed by Achilles and his men. The similarities in these stories seem to confirm that already in antiquity Aesop's demise was felt to be a variation on the scapegoat pattern.

(19.) An unusual superlative used with some frequency by Philo of Alexandria and at Schol. Hesiod. *Erg.* 1 in a description of the Muses.

(20.) κακοπυῆς τὸ ιδέσθαι, εἰς ὑπηρεσίαν σαπρός, προγάστωρ, προκέφαλος, σιμός, σόρδος, μέλας, κολοβός, βαλισός, γαλιάγκων, στρεβλός, μυστάκων, προσημαῖνον ἀμάρτημα (*Vit.* G 1).

(21.) Aesop receives similarly dehumanizing blazons at G 14 and 87. As Gleason (2009) discusses, demonstrations of *aphōnia* in living animals (especially pigs) was one of Galen's most famous displays of anatomical erudition.

(22.) Aesop's vomit parallels that of Julian in *Misopogon*, where he tells the debauched and drunken people of Antioch that he has only ever vomited once—and that upon his doctor's orders. As discussed by Hawkins (2014: 276–7), the episode was clinical, simple, barely unpleasant, and overall a nonissue.

(23.) I would like to thank Dimos Spathras for noting that vomit is the only substance that frequently causes and is caused by disgust.

(24.) Nelson-Hawkins (2016) discusses the role of bile in the Archilochean tradition, including a scene in which Cerberus pukes up bile when Heracles brings him up from Hades.

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(25.) Kurke (2011: 263) suggests that although Bakhtin never mentions the Aesopic *vitae*, his analysis of the *spoudogeloion* elements of Socratic dialogue in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* is relevant to the Aesopic tradition as well. Yet Aesop seems to know too much to fit the mold of Bakhtin's dialogism in which truth "is born *between people* collectively searching for the truth" (1984a, 110). And while Aesop's adventures have many carnivalesque traits, the inversions seem less based on "a deep philosophical meaning" of laughter (1984b, 66) than on the deep existential revelation of confronting disgust (i.e., Korsmeyer's theory of the sublate).

(26.) *Teratōdes*, the adjective derived from *teras*, denotes something amazing or portentous, but it can also refer to monstrous hybrids or births—hallmarks, that is, of the disgust that arises from the interpenetration of discrete categories, and Aesop is explicitly described as a *teras* on several occasions throughout the *vitae*. Aesop is called a *teras*, surely with monstrous implications, when first seen by a slave girl (G 29), by the people of Samos (G 87), by Croesus (G 98), by Xanthus' wife (W 31, Pl 246); he is also described as a *teras* by the students of Xanthus when Aesop laughs in a way that shows his teeth (W 24 and Pl 239), and in the midst of the Zenas-master scene in the shorter Planudian life (Pl 233); the slave trader calls Aesop a *teratomakhias salpistēs*, "the trumpeter of the monstrous battle" (W 14; *teratomakhia* is a *hapax*).

(27.) Things that are *sapros* often elicit disgust. The word is frequently used by Aristophanes of disgusting people, especially old people (e.g., *Pax* 698 and *Eccl.* 884). Closer to the era in which *Vita G* came into its present form, Dio Chrysostom describes the wretched poets of Alexandria as *sapros* in a speech with markedly comic overtones (32.81). The Aristophanic tenor of *sapros* in Dio's speech is noted by Kasprzyk and Vendries (2012: 143), and Dio's parabolic agenda is assessed by Hawkins (2015).

(28.) Phlegon of Tralles includes male births among his teratological catalog. For the range of ideas about male births in antiquity, see Leitao 2012.

(29.) The overarching argument of Heath (2005) is that speech is the primary distinguishing marker between humans and animals and that, within the human sphere, one's ability to

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control speech is proportional to one's status in society. Thus Aesop's acquisition of verbal language makes him more human, but it also threatens to allow him to transcend his servile status.

(30.) Istros emphasizes this point in his account of *Pharmakos* being killed not by Achilles alone but by Achilles' men as a group (see Bremmer 1983: 305).

(31.) Porter (2008: 311), building on Burke (1968), makes a similar point in terms of what he calls "the material sublime."

(32.) Scholars have long wrestled with interpretations of Thersites' role in the *Iliad*. Foundational to such discussions is Thalmann 1988. Barker (2009: 53–61) provides both a useful re-evaluation of the most important of these theories and a compelling reading that focuses on Thersites as a character attuned to matters of dissent in the epic. Barker emphasizes that Thersites' words may echo those of Achilles, but the different contexts of those words lead to importantly different poetic effects. I assess Thersites' two direct quotations of Achilles (*Il.* 2.240 = 1.356 and 2.242 = 1.232) in terms of a parodic effect in Hawkins 2016.

(33.) Homer's description of Thersites maps closely onto the account of the classically disgusting body provided by Menninghaus (2003: 51–102).

(34.) As Thalmann (1988: 19) puts it: "For the Achaean army, ideology has indeed been validated [through Odysseus' silencing of Thersites]. But the text makes clear what that ideology is—a mystification that serves to disguise the lack of good reasons for continuing to fight."

