

CHAPTER 1

AESOP AND ANIMAL FABLE

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INTRODUCTION

It is a commonplace to assert that the anthropomorphic animals of fable have nothing in common with real animals. Famous stories such as ‘The Tortoise and the Hare’ (Perry 226), ‘The Fox and the Grapes’ (Perry 15), and ‘The Ant and the Cricket’ (Perry 373), epitomize the fable’s tendency to project human instincts and responses onto animal protagonists with little concern for naturalism or genuine animal behaviour. But, in granting speech to animals, fables not only endow animals with the quintessential faculty of the human mind, they also draw attention to questions about what differentiates human from animal by manipulating a standard marker of the boundary between the two categories. Moreover, our notions of what the ancient fable *is* and *does* have undergone radical revision over the past several decades, making it increasingly difficult to characterize the genre’s attitude towards animals in simple terms. After offering brief overviews of sources and scholarly approaches to the Graeco-Latin fable, this chapter will attempt to identify tensions in fable between the symbolic valence of anthropomorphic animals and authentic concerns about real animals. By drawing attention to some of the ways in which the fable engaged in dialogue with the literary and cultural contexts from which it emerged, this chapter aims to lay open numerous pathways for exploration of the fable’s interaction with contemporaneous conceptions of and anxieties about animals in the Classical world.

AESOP’S FABLES: SOURCES AND APPROACHES

It is tempting to take the animal fable as a starting point for an investigation of Greek and Roman ideas about animals. After all, despite the exclusively textual nature of our

evidence for the ancient fable, it is generally assumed that written fables bear traces of an oral tradition that stretches back to the very dawn of history. Before the occurrence of the earliest Greek animal fables in the poems of Hesiod (*Works and Days* 202–12) and Archilochus (frs. 172–81 West), and long before the earliest reference to the legendary fabulist Aesop in the fifth century BC (Herodotus, *Histories* 2.134), the genre had already enjoyed a long history in the Near East, from where, most scholars agree, the fable migrated to Greece during the ‘orientalizing revolution’ of the archaic period (Burkert, 1992; cf. Meuli, 1954; Nøjgaard, 1964: i.431–41; Perry, 1965: xi–xxxiv; Karadagli, 1981: 6–52; West, 1997: 319). The Greeks themselves considered the fable to be of great antiquity, and in a number of instances Greek authors associate the fable with various exotic figures (e.g., Conis the Cilician, Thourous the Sybarite, and Cybissus the Libyan) and locales (e.g., Libya, Phrygia, Cilicia, Caria, Egypt) that had reputations as sources of wisdom in the Greek imagination.

But there are good reasons to be cautious when calibrating the antiquity of any Greek or Latin fable or when reflecting generally on the purity and primordially of the wisdom the tradition espouses. For one, all of the extant fables to which we have access are found either in highly developed and sophisticated literary contexts (e.g., in the works of authors such as Aristophanes, Aristotle, Callimachus, Horace, Phaedrus, and Babrius) or in late prose collections (our oldest substantial prose collection, the *Collectio Augustana*, probably dates from the second or third century AD), in which the narrative style and linguistic register suggest a deliberate and cultivated air of simplicity (Perry, 1962: 343). The rhetorician Nicolaus recommends an approach to fable composition that aptly describes what we encounter in the extant prose collections that form the basis of what we have come to know as ‘Aesop’s fables’:

The language (*phrasis*) should be very simple, straightforward, unassuming, and free of all subtlety and periodic expression, so that the meaning is absolutely clear and the words do not appear to be loftier in stature than the actors, especially when these are animals.

(Nicolaus, *Progymnasmata* 2.11)

The simple style of the fable—one of its trademarks—is often a studied ruse, designed to strip away evidence of artistry in order to give the prosaic narratives an air of archaism and authenticity (cf. Quintilian, *Institutiones Oratoriae* 1.9.2–3). When one considers that the earliest prose collection we know of is the lost ‘collection of Aesopic fables’ (*Aisopeiōn logōn sunagogē*, Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 5.80) compiled by Demetrius of Phaleron in the fourth century BC, and when one acknowledges the enormous gulf that lies between a collection such as the *Collectio Augustana* and the sixth century BC, when Aesop was supposed to have flourished as a *logopoios* (‘fable-maker’) (Herodotus, *Histories* 2.134), it becomes clear that anyone wishing to develop an informed sense of the antiquity or style of Aesopic fables will first need to come to terms with the diverse goals and motivations of the various authors who wrote them down.

For Greek and Roman authors, the genre ‘fable’ and its legendary founder ‘Aesop’ are not mutually distinct categories. Aesop left no writing and no single fable can be securely

ascribed to him, but he was so prominent as a fable-teller that stories, anecdotes, proverbs, and other types of narrative became associated with his name because they conform to certain loosely defined stylistic prerequisites. Thus the tradition appropriates massive amounts of material under the name 'Aesop' with little or no concern for historicity. It is telling that even the earliest authors to associate particular fables with Aesop in the fifth and fourth centuries already use the adjective *Aesopikos* (Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1259) or refer to stories in the style of Aesop (Plato, *Phaedo* 60b; cf. Phaedrus 3.29).

Sources

Our sources for the Greek and Latin fable fall into four categories of evidence:

(1) Fables are told, either in whole or in part, in diverse genres of Greek and Latin literature, prose and verse, in periods ranging from Archaic Greece to Late Antiquity. Some of the most famous examples are: Hesiod (*Works and Days* 202–12), Archilochus (fr. 172–81 West), Aeschylus (*Myrmidons* fr. 139 Radt), Herodotus (*Histories* 1.141), Aristophanes (*Wasps* 1401–5; 1427–32; 1435–40; *Birds* 471–5), Plato (*Phaedo* 60b–c; *Phaedrus* 259b–c), Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1393b10–22; 1393b22–1394a1), Ennius (*Satires* fr. 21–58 Vahlen), Horace (*Satires* 6.79–117), and Livy (2.32.5–12). Beginning in the fifth century BC, fables embedded in other genres are occasionally ascribed to Aesop with varying degrees of specificity; sometimes a fable is ascribed to Aesop with reference to a particular moment in the fabulist's life when he may have told such a fable (e.g., Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1441f.), while in other instances there is only vague reference to a story told in the manner of Aesop (Plato, *Phaedo* 60c) (West, 1984). Rarely does an author simply address a fable to the reader or audience directly. Usually a scene of fable-telling is represented, in which a character (or the narrator/poetic persona, e.g., in Hesiod and Horace) is imagined to be telling a fable to a specific addressee(s) in a particular situation for a specified reason.

(2) Fables are preserved in Greek and Latin fable collections, in prose and verse, beginning with the lost collection of Demetrius of Phalerum (c.350–280 BC), which Diogenes Laertius described as a 'collection of Aesopic stories' (*Aisōpeion logōn sunagogē*, Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 5.80), in the earliest notice of such a collection. Fragments of a fable collection in Greek prose are preserved in *Rylands Papyrus* 493 (first century AD; cf. Roberts 1938, III, 119f.), which may be a fragment of Demetrius's collection (Perry, 1965: xiv). Of our surviving prose collections, it is generally agreed that the *Collectio Augustana* (231 fables, known also as Recension I) is the ancestor of the collections known as Recension Ia (143 fables), the *Collectio Vindobonensis* (130 fables, Recension II), and the *Collectio Accursiana* (127 fables, Recension III). There are also a number of brief collections linked to rhetorical instruction, including a bilingual (Greek and Latin) collection ascribed to pseudo-Dositheus (second century AD) and the Greek prose collection of Aphthonius (fourth century AD). The verse fable books by Phaedrus (first century AD), Babrius (early third century AD), and Avianus (late fourth/early fifth century AD) have been most influential on the subsequent tradition and have spawned prose paraphrases as well (e.g., the so-called Bodleian paraphrase of Babrius

and Romulus's *Aesopus Latinus*, which draws heavily, if not exclusively, on Phaedrian material). Generally, while the authors of prose collections tend to remain anonymous (or blatantly pseudonymous, as in the case of 'Romulus') and self-effacing, the authors of verse collections are not only named but they even engage in sophisticated reflections on authorship and, in the case of Phaedrus, literary history. The relationships between the various major and minor collections and the fate of the medieval manuscripts that form the basis of our modern texts are complex problems, made in every instance more difficult by the open, adaptable, and appropriative spirit of the fable tradition.

(3) The anonymous *Life of Aesop*, which was probably at one point in its history an introductory text attached to a collection such as that of Demetrius, is a source of several fables embedded in its narrative; but it is of primary importance for the picture it provides of the legendary founder of the genre. This fictionalized biography is usually dated to the second century AD, though various elements of its narrative were known in one form or another as early as the fifth century BC (Perry, 1936: 1–26; Nagy, 1979: 280–90, 300–316; West, 1984; Holzberg, 2002; Kurke, 2003; cf. Adrados, 1999: 271–85, who argues for an earlier date). There seem to have been rival traditions in antiquity on the matters of Aesop's origins and life as a fabulist. On the one hand, the historical record places him firmly on Samos in the sixth century BC (Herodotus, *Histories* 2.134; Aristotle, *Constitution of the Samians* [fr. 573 Rose]), where he gained notoriety as a fable-teller (*logopoios*), and may even have defended a politician on trial for embezzlement (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.20). On the other hand, beginning in the fifth century BC, there is a more legendary tradition that has Aesop associated with major sites and figures of his day, including not only Aesop's infamous execution at the hands of the Delphians (Herodotus, *Histories* 2.134; Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1443–8) and subsequent return to life (Plato Comicus, fr. 70 KA), but also affiliations with Solon (Alexis, fr. 9 KA), Periander (Plutarch, *Banquet of the Seven Sages*), and Croesus (Plutarch, *Life of Solon* 28). The *Life of Aesop*, which is usually dated to the first or second century AD (Kurke, 2010: 5–6), draws primarily upon this latter body of Aesopic lore, as well as borrowing motifs and episodes from the Aramaic *Story of Ahikar* (cf. *Life of Aesop*, chs. 101–23), and numerous other sources (cf. Wiechers, 1961; La Penna, 1962; Jedrkiewicz, 1989), to create a novel account of the fabulist's life. The text history is troubled, although Perry's edition of *Vita G* has become something of a standard, as it is thought to be the oldest and fullest extant version (Perry, 1952; cf. Papatomopoulos, 1991; Ferrari, 1997).

(4) Allusions and intertexts. Despite persistent, romantic notions that fables bear direct traces of man's earliest observations of the animal world, or that they enshrine the world view of a period in which man lived closer to nature, most scholars in recent years have downplayed fable's putative temporal priority and emphasized instead the fable's interconnectedness with other related traditions and literary genres (cf. Dijk, 1997; Adrados, 1999; Kurke, 2010). The heterogeneous category of 'fable' shares many features with related types of figurative and indirect speech acts in which animals often appear, including riddle, portent, simile, metaphor, allegory, and especially proverb. Allusions to fables tend to appear in genres in which animals already figure prominently, including such diverse traditions as Attic comedy, natural history, and mock epic. But traces of

fable motifs may be found in any number of media. Influence can be expected to be (to some degree) reciprocal in allusions to fables, with an individual fable functioning as the seed of this or that image in some instances and in turn bearing the traces of its deployment in a particular context in others.

Approaches to Animal Fable

The animal fable occupies a privileged position in the history of the genre; animals play a role in roughly 75% of fables in the *Collectio Augustana*, 65% of Phaedrus, and 80% of Babrius. But in every period of the fable's history one also encounters numerous and diverse narratives considered to be 'fables' that make no mention of animals, including stories featuring plants, gods, personifications (e.g., *Religio*, Phaedrus 4.11; *Tempus*, Phaedrus 5.8; *Alēthiē*, Babrius 126), and humans, both generic and pseudo-historical (cf. Phaedrian fables featuring Socrates, Simonides, and Pompey). A misleading ancient opinion with a good deal of currency had it that 'Aesopic' fables are defined by their use of animal characters, while fables that feature humans are called either 'Sybaritic' or 'Libyan'; but the original source of this opinion, a scholiast's comment at Aristophanes *Wasps* 1259, seems to draw the distinction only from lines of that play (the source of the only two 'Sybaritic' fables known to us), which in fact does not reflect so neat a division (Dijk, 1997: 108). Despite the undeniable popularity of talking animals in the tradition, the adjective 'Aesopic', from its earliest description of a story in Aristophanic comedy until the present day, is used to refer to a manner of telling stories rather than to any particular type of content.

A story or anecdote may come to be recognized as a 'fable' for any number of reasons, among which the most prominent are: (1) it is explicitly referred to as an *ainos*, *muthos*, or *logos*, in Greek, or *apologus*, *fabula*, or *fabella*, in Latin (cf. Dijk, 1997: 79–111); (2) it is ascribed to Aesop (cf. West, 1984) or collected under Aesop's name (Perry, 1952); (3) it contains certain formulae and/or conventional narrative elements that are strongly associated with the tradition, such as, for example, specific introductory and closing formulae (Fraenkel, 1920; Karadagli, 1981), a tripartite narrative structure (Nøjgaard, 1964), and/or an explicit announcement of the story's message or 'moral' (Perry, 1940). The latter is frequently posited as the defining characteristic of the fable, but in fact many other indirect modes of communication may occasionally involve the drawing out of a moralizing message, including forms technically distinct from fable, such as the *chreia* and the historical *exemplum*.

Traditionally, studies of the Graeco-Latin fable have been characterized by a range of structuralist and definitional projects. The predominant concerns of twentieth-century fable scholarship were: studies of the formal features and content of the fable influenced by the work of Andre Jolles and Vladimir Propp (see especially Nøjgaard, 1964); folkloric investigations into the origins of the motifs, characters, and the geographic sources of the fable (see especially Halliday, 1927; Meuli, 1954; Josifovic, 1974); and traditional *Quellenforschung* (e.g., Chambry, 1925–6; Hausrath, 1940–56). While the seemingly

intractable problems of defining the genre and identifying the boundaries between fable and various other forms (proverb, *exemplum*, parable, *chreia*, etc.) continue to occupy scholars, over the past several decades a major shift in perspective has developed, which is reflected in the growing number of studies by classicists on the ancient fable and the figure of Aesop. Whereas most modern approaches to fable have been marked by an interest in various kinds of structures and origins, recent studies show an overriding interest in *contextualizing* the Aesopic fable in one way or another. In addition to major overviews such as Dijk's *Ainoi, Muthoi, Logoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature* (1997), the massive three-volume *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable* by Adrados (1999), Holzberg's *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction* (2002), and Kurke's *Aesopic Conversations: Popular Tradition, Cultural Dialogue, and the Invention of Greek Prose* (2010), several other recent books and articles have attempted in various ways to situate Aesop and the fable within the broader contexts of Greek and Roman literary, social, or cultural histories (e.g., Nagy, 1979, 1991; Winkler, 1985; Jedrkiewicz, 1989; Holzberg, 1992; Hopkins, 1993; Bloomer, 1997; Henderson, 2001; Kurke, 2003). There have also been a few related and noteworthy efforts to position the Greek fable within the broader context of interactions between Archaic Greece and the traditions of the Near East (especially Burkert (1992: 120–4) and West (1997: 495)).

This is not to say that any clear scholarly consensus has emerged on the history of the fable, nor that contemporary scholars have lost interest in issues relating to source and textual history. But there has been an undeniable movement away from asking historical questions for their own sake towards the formulation of *historicizing* questions—rather than seeking to reconstruct the *real* fable as it originally existed or seeking to describe the essential features of the fable, recent studies are united by an interest in studying the presence of fables in specific contexts and in tracing the evolution of the Aesopic tradition within broader historical and literary developments.

A 'Monstrous and Chaotic' Literary Genre

In their movement away from structuralist, formalist, and folkloristic approaches, towards more context-specific perspectives, these recent studies reach back (explicitly, in some cases) to the work of Ben Edwin Perry. In his monumental *Aesopica* (1952)—a text that, more than any other single criterion, has come to define what counts as 'Aesopic'—and in a number of influential mid-century publications (Perry 1940, 1962, 1965), Perry insisted that the fable was better understood as a kind of rhetorical device than a literary genre, and he emphasized the fundamental importance of acknowledging the fable's links to its diverse literary contexts. Perry resisted reductionist efforts to define the fable; for Perry, there is simply no such thing as a *real* Aesopic fable: 'Fable is as fable does' (Perry, 1959: 66). Instead, there is the vast and eclectic sum-total of whatever diverse, chronologically distinct authors decided for themselves constituted 'Aesopica'. As he wrote in the preface to his *Aesopica* (Preface, x):

The range of what may rightly be called Aesopic, both by tradition and by kind, is so vast and so repetitious as not to be worth including, even if it were possible, within the compass of a single, necessarily monstrous and chaotic volume. A fable invented by an eighteenth-century writer, or by one today, may be just as truly 'Aesopic' in all essential respects as any of those which were made up or adapted from popular lore in antiquity after the time of Aesop, which is to say any of the fables extant in ancient collections.

Although ancient and modern observers have frequently become interested in the origins, definitions, and boundaries of the fable, in practice, as Perry emphasized, the Aesopic fable is an appropriate, adaptable, flexible, 'monstrous and chaotic' literary category. As Perry's book demonstrates, the Aesopic fable is less an independent literary genre than an accumulation of material deployed in *other* genres.

Nothing to Do with the Zoo?

Despite recent efforts to situate the Aesopic fable in Greek and Roman literary and cultural histories, scholarship on the fable remains somewhat indifferent to animals. While it continues to be taken for granted that fables have nothing to teach us about real animals, the emphases in recent scholarship on the genre's diversity and its dialogue with other forms of cultural expression can be taken as starting points for a re-evaluation of the conventional view that fable has nothing to do with animals *qua* animals. We may now ask a number of questions. Does the anthropomorphism of fables preclude the possibility that they may shed light on ancient views of the animal world? To what extent was Aesopic fable in dialogue with mainstream currents in Greek and Roman thinking about animals? How will acknowledgement of the eclecticism and diversity of the category of 'Aesopica' influence our assessment of the fable's interest in zoology? Instead of attempting encyclopedic coverage of these problems, in what follows I offer a series of snapshots of moments where tensions arise between the fable's commitment to anthropomorphism and its rootedness in a wider discourse about the boundaries between humans and the rest of the animal world.

BOUNDARIES BETWEEN HUMAN AND ANIMAL IN EARLY GREEK FABLE-TELLING

Let us begin by turning directly to Hesiod's fable of the hawk and nightingale, the earliest animal fable in Greek literature:

And here's a fable for kings, who'll not need it explained:
 It's what the hawk said high in the clouds
 As he carried off a speckle-throated nightingale
 Skewered on his talons. She complained something pitiful,

And he made this high and mighty speech to her:
 'No sense in your crying, You're in the grip of real strength now,
 And you'll go where I take you, songbird or not.
 I'll make a meal of you if I want, or I might let you go.
 Only a fool struggles against his superiors.
 He not only gets beat, but humiliated as well.
 Thus spoke the hawk, the windlord, his long wings beating.
 But you, Perses, you listen to Justice
 And don't cultivate Violence.

(Hesiod, *Works and Days* 202–13, tr. Lombardo)

The deceptive simplicity of Hesiod's fable obscures a number of interpretive problems. For one, it is not clear whether Hesiod is directing the message of the fable to the kings 'who'll not need it explained' (*phroneousi kai autois*), to whom the fable is initially addressed (202), or if it is aimed at his brother, Perses, who is named at line 213 and who is the primary addressee in the rest of the poem. Second, it is not at all obvious that there is a message to this particular fable: if Hesiod proceeds to advise Perses to 'listen to Justice' (*su d' akoue Dikēs*) and not to 'cultivate Violence' (*mēd' hubrin ophelle*), then why is the hawk—and its profoundly harsh and unjust world view—given the last word at lines 207–11? Third, if we presume that the fable is a kind of allegory corresponding to the immediate context (i.e., the situation in which the narrator/Hesiod, Perses, and the kings find themselves), then how does the symbolism operate? Is it the case, as suggested in the *scholia*, that Hesiod = nightingale (*aoidos* = *aēdōn*) and the kings = hawk? Or is it perhaps nightingale = Perses (Hubbard, 1995) or hawk = Zeus (Nelson, 1997)? Finally, given the absence of a number of conventional features normally associated with fable, including especially a setting of the stage (Daly, 1961a), and given the focus of the narrative on 'what the hawk said' (203), which makes the whole thing seem more like a *chreia* (a pithy and 'useful' anecdote referring to what someone once did or said on a specific occasion), is it even correct to call this passage a 'fable'?

It is worth noting that this last problem dissipates if, following the lead of our ancient sources, we embrace the appropriative nature of the ancient fable tradition. Indeed, Hesiod's fable was frequently held to be exemplary of the genre in ancient testimonies and Hesiod was mentioned as a pre-Aesopic fabulist in a number of ancient texts (cf. Dijk, 1997: 127). Although no 'Hawk and Nightingale' fables have been identified in Near Eastern sources—despite extensive evidence of Near Eastern influence in the rest of the Hesiodic corpus (West, 1997)—at least two versions, no doubt influenced by Hesiod, appear in later Greek and Latin prose compilations under the name of 'Aesop' (Perry 4 and 567). Moreover, Hesiod seems to go out of his way to label this story a 'fable' (202). Hesiod's word for 'fable' here is *ainos*, a term that remained attached to animal fable throughout antiquity (cf. Quintilian, *Institutiones Oratoriae* 5.11.19–21 and Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata* 3), but that is in fact found in only a small number of literary fables (e.g., Hesiod, *Works and Days* 202, Archilochus fr. 174 W and fr. 185 West; Callimachus fr. 194 Pfeiffer). Nonetheless, the term's significance for the history of the genre cannot be overstated (Fraenkel, 1920). It is particularly useful to consider the term *ainos*

within the context of a network of other related words including the verb *ainittesthai* ('to hint at', 'to say allegorically') (Nagy, 1979; cf. Rosen, 1984). Thus *ainos* terms were also used to designate 'proverb' (e.g., Callimachus fr. 178.9 Pfeiffer)—because of the oblique way in which proverbial phrases refer to the contexts in which they are deployed—as well as a number of other types of symbolic or metaphorical speech acts, including 'riddle' (*ainigma* < *ainittesthai*) (cf. Struck, 2004). The function of fables, in turn, was occasionally described by forms of the verb *ainittesthai* (cf. Sophocles, *Ajax* 1158 and Aristophanes, *Peace* 46) and, according to Theon (first century AD), a fable could be called an *ainigma*: 'Nowadays some people even refer to fables as *ainigmata*' (*nūn mentoi kai ta ainigmata ainous tines kalousi*; Theon, *Progymnasmata* 3). In this context, we are inclined to see the translation of *ainos* as 'fable' in Hesiod as valid but perhaps insufficient. Packed into the sense of *ainos* are (1) the presence of multiple levels of meaning and (2) a discernible ulterior motive on the part of the speaker (cf. Homer, *Odyssey* 14.508; Archilochus fr. 174 West; Callimachus fr. 194.6 Pfeiffer).

But the presence of multiple audiences (the kings and Perses) in lines 202–13 and the packing of multiple levels of meaning into the *ainos* make the function of animal imagery and symbolism extremely difficult for us to decode, especially if we expect a neat correspondence between animal protagonists and the 'real' human characters of the *Works and Days*. Is Hesiod simultaneously attempting to persuade the kings to give 'sound' judgments and trying to convince Perses that he is doomed if he continues socializing with the kings? Perhaps. Or it is the case that Hesiod, as nightingale, must give up seeking to change the behaviour of the kings, as hawk, and turn his attention instead to saving Perses? That scholars should have found a number of persuasive and incompatible ways of working out the identifications of the two birds is itself evidence that we may be dealing with an intractable problem. If we are open to viewing animal fables as engaged with larger currents in ancient discourse on animals in general, then we can bracket the symbolic correspondences as just one (perhaps irresolvable) dimension of Hesiod's *ainos*. Indeed, the most persuasive readings of Hesiod's *ainos* (cf. Daly, 1961a; West, 1978; Heath, 1985; Lamberton, 1988) have abandoned any neat solution to the problems posed by its symbolic function and have drawn attention instead to a passage that appears some 60 lines later:

Perses, you take all this to heart. Listen
 To what's right, and forget about violence.
 The son of Kronos has laid down the law for humans.
 Fish and beasts and birds of prey feed on
 Each other, since there's no justice among them.
 But to men he gave justice, and that works out
 All to the good.

(Hesiod, *Works and Days* 274–80, tr. Lombardo)

The gap between this passage and the fable is, admittedly, a cause for concern; but the passages that intervene fall into two, roughly equal sections (213–47, addressed to Perses, and 248–73, addressed to the kings), in which Hesiod remains doggedly focused on the

dangers of violence (*hubris*) and the urgent need for justice (*dikē*). The implications of this passage on any interpretation of the earlier *ainos* and the hawk's triumphant celebration of the principle of 'might is right' are undeniable. The hawk's apparent amoral application is reversed by the distinction that is subsequently drawn between the bestial and the human order (Heath, 1985: 249). Zeus has required that humans conduct their relationships by *dikē*, not—like animals—by *biē*. Thus it is possible to read this passage as a retrospective rejection of the earlier animal fable *tout court*, and a recasting of the talking, anthropomorphic animals as, simply, *animals*.

In a way, Hesiod is implying that fable-telling is a waste of time. Or, put another way, by using talking animals merely to show that real animals behave in ways that are not appropriate for humans, Hesiod undercuts the central conceit of animal fable. But there are two further points that draw attention to the potential for viewing Hesiod's *ainos* as a model for the ways in which animal fables may engage with wider discourses about animals in the Greek world. Firstly, the basis for Hesiod's rejection of animal fable is the denial of justice to animals, which remains a central tenet of conceptions of the differences between humans and animals throughout antiquity. For example, Plato's *Protagoras* (320c–322d) has the sophist Protagoras tell a story about how Zeus gave justice to men to save them from one another—Protagoras's myth emphasizes that the gift was *not* granted to animals, since the need for justice only arose once men had decided to live in close quarters with each other in cities—for the very reason of excluding animals (Sorabji, 1993: 117). Urbanization, on the one hand, protects humans from wild animals; justice, on the other, protects humans from each other. According to this model, any violation of justice can potentially be cast as a disavowal of one's essential humanity—and a downward sliding towards animal behaviour.

The second point is this: Hesiod's recasting of anthropomorphic animal speech as futile is in fact paralleled in the action of the hawk towards the nightingale. On the one hand, the fable presents a kind of animal speech—the nightingale's song—which is anthropomorphic (she *sings*, like a poet) but completely ignored by the hawk; then there is the hawk's retort, which is utterly clear and audible, and which itself redescribes the nightingale's words as mere 'screeching' (*lelēkas*). Thus we can observe that the idea of animal speech was already problematized in the fable, where the nightingale attempted to communicate in human terms, but the hawk did not listen—her anthropomorphic utterances are thrown back at her as irrelevant animal noises in the fable itself. Thus the central conceit of the animal fable—namely, that there was indeed a time when animals could speak as men do—is already challenged before Hesiod's explicit articulation of the same idea. Speech, of course, is inextricably bound up with Greek ideas about the differences between human and animal. Aristotle famously denied that animals have the power of speech (*logos*) (Aristotle, *Politics* 1.2, 1253a9–18), although he allowed that some animals do make meaningful sounds (e.g., *phone*, *semantikos psophos*, *semainein*) (Aristotle, *De Animalibus* 2.8, 420b9–421a6; *Politics* 1.2, 1253a10–14). Aristotle's insistence that animals do not have words (*onomata*) was grounded in the belief that words involve a convention (*suntheke*) (Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 2, 16a26–9) (cf. Sorabji, 1993: 81). Thus, as in the denial of justice to animals, Hesiod's denial of meaningful

speech to animals anticipates philosophical inquiries about what it means to be human, what differentiates words from sounds, and where exactly the boundaries between animal and human lie.

ANIMALS IN FABLE BOOKS

Using a fable as an *exemplum* in a larger context always involved applying the *traditional* narrative to a *specific* setting. Thus Hesiod addresses the fable of the hawk and the nightingale to the kings and to Perses, as Archilochus addresses the fable of the fox and the monkey to ‘Kerkydes’ (frs. 185–7 West) and the fable of the fox and the eagle to ‘Father Lycambes’ (frs. 172–4 West). This is also true of all of the fables told in the *Life of Aesop*, in which Aesop is represented as reacting to particular situations, never as simply telling fables for their own sake. When fables are used as *exempla*, the fable-teller always, to some degree, implicates his addressee(s) in the traditional narrative: the message to be drawn from the fable is thus often preceded by a formulaic expression such as ‘You, too, ought to listen...’ (*su d’ akoue*; *Works and Days* 212) or ‘Thus, you, too...’ (*houtō de kai su...*; Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1432). In later collections of fables, these formulaic expressions evolved into the introductions to *promythia* and *epimythia* (*ho logos dêloi*, ‘The Fable shows...’; *pros tois*, ‘For the type of people who...’) (cf. Perry, 1940). Thus collected fables are told without any context whatsoever. If we are to search for traces of tensions between the anthropomorphic animals of fable and anxieties about real animals, then these must be found in the fables themselves. In this section, I argue that, rather than simply symbolizing this or that human behaviour, animal fables also draw attention to the animal part of the functional analogism of fable, which signifies that the animals have been only partially analogized to human beings, behaving in some ways like humans but retaining the outward appearance and eating habits of animals (cf. Hansen, 1998: 260). On the one hand, in granting animals the power of speech, fables become fantastic, obvious fictions; on the other hand, by drawing attention to the limits of animal speech and emphasizing the ways in which animals tend to devour one another from time to time, fables also depend on implicit assumptions about how real animals behave in the real world.

Futility of Animal Speech

We begin with two wolf fables that appear near each other in the *Augustana* collection, which was organized alphabetically according to the name of the primary character (thus *lykos kai arēn* is numbered 155 in Perry and *lykos kai probaton* is Perry 159). In the first (Perry 155), a wolf attempts to find a compelling reason (*met’ eulogou aitias*) to eat a lamb he has encountered while drinking in a river. He accuses the lamb of muddying the water and preventing him from getting a drink, to which the lamb replies that he was

merely touching the water with his lips and that, since he is downstream from the wolf, he cannot possibly be disturbing his water. The wolf, failing in this attempt at reasoning (*apotuchōn tautēs tēs aitias*), claims that the lamb insulted the wolf's own father last year, before the fable concludes as follows:

When the lamb replied that he was not even one year old, the wolf said to him, 'Even if you are so full of good excuses, does that mean I should not devour you?'

This fable dramatizes talking animals failing to communicate with one another. Our attention is drawn to the wolf's search for a just cause to devour the lamb and to the lamb's readiness to defend itself with words; but the only message one can draw from the fable is that words and just causes are irrelevant. Thus the *epimythium* reads: 'The fable shows that even just arguments (*dikaia apologia*) have no power (*oude... ischuei*) over those who are set on doing wrong.'

Perry 159 also stages a wolf encountering a sheep, but this time the wolf is described as 'having eaten his full' (*trophēs kekoresmenos*) at the time of the meeting. The wolf tells the sheep that he will let him go if he can make three truthful statements (*treis logous alētheis*), which the sheep accomplishes swiftly: he wishes he never met a wolf; he wishes the wolf he did meet was blind; and he wishes all wolves would die for their unjust and relentless war against the sheep. The wolf, we are told, accepted the truthfulness of these statements and let the sheep go. The author of the *Augustana* attaches an *epimythium* that expresses the opposite view of the earlier one: 'The fable shows that the truth (*alētheia*) often has force (*ischuei*) even with enemies.'

Each of these fables presents us with a familiar bogeyman ('might is right') and familiar stereotypes: the wolf is the ultimate predator, violent and insatiable, while the lamb is the very model of innocence, as well as a keen and clear-eyed truth-teller (cf. Maximus of Tyre, *Orations* 19). But neither the character of these animals nor the ethical perspective of the Aesopic tradition can explain the blatant contradiction between these two fables. The authoritative tone of the *epimythia* appeals to custom and putatively shared experience, but clearly the *Augustana* offers no stable conception of the strength of truth or justice in the face of hostility (cf. Zafiroopoulos, 2001). The only real difference between the two fables is the change in the wolf's appetite: when his primary motivation as a predator has been removed (*trophēs kekoresmenos*), the wolf is able to hear the sheep's words. This suggests that animal *speech* is effective only when *animal* instincts have been taken out of the equation.

In a similar fable, 'The Cat and the Rooster' (Perry 16), a cat ruthlessly devours a bird after first attempting and failing to justify his behaviour:

A cat had caught a rooster and was looking for a plausible reason for eating him. First he accused the rooster of being a nuisance to men, because he crowed at night (*nuktōr kekragota*) and wouldn't let them sleep. The rooster said that he did this for their own good, for he was arousing them to go about their accustomed tasks. Again the cat said, 'But you are also a confirmed transgressor against nature (*asebēs eis tēn*

physin) in mating with your sisters and your mother.' When the rooster also said that he did this for the good of his masters since got the hens to lay many eggs for them, the cat was nonplussed (*diaporētheis*) and said, 'Am I to forgo eating you just because you always have some plausible excuse?'

We encounter again the paradoxical situation in which animals are miraculously able to speak but nonetheless unable to converse with one another. After both the cat and the rooster fail to persuade one another with words, the cat explicitly rejects the rooster's powers of speech as futile. Moreover, it is worth noting that the cat's particular complaints have to do with the rooster's behaviour as a rooster! That is, it is the rooster's animal voice (*nuktōr kekragota*) and mating habits that the cat attempts to use as a justification for killing him, not some pre-packaged 'type' of behaviour the rooster represents.

The futility of animal speech and the related tension between symbolic and real animals also surfaces in fables in which humans and animals interact with one another directly. In Perry 11 (cf. Herodotus, *Histories* 1.141), for example, a fisherman tries playing the flute in order to get fish to jump spontaneously out of the water. When the fish do not comply, the fisherman uses his net instead; after the fish are dumped onto the shore and begin their frantic wriggling, the fisherman rebukes them for not dancing (*ouk ōrcheisthe*) while he played his music (*ēloun*). Similar is Perry 233 (rec. Ia), in which a man purchases a swan—described as a most melodious creature (*eumeles-taton... zōon*)—in order to hear it sing (*adein*), but is disappointed to discover that it finally sings only when it sings its own dirge (*thrēnountos heauton*) before it is about to die. In both fables, humans are disappointed by their failure to elicit desired non-verbal, human-like communication (music, dance, mournful song) from animals, and in both fables the animals end up dead. Stories like these highlight instead the difficulties of human–animal intercourse, drawing attention to the folly of anthropomorphizing and the potentially disastrous results of confusing animal and human behaviour.

The give and take between the fantastic and the real depiction of animals gives rise to a tension that is more or less discernible in all animal fables. In a most influential study of the ancient fable, Morten Nøjgaard (1964) has described the fable's management of this tension as *l'allegorie mécanique* ('mechanical allegory'). According to Nøjgaard, fables endow characters with some impossible quality (a talking animal, a visible god, the personification of some belief, etc.), which is only the functional expression of the fact that the characters are to be taken allegorically; by bringing to the fore the fictitious nature of the story, the fable establishes that the only possibility of giving it meaning remains the interpretation (Nøjgaard, 1964: I. 63). But the fantastic element must be balanced by an internally logical narrative and by an overall plausibility in order that the fable-teller may persuade the addressee that the situation of the fable is somehow analogous to the one in which they find themselves. Thus, following Nøjgaard, we can observe that the fabulous depiction of animals is controlled by an appeal to common sense: the animals of fable must simultaneously serve their function as *mécaniquement allegoriques* and conform in one way or another to popular expectations of their traits and behaviours.

Animal Stereotypes and the Impossibility of Change

At this point it is worth reflecting on the theme of character and stereotype as it surfaces explicitly in a number of collected fables. Babrius's description of the fox in one of his longer fables (103 lines!), on the lion, fox, and stag (Babrius 95), incorporates the theme of knowledge of animal stereotypes into the plot of the story. While the lion is sick and cannot hunt for himself, he asks his friend the fox to catch a stag with the fox's famous 'honey-tongued words' (*logoisi thēreutheisa sois meliglōssois*; 95.9). The fox, who holds an incomparably privileged position among fable animals, comes across a stag in the woods and delivers a long speech, beginning with the following lines:

'The lion is my neighbor, as you know,' said he. 'But now he's very ill and close to death, and so he has been thinking much of late concerning who should rule the beasts when he is gone. 'The boar,' he says, 'is a senseless creature, the bear too sluggish, the leopard too prone to anger, the tiger a braggart who always keeps to himself.' The stag, he reckons, is worthiest of all to rule. 'He has a proud appearance; he lives many years; his horns are fearful to all creeping things and are like the trees with their branches, not such as are the horns of bulls.' Why need I say more?'

(95.13–23, tr. Perry)

The fox uses knowledge of animal stereotypes in this speech to persuade the stag of his suitability to rule over the beasts; in so doing, the fox also appeals to the stag's vanity, itself that creature's stereotypical trait. Moreover, the punchline of the fable will eventually turn on the reader's ability to discern the difference between the fox's manipulation of the image of the stag and the other common association of stags and deer with stupidity. While hungrily observing the lion devour the stag, the fox snatches away the stag's heart and eats it without the lion's awareness; when the lion asks what happened to the heart (*kardiē*), which is by convention the seat of intelligence—the fox simply explains what everyone knows: the stag has no heart (95.101). Thus knowledge of the stereotypical traits of fable animals becomes a theme of the fable, not only because it is an important dimension of the fox's cleverness, but also since both the fox and the reader occupy privileged positions as masters of the Aesopic zoo.

In fact, the fable tradition frequently expresses the view that everyone—human and animal—has an essential, unchangeable nature, and that it is dangerous to attempt to transcend the limitations of one's character or to try to improve one's natural circumstances. This view is expressed particularly clearly in the inter-species fable of the weasel bride (Barbius 32):

Once a weasel fell in love with a handsome young man, and Cypris, the mother of Desire, revered goddess, gave her the privilege of changing her form (*morphēn ameipsai*) and of becoming a woman, one so beautiful that any man would yearn to possess her. When the young man of her choice saw her he, too, was overcome by desire and planned to marry her. When the main part of the dinner was over

a mouse ran by. Up sprang the bride from her richly strewn couch and began to chase it. That was the end of the wedding banquet. Love (*Erōs*), after playing his game with skill and merriment, departed. Nature was too much for him (*tē phusei gar ettēthē*).

The weasel's failure to change her natural instincts in accordance with her improved appearance (*morphēn ameipsai*) is also figured as Love's inability to overcome nature (*phusis*), as if to emphasize nature's supreme power. A rivalry between nature (*phusis*) and divinity surfaces again in the *epimythium* to a related fable (Perry 107) about Zeus's promotion of the fox to the position of king of animals: the fox is made king on the basis of his intelligence and cunning (*to suneton tōn phrenōn kai to poikilon*)—the most prominent dimensions of his character—but Zeus also wants to test whether the changed fox is still marked by another of its characteristics, his cupidity (*tēn glischrotēta*). When the fox is unable to resist chasing a beetle (sent by Zeus) that flies past the royal litter, he is described as jumping at it in an undignified way (*akosmōs*) and is subsequently demoted to his old station (*eis tēn archaiaian taxin*). Thus there is a consistent trope that insists that character cannot be changed (even by divine intervention) and that nature has set strict limits on behaviour as well as social mobility. Many fables suggest that there are dangerous consequences when one tries to transgress the natural boundaries of one's character and circumstances by mimicking or appropriating other behaviours (e.g., in Perry 83, 91, 97, 125, 187–8, 203, 233).

Finally, it should be noted that the animals of fable books frequently act out of character, often with unexpected results. In Perry 146, the brave lion is startled by a mouse, in Perry 150 he requires the help of one, and in Perry 157 the crafty wolf is unable to trick the (usually) gullible goat. Successful change is explicitly celebrated in Phaedrus *App.* 31, when the wasp—a mule in a former life—tells the butterfly, 'Look not to what we once were, but to what we are now' (*non qui fuerimus, sed qui nunc simus, vide*).

ANIMAL FABLE AND NATURAL HISTORY

The fable tradition occasionally eschews symbolism and anthropomorphism entirely, revealing a deep and abiding interest in animal behaviour and in material that could be described as natural history. On the one hand, there are numerous aetiologies offering explanations of particular animal traits and characteristics (e.g., Perry 25, 65, 82, 152, 218); some of these are turned into lessons in keeping with other fabulous warnings against changing one's nature, such as the camel whose cropped ears are the result of a misguided request for horns (Perry 117). Indeed, some of the earliest fables ascribed to Aesop are aetiological (Aristophanes, *Birds* 471–5; Plato, *Phaedo* 60bf.; Callimachus, *Iamb* 2). On the other hand, several fables simply describe a particular animal behaviour (rather than positing any explanation), which is in turn moralized in one way or another in an *epimythium*. Occasionally such fables report behaviours found also in science

writers. For example, Aristotle's *Parts of Animals* 4.2 corroborates the camel's lack of a gall bladder (cf. Perry 220), and *Parts of Animals* 551a alludes to the idea that after death a spirit or *psychē* may take shape as a butterfly (cf. Phaedrus, *App.* 31). Some of these expand a single behaviour into a kind of story, such as the fable of the beaver who castrates himself to preserve his life (Phaedrus, *App.* 31) and the halcyon who builds its nest too close to the sea (Perry 25). In these stories the word *legetai* ('it is said') appears in place of a more traditional incipit (e.g., *pote*, 'Once upon a time'), which marks a difference between anecdotal accounts of animal behaviour and legendary tales of fantastic animals.

Fable and Science in Dialogue

In August 2009, two animal behaviourists published results of a study showing that crows were capable of deliberately using stones to raise the water level of a jug. The scientists framed the abstract of their article with references to an ancient fable:

In Aesop's fable 'The Crow and the Pitcher,' a thirsty crow uses stones to raise the level of water in a pitcher and quench its thirst. A number of *corvids* have been found to use tools in the wild... and New Caledonian crows appear to understand the functional properties of tools and solve complex physical problems via causal and analogical reasoning... We presented four captive rooks with a problem analogous to Aesop's fable: raising the level of water so that a floating worm moved into reach. All four subjects solved the problem with an appreciation of precisely how many stones were needed.

(Bird and Emery, 2009: 1410)

The authors do not claim that Aesop's fables may be a source of valid and demonstrable scientific truths in other instances; but their casual framing of this experiment as 'Aesopic' in fact participates in a very old dialogue between fable and science. As Geoffrey Lloyd has demonstrated, some of Aristotle's beliefs and assumptions in his approach to animal categorization (e.g., in *History of Animals* and *Parts of Animals*) have their roots in 'folklore', especially animal fable (Lloyd, 1983: 20). The dialogue between folklore and science has left traces in a wide range of areas, including animal names that have their roots in descriptive *kenning* and the Aristotelian notion that animals can be differentiated from one another on the basis of their particular character (*ēthos*). A closer look at the history of this crow fable in particular can shed light on the surprisingly fluid boundaries between fable and natural science.

To begin with, there is nothing incorrect about calling this story one of 'Aesop's Fables'. The fable is included as number 293 in the fable book of Roger L'Estrange (1693), perhaps the most influential anglophone Aesop ever produced (Patterson, 1991; Lewis, 1996). But it is not ascribed to Aesop in any direct way before late antiquity, as it is found in neither the *Collectio Augustana* nor the verse collections of Phaedrus and Babrius. By the time the crow fable does appear in Greek and Latin sources—in the *Hermeneumata*

of pseudo-Dositheus, in a prose paraphrase of Babrius, and in Avianus—closely related anecdotes seem already to have circulated (in one form or another) rather widely in other genres (cf. Plutarch, *Moralia* 967 A; Pliny, *Natural History* 10.125; Aelian, *Characteristics of Animals* 2.48). The subtle but significant differences between the versions of ‘The Crow and the Pitcher’ as told by the natural scientist Aelian (*Characteristics of Animals* 2.48) and the verse fabulist Avianus (27) reveal the ways in which their divergent narrative techniques and emphases do more to set the two genres apart than any profound differences in orientation towards the animal world:

A thirsty crow (*sitiens cornix*) noticed a huge jar and saw that at the very bottom there was a little bit of water. For a long time the crow tried to spill the water out so that it would run over the ground and allow her to satisfy her tremendous thirst. After exerting herself for some time in vain, the crow grew frustrated and applied all her cunning with unexpected ingenuity: as she tossed little stones into the jar, the water rose of its own accord until she was able to take a drink. *This fable shows us that thoughtfulness is superior to brute strength, since this is the way that the crow was able to carry her task to its conclusion.*

(Avianus 27, tr. Gibbs)

The crows (*korakes*) of Libya, when (*hotan*) thirsty men draw water, fill their vessels, and place them on the roof in order that the fresh air may keep the water from spoiling, these crows, I say, help themselves to drink by bending over and inserting their beaks into the vessels as far as they will go. And when (*hotan*) the water is too low they gather pebbles in their mouths and claws and drop them into the earthenware vessel. The pebbles are borne down by their weight and sink, while the water, because of their pressure, rises. So the crows manage to drink by a most ingenious contrivance (*eumēchanōs*): they understand by some mysterious instinct (*phusei tini aporrētō*) that one space will not contain two bodies.

(Aelian, *Characteristics of Animals* 2.48)

In Avianus, the initial verb (*adspererat*) is in a past tense (‘A thirsty crow noticed...’); the story remains set in a non-specific but assuredly past time and emphasizes the drama of one, singular bird (*cornix*) and its long process (*diu*) of experimentation leading up to its discovery. By means of applying all of its cunning (*omnes dolos*) and demonstrating its ‘novel ingenuity’ (*nova calliditate*), the crow realizes that by tossing little stones into the jar it can raise the water level and access the water. The unique act of a single clever bird in Avianus can be contrasted with the more generalized tone of Aelian, whose plural *korakes* are placed in a specific geographical locale (Libya). In Aelian’s account, the subjunctive verbs of the temporal clauses introduced by *hotan* place emphasis on the typicality and repetitive nature of the crows’ behaviour, stressing the regularity of the crows’ fascinating behaviour. After telling this tale, Aelian simply moves on to another interesting story about

crows, whereas the *one* bird in Avianus who *once* discovered a brilliant solution to a problem is presented as something to be emulated, a demonstration of what a folklorist would describe as the motif of 'Wisdom Taught by Necessity', catalogued as J101 in the Thompson *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 1955. It is interesting to note the way in which both stories conclude with an author's comment on the birds' surprising cleverness, but only in Avianus is cleverness linked to a moralizing *epitmythium*. It is also worth noting that neither story involves talking animals, but both describe the birds' mental capacities in anthropomorphic terms of 'cunning' (*omnes... dolos*) and 'ingenious contrivance' (*eumēchanōs*).

But the tone of the dialogue between fable and science can become contentious. Aristotle is occasionally critical of the fable's attempts at scientific observation. At *Parts of Animals* 3.2, he is critical of a fable (cf. Babrius 59 and Perry 100) in which Momus claims that the bull's horns ought to have been put on his shoulders to increase the strength of thrust. Aristotle points out the placement of horns on the bull's head give it the widest possible range and that, if they were placed anywhere else, they would inhibit a full range of motion. In a similar spirit, Aristotle introduces Aesopic natural history at *Meteorologica* 2.3, 356b13–15 (although no animals are mentioned), only to mark Aesopica's difference from his own project. Aristotle seems in both cases to go out of his way to mark Aesopic fable as a poor imitation of science, in opposition to the genuine form of inquiry in which he is engaged (cf. Dijk, 1997: 354). Finally, we find another disavowal of Aesopic material as foreign to the project of science at Pliny, *Natural History* 10.32: 'A story is told (*narratur*) about the mournful song of swans at their death—a false (*falso*) story as I judge on the strength of a certain number of experiences (*ut arbitrator aliquot experimentis*).' Here the fictitious and anecdotal fable (*narratur... falso*) is explicitly opposed to scientific method (*aliquot experimentis*).

SOCIOPOLITICAL ANIMALS IN THE AESOPIC TRADITION

Finally, we turn to the social status of the genre, particularly the idea that fable was linked to the lower classes in antiquity and affiliated with slaves. This is one area of scholarship where reflections on the fable's links to ancient attitudes towards animals do occasionally surface. Opinions on these issues, however, are sharply divided, with some arguing that the Aesopic fable is a genuine form of social criticism expressing the viewpoint of the oppressed (Crusius, 1913; La Penna, 1962; Meuli, 1954; de Ste Croix, 1981: 444–5; Rothwell, 1996), and others insisting that no single, consistent sociopolitical perspective characterizes the diversity of content and application of the ancient fable (cf. Jedrkiewicz, 1989: 395–413; Zafiroopoulos, 2001; Holzberg, 2002: 16–17). Animals tend to become relevant to sociopolitical matters when one draws attention to the potential for parallels between the fable's granting of a voice to voiceless animals and its putative empowerment of members of society who are similarly muted.

The *locus classicus* for the idea that the fable expresses the point of view of the oppressed is a passage from the prologue to the third book of Phaedrus's fable collection:

Now, I will explain briefly why the genre of fable
 Was invented. The slave, liable to punishment at all times,
 Transferred his personal thoughts into fables,
 Since he did not dare to say openly what he wished to say,
 And eluded censure under the guise of joking with made-up stories.

(Phaedrus 3. *Prol.* 33–7)

Phaedrus, who is identified as a 'freedman of Augustus' (*Augusti libertus*) in the title of our principal manuscript (Currie, 1984; cf. Champlin, 2005 on historical issues), does not explicitly link the idea that fable was invented as a kind of secretive slave language to the way in which the fictional world of fable grants a voice to normally voiceless animals. Nonetheless, a number of recent studies have shown Phaedrus's animal fables to be a valuable repository of ideas relating to the experience and outlook of slaves and freedmen in Rome (cf. Bloomer, 1997; Henderson, 2001).

But the reader who approaches the fictionalized animals of Phaedrus's fables as if they were speakers of the unspeakable 'personal thoughts' (*effectus proprios*) of Roman slaves faces a number of significant challenges. The fables themselves do not offer anything resembling a condemnation of slavery nor even consistent praise of freedom. In fact, one Phaedrian fable—which seems a deliberate echo of the above quotation—tells of a runaway slave (*servus profugiens*, Phaedrus, *App.* 20.1) who encounters Aesop (*Aesopo occurit*; 2) and decides to entrust his personal complaints to the fabulist (*tuto querela quia apud te deponitur*; 5). After listening to the long, pitiable list of indignities from which the slave is attempting to flee, Aesop persuades the runaway slave to give up his plans of escape with the following words: 'If you must endure such troubles even without having done anything wrong, just think what is going to happen to you now that you are actually guilty of something!' (17–19). In fact, numerous examples could be put forward in defence of the claim that Phaedrus's fables advocate complaisance and warn against rebellion. But rather than searching through the explicit messages of the individual fables for evidence of Phaedrus's personal point of view on issues of slavery and freedom, the most stimulating recent studies have drawn attention to the ways in which the topic of slavery in Phaedrian fables relates to the development of the fabulist's complex poetic persona (Champlin, 2005) and his interest in anxieties relating to social position in Imperial Rome (Bloomer, 1997; Henderson, 2001).

The *Life of Aesop* also stages the emergence of fable from the world of slavery. In addition to being a valuable source on ancient slavery in its own right (Hopkins, 1993), the *Life of Aesop* also emphasizes a number of thematic connections between Aesop's status as a slave and the animal fables for which he became famous. For example, the text begins by describing Aesop as both hideously ugly and mute, both of which suggest connections to the animal world (cf. Marin, 1989; Lissarague, 2000). These suggestions are made more explicit when Aesop is granted the power of speech by the goddess Isis (*Life of Aesop*, ch. 7); some characters in the *Life of Aesop* hear Aesop speak and question whether he is

indeed human (e.g., *Life of Aesop*, chs. 14, 26), and throughout the text Aesop is compared to a number of animals: a baboon (*kunocephalon*; *Life of Aesop*, chs. 11, 30), a mule (*ktēnos*; *Life of Aesop*, chs. 18–19), a frog (*batrachos*; *Life of Aesop*, ch. 87), a hedgehog (*hus trochazon*; *Life of Aesop*, ch. 87), and a monkey (*pithēkōn*; *Life of Aesop*, ch. 87). Aesop's beastly appearance is also characterized as a 'portent' (*sēmeion*), a 'monstrosity' (*teras*), and a 'riddle' (*ainigma*), which is itself in need of interpretation (*Life of Aesop*, ch. 87), prompting the reader to view his body as similar to the genre of animal fable (Lefkowitz, 2008).

In the climactic episode of the *Life of Aesop* (*Life of Aesop*, chs. 124–42) the fabulist is put to death in Delphi. Scholars have detected traces of ancient *pharmakos* ritual in the Delphi passages (Wiechers, 1961; Nagy, 1979) as well as numerous echoes of Socrates' execution by the Athenians (Shauer and Merkle, 1992). The juxtaposition of the trickster-slave fabulist and the elite cult site, and the corrupt way in which the lowly Aesop is framed and killed—and thus silenced—by the powerful Delphians, serve as the archetypal example of how Aesopica can draw attention to central ideological tensions within the cultures of the Classical world (Winkler, 1985; Kurke, 2010). While Aesop's use of mocking animal fables against the Delphians has been viewed as a paradigmatic act of fable-telling as sociopolitical resistance, it is worth noting that it is not just by way of his stories that Aesop is linked to animals in the *vita* tradition. In addition to the fables embedded in the narrative, animals surface outside of the fables proper, including (in addition to descriptions of Aesop's body) Aesop's naming of animals in his first words (*Life of Aesop*, ch. 8), his physical proximity to animals (*Life of Aesop*, ch. 6), his use of animals in the agonistic Xanthus episodes (e.g., *Life of Aesop*, chs. 44–6; 47–8; 51–5; 59; 77–8), and the ways in which his body (*qua* slave body) is treated explicitly as if it were less than human throughout the narrative (cf. especially *Life of Aesop*, ch. 77), putting the *Life of Aesop* in dialogue with ancient discourse on the nebulous boundaries between animals and slaves (on the association of slaves with animals, see Bradley, 2000; Fitzgerald, 2000; and Dubois, 2003).

SUGGESTED READING

The best starting point is Holzberg's succinct overview (2002), which is judicious, insightful, and accessible to non-specialists. Dijk (1997) provides a valuable overview of ancient theory of the fable and a thorough account of the ways in which Greek authors connected fables to the larger contexts of their works. More complex and tendentious efforts to explain the fable's origins and place in cultural history are Adrados (1999), which is dense and difficult, and Kurke (2010), which breaks new ground in putting Aesopica in direct dialogue with core texts and ideas of Greek literature—neither study, however, has much interest in animals *qua* animals. Essential collections of evidence can be found in Chambry (1925–6), Hausrath (1940–56), and Perry (1952). For English translations of primary sources, the combination of Perry's Loeb edition of Babrius and Phaedrus (1965), the collection of Aesop's fables by Gibbs (2002), and Daly's translation of the *Life of Aesop* (1961; reprinted in Hansen, 1998), will provide a full and accurate picture of the tradition.

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