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Fabulous Style: Learning To Compose Fables In The Progymnasmata

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Aesopic fables were among the first narratives encountered by students in the rhetorical schools of the Greco-Roman world.[1] While it is common to attribute the fable's place in early education to its putative moral content and associations with children,[2] our evidence tends not to appeal to ethics or morality as justification for the fable's position in the curriculum.[3] Indeed, moral content appears to have been of relatively little importance in students' work with fable-composition in elementary education, as reflected in texts that describe the *progymnasmata* (Gk. προγυμνάσματα; Lat. *prae-exercitamina*), a sequence of exercises that constitute the earliest formal phase within the Greek system of teaching rhetoric.[4] If the sage advice and wisdom often attributed to Aesopic

[1] See K. J. Freeman, *Schools of Hellas* (London: Macmillan, 1907), 96, who concludes that fables were a fixture in Greek elementary schools of the fourth and third centuries BCE. Indeed, the use of fables in Greek and Latin classrooms continued whenever and wherever both languages were studied in antiquity, through the Middle Ages, until well into the nineteenth century; cf. C. A. Gibson, "Better Living through Prose Composition? Moral and Compositional Pedagogy in Ancient Greek and Roman Progymnasmata," *Rhetorica* 32 (2014): 3–4. As B. Fisher, "A History of the Use of Aesop's Fables as a School Text from the Classical Era through the Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1987), has shown in her study of Aesop as a school text, it is only relatively recently that fable has fallen out of the mainstream of classical studies. It seems that fables enjoy curricular success in periods when there is an emphasis on the acquisition of reading and composition skills as ends in themselves, while they fall out of favour when the primary criterion behind curricular design is the perceived literary-historical value of the selected texts; cf. J. B. Lefkowitz, "Review of *Aesop's Fables in Latin: Ancient Wit and Wisdom from the Animal Kingdom*, by L. Gibbs," *BMCR* 12.24 (2009), http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2009/2009-12-24.html.

[2] Cf., e. g., D. L. Clark, *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 209, who claims that with regard to the fable's use in early education "the emphasis was on the general moral idea illustrated rather than on the story for its own sake."

[3] See G. A. Kennedy, ed., *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2003), xi. Fisher, "Aesop's Fables," demonstrates that moral content was not the primary rationale for the fable's place in the curriculum, nor were they perceived as having a larger role in teaching good conduct than any other literature in the curriculum. Studying two millennia of the practically uninterrupted use of fables in education, Fisher concludes that, from a pedagogical point of view, teachers have always been as much, if not more, concerned to teach reading and composition through fables as they were morality.

[4] The progymnasmata can be described as "elementary school" texts, but the phrase is mis-

fables were not emphasized in these exercises, then what was it about the fable that earned it a primary position in ancient education? What did future orators learn from composing fables? This article analyzes the progymnasmatic fable exercises in order to gain a clearer sense of the fable's place in ancient education, with a focus on two salient features of Aesopic fable that appear to have been especially valued in the progymnasmata: (1) the simplicity of fable style and (2) the fable's status as fiction that claims to represent truth.[5]

Before turning to the progymnasmata texts and their particular interest in Aesopic fable, let us consider earlier evidence provided by two brief notices, one in Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1394a) and another in Quintilian (*Inst.* 1.9.2–3). Although Aristotle does not mention preliminary exercises in the *Rhetorica*, he does discuss fable along with other forms that later appear among the exercises, including maxim (γνώμη), narrative (διήγημα), encomium (ἐγκώμιον), and others (see below).[6] At *Rhet.* 1394a, Aristotle compares fable to historical exemplum in his discussion of the use of παραδείγματα ("examples") in speeches, describing two types of example: one that consists in relating things that have actually happened (τὸ λέγειν πράγματα προγενομένα) and another that requires invention (τὸ αὐτὸν ποιεῖν); the latter are divided into comparisons (παραβολαί) and fables (λόγοι), "such as those of Aesop and the Libyan ones" (λόγοι οἷον οἱ Αἰσώπειοι καὶ Λιβυκοί) (*Rhet.* 1393a).[7] Aristotle goes on to claim that historical exempla

leading to the extent that it suggests a connection to what Anglophones call "elementary" or "primary" school. Scholars generally agree that the progymnasmata were assigned by Greek grammarians to students well after they had learned to read and write and were continued in rhetorical schools as written exercises even after declamation had begun. Thus it is also agreed that the prefix προ- in *pro-gymnasmata* refers specifically to these exercises as being *preliminary* above all to the practice of declamation. We should thus probably imagine teenagers rather than young children as the target audience of these exercises, in any case before they have undertaken other formal training in rhetoric. The term *progymnasmata* first appears in chapter 28 (*Rhet. Alex.* 1436a25) of the handbook known as the *Rhetoric for Alexander*, probably written by Anaximenes of Lampsacus in the third quarter of the fourth century BCE and preserved with the works of Aristotle; see Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, xi.

[5] I do not intend to suggest that moral and stylistic rhetorical training are mutually exclusive. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine any educational experience that is not implicated in the transmission of value systems beyond what is explicitly acknowledged as such; moreover, in the context of deliberative rhetoric, any rhetorical use of fable would theoretically be aimed at persuading others to pursue good and avoid bad decisions; cf. D. Hawhee, *Rhetoric in Tooth and Claw: Animals, Language, Sensation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 81, and Gibson "Better Living," 3–4, 7, *et passim*. My point in this paper is to note the explicit emphases in our evidence and to question some assumptions regarding the fable's place in rhetorical education.

[6] See Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, xi.

[7] Aristotle notes the close association here between fable and comparison (παραβολαί) as forms of fiction; cf. G. J. van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi: Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature*, MnemSup 166 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 78, 113–114. But the connection between the two forms does not appear to have been of interest to the writers of the progymnasmata, where comparison is virtually ignored and the fable is included as the only explicitly fictional material.

are more persuasive than such λόγοι, but in passing he notes the following virtue of fable-composition:

> εἰσὶ δ' οἱ λόγοι δημηγορικοί, καὶ ἔχουσιν ἀγαθὸν τοῦτο, ὅτι πράγματα μὲν εὑρεῖν ὅμοια γεγενημένα χαλεπόν, λόγους δὲ ῥᾷον· ποιῆσαι γὰρ δεῖ ὥσπερ καὶ παραβολάς, ἄν τις δύνηται τὸ ὅμοιον ὁρᾶν, ὅπερ ῥᾴόν ἐστιν ἐκ φιλοσοφίας.
>
> Fables are suitable for public speaking, and they have this advantage: while it is difficult to find similar things that have actually happened in the past, it is easy to invent fables; for they must be made up, like comparisons, if someone is to be capable of comprehending the analogy, which is easy if one studies philosophy.[8]
> (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1394a)

In classifying fable as fiction, that is, as a λόγος that is invented (τὸ αὐτὸν ποιεῖν, *Rhet.* 1393a; εὑρεῖν, *Rhet.* 1394a) and distinct from "things that actually happened" (τὸ λέγειν πράγματα προγενομένα), Aristotle claims that an advantage (ἀγαθὸν) of fables is that they are easy (ῥᾷον) to invent and easy (ῥᾷον) to understand. Analogy or "likeness" (ὅμοια, τὸ ὅμοιον) plays a role in both invention and comprehension: on the one hand, it is relatively easy to invent (εὑρεῖν) a fable that is similar (ὅμοια) to one's current situation (as compared to finding a relevant historical *exemplum*); on the other hand, a fable must be composed in such a way that makes it easy for the addressee to comprehend the likeness (τὸ ὅμοιον) and its relevance to their present reality.[9] According to Aristotle, then, a successfully composed fable is a particular kind of fiction that, drawing on experience with philosophy (ἐκ φιλοσοφίας), furnishes a clear analogy to real life.[10]

Quintilian, in the context of discussing the earliest stages of oratorical education,[11] gives us our first extant attempt at a rationale for working with fables early on:

> *Igitur Aesopi fabellas, quae fabulis nutricularum proxime succedunt, narrare sermone puro et nihil se supra modum extollente, deinde eandem gracilitatem stilo exigere condiscant: versus primo solvere, mox mutatis verbis interpretari, tum paraphrasi audacius vertere, qua et breviare quaedam et exornare salvo modo poetae sensu permittitur.*
>
> The pupils should learn to paraphrase Aesop's fables, the natural successors of the stories of the nursery, in simple and restrained language; and subsequently to set

[8] Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

[9] See the excellent recent discussion of "likeness" in fable exercises in Hawhee, *Rhetoric*, 76–77.

[10] Given the apparent ease of fable-composition and fable-comprehension, it is perhaps surprising that Aristotle indicates some experience with philosophy as a prerequisite. But it is important to note that the simplicity and easiness associated with the fable in rhetorical or literary contexts will nonetheless have involved elite, highly-educated authors deliberately crafting the fable to be prosaic and simple in accordance with expectations and generic norms; cf. J. B. Lefkowitz, "Aesop and Animal Fable," in *The Oxford Handbook of Animals in Classical Thought and Life*, ed. G. L. Campbell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2–3.

[11] Cf. *quaedam dicendi primordia quibus aetatis nondum rhetorem capientis instituant* (Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.9.1).

> down this paraphrase in writing with the same simplicity of style: they should begin by analysing each verse, then give its meaning in different language, and finally proceed to a freer paraphrase in which they will be permitted now to abridge and now to embellish the original, so far as this may be done without losing the poet's meaning.[12] (Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.9.2–3)

Quintilian positions fable early in the curriculum first by noting a connection to "stories of the nursery" (*fabulis nutricularum*; cf. *anilibus fabulis* at *Inst.* 1.8.19), a phrase that implies fables are appropriate for young learners both because they are familiar and because they are fictional (cf. also *versus* and *poetae*).[13] But the primary value of fable here is as an epitome of the simple style (*sermone puro et nihil se supra modum extollente*; *eandem gracilitatem stilo*), presumably also marked in "stories of the nursery," which the student should preserve in fable-paraphrasing (*narrare*) and fable-writing (*exigere condiscant*). Both Aristotle and Quintilian, then, note the importance of simplicity in fable-composition and draw attention to fable's status as fiction that communicates a clear meaning, even when the fictional narrative has been invented by the speaker or freely adapted (*paraphrasi audacius vertere*; cf. *exornare salvo modo poetae sensu permittitur*).

A. The Place of Fable in the Curriculum

In their reflections on the fable genre and their detailed descriptions of fable exercises, the progymnasmata reinforce Aristotle and Quintilian's emphasis on style and fictionality. Indeed, the exercises in *abbreviatio* (*breviare*) and *amplificatio* (*exornare*) to which Quintilian alludes are precisely the kind of work we encounter in the progymnasmata. While there was no single model governing the rhetorical curriculum in the imperial period,[14] scholars generally agree that the progymnasmata were assigned by grammarians to students relatively soon after they learned to read and write and were continued in schools after declamation had begun.[15] The sections on fable in each of our sources for the progymnasmata begin with definitions and brief histories of the genre before moving on to describe a sequence of fable-composition and manipulation exercises, which included practice in narration (ἀπαγγέλλειν), the declining of forms (κλίνειν), weaving fable into larger narratives (συμπλέκειν αὐτὸν διηγήματι), expanding

[12] Text and translation from D. A. Russell, ed. and trans., *Quintilian: The Orator's Education*, 5 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 208.

[13] For further discussion of the phrase *fabulis nutricularum*, see especially M. Nøjgaard, *La fable antique*, vols. 1–2 (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1964–1967), 1:548.

[14] See R. J. Penella, "The Progymnasmata and Progymnasmatic Theory in Imperial Greek Education," in *A Companion to Ancient Education*, ed. W. Martin-Bloomer (Malden, MA: Wiley & Sons, 2015), 160–162. See also the helpful overview in Gibson, "Better Living," 3–4.

[15] See above note 4.

(ἐπεκτείνειν) and condensing (συστέλλειν) them, adding explanatory messages (ἐπιλέγειν αὐτῷ τινὰ λόγον), and confirming (ἀνασκευάζειν) and refuting (κατασκευάζειν) the substance of their arguments.[16]

Some of the fable exercises are quite rudimentary and mechanical, while others involve a fair amount of creativity. For example, when students are asked to "decline" (κλίνειν), that is, to change the grammatical case of some words in the fable, this is primarily a matter of drawing on one's knowledge of the accusative case to change a passage from direct to indirect statement. When, however, they are asked to expand (ἐπεκτείνειν) and condense (συστέλλειν) fables, there are more options and choices to be made. Hermogenes helpfully provides some discussion and an example in his treatment of expansion:

> χρὴ δὲ αὐτοὺς ποτὲ μὲν ἐκτείνειν, ποτὲ δὲ συστέλλειν. πῶς δ' ἂν τοῦτο γένοιτο; εἰ νῦν μὲν αὐτὸν ψιλὸν λέγοιμεν κατὰ ἀφήγησιν, νῦν δὲ λόγους πλάττοιμεν τῶν δεδομένων προσώπων· οἷον, ἵνα σοι καὶ ἐπὶ παραδείγματος γένηται φανερόν, "οἱ πίθηκοι συνελθόντες ἐβουλεύοντο περὶ τοῦ χρῆναι πόλιν οἰκίζειν· καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἔδοξεν αὐτοῖς, ἤμελλον ἅπτεσθαι τοῦ ἔργου. γέρων οὖν πίθηκος ἐπέσχεν αὐτοὺς εἰπών, ὅτι ῥᾷον ἁλώσονται περιβόλων ἐντὸς ἀποληφθέντες." οὕτως ἂν συντέμοις. εἰ δὲ ἐκτείνειν βούλοιο, ταύτῃ πρόαγε· "οἱ πίθηκοι συνελθόντες ἐβουλεύοντο περὶ πόλεως οἰκισμοῦ. καὶ δή τις παρελθὼν ἐδημηγόρησεν, ὅτι χρὴ καὶ αὐτοὺς πόλιν ἔχειν· ὁρᾶτε γάρ, φησίν, ὡς εὐδαίμονες διὰ τοῦτο οἱ ἄνθρωποι· καὶ οἶκον ἔχει ἕκαστος αὐτῶν καὶ εἰς ἐκκλησίαν οἱ σύμπαντες καὶ εἰς θέατρον ἀναβαίνοντες τέρπουσι τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν θεάμασί τε καὶ ἀκούσμασι παντοδαμοῖσ', καὶ οὕτω πρόαγε διατρίβων καὶ λέγων, ὅτι καὶ τὸ ψήφισμα ἐγέγραπτο, καὶ λόγον πλάττε καὶ παρὰ τοῦ γέροντος πιθήκου. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ταύτῃ.
>
> Sometimes fables need to be expanded, sometimes to be compressed. How would this be done? If we sometimes recount the fable in a bare narrative, at other times invent speeches for the given characters; thus, to make it clear to you by an example, The apes gathered to deliberate about the need to found a city. Since it seemed best to do so, they were about to begin work. An old ape restrained them, saying that they will be more easily caught if hemmed in by walls. This is how you tell a fable concisely, but if you wanted to expand it, proceed as follows: The apes gathered to deliberate about building a city. One stepped forward and delivered a speech to the effect that they had need of a city: 'For you see,' he says, 'how happy men are by living in a city. Each of them has his house, and by coming together to an assembly and a theater all collectively delight their minds with all sorts of sights and sounds,' and continue in this way,

[16] The best preserved texts are those ascribed to Theon (first century CE), Ps.-Hermogenes (second century), Aphthonius (fourth century), and Nicolaus (fifth century). These four treatises have been translated into English with introductions and notes in Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*. For a concise introduction to the Progymnasmata texts, see Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, ix. The Greek texts consulted for this article are: M. Patillon and G. Bolognesi, eds. and trans., *Aelius Théon: Progymnasmata* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1997); M. Patillon, ed. and trans., *Corpus Rhetoricum* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2008) [for Ps.-Hermogenes and Aphthonius]; J. Felton, ed., *Nicolai Progymnasmata* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913); C. Walz, ed., *Rhetores Graeci*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Cottae, 1832). On the sources and predecessors of the earliest surviving Progymnasmata texts, see G. Reichel, *Quaestiones progymnasticae* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1909), 22–30; Patillon and Bolognesi, *Aelius Théon*, esp. cxx–cxxiv and 113–120.

> dwelling on each point and saying that the decree was passed; then fashion a speech also for the old ape. So much for this.[17]
> (Hermogenes, *Prog.* 2–3)

As this example shows, making fables longer or shorter required preserving the conciseness of expression that is central to the genre, even when the total number of words may fluctuate as a result of adding or subtracting details or speeches.

In addition to fable (μῦθος),[18] the subjects covered in the progymnasmata include narration (διήγημα), chreia (χρεία), maxim (γνώμη), refutation (ἀνασκευή), confirmation (κατασκευή), commonplace (τόπος), encomion (ἐγκώμιον), invective (ψόγος), comparison (σύγκρισις), characterization (ἠθοποιία), ekphrasis (ἔκφρασις), thesis (θέσις), and law (νόμος). Fable consistently appears early in the surviving accounts of these preliminary exercises, usually positioned as the first but sometimes as the second exercise in the curriculum.[19] In comparison with their discussions of the related forms of chreia (χρεία) and maxim (γνώμη), both of which also appear early in the sequence of exercises, the progymnasmata relatively ignore the ethical content of fables. Reflecting on the reason the chreia exercises sometimes come before fable in the sequence, Nicolaus writes (Nicolaus, *Prog.* 17.16–20) that some position chreia before both fable and narrative because the young need to know first how to avoid evil and pursue good. In citing the opinion that the moral teachings of the chreia are more appropriate for young learners, Nicolaus echoes Theon, who claims that the chreia teaches "good character (ἦθος) while we are being exercised in the moral sayings of the wise (τῶν σοφῶν)" (Theon, *Prog.* 60). Later, at *Prog.* 96–97, Theon will rate the moral value of the maxim (γνώμη) even higher, noting that sometimes the chreia is a pleasantry not useful for life, while the maxim (γνώμη) is always about something useful for life (ἔτι δὲ τῷ χαριεντίζεσθαι τὴν χρείαν ἐνίοτε μηδὲν ἔχουσαν βιωφελές, τὴν δὲ γνώμην ἀεὶ περὶ τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ χρησίμων εἶναι).

This contrasts sharply with the treatment of fable, where there is no explicit association with goodness or wisdom.[20] We might expect such ideas to surface above all in those exercises that involve the pithy messages attached to fables,[21]

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[17] Text and translation from Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 74–75.

[18] The progymnasmata conventionally use both μῦθος and λόγος to refer to Aesopic fable; for full discussion of these polysemic words in the context of ancient fable terminology, see especially van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 79–111.

[19] Fable is the second exercise in Theon (coming after chreia), but is placed first in Hermogenes, Aphthonius, and Nicolaus. On variations in the order of exercises in the progymnasmata, see Gibson, "Better Living," 3; Penella, "Progymnasmata," 82–83; and Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, xiii.

[20] But the progymnasmata do recognize the essential utility of fable, in the form of the advice or warning that is built into its basic structure, as Theon (*Prog.* 73–74) notes, explaining that "the reason fable is sometimes called *ainos* is that it provides advice (παραίνεσις), since the whole point of fable is to give some kind of useful advice."

[21] None of the terms carry the ethical connotations of English "moral," but cf. van Dijk,

called "morals" in English and denoted in Greek by terms that prefix a preposition to a word for "story" (either λόγος or μῦθος), as, e. g., ἐπιμύθιον, προμύθιον, ἐπίλογος, παραμυθία, περιμύθιον.[22] But the progymnasmatic exercises that teach students how to draw out the moral of the fable further demonstrate a lack of explicit interest in ethical content, insisting that morals are as adaptable as the fables themselves. At Theon, there is an expressed arbitrariness in the relationship of fable to message:

> γένοιντο δ' ἂν καὶ ἑνὸς μύθου πλείονες ἐπίλογοι, ἐξ ἑκάστου τῶν ἐν τῷ μύθῳ πραγμάτων τὰς ἀφορμὰς ἡμῶν λαμβανόντων, καὶ ἀνάπαλιν ἑνὸς ἐπιλόγου πάμπολλοι μῦθοι ἀπεικασμένοι αὐτῷ. τὴν γὰρ τοῦ ἐπιλόγου δύναμιν ἁπλῆν προτείναντες προστάξομεν τοῖς νέοις μῦθόν τινα πλάσαι τῷ προτεθέντι πράγματι οἰκεῖον· προχείρως δὲ τοῦτο ποιεῖν δυνήσονται πολλῶν ἐμπλησθέντες μύθων, τοὺς μὲν ἐκ τῶν παλαιῶν συγγραμμάτων ἀνειληφότες, τοὺς δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ μόνον ἀκούσαντες, τοὺς δὲ καὶ παρ' ἑαυτῶν ἀναπλάσαντες.
>
> There can be several conclusions for one fable when we take a start from the contents of the fable, and conversely one conclusion when many fables reflect it. After proposing the simple meaning of the conclusion, we shall assign the young to imagine a fable suitable to the material at hand. They will be able to do this readily when their minds have been filled with many fables, having taken some from ancient writings, having only heard others, and having invented some by themselves.[23]
> (Theon, *Prog*. 75–76)

If the student becomes familiar with many fables, they will be able to match any message to any fable by drawing on their knowledge of fables read, heard, and invented. According to Theon, this can be done easily enough (προχείρως), although not because the student is expected to draw directly on ethical principles or popular morality; rather, what makes this easy is the student's familiarity with models of the genre. Thus, while fable "morals" or messages will always presumably contain some form of advice or warning, it is surprising – given the readiness with which they associate chreia and maxim with "goodness" and "wisdom" – that the writers of progymnasmata texts did not approach the composition of "morals" as having anything to do with morality.

Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi, 35, who notes the use of *moralitas* and *moralisatio* in connection with fables in Erasmus, *Cop*. 2 (256 Knott).

[22] The word *epimythium* (ἐπιμύθιον), introduced in the Aphthonian progymnasmata, eventually became the standard term for "morals" in their familiar position after the narrative. Writing a few centuries before Aphthonius, Theon described "morals" as "gnomic statements that fit the story" (ἐοικότα τινὰ γνωμικὸν αὐτῷ λόγον). See B. E. Perry, "Demetrius of Phalerum and the Aesopic Fable," *TAPA* 93 (1962): 336–337; Nøjgaard, *Fable*, 1:122–128; S. Jedrkiewicz, *Sapere e paradosso nell'antichità: Esopo e la favola* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1989), 290–294; van Dijk, *Ainoi, Logoi, Mythoi*, 82–88; C. A. Zafiropoulos, *Ethics in Aesop's Fables: The Augustana Collection*, MnemSup 216 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 3 f.; J. B. Lefkowitz, "Innovation and Artistry in Phaedrus' *Morals*," *Mnemosyne* 70 (2017): 417–435; see also J. D. Strong, "How to Interpret Parables in Light of the Fable: Lessons from the Promythium and Epimythium" in this volume.

[23] Text and translation from Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 26.

Following Quintilian, the progymnasmata explain fable's position early in the curriculum by pointing to the simplicity of the genre and its status as a form of fiction similar to poetry:

> ὥσπερ γὰρ τὸ ἐν ⟨ταῖς⟩ τελείαις ὑποθέσεσι δυσχερὲς φεύγοντες εὗρον τὴν τῶν προγυμνασμάτων χρείαν οἱ ταῦτα διατάξαντες, οὕτω καὶ τούτων τὸν μῦθον προέταξαν ὡς φύσει τε ὄντα ἀφελῆ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἁπλούστερον καὶ ὡς συγγενείᾳ τινὶ χρώμενον πρὸς τὰ ποιήματα, ἀφ' ὧν μεταβαίνοντας τοὺς νέους ἐπὶ τὴν ῥητορικὴν οὐκ ἀθρόως ἔδει ξένοις τε καὶ μηδαμῶς συήθεσιν ἐντυγχάνειν. περὶ τούτου οὖν πρῶτον λεκτέον.
>
> Just as by avoiding what is difficult in complete hypotheses those who arranged these things invented the use of *progymnasmata*, so they put the fable first among them as being naturally plain and simpler than the others and as having some relationship to poems. In their transition from poems to rhetoric, students should not all at once encounter things that are strange and unusual to them. Let us speak first, therefore, about fable.[24]
> (Nicolaus, *Prog.* 5–6)

Theon further develops the association of fable and poetry, noting the origin of fable among poets and claiming that fables are called "Aesopic" in the same way poetic meters are often named for the poets who used them, such as "Aristophanic," "Sapphic," and "Alcaic" (Theon, *Prog.* 73). It is worth noting that, in keeping with the general lack of interest in morality in fable exercises, this flexible view of the adjective "Aesopic" reflects the progymnasmata's avoidance of romantic ideas about a sage or enslaved Aesop as the source of the fable's wisdom.

Following Theon, the progymnasmata treatises offer remarkably sophisticated and worry-free accounts of how the name "Aesop" came to be associated with so much and such diverse material in antiquity. For Theon, there are structural and stylistic elements that make all of this material essentially cohere as a genre:

> μῦθός ἐστι λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν, εἰδέναι δὲ χρή, ὅτι μὴ περὶ παντὸς μύθου τὰ νῦν ἡ σκέψις ἐστίν, ἀλλ' οἷς μετὰ τὴν ἔκθεσιν ἐπιλέγομεν τὸν λόγον, ὅτου εἰκών ἐστιν· ἔσθ' ὅτε μέντοι τὸν λόγον εἰπόντες ἐπεισφέρομεν τοὺς μύθους. καλοῦνται δὲ Αἰσώπειοι καὶ Λιβυστικοὶ ἢ Συβαριτικοί τε καὶ Φρύγιοι καὶ Κιλίκιοι καὶ Καρικοὶ Αἰγύπτιοι καὶ Κύπριοι· τούτων δὲ πάντων μία ἐστὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαφορά, τὸ προσκείμενον αὐτῶν ἑκάστου ἴδιον γένος, οἷον Αἴσωπος εἶπεν, ἢ Λίβυς ἀνήρ, ἢ Συβαρίτης, ἢ Κυπρία γυνή, καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων· ἐὰν δὲ μηδεμία ὑπάρχῃ προσθήκη σημαίνουσα τὸ γένος, κοινοτέρως τὸν τοιοῦτον Αἰσώπειον καλοῦμεν. οἱ δὲ λέγοντες τοὺς μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀλόγοις ζώοις συγκειμένους τοιούσδε εἶναι, τοὺς δὲ ἐπ' ἀνθρώποις τοιούσδε, τοὺς μὲν ἀδυνάτους τοιούσδε, τοὺς δὲ δυνατῶν ἐχομένους τοιούσδε, εὐήθως μοι ὑπολαμβάνειν δοκοῦσιν· ἐν πᾶσι γὰρ τοῖς προειρημένοις εἰσὶν ἅπασαι αἱ ἰδέαι.
>
> A fable is a made-up story giving an image of truth, but it must be understood that the present discussion does not concern every type of fable but only those that add an

[24] Text and translation from Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 133.

> explanation of the fable's representation of truth after the telling of the story (as well as those that put the explanation before the fables). Fables can be called "Aesopic" and "Libyan" and "Sybaritic" and "Phrygian" and "Cilician" and "Carian," "Egyptian," and "Cyprian." But among all these there is really only one difference, and that is that the particular genre is made clear in the beginning, by starting with "Aesop said" or "a Libyan man said," or "a Sybarite" or "a Cyprian woman" and the same way for the others. If there is nothing in the beginning specifying the genre of fable, then we commonly call such fables "Aesopic." But those who differentiate among the genres and argue that some involve speechless animals, others humans, or that some touch on the impossible, others on the possible – all such people seem to me to be wasting their time. For each of these particular sub-types in fact appears in each of these so-called genres. (Theon, *Prog.* 72–73)

Used above in Theon's analogy to poetic meters, the adjectival form "Aesopic" appears here among a list of place-names, as though it referred to a type of identity and not one historical person, possessing a kind of appropriative, archiving force. It follows that the label "Aesopic" was deployed sometimes by default, simply because there was no good reason to call a story by any other name. As far as the progymnasmata are concerned, a fable is a fable, irrespective of its specific ascription, whether it is something invented, heard, or encountered in ancient poets and prose authors.[25]

B. Playing with Fiction and Truth

But one vital difference between fictional literature in general, and Aesopic fable in particular, is the fable teller's claim that the fiction is a representation of some kind of truth. And this, it seems, is where we find a deeper dimension of the fable's value to the larger project of rhetorical training. By working with material that is obviously fictional, progymnasmatic fable exercises aimed to teach young students how to write plausibly and persuasively even when working with material that is ψευδής.[26] Progymnasmata writers occasionally described this work with fictional fables as having an almost mystical value (τὸ μέγα τῆς ῥητορικῆς

[25] In addition to Homer, Hesiod, and Archilochus (cf. Hermogenes, *Prog.* 1), the progymnasmata recommend models of the genre found in Herodotus (*Hist.* 1.141); Philistus (*FGrH* 556 F6); Theopompus's *Philippica* (*FGrH* 115 F127; cf. Babrius, *Fab.* 70); Xenophon (*Mem.* 2.7.13–14) (cf. Theon, *Prog.* 66). Given the focus on making students masters of fable style, it is worth noting that the progymnasmata make no mention of Greek prose fable collections, such as the one ascribed to Demetrius of Phalerum at Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* 5.80, which were likely in circulation at the time. On Demetrius of Phalerum, cf. especially Perry, "Demetrius of Phalerum."

[26] I translate ψευδής above and throughout as "fictitious" because there is an explicit contrast with the truth and in the context of story-telling "fictitious" seems more accurate and appropriate than "false" or "lying"; when it comes to plausibility, however, there is also undoubtedly a dimension of "falseness" that must be avoided.

μυστήριον),[27] which was able to "bring the minds of the young into harmony" (διότι τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον ῥυθμίζειν δύναται)[28] and "contained the seeds of the whole art of rhetoric" (ὁ μῦθος ὡς σπέρματά τινα τῆς πάσης τέχνης ἐμπεριειληφώς).[29] As it happens, fable is the only explicitly fictional (ψευδής) form included in the progymnasmata exercises, a label it receives in Theon's elegant and influential definition (see above).[30] While the genre's (deceptively) straightforward management of fiction to truth (ἀλήθειαν) – described with reference to "representation" or "likeness" (εἰκονίζων) – makes the fable an ideal basis for challenging and suitable exercises early in the curriculum, Theon's elegant definition of fable and refreshingly untroubled attitude toward the boundaries and origins of the genre conceal certain complexities, especially the difficulties packed into the oxymoronic partnering of fictitious speech (λόγος ψευδής) and truth (ἀλήθειαν).[31]

The slightly expanded definition in Nicolaus focuses attention on this relationship by claiming that the representation of truth depends on the plausibility of the fiction:

> μῦθος τοίνυν ἐστὶ λόγος ψευδὴς τῷ πιθανῶς συγκεῖσθαι εἰκονίζων τὴν ἀλήθειαν. λόγος μὲν ψευδής, ἐπειδὴ ὁμολογουμένως ἐκ ψεύδους σύγκειται· εἰκονίζων δὲ τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ἐπειδὴ οὐκ ἂν ἐργάσαιτο τὸ ἑαυτοῦ, μὴ ἔχων τινὰ πρὸς τὸ ἀληθὲς ὁμοιότητα. γένοιτο δὲ ἂν πρὸς τὸ ἀληθὲς ὅμοιος ἐκ τοῦ πιθανοῦ τοῦ περὶ τὴν πλάσιν.
>
> Fable, then, is fictitious speech, representing truth by being persuasively composed. The speech is fictitious since it is admittedly made up of falsehoods, but it represents the truth since it would not accomplish its purpose if it did not have some similarity to the truth. It becomes like truth from the credibility of the invention.
> (Nicolaus, *Prog.* 6)

The implicit challenge in the expression εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν is brought out here more explicitly;[32] not only is it expected that the fable will make some gesture toward reality in the attached pro- or epimythium, but the invented tale must also itself be composed in a way that is "similar to the truth" (πρὸς τὸ ἀληθὲς ὅμοιος), which means it must be composed in such a way that is internally coherent and plausible.

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[27] John of Sardis, *In. Aphth. prog.* 11.

[28] Hermogenes, *Prog.* 1; cf. Hawhee, *Rhetoric*, 83 f.

[29] John of Sardis, *In Aphth. prog.* 11.

[30] Theon's definition became the standard and remains influential; cf. N. Holzberg, *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 19–20.

[31] Later writers would find the need to defend the appropriateness of working with fiction in rhetorical education; cf. esp. the commentary attributed to John of Sardis, *In Aphth. prog.* 13–14.

[32] On the network of terms related to εἰκονίζω in Greek rhetorical theory, see T. A. Schmitz, "Plausibility in the Greek Orators," *AJP* 121 (2000): 47–77, esp. 51; and Hawhee, *Rhetoric*, 82–87.

Leaving aside the pro- or epimythium, which must make clear the meaning of the fictional tale, i. e., the way in which it bears on "truth," discussions of plausibility in fable composition acknowledge two distinct modes of establishing plausibility within the fabulous narrative itself: one mode appeals to knowledge of the observable, natural world, and another that refers to acquired familiarity with the conventions of fictional fables. For a fable to be both fictional and convey a message that is relevant or applicable to the real world, it must first, according to Hermogenes, at least, accurately depict the stereotypical associations of each animal character.

> ψευδῆ μὲν αὐτὸν ἀξιοῦσιν εἶναι, πάντως δὲ χρήσιμον πρός τι τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ· ἔτι δὲ καὶ πιθανὸν εἶναι βούλονται. πῶς δ' ἂν γένοιτο πιθανός; ἄν τὰ προσήκοντα πράγματα τοῖς προσώποις ἀποδιδῶμεν. οἷον περὶ κάλλους τις ἀγωνίζεται; ταὼς οὗτος ὑποκείσθω. δεῖ τινι σοφόν τι περιτεθῆναι; ἀλώπηξ ἐνταῦθα. μιμουμένους τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράγματα; ἐνταῦθα οἱ πίθηκοι.
>
> They think it right for it to be fictitious, but in all cases to be useful for some aspect of life. In addition, they want it to be plausible. How would it become plausible? If we attribute appropriate things to the characters. For example, someone is arguing about beauty; let him be represented as a peacock. Cleverness needs to be attributed to someone; here a fox is appropriate. For imitators of the actions of human beings, choose apes.
> (Hermogenes, *Prog.* 2)

This view of plausibility resonates with the discourse of "likeness" and "plausibility" in the Greek rhetorical tradition. Fables have to represent animal characters appropriately, where "appropriate" (τὰ προσήκοντα πράγματα) refers to things that correspond to expectations and assumptions about the way *fictional* animals behave and look. As T. A. Schmitz has shown, citing Anaximenes, ancient rhetorical theory accommodated a view of plausibility that was not necessarily grounded in truth or reality, where *eikos* means simply "an attentiveness to the public's assumptions rather than an objective reality inherent in certain facts."[33] By the same token, the implausible would fall short of meeting the public's expectations and assumptions, even when it comes to what one expects of invented animal fables.[34]

While Hermogenes's view of plausibility makes reference to a kind of internal logic or credibility based on familiarity with the unrealistic (yet coherent) conventions of fable-telling, authors of the progymnasmata also viewed fable composition as somehow connected to the realistic, material world of nature. As Nicolaus writes in his discussion of credibility, fable composition:

> ἐπειδὴ δὲ εἴρηται, ὅτι δεῖ πιθανῶς συγκεῖσθαι τὸν μῦθον, πόθεν ἂν γένοιτο πιθανὸς σκοπητέον. πολλαχόθεν δὲ τοῦτο· ἐκ τόπων, περὶ οὓς τὰ ὑποκείμενα ⟨τῷ λόγῳ⟩

[33] Schmitz, "Plausibility," 48.
[34] Cf. Theon, *Prog.* 76–77.

ζῷα διατρίβειν εἴωθεν· ⟨ἐκ καιρῶν, ἐν οἷς φαίνεσθαι φιλεῖ·⟩ ἐκ λόγων τῶν τῇ φύσει ⟨ἑκάστου⟩ ἁρμοζόντων· ἐκ πραγμάτων, ἃ μὴ ὑπερβαίνει τὴν ἑκάστου ποιότητα, ἵνα μὴ λέγωμεν, ὅτι ὁ μῦς περὶ βασιλείας τῶν ζῴων ἐβουλεύετο ἢ ὅτι ὁ λέων ἐζωγρήθη ὑπὸ τυροῦ [καὶ] κνίσης, κἂν λόγους τινὰς δεήσῃ περιθεῖναι, [καὶ] ἵνα ἡ μὲν ἀλώπηξ ποικίλα φθέγγηται, τὰ δὲ πρόβατα εὐήθη καὶ μεστὰ ἀνοίας· τοιαύτη γάρ τις ἡ ἑκατέρων φύσις· καὶ ἵνα ὁ μὲν ἀετὸς ἁρπακτικὸς καὶ νεβρῶν καὶ ἀρνίων εἰσάγηται, ὁ δὲ κολοιὸς μηδὲν τοιοῦτον μηδὲ ἐννοῶν. εἰ δὲ ἄρα ποτὲ γένοιτο χρεία τοῦ καὶ παρὰ τὴν φύσιν τι συμπλάσαι, δεῖ τοῦτο προοικονομῆσαι καὶ παρασχεῖν αὐτῷ τὴν ἐκ τοῦ μύθου διάνοιαν· οἷον εἰ διαλέγοιτο τὰ πρόβατα πρὸς τοὺς λύκους φιλικῶς, προοικονομῆσαι δεῖ τὴν φιλίαν καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τοιαῦτα.

Since it has been said that a fable should be composed so as to be credible, we should consider how it may become credible. Many things can contribute to this: mention of places where the creatures imagined in the fable are accustomed to pass their time; from the occasions on which they are wont to show themselves; from words that harmonize with the nature of each; from actions which do not surpass the kind of thing each does – so we do not say that a mouse gave advice about the kingdom of the animals or that a lion was captured by the savor of cheese – and if there is need to attribute some words to them, if we make the fox speak subtle things and the sheep naïve and simple-minded things; for such is the nature of each; and so that the eagle is introduced as rapacious for fawns and lambs, and the jackdaw does not so much as think of anything like that. If there should ever be need to invent something contrary to nature, one should set the scene for this first and should connect the moral of the fable with it; for example, if the sheep were being described as having a friendly talk with the wolves, first you should set the scene for this friendship and anything else of that sort.[35]

(Nicolaus, *Prog.* 7)

In Nicolaus's account the lines between fictionalized animals and real ones are blurred, as terms for "nature" are applied to fiction and to the natural world at one and the same time. It seems that the content of fables must conform not only with the kinds of things people associate with each fable animal; the fictionalized animal speech and behavior must also cohere to some extent with what can actually be observed in nature. In mapping out the importance of "plausibility" in successful fable composition, the progymnasmata writers do not differentiate between the two categories of what twentieth-century literary theorists would label as "natural" and "cultural" *vraisemblance*, where "natural" correspondence to reality is based on universal truths observable in nature while the "cultural" is that which is accepted as plausible irrespective of the realities of the material world.[36] While fables are anthropomorphizing in their projection of human behaviors and thoughts onto animals, the fact that the animals are familiar species and not fantastic or mythological beasts means that a certain amount of attention must also be paid to the kinds of things real animals do in the real world.

[35] Text and translation from Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 134.

[36] Cf. Schmitz, "Plausibility," 59–61; J. D. Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 140.

C. Fable and the Simple Style

While ideas about real animal habitats and behaviors are relevant in progymnasmatic fable exercises, it is primarily by dealing with the stereotyped animals of fable that students gain experience matching style and ideas to character types. Of course, knowing what different types of people are likely to do or what is fitting for them to do is of great importance in ancient rhetorical theory generally.[37] The simplicity of fable becomes implicated in these discussions of plausibility in striking ways. On the one hand, the ability to convey an accurate picture of circumstantial details, whether these may pertain to the fictional or natural world, is important to *enargeia*, a highly valued dimension of the "simple style" (Gk. ἀφελεῖα) in post-Aristotelian rhetorical and poetical theory.[38] On the other hand, the progymnasmata claim that, in order for fables to be persuasive and plausible, there must be a certain purity and simplicity in their style. But if language and style constitute the primary substance and significance of fable in the rhetorical-educational curriculum – and, by extension, if fable is a fundamental part of the orator's training in expression and stylistics – then what, exactly, is fable style? What does it mean, in practice, to tell fables with *gracilitas*, as Quintilian prescribes? How does the language, the *sermo* of fable, achieve and preserve its purity?

Nicolaus answers these questions by recommending a fable style that is "simple" (ἁπλουστέραν) and not contrived (ἀνεπιβούλευτον), devoid of all forcefulness and periodic expression (δεινότητος ἁπάσης καὶ περιοδικῆς ἀπαγγελίας ἀπηλλαγμένην), in order that the advice is clear (τὸ βούλημα εἶναι σαφὲς), and what is said (by the speakers in the fable) does not seem more elevated than their supposed character (τῶν ὑποκειμένων προσώπων), especially when the fable consists of actions and speeches by irrational animals (ἄλογα ζῷα). The simple style Nicolaus describes is likened to that used in ordinary conversation (τῆς ἐν τῇ συνηθείᾳ ὁμιλίας).[39] The key terms in Nicolaus's account of fable style and similar terminology used with reference to fable elsewhere in the progymnasmata overlap with contemporary notions of the so-called plain style or *apheleia* in prose writing, established and highly valued in post-Aristotelian rhetorical theory and during the Second Sophistic.[40] The progymnasmata provide further

[37] N. Worman, *The Cast of Character: Style in Greek Literature* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2002), 7.

[38] Schmitz, "Plausibility," 65; on *enargeia*, see G. Zanker, "*Enargeia* in the Ancient Criticism of Poetry," *RhM* 124 (1981): 297–311.

[39] Nicolaus, *Prog.* 11.

[40] Our most important sources for descriptions of *aphelic* composition are Hermogenes's *On Types of Style* (*Περὶ Ἰδεῶν*) and the second book of Ps.-Aristides's *Rhetorica* (*Περὶ τοῦ ἀφελοῦς λόγου*). See also the excellent discussion of *aphelic* writing in Xenophon of Ephesus in K. De Temmerman, *Crafting Characters: Heroes and Heroines in the Ancient Greek Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 118–151.

links of fable style to the discourse of *apheleia* by describing it as "rather simple and natural" (ἁπλουστέραν τὴν ἑρμηνείαν εἶναι δεῖ καὶ προσφυῆ, Theon, *Prog.* 74); "artless and clear" (ἀκατάσκευόν τε καὶ σαφῆ, Theon, *Prog.* 74); "avoiding the use of periods and to be close to sweetness" (τὴν δὲ ἀπαγγελίαν βούλονται περιόδων ἀλλοτρίαν εἶναι γλυκύτητος ἐγγύς, Hermogenes, *Prog.* 3–4); and using a pure "Attic lexicon" (John of Sardis, *In Aphth. prog.* 8). Progymnasmatic descriptions of appropriate and persuasive fable style often also refer to nature, animal behavior, and the notion that speechless animals would, when given the power of speech, only manage to achieve a certain level of elevation in their expression (cf. Nicolaus, *Prog.* 11 above). Thus, while style is clearly an acquired, cultural phenomenon (similar to knowledge of the stereotyped behaviors of fabulous animals), there are repeated hints, both in the progymnasmata and in earlier rhetorical treatments of fable, that fable style was conceived of as close to nature itself, implying that ideas about the natural world and real animals may have aided students in figuring out how to write clearly and simply in these fable exercises.[41]

It is reasonable to conclude that these experiments with made-up stories about nature and animals in the opening of the progymnasmata were also implicated in the construction of what it meant to express oneself simply and clearly beyond fable-composition. That is, the exercises in fable composition in the progymnasmata can be understood as developing skills that would be vital to mastering the broader network of dimensions of "simple" expression. In the ancient theorizing of *apheleia* we can identify a number of points of contact with characteristics of fable-composition, including (but not limited to) the following features: the use of animals and animal imagery (Hermogenes, *Περὶ Ἰδεῶν* 325–326); similarity to oral discourse (Hermogenes, *Περὶ Ἰδεῶν* 323); brevity (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp.* 31); rusticity (Hermogenes, *Περὶ Ἰδεῶν* 573); commonness (Demetrius, *Eloc.* 111); nature (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp.* 35); folk wisdom and proverbial elements (Cicero, *Or. Brut.* 81); and metonymical characterization (Ps.-Aristides, *Rhet.* 2.34), according to which attention to behaviors (τὰ ἰδιώματα … τῶν προσώπων), context (τοὺς καιρούς), and circumstances (τὰς περιστάσεις) is preferred to explicit description of character.[42] The exercises in fable composition in the progymnasmata thus develop skills that would be vital to mastering the art of "simple" expression and its broader network of associations.

[41] For a discussion of ways in which Greek and Roman thoughts about real animals figured in Aesopic fables, see Lefkowitz, "Aesop and Animal Fable," 1–23; see also Hawhee, *Rhetoric,* 70–88.

[42] De Temmerman, *Crafting Characters*, 132.

D. Fable Style in Aphthonius

We can reasonably expect prose authors and poets working in diverse genres to have been influenced by their progymnasmatic training, irrespective of whether or not they display an affinity for forms such as fable, maxim, and chreia in their works.[43] When it comes to authors of our extant ancient fable collections, however, scholars have historically overstated the role of the rhetorical schoolroom; this, in turn, has contributed to a general lack of attention to the literary and stylistic dimensions of fable collections.[44] Thus, while it is demonstrably not the case that all surviving fable collections in Greek and Latin are direct products of rhetorical-school training, we do have a number of well-preserved collections that meet the stylistic demands established in the progymnasmata.

One such collection, ascribed to Aphthonius, a rhetorician of the fourth or fifth century, is notable for its close adherence to progymnasmatic fable-writing aesthetics. The Aphthonian corpus includes both a progymnasmata and a collection of forty fables in Greek prose.[45] The fables stand as a model of *aphelic* writing: the style is characterized by brevity; antitheses and parallelisms; avoidance of complex periods; rare use of indirect speech; and by the commonness of the vocabulary.[46] By way of conclusion, we will turn to three fables by Aphthonius: Aphth. 2 (Perry 399), 17 (Perry 351), and 24 (Perry 289), in order to observe elements of fabulous style in action.

In the first fable, a man is about to kill his goose to make a meal, but, unable to see clearly in the dark, he grabs his swan instead and almost kills it:

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[43] See Gibson, "Better Living," 103–104; cf. Theon, *Prog.* 70: "Now I have included these remarks, not thinking that all are useful to beginners, but in order that we may know that training in exercises is absolutely useful not only to those who are going to practice rhetoric but also if one wishes to undertake the function of poets or historians or any other writers. These things are, as it were, the foundation of every kind (*idea*) of discourse, and depending on how one instills them in the mind of the young, necessarily the results make themselves felt in the same way later" (trans. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata*, 13).

[44] In such moments, the word "schoolroom" implies lack of artistry and literary quality. Theories about the rhetorical origin of the fable genre and, more specifically, of our extant fable collections, have been disproven over the past several decades; see the discussion in F. Rodríguez Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, trans. L. A. Ray, ed. F. Rodríguez Adrados and G. J. van Dijk, 3 vols., MnemSup 201, 207, 236 (Leiden: Brill, 1999–2003), 1:128 f.

[45] Aphthonius's collection of fables is published in A. Hausrath, H. Haas, and H. Hunger, eds., *Corpus Fabularum Aesopicarum*, vol. 1, *Fabulae Aesopicae soluta oratione conscriptae*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner, 1959–1970), 2:133–151. The rhetoricians Libanius, Themistius, and Julianus also include fables among their writings; see Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:128–129. Although he does not discuss style *per se*, G. J. van Dijk, "The Rhetorical Fable Collection of Aphthonius and the Relation between Theory and Practice," *Reinardus* 23 (2010–2011): 186–204, offers a valuable overview of the contents of Aphthonius's collection and its relation to prior fable tradition.

[46] See Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:130; Nøjgaard, *Fable*, 2:483; and Sbordone, "Recensioni retoriche delle favole esopiane," *RIGI* 16 (1932): 35–68, esp. 58.

μῦθος τοῦ χηνὸς καὶ τοῦ κύκνου τοὺς νέους εἰς λόγους παρακαλῶν. ἀνὴρ εὐπορῶν χῆνά τε ἅμα καὶ κύκνον ἄμφω τρέφειν ἐβούλετο. ἔτρεφε δὲ οὐκ ἐφ᾽ ὁμοίοις βουλεύμασι: τὸν μὲν γὰρ ᾠδῆς, τὸν δὲ τραπέζης ἐκέκτητο χάριν. ὡς δὲ ἔδει τὸν χῆνα ἀποθανεῖν ἐφ᾽ οἷς ἐτρέφετο, νὺξ μὲν ἦν, καὶ διαγινώσκειν ὁ καιρὸς οὐκ ἀφῆκεν ἑκάτερον, ὁ κύκνος δὲ ἀντὶ τοῦ χηνὸς ἀπαχθεὶς ᾠδῇ σημαίνει τὴν φύσιν καὶ τὴν τελευτὴν διαφεύγει τῷ μέλει. ἡ μουσικὴ τελευτῆς ἀναβολὴν ἀπεργάζεται.

A story about a goose and a swan, exhorting young people to study. A wealthy man wanted to raise a goose and a swan together but for different purposes: the swan was for singing and the goose was for eating. The time came for the goose to meet his appointed fate and have his throat cut. Yet the darkness of nighttime prevented the man from knowing which bird was which. As a result, he grabbed the swan instead of the goose. The swan then declared his true nature by bursting into a swan-song, and thus narrowly escaped from death. The fable shows that music is so powerful that it can even avert death.[47]
(Aphth. 2 [Perry 399])

We can observe a number of features of the simple fable style: short sentences with paratactic syntax (note the exclusive use of infinitives and the indicative mood); parallelism and contrast (ἅμα … οὐκ ἐφ᾽ ὁμοίοις; μὲν … δὲ; μὲν … δὲ); prosaic vocabulary, with repetition (e. g., τρέφειν, ἔτρεφε, ἐτρέφετο; ᾠδῆς, ᾠδῇ; τελευτὴν, τελευτῆς). In addition, plausibility and realism appear to be well managed in this fictional context, as there is nothing unusual or unexplained in the narrative.[48]

As is typical throughout the collection, Aphthonius here includes both a promythium and an epimythium (each refers to "learning," εἰς λόγους … ἡ μουσικὴ), perhaps in order to demonstrate how best to manage both.[49] The promythium simply states the subject of the fable (μῦθος) and what advice it offers (παρακαλῶν, i. e., what it "urges" or "exhorts"), while the epimythium typically contains some more generalized, gnomic sentiment, usually introduced by οὕτως ("and so" or "thus"). But, in keeping with the somewhat freewheeling attitude toward "morals" proscribed in the progymnasmata, there is a discernible arbitrariness in these particular pro- and epimythia. On the one hand, the promythium claims the story urges young people to work, that is, to attend to their studies (εἰς λόγους). But it is not entirely clear that the swan in the fable has studied anything at all; indeed, the swan's singing is explicitly attributed to its "nature" (τὴν φύσιν). On the other hand, the epimythium claims that the story demonstrates how μουσική can postpone death (where μουσική means both "music" and, more generally, "learning"), a proverbial sentiment. But the story

[47] Translation from L. Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2002), 146.

[48] For example, the man's motivation for acquiring both birds is elaborated (τὸν μὲν γὰρ ᾠδῆς, τὸν δὲ τραπέζης ἐκέκτητο χάριν), and a clear reason is offered for why he was unable to distinguish between the two (νὺξ μὲν ἦν).

[49] Practically all of the fables in Aphthonius's collection use both a pro- and epimythium (Aphth. 18 is the exception).

turns on the ancient belief that swans sing precisely at the moment when they are about to die, again, because it is in their nature (*phusis*) to do so.

In Aphth. 17, a mother deer attempts to counsel her son, but she cannot live up to her own advice:

> μῦθος ὁ τῆς ἐλάφου νουθετεῖν παραινῶν τὸν καὶ πράττειν δυνάμενον. ἔλαφον ἡ μήτηρ ἐνουθέτει "τί ταῦτα;" λέγουσα· "κέρας μέν, ὦ παῖ, παρὰ τῆς φύσεως εἴληφας, μεγέθει δὲ διενήνοχας σώματος καὶ οὐκ οἶδ' ὅ τι παθών, ἀποδιδράσκεις ἐπιόντας τοὺς κύνας". ταῦτα ἦν, καὶ κυνῶν δρόμος ἠκούετο πόρρωθεν· ἡ δὲ μένειν τῷ παιδὶ παραινέσασα, αὐτὴ τῆς φυγῆς προκατήρξατο. παραινεῖν ἕτοιμον ἃ ποιεῖν ἀπορώτερον.
>
> A story about a deer, urging that advice should be given by a person who is also capable of action. The deer was being lectured by his mother, "Why do you act this way, my child? You have been naturally endowed with horns, and you are powerfully built, so I cannot understand why you run away at the approach of the dogs." That is what the mother said. Then, when she heard the sound of the hunting dogs in the distance, she again urged her child to stand firm while she herself took off at a run. It is easy to advise action which cannot be carried out.[50]
> (Aphth. 17 [Perry 351])

Aphthonius's fable characteristically avoids complex syntax and difficult vocabulary, depends on simple contrasts (μὲν … δέ), and is markedly brief – as soon as the stage is set and words are exchanged (29 words), there is an action marked by a verb of perception (ἠκούετο πόρρωθεν), leading directly to the denouement (17 words). The promythium opens with an announcement of the subject of the story (μῦθος), using the participle for the advice the fable urges (παραινῶν).[51] Advising then becomes a theme within the narrative, repeated in the body of the story (ἐνουθέτει, παραινέσασα) and in the epimythium (παραινεῖν), and then contrasted with action twice (πράττειν δυνάμενον, ποιεῖν). There is nothing naturally or culturally implausible introduced into the narrative: deer are stereotypically associated with cowardice in fictionalized fables and would have good reason to run from hunting dogs in the real world.

Finally, to highlight some aspects of Aphthonius's fable style, it may be helpful to compare one of his fables (Aphth. 24) to its likely model in the poetic version in Babrius (Babrius, *Fab.* 120):[52]

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[50] Translation from Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables*, 122.

[51] The word παραινῶν appears in the promythia of twenty-eight of the forty Aphthonian fables: 3–5, 8–14, 16, 18–22, 25–29, 31, 33–36, 39, 40.

[52] Babrius's collection, in choliambic verse and produced sometime in the second-century CE, is believed to be the main source of Aphthonius's fables; cf. van Dijk, "Rhetorical Fable Collection."

Aphthonius 24	*Babrius 120*
μῦθος ὁ τοῦ βατράχου παραινῶν κρίνειν πρὸ τοῦ κέρδους τὸν ὑπισχνούμενον. βάτραχος τῆς τῶν ἰατρῶν κατηλαζονεύετο τέχνης, πάντα μὲν εἰδέναι φάρμακα γῆς ὑπισχνούμενος, πᾶσι δὲ μόνος εἰς ὑγείαν ἀρκέσειν· καὶ παρεστῶσα τοῖς λόγοις ἀλώπηξ, τὸ ψεῦδος ἀπὸ τοῦ χρώματος ἤλεγχε· "τί δῆτα – λέγουσα – νόσου μὲν τοὺς ἄλλους ἐλευθεροῖς, νόσου δὲ φέρεις ἐπὶ τῆς ὄψεως σύμβολον;" ἀλαζονεία τὸν ἔλεγχον οἴκοθεν εὗρατο.	ὁ τελμάτων ἔνοικος ὁ σκιῇ χαίρων, ὁ ζῶν ὀρυκτοῖς βάτραχος παρ᾽ εὐρίποις, εἰς γῆν παρελθὼν ἔλεγε πᾶσι τοῖς ζῴοις· "ἰατρός εἰμι φαρμάκων ἐπιστήμων, οἵων ταχ᾽ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδ᾽ ὁ Παιήων, ὃς Ὄλυμπον οἰκεῖ καὶ θεοὺς ἰατρεύει." "καὶ πῶς" ἀλώπηξ εἶπεν "ἄλλον ἰήσῃ, ὃς σαυτὸν οὕτω χλωρὸν ὄντα μὴ σῴζεις;"
A story about a frog, urging us not to trust someone's promises before they are fulfilled. There was a frog who claimed to be trained in the physician's art, acquainted with all the medicinal plants of the earth, the only creature who could cure the animals' ailments. The fox listened to the frog's announcement and exposed his lies by the color of his skin. "How can it be," said the fox, "that you are able to cure others of their illnesses, but the signs of sickness can still be seen in your own face?" Boastful claims end up exposing themselves.[53]	That denizen of the swamps who likes the shade, the frog, who lives beside the ditches, once came forth on dry land and bragged to all the creatures: "I'm a physician, skilled in the use of drugs such as no one, doubtless, knows, not even Paean who lives on Olympus, physician to the gods." "And how," said a fox, "can you cure someone else, when you can't save yourself from being so deathly pale?"[54]

A number of differences emerge from the comparison: the fable's "message" in Babrius is delivered exclusively by one of the characters,[55] while Aphthonius frames his version with both a pro- and epimythium; the poetic, kenning-like naming of the frog in Babrius (ὁ τελμάτων ἔνοικος ὁ σκιῇ χαίρων) is replaced by the straightforward and prosaic noun βατράχου in Aphthonius; repetition and parallelism is avoided in Babrius, but occurs in Aphthonius (πάντα μὲν … πᾶσι δὲ, νόσου μὲν … νόσου δὲ); the words ἰατρός and φάρμακον appear in both Babrius and Aphthonius, but only Aphthonius uses (indeed, repeats) words for health (ὑγείαν) and sickness (νόσου … νόσου), making the concerns of the story explicit; Babrius describes the frog's condition indirectly (οὕτω χλωρόν), while Aphthonius is again more direct (νόσου δὲ φέρεις ἐπὶ τῆς ὄψεως σύμβολον).

[53] Translation from Gibbs, *Aesop's Fables*, 148.

[54] Translation from Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus*, 157.

[55] Nøjgaard, *Fable*, labelled this the "réplique finale"; cf. Rodríguez Adrados, *Graeco-Latin Fable*, 1:443.

Here and throughout the collection, Aphthonius follows the lead of the progymnasmata in providing models of *aphelic* Greek prose, avoiding implausibility with respect to nature and animal behavior, and attaching simple messages to each narrative, even when the ethical import or gnomic elements are neither particularly edifying nor entirely clear. The purity of expression and prosaic simplicity of Aphthonian fable provide useful models for students early in the process of mastering the simple style. In using natural, conversational language to create fictions that are internally plausible, with messages attached that make simple gestures toward a real-life application, Aphthonius's fabulous style demonstrates the basic lessons learned from the exercises in the progymnasmata.

E. Conclusion

Aesopic fables were introduced early in the progymnasmatic curriculum because they allowed teachers and students to focus on fundamental aspects of Greek prose composition, such as narration (ἀπαγγέλλειν), declension (κλίνειν),[56] expansion (ἐπεκτείνειν), contraction (συστέλλειν), confirmation (ἀνασκευάζειν), and refutation (κατασκευάζειν), all of which would be applicable to writing in many different forms and genres. As brief, self-contained, and complete units of meaning, fables minimize difficulties of comprehension and memorization, and they provide relatively easy material for beginner-level students developing these essential, transferable skills.

In addition, the fable exercises that appear to have been more specifically geared to fable-composition, such as those involving the weaving of fable into a larger narrative (συμπλέκειν αὐτὸν διηγήματι) and, above all, the addition of the fable's characteristic explanatory message (ἐπιλέγειν αὐτῷ τινὰ λόγον), were also undoubtedly useful in other arenas. But, as we have seen, there are also a number of guidelines and principles related to style articulated in the progymnasmata that suggest another set of benefits gained from an encounter with fables early in the curriculum, beyond those of the individual exercises. For the writers of the progymnasmata, the fable was the very model of the simple style. The lessons learned from making animals speak must have been formative in conceptions of simplicity and purity of expression for generations of Greek writers. Furthermore, the progymnasmata link style to plausibility and persuasiveness; beginning with Theon, the authors of the progymnasmata texts define fable as a fictional representation of the truth (μῦθός ἐστι λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν), thereby challenging students to craft plausible fictions by drawing on both their knowledge of the observable, natural world and their fa-

[56] Although basic grammar and morphology would have been learned before students began the progymnasmata, fable exercises in "declension" further developed these skills, with an emphasis on variation in the use of direct and indirect discourse; see, e. g., Theon, *Prog.* 74.

miliarity with the conventions of fictional narratives. Although they were placed quite early in the sequence, the fable exercises thus cultivated a complex and nuanced conception of plausibility, one that applied to both truth and fiction, which would be indispensable for future orators.

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