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# Diachrony and the Case of Aesop

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## Introduction

§1. In this project, which is a radical rewriting of a keynote address I gave at a conference held at Duke University in 2010 on the topic of diachrony, I speak about a methodology and about the application of this methodology in analyzing a tradition. The methodology is diachronic analysis, and I apply this methodology here to an ancient tradition that combines the fables of Aesop with a set of stories that tell about his life and times, conventionally known as the *Life of Aesop* narratives or even *Lives of Aesop*.

§2. When I speak about the fables and the *Lives*, I will talk like a classicist. When I apply a diachronic perspective in analyzing the fables and the *Lives*, I will talk more like a linguist. Talking linguistics comes naturally to me, since I was trained as a linguist during the earliest episodes of my academic life. Such talk, however, may at times upset classicists, and that is something I want to avoid. I have no intention of causing them to take offense, especially since I consider myself to be one of them by now, having slowly evolved into a classicist during later episodes of my academic life. To make sure, then, that classicists will not take offense, I will signal those moments in my upcoming argumentation where I am talking linguistics, with the aim of reconciling such talk with the way classicists are used to talking.

§3. I will begin by outlining the work I have already done on the fables of Aesop and on his *Lives*. Then I will turn to the methodology of diachronic analysis as applied to both the fables

and the *Lives*. And then I will engage in a set of debates about the applications of this methodology.

## **Relevant findings about the fables of Aesop and about his *Lives***

§4. I first studied the fables and *Lives* of Aesop in a book about heroes, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Nagy 1979; revised edition 1999). This book concerned heroes not only as celebrated in poetry but also as worshipped in hero cult, in which context the generic hero can be described specifically as a cult hero. My work on hero cults and cult heroes was based on an essential historical fact about ancient Hellenic religion: both gods and heroes were worshipped in a wide variety of cults (Brelich 1958).

§5. Of the twenty chapters in the book, Chapters One through Ten as well as Chapter Twenty concentrated on high-minded views of the hero as conveyed in poetry and song, while Chapters Eleven through Nineteen concentrated on correspondingly low-minded views, exploring the opposition of high- and low-mindedness in terms of positive and negative speaking, to which I referred shorthand as praise and blame. The primary hero in the first half of the book, that is, in Chapters One Through Ten as well as Chapter Twenty, was the high-minded Achilles, while the primary hero in the second half, that is, in Chapters Eleven through Nineteen but not in Chapter Twenty, was the ostensibly low-minded Aesop. I say “ostensibly” because, as we will see later, the figure of Aesop can be high-minded as well.

§6. Here is the way I situated Aesop within the framework of the whole book, as I point out in my Preface to the 1999 revised edition of *The Best of the Achaeans* (Nagy 1979|1999 §2 = p. viii):

This book is about how to read Homer—both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*—and various related forms of Greek poetry in the archaic period, most notably the Hesiodic *Theogony* and *Works and Days* and the *Homeric Hymns*, especially the

*Apollo, the Demeter, and the Aphrodite.* Other related forms include the praise poetry of Pindar and the blame poetry of Archilochus. The readings are infused with references to non-canonical traditions as well, especially women's laments and the earliest attested versions of Aesop's fables.

§7. As this Preface to the book makes clear, Aesop figured prominently in *The Best of the Achaeans*. And this prominence was due at least in part to the fact that this hero is traditionally linked with a form of speaking known as the fable. As I explained in the book, relying primarily on narratives about the life and times of Aesop, the fable could be used for both praise and blame, and I highlighted a Greek word that was applicable to such a form of speaking fables, *ainos*. This word, as I emphasized, applied not only to the fables of Aesop, attested in a prose form that can be traced back to the fifth and the fourth century BCE, but also to the fables of Archilochus as attested in poetry conventionally assigned to the seventh century BCE. And this same word *ainos* applied also to the poetry of Pindar, stemming from the first half of the fifth century BCE. Further, since the poetry of Pindar was praise poetry whereas the poetry of Archilochus could be described as blame poetry, I argued that the traditional linking of the word *ainos* with these two antithetical forms of praise and blame is comparable to the use of the fable, as a form of *ainos* in its own right, either to praise or to blame. Both uses of the fable are evident, as I showed, in the narratives of the *Lives of Aesop*, the earliest continuous form of which, Vita G, can be dated only as far back as the first or second century CE.

§8. In another book, *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Nagy 1990a, especially ch. 11), I followed up on *The Best of the Achaeans* (Nagy 1979|1999) by pursuing my study of the *ainos* in the sense of a fable as deployed in the narratives of the *Lives of Aesop*, showing that this sense is relevant to the strategies of narratives that we find in the prose of Herodotus, dating from the fifth century BCE.

§9. In this brief review of the two books, I have been drawing attention to the wide range of different dates assigned to the various different forms of the *ainos* and even to the tradition of Aesop in general. The span of time that is covered here ranges from the archaic through the classical period and beyond. (By archaic here I mean a period in Greek civilization that extends roughly from the eighth century BCE to the middle of the fifth, and by classical I mean a succeeding period that extends from the middle of the fifth century BCE through the fourth.) In studying all this chronologically diverse evidence through time, I applied diachronic as well as historical perspectives in both books.

### **Explaining diachronic, historical, and synchronic perspectives**

§10. I will now explain what I mean by diachronic perspectives and why I am making a distinction here between diachronic and historical perspectives. And, in the course of developing this explanation, I will argue for the necessity of making two kinds of correlation:

- 1) diachronic perspectives need to be correlated with synchronic perspectives
- 2) these two perspectives need to be correlated in turn with historical perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

§11. In using the terms synchronic and diachronic, I rely on working definitions recorded in a book stemming from the lectures of the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1916). Here I paraphrase these definitions from the original French wording:

A synchronic perspective has to do with the static aspect of linguistic analysis, whereas a diachronic perspective deals with various kinds of evolution. So synchrony and diachrony refer respectively to an existing state of a language and to phases of evolution in the language.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Saussure 1916:117: “Est synchronique tout ce qui rapporte à l’aspect statique de notre science, diachronique tout ce qui a trait aux évolutions. De même synchronie et diachronie désigneront respectivement un état de langue et

I note especially the equation here of the words diachronic and evolutionary.

§12. And now I need to add that a diachronic or evolutionary perspective is not the same thing as a historical perspective.

§13. The remark that I just added here about diachrony and history is based on a formulation that I had put together in *Pindar's Homer* (Nagy 1990a 1§9 = p. 21n18):

It is a mistake to equate diachronic with historical, as is often done. Diachrony refers to the potential for evolution in a structure, whereas history is not restricted to phenomena that are structurally predictable.

§14. This formulation was applied in the specific context of explaining a phenomenon I described as diachronic skewing.<sup>2</sup> But then I reapplied the same formulation in a general context when I produced the Preface for the 1999 revised edition of *The Best of the Achaeans* (Nagy 1979|1999 §25 = p. xv). There I was explaining my overall use of a combination of diachronic, synchronic, and historical perspectives in studying cultural as well as linguistic evidence.

§15. In the same general context, with reference to synchronic as well as diachronic approaches to the study of cultural evidence (Nagy 1979|1999 §25 = p. xv with n3), I quoted a relevant formulation by the anthropologist Pierre-Yves Jacopin (1988:35-36): “Both synchrony and diachrony are abstractions extrapolated from a model of reality.”

§16. A key word in the formulation by Jacopin is model. Both synchronic and diachronic perspectives are a matter of model building. We can build synchronic models to describe and

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une phase d'évolution.” For background on the original wording and on my paraphrase, including remarks on the special relevance of these terms to Homeric studies, see Nagy 2003:1.

<sup>2</sup> Here is an example of diachronic skewing: in Homeric poetry, the narrator refers to his medium as an act of singing (as at *Iliad* I 1) even though the historical evidence indicates that this medium had already become an act of reciting (Nagy 1990a 1§9 = p. 21; further analysis in ch. 2 of Nagy 2003)

explain the workings of a structure as we see it attested in a given historical context. We can likewise build diachronic models to describe and explain how that given structure may have evolved from one of its phases into other phases. What we have built, however, is a set of models to be tested on historical realities. The models are not the same thing as the realities themselves. And the realities of history as a process are not dependent on such models. History may either confirm or upset any or all aspects of our models, since the contingencies of history do not need to follow the rules of existing structures.

## **Building synchronic and diachronic models**

§17. The aim, then, in applying synchronic and diachronic perspectives is to build synchronic and diachronic models for the description of structures and for visualizing the evolution of these structures. And the building of such models, as I showed in both *The Best of the Achaeans* (1979|1999) and *Pindar's Homer* (1990a), can be applied not only to linguistic structures but also to the cultural structures of traditions in general. A case in point is the object of my study here, the tradition we see at work in the fables and *Lives* of Aesop.

§18. In the project I am now presenting here, I have in mind primarily two models I have built on the basis of this Aesopic tradition: (1) the function of Aesop as a cult hero in the *Lives* and (2) his function as a “blame poet” by virtue of his use of the fable as *ainos*.

§19. And I have in mind, secondarily, a strategy for refining these two models. The first part of this strategy will be to delimit even further my use of the terms synchronic and diachronic. And the second part will be to delimit the use of the term historical.

## **Delimiting the terms synchronic and diachronic in the analysis of structures**

§20. I offer here two different ways of further delimiting these terms synchronic and diachronic, thus bringing them into sharper focus:

(1) The terms synchronic and diachronic need to be applied consistently from the objective standpoint of an outsider who is thinking about a given structure, not from the subjective standpoint of an insider who is thinking within that structure (Nagy 1990a 0§11 = p. 4). Such an objective standpoint enhances the synchronic as well as the diachronic perspectives that are needed for describing structures and for explaining how these structures evolve. This way of looking at a given structure helps avoid the pitfall of assuming that one's own synchronic or diachronic perspectives are identical with the perspectives of those who were part of the culture in which that structure was historically anchored. Such an assumption runs the risk of misreading the historical context in which the structure is attested.

(2) Whereas synchronic and diachronic perspectives are needed to describe a given structure as it exists at a given time and as it evolves through time, historical perspectives are needed to describe what actually happened to that structure. As I noted already, what happened in history can be unpredictable, since we cannot predict the contingencies of history. So, when it comes to reconstructing what happened to a given structure, it is not enough to use a purely diachronic perspective. As I have also already noted, a purely diachronic perspective is restricted to phenomena that are structurally predictable.

### **Delimiting the term historical in the analysis of structures**

§21. Here I come to the third of the three delimitations I am now proposing: in analyzing a given structure, synchronic and diachronic perspectives need to be applied before historical judgments or prejudgments can be made.

§22. The delimitation I have just outlined is especially important in situations where we find little or no historical evidence for earlier attestations of a given structure. I am addressing here one of the biggest problems that historians face when they try to view structures over time. If they apply only a historical perspective as they reconstruct a given structure backward



in time, back to the era when that structure is actually documented, they find themselves limited to the realities they find in that era. And the only way they can reconstruct further back in time is to find further documentation stemming from earlier eras.

## **Reconstructing structures forward as well as backward in time**

§23. By contrast, a diachronic perspective provides also for the reconstruction of realities that that are historically undocumented. And reconstruction from a diachronic perspective is not restricted to the hindsight of history. A diachronic perspective not only makes it possible to reconstruct backward in time by tracing the evolution of a given structure back to undocumented phases of that structure. It also makes it possible to reconstruct forward in time.

§24. In previous work (Nagy 1972|2008a:19), I applied the concept of reconstructing backward and forward in time with reference to the term Common Greek, which refers to a diachronic model developed by linguists. I offer here a summary:

I am speaking here about the historical evidence for a chronological demarcation between pre-documented and documented eras of the Greek language. Experts used to place this demarcation somewhere around the eighth century BCE, which is the era when alphabetic writing was first being introduced into the Greek-speaking world. The Greek language as it existed in what was understood to be the pre-documented era on the farther side of this demarcation could only be reconstructed diachronically, all the way back to a hypothetical proto-language known to linguists as Common Greek. This proto-language, Common Greek, is not a historical reality but a construct, a diachronic model. But then a major shift in demarcation took place, signaled by the

decipherment of Linear B, which was a system of syllabic writing that dates back to the second millennium BCE. Once the decipherment revealed that the language written in this script was an earlier form of Greek, the documented era of the Greek language needed to be pushed back into the second millennium BCE, and this newly demarcated older era could now reveal new historical facts about the language. These new facts in some ways confirmed but in other ways contradicted the reconstructions achieved by way of diachronic perspectives that had already been developed before the decipherment of Linear B (Nagy 1972|2008a:33). Those previous reconstructions, which were dominated by the hindsight of later history, needed to be modified in the light of earlier history. So now a new diachronic model of Common Greek needed to be built by way of reconstructing backward in time, even farther back than before. And, now that an earlier historical phase of Greek had been discovered, this discovery required re-adjustments in how we reconstruct forward in time from that earlier phase to later phases.

§25. From this example, we can see that the diachronic process of reconstructing forward as well as backward in time depends on the data provided by historical evidence. But the actual reconstruction of structures depends primarily on diachronic and synchronic perspectives and only secondarily on a historical perspective. I say this because the historical perspective works only by hindsight, whereas the diachronic perspective allows for foresight as well, so to speak, by way of the procedure I describe here as reconstructing forward in time.

§26. For an immediate illustration, I chose as my example a set of findings achieved by applying another diachronic model. This model is another construct built by linguists, and this one is even bigger than the model of Common Greek. The diachronic model I have in mind

here is what German-speaking linguists call Indo-Germanic and other linguists call Indo-European or Common Indo-European or proto-Indo-European. I focus here on an example of what kinds of things we can find when we reconstruct forward as well as backward in Indo-European linguistics:

The example centers on the etymology of the Greek word *pontos* (πόντος) ‘sea’, which is cognate with the following words in other Indo-European languages: Latin *pōns* ‘bridge’, Armenian *hun* ‘ford’, Old Church Slavonic *ꙗꙋtŭ* and Old Prussian *pintis* ‘path’, Sanskrit *pánthāḥ*, and Avestan *pan̥tā* ‘path’. When we reconstruct all these words backward in time, back to an undocumented common proto-language known to linguists as Common Indo-European or proto-Indo-European, such reconstruction backward in time does not help us fully comprehend the semantic relationship of the meaning ‘sea’ in Greek with such divergent meanings as ‘bridge’, ‘ford’, and ‘path’ in the other Indo-European languages. It is only after we reconstruct forward in time, taking into account all the comparative evidence we derive from the cognate languages that we factored into our reconstruction backward in time, that we can comprehend more fully the convergent meaning that unifies diachronically the divergent meanings of these words. This convergent meaning has to do with a crossing, over a dangerous body of water or over some other dangerous zone, that sacralizes the one who succeeds in achieving such a dangerous crossing (Nagy 1972|2008a:48-49, following Benveniste 1954|1966:296-298). Only then, only after we have reconstructed forward in time, can we understand the contexts of the word *pontos* (πόντος) ‘sea’ in the earliest attested phases of Greek poetry, where we see expressions of dread about dangerous sea crossings and

references to the sacralizing effect of such crossings. Further evidence comes from the derivative form *Hellēs-pontos* (Ἑλλήσ-ποντος), which is the name of a famous strait that we know as the Hellespont and which means etymologically ‘the crossing of Helle’, referring to a myth about a dangerous crossing of this strait by a girl named Helle and by her brother, who are being carried across the dangerous waters by a ram with a golden fleece: the girl falls off the ram and drowns in the Hellespont while her brother succeeds in crossing the strait and is thus sacralized (Nagy 1979|1999:339-340).

§27. This example shows that diachronic analysis, by way of reconstructing forward in time, can enhance not only historical analysis but also synchronic analysis, since a purely synchronic analysis of the attested contexts of *pontos* (πόντος) would yield only the meaning ‘sea’. The underlying sense of a dangerous crossing that sacralizes would be impossible to recover without applying a diachronic perspective.

## **Reconstructing through time the structures of the fables and the Lives of Aesop**

§28. The three perspectives that I have examined, synchronic, diachronic, and historical, are all at work in my reconstruction, through time, of the tradition of Aesop’s fables and Lives in the two books *The Best of the Achaeans* (1979|1999) and *Pindar’s Homer* (1990a). In developing synchronic and diachronic perspectives in analyzing such a tradition, I built models that were meant to be tested by way of applying historical perspectives. In reconstructing backward in time, I considered not only the classical phases of this tradition, dating back to the fifth and the fourth century BCE, but also their preclassical phases in the sixth century BCE and before. And, in reconstructing forward in time, my point of departure was not the classical but the

preclassical phases of the Aesop tradition, as I worked my way forward from there into the classical and the postclassical phases.

§29. Just now, I referred to the classical phases of the Aesopic tradition, dating these phases to the fifth and the fourth century BCE. I was speaking from a historical point of view, from the hindsight of history. From a diachronic perspective, however, reconstructing backward and then forward in time, even the term classical becomes relative, in the sense that it can no longer be absolutized.

## **Another work on Aesop**

§30. Some aspects of my work on Aesop as published in the two books I have just summarized have been debated by Leslie Kurke in her book *Aesopic Conversations: Popular Traditions, Cultural Dialogue, and the Invention of Greek Prose* (2011). In what follows, I will outline the relevant parts of her argumentation, which as we will see depend partly on her understanding of diachrony.

§31. Kurke argues that the form of discourse we see at work in the fables of Aesop is a genre that became integrated into the traditions of making prose in the classical period. I have no objection to that part of her argumentation, and in fact I argued for such an integration in my own work. But she argues further that such integration explains what she describes as the “invention” of Greek prose itself (p. 47; or as the “beginnings,” p. 15). As we will see, I do have an objection to that part of her argument.

§32. In developing her arguments in *Aesopic Conversations* (2011), Kurke questions my interpretation of Aesop as a “blame poet” (for example, at p. 76) arguing that the fables ascribed to Aesop could not have had a poetic form. Further (p. 77), she questions my understanding of the status of Aesop as a cult hero.

§33. The problem that Kurke finds with what I say about Aesop as a “blame poet” is formulated in such a way that it applies also to what I have to say about Aesop as a cult hero. In both cases, she says that something is missing in my explanation. And she formulates that missing something by invoking what she describes as a diachronic perspective.

## **A transition to two friendly debates about diachronic models**

§34. Before I can show the way Kurke uses the term “diachronic” in making her formulations in *Aesopic Conversations* (2011), I need to set forth my own arguments about Aesop as a cult hero. These arguments center on a diachronic model of what I describe as ritual antagonism between Aesop and the god Apollo. Following an exposition of these arguments, I will confront in a debate the counterarguments of Kurke, with special reference to her use of the term diachronic. Following that debate, I will proceed to set forth my arguments centering on a diachronic model of Aesop as a poet and then I will confront in a second debate the relevant counterarguments of Kurke. Finally, after concluding these two friendly debates, I will offer a formulation that aims at a possible reconciliation of the opposing arguments.

## **A diachronic model of ritual antagonism for the cult hero**

§35. What I am about to formulate originated in *The Best of the Achaeans* (Nagy 1979|1999) and was then developed further in *Pindar’s Homer* (1990a). On the basis of my study of a wide variety of myths about heroes, I built a diachronic model for what I see as a pattern of ritual antagonism between god and hero. In *The Best of the Achaeans* (Nagy 1979|1999), the examples included: Achilles as antagonist of Apollo (pp. 62-64); Patroklos as antagonist of Apollo by virtue of becoming the ritual substitute of Achilles (p. 73); Neoptolemos as antagonist of Apollo by virtue of being the son of Achilles (p. 121); Hector as antagonist of Athena (pp. 142-153); Kallisto as antagonist of Artemis (p. 202); Amphiaraos as antagonist of Zeus (p. 204);

Archilochus as antagonist of Apollo (pp. 302-307); Herakles as antagonist of Hera (p. 303); and, finally, Aesop as antagonist of Apollo (p. 302).

§36. I highlight the fact that the case of Aesop, whom I mention last here, was not the basis for my study of cult heroes. Aesop was only one of many cult heroes that I studied. True, the case of Aesop goes to the core of my overall work on concepts of the hero in general. But my point for now is simply the fact that the case of Aesop looms large in my work for reasons that transcend his status as a cult hero.

§37. That said, I return to the matter at hand, which is the diachronic model I built to describe what I see as a pattern of ritual antagonism between god and hero. On the basis of historical evidence showing that heroes known for their antagonism with given divinities in myth could be worshipped together with those divinities in the context of hero cult, I formulated a model that I will now quote: “antagonism between hero and god in myth corresponds to the ritual requirements of symbiosis between hero and god in cult” (Nagy 1979|1999:121).

## **A debate about the model of ritual antagonism**

§38. The formulation that I just quoted is also quoted, twice, by Kurke (2011:29, 75). The context of the first quotation is the case of Aesop as a cult hero at Delphi, and Kurke is taking exception here to my argument that the god Apollo is the ritual antagonist of Aesop. The context of the second quotation is the case of Aesop compared with the case of Neoptolemos as the main cult hero at Delphi, and this time Kurke is taking exception to my additional argument that the god Apollo is also the ritual antagonist of Neoptolemos. My model of an antagonism between hero and god in myth, corresponding to a symbiosis of the two in rituals of hero cult, especially in the cases of Aesop and Neoptolemos as cult heroes, is disputed by Kurke (p. 77) for the following reasons:

Nagy's model of a myth-ritual complex does not allow for either diachronic or synchronic change, development, or contestation. That is to say, did everyone believe in god-hero antagonism in just the same way in every period? Or should we instead conceptualize the stories of the interaction of different figures with Apollo as available for competing appropriations at the same time or at different times?

The first sentence of this statement, to my way of thinking, manages to be unclear and unreasonable at the same time. And the lack of clarity, as I will argue, can be blamed on imprecision in Kurke's use of both words "diachronic" and "synchronic" here. The other two sentences in the statement, on the other hand, both of which are questions, are I think perfectly reasonable questions. But the answers to these questions are already there, I insist, in my two books dealing with Aesop (Nagy 1979|1999, 1990), in both of which I apply a combination of historical, synchronic, and diachronic perspectives.

§39. Unfortunately for me, Kurke has not used the revised 1999 edition of *The Best of the Achaeans*. As I have already noted, the Preface to this book makes a point of foregrounding my use of a combination of historical, synchronic, and diachronic perspectives (pp. xv-xv). Kurke has used only the 1979 edition of *Best*, in which I avoided using the words synchronic and diachronic even though I consistently applied synchronic and diachronic perspectives. On the other hand, I did in fact use both words synchronic and diachronic in the book *Pindar's Homer* (1990a), and I am disheartened that Kurke has not tracked the applications of these words there. I am even more disheartened by the fact that Kurke has not read my formulation about ritual antagonism between god and hero as a diachronic model, which is what I had intended it to be.



§40. Kurke interprets my overall formulation about god-hero antagonism in myth and symbiosis in cult as if it were a historical rather than a diachronic model, and she interrogates the model in historical terms, objecting especially to my use of the word “principle” as she proceeds to argue against the model (Kurke 2011:31). The vehemence of Kurke’s objections in this context is intense—and it is a good example of what I meant at the beginning when I said that classicists can sometimes get upset if you speak like a linguist. And there is an irony I see in all this, since I was trying to speak more like a classicist in the original 1979 version of *The Best of the Achaeans* by not explicitly describing my model as a diachronic model, which is what it was then and is now.

§41. My use of the word principle in this context is comparable to the way linguists use the word law with reference to diachronic models that are meant to be tested on synchronic descriptions. Of all these “laws,” my personal favorite is the “fourth law of analogy” as formulated by Jerzy Kuryłowicz (1945-1949 [1966] 169), which I applied in *Pindar’s Homer* (Nagy 1990a 0§13 = pp. 5-6) in the process of analyzing the semantics of secondary meanings taken on by older forms when the primary meanings of these forms have been taken over by newer forms. I will take the opportunity of applying this “law” at a later point in my argumentation.

§42. In the Preface to the 1999 version of *The Best of the Achaeans*, I reverted to the explicit use of the terms synchronic and diachronic, just as I had used them in earlier work (Nagy 1974, especially pp. 20-21). I did so in part because I felt encouraged by what was said about my use of the term diachronic in a posthumously published work of Albert Lord (1995). The context of what Lord was saying had to do “models for the creating of epic songs” (Lord p. 196), and here is what he went on to say about such models (pp. 196-197):

In the foregoing discussions the word tradition has occurred very seldom, except in my replies to criticism, when I have adduced occasionally the

compound term oral traditional. It is at this juncture, as we consider the Pacific traditions, especially the Gilbertese songs, that the element of the “tradition” begins to loom as significant. It is important to understand that [Milman] Parry’s studies of Homer when he was at Berkeley and in Paris were on the traditional character of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Years ago Nagy reminded me of the significance of the diachronic element in archaic Greek poetry: he was speaking of Hesiod particularly [Nagy 1982]. In some ways, the traditionality of the poetry is more pertinent than its orality, but both aspects must be understood. The point is to emphasize the diachronic character of the oral poeties concerned.

Parry’s first tenet in regard to the traditionality of Homeric style was, I believe, that such a complex style could not have been invented by a single person but must have been created by a number of poets over several generations. I think this is true, for the epic at least, about the medieval vernacular poeties. It is also true, I suggest, that the poetics of that style antedated writing. Finally—and this seems to me to be the most important—the values inherent in oral traditional narratives, their “mythic” patterns, are very old, although they may have undergone changes and reinterpretations as there were changes in religion or social structure.

§43. Milman Parry’s “tenet” about “traditionality,” as accepted and explained by Lord in the statement I just quoted, is clearly a model, a diachronic model. And, if I may borrow from the words of Lord, this model was subject to “changes and reinterpretations as there were changes in religion or social structure.” This diachronic model of Parry and Lord was later

developed into what I have called an evolutionary model for the making of Homeric verse (Nagy 1996a and b, summarized in Nagy 2008|2009 P§§11-14).

§44. When I developed my diachronic model of god-hero antagonism in myth and symbiosis in cult, I had meant it to be read likewise as subject to “changes and reinterpretations as there were changes in religion or social structure.” But Kurke (2011:31n91) reads it differently, saying: “Nagy’s model is preeminently structuralist, but lacks any notion of ideology or contestation within culture or religion.” In what follows, I will strenuously argue against the claim that my model fails to account for such notions.

### **Abbreviations used hereafter for citations from three books**

§45. In making citations from here on, I will refer to Kurke’s *Aesopic Conversations* simply as AC and to my *The Best of the Achaeans* and *Pindar’s Homer* as respectively BA and PH.

### **A closer look at what it means to use a “structuralist” approach**

§46. In her book on Aesop, Kurke (AC 24-25) espouses what she describes as her own “structuralist approach to text and culture,” and she uses the terms “synchronic” as well as “diachronic” in describing her methodology. I think, however, that her structuralist approach needs to be adjusted. The way she uses these two terms “synchronic” and “diachronic” is different from the way they were defined by Saussure, who was the first to use them—and whom she does not cite in her book (unless we count a passing reference at p. 39n117 to secondary sources that she uses as examples of “Saussurian” approaches involving the terms *langue* and *parole*, on which I will have more to say later). Also, Kurke does not distinguish between diachronic and historical perspectives. I will now proceed to back up what I just said by quoting some of her formulations and then commenting on them.

§46a. “A structuralist approach to texts and culture reads individual elements relationally as parts of a system.” (AC 24.) So far, so good. But then she goes on to say...

§46b. “Where weird or anomalous elements occur that cannot be accounted for within the synchronic system postulated, we need another account of motivation.” (AC 24.) This does not make sense to me. So the idea is to postulate from a synchronic perspective that there is a system at work in a text or in a culture. Fine. But then, if there is no way to account for “weird or anomalous elements” in what was postulated as a system, then I think it has to be admitted that there was no “system” there to start with, since whatever it was that had been postulated has simply not worked out when it was tested on historical evidence. And then the best alternative would be to start over again and try to build a better explanatory model. Instead of starting all over again, however, Kurke sticks to the “system” that she has already postulated and goes on to explain the “weird or anomalous elements” this way...

§46c. “Thus these elements may be parts of a different synchronic system, or they may justify diachronic explanation, as remnants or residue of an older system that has otherwise been erased or overwritten within a cultural formation or within a text.” (AC 24-25.) Here I need to take the two parts of her formulation separately...

§46c1. I begin with the first part: “these elements may be parts of a different synchronic system.” In postulating a system from a synchronic point of view, how do we explain something that strikes us as “unsystematic” about this system of ours? If we try to explain such an unsystematic something by claiming that it must be part of a different system, then we have not succeeded in building a synchronic model of a system in the first place. And to say that there must be a “different synchronic system” is simply to reify another system that is not there, and, meanwhile, we do not even have a system to start with.

§46c2. Now I come to the second part: according to Kurke (AC 24-25), if we cannot explain these “weird and anomalous elements” as “parts of a different synchronic system,” then we can still resort to an alternative approach. She goes on to say about these anomalous elements: “or they may justify diachronic explanation.” But what is the justification here? If our model for a system simply does not work from a synchronic point of view, how can we go on to say that the “weird or anomalous elements” that have knocked down our model “may justify diachronic explanation”? Here is where I would have expected a historical perspective to come into play. But instead, Kurke is now speaking of a “diachronic explanation.” The problem is, an explanation from a diachronic point of view needs to be done in terms of a system as already ascertained from a synchronic point of view. And, as I noted, Kurke has no such system to start with.

§46d. As we have seen, Kurke describes the “diachronic explanation” in terms of “remnants or residue of an older system that has otherwise been erased or overwritten within a cultural formation or within a text” (AC 25). So now she is dealing not with “parts of a different synchronic system” (p. 24) but with “an older system.” Presumably, that is why she now invokes a “diachronic” explanation. What I said before applies here as well: this is simply to reify another system that is not there, but Kurke never even had a system to begin with.

§47. So what is this system that is not a system? Throughout her explanation of her structuralist approach to a given system, Kurke (AC 25) is referring to the *Life of Aesop*. In this context, she chooses to describe this *Life* as one text, even though it is attested in significantly different versions, especially as represented in Vita G and in Vita W (for recent work on the distinctness of the narrative in the manuscript that represents Vita G, see especially Holzberg 1992b and Ferrari 1997, whose arguments are conscientiously reviewed in AC 33-39, 42). This one “text” of the *Life of Aesop*, according to Kurke, “contains within its boundaries a complex

dialectic of oral traditions and multiple textual fixations.” And the “narrative incoherences” of this one text, revealing “different interests and emphases,” make it possible for us “to access different diachronic layers of cultural and ideological contestation.”

§48. I find Kurke’s term “different diachronic layers” here (AC 25) most problematic—and revealing. If she had said “different historical layers,” the description would be perfectly understandable, since a historical perspective would go a long way toward explaining the “weird and anomalous elements” that contradict her description of this “text” as a “system.” From a historical point of view, what is needed here is an approach that can best be described as source criticism or *Quellenforschung*.

§49. But Kurke has a big problem with this term *Quellenforschung*: for her, it is a straw man that stands for the approaches of her predecessors working on the *Life of Aesop* traditions. She rejects the *Quellenforschung* of these predecessors, noting that they “often assumed that the *Life* was an incoherent patchwork with no synchronic unity and proceeded to analyze it piecemeal” (AC 27). After all, as she adds, “most versions of *Quellenforschung* are prestructuralist.”

§50. Needing *Quellenforschung* as a straw man, Kurke makes it seem as if her predecessors saw no structure in the *Life of Aesop* traditions—no unity, not even any tendency toward unity. I disagree with her. And I disagree even more when she starts naming names. She singles out as her primary straw man the argumentation of Anton Wiechers (1961) about the *Life of Aesop* traditions, adding that this argumentation is “closely followed” by me. Speaking for myself, I am convinced that Wiechers did in fact see “structure” in the *Life of Aesop* traditions. And if he did not see “synchronic unity,” as Kurke calls it, it is because there is no unity to be seen here from a synchronic point of view: rather, the unity has to be reconstructed by applying historical as well as synchronic and diachronic perspectives. That is what I was trying to do in

my own work on Aesop, following the historical perspectives that Wiechers had already applied. Without these historical perspectives, I am sure that my own work on Aesop would have led to a dead end. And without these same historical perspectives, I must add, there is a possibility that Kurke's own work on Aesop, much as I admire it, would never have gathered any steam. In any case, I argue that we need to combine the historical perspectives of Wiechers with synchronic and diachronic perspectives. Such a combination, to my mind, is an improved and refined form of *Quellenforschung*.

§51. Kurke is at her best when she actually practices such *Quellenforschung* herself, even if she rejects the term—and even if her methodology is obscured by her imprecise use of the terms diachronic and synchronic. I quote here a formulation of hers that comes closest to the ideal of *Quellenforschung* that I have just argued for. In the context of this formulation, she is disputing the “historicizing” approaches of those who concentrate on the relevance of the *Life of Aesop* as a “Roman imperial text” (AC 25, with relevant citations):

I would like to try a different kind of historicizing approach, reading the *Life* (or at least certain strands in the *Life*) in a way that is simultaneously diachronic and focused on ideology. I start from the assumption that stories about Aesop circulated for centuries, with different elements doing complex ideological work at different points. Thus, in what resembles a three-dimensional chess game, I want to try to take different synchronic slices or snapshots, and, at each point, put the elements in dynamic relation to their cultural and historical context.

§52. In this case, I can agree with Kurke's use of the terms synchronic and diachronic, since she applies them here from the standpoint of an empirical observer who is standing outside the structure that she is trying to analyze from a historical point of view. And, as far as I am

concerned, the methodology she describes here can apply to the methods I used in my own work on Aesop.

§53. But I must disagree most strenuously with Kurke's own description of my methods, which she links with her negative views about the *Quellenforschung* of Wiechers (1961). Faulting Wiechers for his attempt to trace the lore about Aesop at Delphi from the time of the First Sacred War in the archaic period all the way into the classical period, Kurke (AC 31) has this to say about his findings and about the models that I and others have built with reference to these findings:

[R]eligious models dependent on Wiechers [1961] presuppose religion—and culture—as entirely static, monolithic, unified systems without any possibility for historical change or human agency. In these models, a reified “religion” or “tradition” often takes over the “author function,” thereby suppressing any serious consideration of human motivation or contestation. So, for example, Gregory Nagy, discussing the death of Neoptolemos at Delphi (to which he then assimilates the death of Aesop at Delphi), asserts: “For we see here a striking illustration of a fundamental principle in Hellenic religion: antagonism between hero and god in myth corresponds to the ritual requirements of symbiosis between hero and god in cult.” (Here she refers to BA 121)

§54. I have three objections to make here:

§54a. First, Kurke here ascribes to me the idea that “tradition often takes over the author function.” Since she does not elaborate on this point of hers any further in her book, I content myself with citing a recent study (Nagy 2012) where I analyze tensions between “tradition” and the authority of the “author” by way of applying the terms *langue* and *parole* as originally developed by Saussure (1916) and as later refined by Roman Jakobson ([1990]:92-23). Following



the structuralist approach of Jakobson, I use the term *langue* with reference to language as a system and the term *parole* with reference to language as it comes to life once it is spoken by historical persons speaking in historical situations. And I must add that I disagree with Kurke's use of these terms (AC 39).

§54b. Second, she claims that I “assimilate” the myth about the death of the hero Neoptolemos at Delphi to the myth about the death of Aesop at that same place. I resist this claim. In my study of these two myths, I was comparing them to each other as structures. That is to say, I applied a comparative structuralist methodology. To compare structures is not to “assimilate” them to each other. I will come back to this observation at a later point in my argumentation, where I outline three different applications of comparative structuralist methodology in studying related structures.

§54c. Third, she claims that my model of god-hero antagonism “reifies” tradition. Here again I resist this claim. As I argued earlier, my model simply views tradition diachronically as well as historically. And I need to make the same point about “religion”: my model does not “reify” it either. Rather, once again, it views religion diachronically as well as historically. And, finally, when Kurke claims that my model was built “without any possibility for historical change or human agency,” what she has done once again is to treat my diachronic model as if it were a historical one.

§55. After making the general statement that I just quoted, where she interprets my overall formulation about god-hero antagonism in myth and symbiosis in cult as if it were a historical model, which it is not, Kurke proceeds to interrogate my model in the form of four rhetorical questions. In what follows, I quote each one of her questions (AC 31) and offer answers:

§55a:

Q. “But what is the status of this ‘fundamental principle?’”

A. It is a diachronic model, meant to be tested on synchronic analysis of the relevant historical evidence.

§55b:

Q. “What are these ‘ritual requirements’?”

A. A basic “requirement,” in terms of my diachronic model, is that the cult hero’s corpse be contained within a sacred space or *temenos* that is sacred to the god.

§55b1. The primary example involves Neoptolemos, son of Achilles: the final resting place for the corpse of this hero was believed to be the sacred precinct of Apollo at Delphi (Pindar *Nemean* 7.44-47; Pausanias 10.24.6). In my work on this subject, I pointed to two other historical examples of coexistence between a hero and the god Apollo in cult: one example was the case of Aesop as cult hero in Samos and the other was the case of Archilochus as cult hero in Paros (BA 285-295 §8n1). I must add that the relationship of both these heroes to Apollo involves also the Muses (further evidence and analysis in Nagy 2008b, which Kurke does not cite). I must also add that the cases of both these heroes are quite different from the case of Neoptolemos and from each other—except for the fact that they have the one shared feature, the one “basic requirement,” of god-hero coexistence within the framework of cult.

§55b2. Objecting to my model of such god-hero coexistence or “symbiosis,” Kurke (AC 77n63), says that my analysis of the myth of Neoptolemos as cult hero of Delphi has been superseded by the analysis of Kowalzig (2007:197-201). I have learned much from that analysis, which links the myth of Neoptolemos with narratives about the First Sacred War, but I must point out that Kowalzig offers no explanation for the coexistence of the hero Neoptolemos with Apollo in the god’s sacred precinct, even though she does acknowledge the testimony of Pindar and others that the hero was believed to be buried there (p. 199): “despite everything he was buried at Delphi, within Apollo’s *temenos*.” She adds at this point in her argumentation:

“Pindar’s formulation leaves little doubt that his grave was there in the early fifth century” (see also her p. 195). I am grateful to Kowalzig for citing at an earlier point in her argumentation (p. 192) my own work analyzing (1) the ritual of the sacrificial slaughter of sheep at Delphi and (2) the myth about the slaughter of Neoptolemos by the sacrificers of sheep or by Apollo himself at Delphi (p. 192 with reference to BA 118-141, especially pp. 123-127). In my work, I connected this same ritual of the sacrificial slaughter of sheep at Delphi with a myth about the death of Aesop at Delphi, following the historical analysis of this myth by Wiechers (1961) and others. Unfortunately, Kowalzig does not cite Wiechers and mentions Aesop nowhere in her book, though she does cite an earlier work of Kurke on Aesop in Delphi (2003).

§55c:

Q. “Does the principle apply to all gods and heroes, or only to certain gods (e.g. Hera, Apollo) at certain times and places in relation to certain heroes (e.g., Herakles, Achilles, Neoptolemos)?”

A. I start with the general part of the question and then proceed to the specific part.

§55c1. Yes, the “principle” does apply to all gods and heroes. At least, it applies in terms of the ideology we see at work in a passage that I will now highlight in the Hesiodic *Works and Days* (134-139, 142). What we see in this passage is in effect an ancient poetic version of what I have been describing as a diachronic model of god-hero antagonism in myth and symbiosis in cult. I say this because, as I have argued (BA 151-154), the same passage in the *Works and Days* narrates how the Silver Generation of mortals died violently because they failed to give *timai* ‘honors’ to the gods (verse 138), even though ‘we’ mortals in the present give *timē* ‘honor’ to this generation of mortals now that they are dead (verse 142); as I have also argued, the word *timē* / *timai* here refers to ‘honor(s)’ in the sense of worshipping, by way of sacrifice, not only

gods but also cult heroes, and this ancient visualization of cult heroes in their negative dimension as the Silver Generation is counterbalanced by the Golden Generation, who are envisaged as the cult heroes in their positive dimension (verses 122-126, with commentary in BA 153).

§55c2. As for Kurke's specific question here, whether I have found other examples of god-hero antagonism in addition to the examples I collected in *The Best of the Achaeans*, I can report positive results. I cite as one example a complex pattern that I found embedded in the overall plot of the Homeric *Odyssey*, featuring two levels of antagonism: (1) between Odysseus as a seafaring hero and Poseidon as god of the sea and (2) between Odysseus as a seafaring pilot and Athena as the goddess of pilots (PH 8§25 = p. 232 with n82). To be correlated with this dual pattern of antagonism in myth is a dual pattern of symbiosis in cult, as attested in an aetiological myth linked with a sacred space located on a mountain peak in Arcadia by the name of Boreion: Pausanias (8.44.4) reports that this sacred space was built by Odysseus when he returned from Troy, dedicating it to Poseidon as god of the sea and to Athena as *Sōteira* or 'Savior'. Since Arcadia is proverbially mountainous and landlocked, this Arcadian myth can be connected with myths about the travels of Odysseus to places that were located as far away from the sea as possible. These myths are reflected in the *Odyssey* (xi 121-137, xxiii 265-284), within the context of a riddling prophecy by Teiresias about the death of Odysseus (Nagy 1990b:214).<sup>3</sup>

§55c3. In the case of god-hero antagonism, I built my diachronic model not only on the basis of ancient Greek myths and their relationships to historically attested cults of gods and heroes. I built it also on the basis of comparative evidence found in Indic myths, which belong to the same Indo-European linguistic family as do the Greek myths that I studied. Premier

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<sup>3</sup> I note here (Nagy 1990b:214) a typographical error: Pausanias "9.44.4" should be 8.44.4.

examples were the myths of the heroes Śisupāla and Jarāsandha in the epic *Mahābhārata* (Nagy 2006 §115). And, besides studying cognate structures like Indic, I also compared parallel structures in non-Indo-European traditions, especially with reference to the work of Ronald Hendel (1987a:104) on the relationship of Jacob with Yahweh himself, who is Jacob’s adversary as well as benefactor, and, in general, on what Hendel has to say about “the dark side of the god-hero relationship” (p. 108).

§55d:

Q. “More importantly, whose principle is it; whose interests does it serve; and why does such a model develop and subsist (if it does)? That is to say, what social work is this religious structure performing?”

A. The “principle” here does not belong to those who are inside the system that is being analyzed. It is simply a diachronic model formulated by an outsider to the system, in this case, by me, and this model is meant to be continually tested by way of synchronically analyzing the available historical realities. The model does not belong to me, since it is meant to be used by anyone who wants to test it on their own synchronic analysis of the realities. If the model works when you test it, then the model is a successful one—at least, it is successful to that extent. And if the model does not work, it will need to be adjusted. Such a model is like the grammar that a grammarian writes for a given language. The grammar can be synchronic or diachronic or both. But the real grammar of the language exists in the language itself, and this grammar exists even if there is no grammarian to write a grammar for it.

§56. The answer I just gave to this fourth and last question that Kurke is asking can be contrasted with the answer she proceeds to give to her own question (AC31):

By establishing this ‘principle’ as axiomatic, Nagy makes of “Hellenic religion” a closed system that is somehow not motivated by or answerable to the domain of

social work and social effects. More particularly: Nagy's assimilation of conflict to "symbiosis" in a two-tiered system preempts in advance any attempt to correlate conflict or tension within a narrative tradition with forms of real conflict or contestation within a society at large.

§57. What I see here once again is a need for distinguishing diachronic and historical perspectives. Diachronic models are axiomatic, yes. But they are not meant to be a "closed system." It is just the opposite. Such models are built to be tested on the open-ended contingencies of historical realities.

## **Testing a diachronic model**

§58. I propose to put to the test my diachronic model of god-hero antagonism in myth and symbiosis in cult by re-examining some of the historical evidence for the hero cult of Neoptolemos and by comparing it with corresponding historical evidence for the hero cult of Aesop. In the course of this testing, I will show that my model is not "an assimilation of conflict," as Kurke describes it. And I will also show that we need to distinguish between conflicts in history and oppositions in a given structure.

§59. In terms of structuralist methodology, linguistic and social structures contain oppositions, as they are known in "Prague School" linguistics, and these oppositions operate as an integral part of the system that is language or society. I have consistently made use of this structuralist methodology in my overall work (as I indicate explicitly in PH 0§§12-16), applying the "markedness theory" of Prague School linguists such as Jakobson (1957 [1984]:47; also 1939). And it was this methodology that led to my formulation of the model of god-hero antagonism in myth and symbiosis in cult (BA 121).

§60. I submit that such a model does not preempt but in fact invites the analysis of oppositions representing conflict and contestation within the myth of Apollo and

Neoptolemos, or within the myth of Apollo and Aesop. And, I should add, such mythical conflict and contestation between gods and non-gods can be correlated with instances of “real-life” conflicts and contestations throughout the lengthy and convoluted history of Delphi as perceptively analyzed in Kurke’s book.

§61. The discourse of myth can articulate such “real-life” conflicts and contestations in a variety of ways, as we see in the varied structural oppositions between, say, high and low forms of discourse in the myth of Apollo and Aesop.

§62. With reference to what I just said, I must highlight the fact that a primary aim of mine in *The Best of the Achaeans* was to study the structural reality of an opposition between higher and lower forms of social discourse in correlation with the historical reality of conflicts between higher and lower elements of society. And I studied such highs and lows by concentrating on Achilles and his son Neoptolemos at one extreme in the first part of the book and on Aesop at the other extreme in the second part.

§63. So, when I was comparing the myth of Neoptolemos at Delphi to the myth of Aesop at Delphi in the two halves of *Best of the Achaeans*, I was not “assimilating” these myths with each other, as Kurke claims. Rather, I was comparing these myths to each other as multiforms of structures.

### **Three kinds of relatedness in comparative structuralist methodology**

§64. When we apply comparative structuralist methodology in analyzing any given set of structures, we can determine whether or not these structures are related to each other. Then, if these structures are related, we can determine how they are related, and there are at least three kinds of relatedness:

1. The structures were always related because they are cognate, that is, because they are diachronically derivable from a shared proto-structure.
2. The structures were at one time unrelated, but they became synchronically interrelated at a later time because of historical contacts.
3. The structures were always related because they are cognate, but they also became synchronically interrelated at a later time because of historical contacts.

### **Comparing once again the myths of Aesop and Neoptolemos**

§65. So the question is, how do we describe the relationship between the myth of Aesop and the myth of Neoptolemos? In comparing the myths with each other, I find that the third of the three explanations I have just formulated fits both the structural and the historical realities of these myths. In terms of the structural patterns of (1) separate myths telling separate narratives about Apollo's antagonism with each one of these two heroes and (2) separate cults featuring the coexistence of the god with each one of the two, I find that the myths and the cults are related to each other diachronically as cognate structures. And then, to the extent that at least some versions of these myths can be situated in the historical context of Delphi, I find that they are also related to each other historically as interdependent structures.

§66. I start with the myth of Aesop as we find it attested in *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 1800 F 2 ii 32-63 (= *Aesop Testimonia* no. 25 ed. Perry 1952), telling how this ostensibly lowly figure was killed by the people of Delphi. According to this version of the myth, they stoned Aesop (λίθοις αὐτὸν βάλλοντες) and then threw him off a cliff (κατὰ κρημνοῦ ἔωσαν). The myth also explains why Aesop was killed: it was because he reproached (ὀνιδίζων [sic]) and ridiculed



(ἐπέσκωψεν) the wrangling and general strife he saw at a sacrifice in Delphi where sheep were being slaughtered and where bystanders at the sacrifice, carrying concealed *makhairai* ‘sacrificial knives’, competed at the altar with the initiator of the sacrifice and with each other by indiscriminately slicing for themselves with their *makhairai* whatever portions of the sacrificial meat they could capture and then taking their prizes back home with them.

§67. Next, I compare this myth of Aesop to the myth of Neoptolemos as we find it attested in two songs of Pindar, *Nemean 7* and *Paeon 6*. These two songs, reflecting two divergent versions of the myth, tell how this ostensibly lofty figure was killed at a sacrifice in Delphi where sheep were being slaughtered. In *Nemean 7*, which follows the version of the myth as accepted in the island state of Aegina, it is made explicit that Neoptolemos was killed while he was wrangling over honorific portions of sacrificial meat, *krea* (line 42), and in this version the killing was done by a man who wielded a *makhaira* or ‘sacrificial knife’ (again, line 42). As we know from another poetic source, the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (535-537), the *makhaira* was the sacrificial implement conventionally used for the ritual slaughter of sheep at Delphi as also for the ritual cutting of portions of the victims’ meat (BA 135 §22n1). In *Paeon 6*, which follows the version of the myth as accepted in Delphi, it is made explicit that the god Apollo himself, within his own sacred precinct or *temenos*, personally killed Neoptolemos while the hero was wrangling with the god’s *amhipoloi* ‘attendants’ over *timai* ‘honors’ that Neoptolemos as the main sacrificer claimed were his due (lines 84-86). In the version of the narrative as Pindar gives it here in *Paeon 6*, the *timai* ‘honors’ are not specified. In *Nemean 7*, on the other hand, we have seen that the honors are specified as honorific portions of sacrificial meat, *krea* (line 42), and we have also seen that the killing in this version is done not directly by the god Apollo but by a man who wields a *makhaira* or ‘sacrificial knife’ (again, line 42).

§68. In both versions, Neoptolemos as the main sacrificer to Apollo at Delphi becomes instead the main sacrificial victim of the god, slaughtered in the god's own sacred precinct just as sacrificial sheep are slaughtered there. As we see from this shared feature, the two versions of the myth have in common the central idea that the violent death of this hero resulted from a ritual of sacrificial slaughter that went wrong, very wrong. Such an idea is typical of aetiologies, by which I mean myths that explain and even confirm the stability of a ritual or of some other such institution by narrating a primordial event of instability in the mythical past. I offer here a working definition of aetiology, based on a formulation originally developed by Walter Burkert (1985:105-107) and further developed by myself (PH 4§§4, 12-20; 5§§9-10; 13§§11, 33-36 = pp. 118, 125-130; 141-142; 386; 395-397): an aetiology focuses on a foundational catastrophe in the mythologized past that explains and thus motivates continuing success in the ritualized present and future.

§69. I tested such a model of aetiology in my analysis of Pindar's *Olympian 1* (PH ch. 4), where the narrative makes a correlation between (1) a ritual athletic event, namely, the stadium footrace, which took place at a seasonally recurring ritual event that we recognize as the festival of the Olympics, and (2) a mythical event that went wrong, namely, the perverted feast of Tantalus: this hero had served up as meat to be eaten by the gods the boiled body of his son Pelops, who had been slaughtered like a sheep and cut up with a *makhaira* 'sacrificial knife' (lines 46-51).

§70. The narration here in Pindar's *Olympian 1* is explicit in reporting the myth about the slaughtering and cutting up and boiling and partial eating of Pelops at a perverted ritual feast (the one divinity who actually tasted the hero's flesh was the vegetarian Demeter), but it attenuates this catastrophic event by reporting it only as a rumor that is contrary to the poet's own lofty standards of mythmaking (lines 46-47). Despite this attenuation, however, the

catastrophic event at the mythical feast of Tantalus is correlated with the ritual festivities of the Olympics in the overall narrative morphology of *Olympian* 1, as I argue (PH ch. 4). So also the narration in Pindar’s *Nemean* 7 is explicit in reporting the slaughter of Neoptolemos with a *makhaira* (line 42) while the hero is wrangling over *krea* ‘cuts of meat’ at a sacrifice in Delphi where the sacrificers are slaughtering sheep and cutting up their meat (lines 42-43), but it attenuates this catastrophic event by not reporting a direct connection with Apollo as the agent of the hero’s violent death. And so also the narration in Pindar’s *Paean* 6 is explicit in reporting the slaughter of Neoptolemos by Apollo himself (line 119) while the hero is wrangling with the god’s *amphipoloi* ‘attendants’ over *timai* ‘honors’ that the hero claimed were his due (lines 117-120), but it too attenuates the catastrophic event—in this case, by not directly connecting the ‘honors’ sought by Neoptolemos with the sacrificial meat that he claimed was his due in *Nemean* 7.

§71. Despite these two attenuations in the two versions of the myth of Neoptolemos as narrated by Pindar, both versions are starkly explicit in linking the violent death of the hero with a sacrifice that goes wrong and becomes a catastrophe. And the version in Pindar’s *Nemean* 7 is also explicit in linking this catastrophic sacrifice in the mythologized past with the successful sacrifices that are given to Neoptolemos as the primary cult hero of Delphi in the ritualized present, which guarantees that this descendant of the heroic lineage of the Aiakidai will be receiving fair and just sacrificial portions for all eternity (lines 44-47):

ἐχρῆν δέ τιν’ ἔνδον ἄλσει παλαιτάτῳ | Αἰακιδᾶν κρεόντων τὸ λοιπὸν ἔμμεναι |  
 θεοῦ παρ’ εὐτειχέα δόμον, ἥροΐαις δὲ πομπαῖς | θεμισκόπον οἰκεῖν ἔόντα  
 πολυθύτοις.

It was ordained that one of the royal Aiakidai should be for all time next to the well-built abode of the god, and that he should live [*oikeîn*] there as the overseer of processions that are worthy of heroes and bountiful in sacrifices.

Pindar *Nemean* 7.44-47

§72. From a synchronic point of view, the narrative of Pindar's *Nemean* 7 is showing here that the myth of Neoptolemos in Delphi is aetiological, in that it explains and even validates the ritual of slaughtering sheep in the sacred precinct of Apollo at Delphi by narrating the myth about the slaughtering of the hero himself in that same sacred precinct.

§73. And same kind of argument can be made about the myth of Aesop in Delphi: this myth too is aetiological, as we will now see. In the *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* that I already cited, it is made explicit that the violent death of Aesop at the hands of the people of Delphi caused a plague, and that the god Apollo ordained through his oracle that the plague will cease only if the people of Delphi established a hero cult in honor of Aesop and sacrificed to him as to a hero (ὡς ἥρω).

§74. There is an interesting variant in Vita G (142): in this narrative as well, the death of Aesop causes a plague, but the god who is consulted by the people of Delphi is in this case not Apollo but Zeus (in BA 302, I fail to record this detail). In Vita W (142), the name of the god who is consulted is not even specified; in Aristotle's *Constitution of the Delphians* (F 487 ed. Rose), on the other hand, the god is specified as Apollo (still, Kurke at AC 67n42 sides with those who think that the version naming Zeus is older than the version naming Apollo). Vita W (142) goes on to say that the people of Delphi were told to make amends for the death of Aesop (*exhilaskesthai*), and they did so by building for him a shrine (*nāos*) and by setting up a *stēlē* in his honor; Vita G (142) likewise reports that they were told to make amends (*exhileōsasthai*), but it elides any mention of a shrine or a *stēlē*.

§75. As we see from the cause-and-effect mentality at work in all these variants of the *Life of Aesop*, this narrative is basically an aetiology. It is one of many attested examples of aetiological myths that explain and thus motivate the ritual practices of hero cults. Here is a diachronic model that I have built to describe such myths (PH 13§34 = p. 396):

- A hero is dishonored by a community. Sometimes he or she is harmed and even killed.
- The community is then afflicted with some form of disaster, usually a plague.
- An oracle is then consulted, and the remedy prescribed by the god of the oracle is that a hero cult must be established in honor of the hero.

§76. I now cite another example of such aetiological myths. This time, the example comes from the narratives we find recorded in the Mnesiepes Inscription (Archilochus T 4 ed. Tarditi 1968), which can be dated to the first half of the third century BCE and which is historically linked with the hero cult of the archaic poet Archilochus on the island of Paros (Clay 2004:9-24; further analysis in Nagy 2008b). This inscription narrates the life and times of the poet, and I focus here on the part of the narration that presents an aetiological myth to motivate the establishment of a hero cult for Archilochus (T 4 III lines 16-57). It is said that the poet improvised ([αὐτο]σχεδιασ[...] 19-20) a composition and taught it (διδάξαντα 27) to the local population, but the city of Paros found this composition to be 'too iambic' (ιαμβικώτερο[...] 38). Archilochus was put on trial (42) and was apparently condemned. Then the city was afflicted by a plague that affected the genitalia (42-44). Emissaries of the city consulted the oracle of Apollo at Delphi (45-48), and the oracle told them that the plague would not abate until the city of Paros gave honors to Archilochus (49-50).

§77. Elsewhere in the Mnesiepes Inscription (T 4 II lines 1-23; commentary by Nagy 2008b:260-261), it is narrated how the oracle of Apollo at Delphi ordained that the people of Paros should *timân* 'honor' (15, 19) Archilochus as a cult hero within a *temenos* 'sacred precinct' (2, 9) known as the *Arkhilokheion* (17), which was evidently the original location of the Mnesiepes Inscription itself; this *temenos* is said to contain an altar set up for the purpose of *thuein* 'performing sacrifices' (3) to Apollo and the Muses and Mnemosyne (2-4), and this same *temenos* contains a second altar, which is also set up for *thuein* 'performing sacrifices' (10) to other gods (9-12), including Dionysus (10); further, it is specified (16-19) that these two altars (17) are meant for *thuein* 'performing sacrifices' (18) not only to the gods (18) but also to Archilochus himself (18), since the god Apollo explicitly ordained that the people of Paros should *timân* 'honor' him (19).

§78. On the basis of such comparative evidence, then, I argue that the myth of Aesop as narrated in *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 1800 is cognate with the myth of Neoptolemos as narrated in Pindar's *Paean* 6 and *Nemean* 7. As we have seen, both myths are aetiological. And, as aetiologies, both myths explain and motivate the establishment of hero cults for their respective heroes. Both myths center on a disorderly and even chaotic sacrifice in the past, which is correlated with the orderly ritual of sacrifice in the present. And that sacrifice, featuring the ritual slaughter of sheep, is evidently central to these two hero cults honoring Aesop and Neoptolemos as cult heroes.

§79. By contrast with my argument, Kurke (AC 75-82, 211-212) argues that the myth of Aesop's death at Delphi is not cognate with the myth of Neoptolemos, and that the Aesopic myth is only a low-minded and indecorous parody of the myth of Neoptolemos, which she considers to be high-minded and decorous. But I must disagree with her attempt here to divorce the chaotic sacrificial scene in the myth about the ostensibly low-minded Aesop from

the sacrificial scene we see in the myth about the high-minded Neoptolemos as narrated by the high-minded Pindar in *Paeon* 6 and *Nemean* 7. That scene, in both narrations of Pindar, is not orderly and decorous. It is chaotic in its own right. So I disagree with Kurke (p. 82) when she says that the myth of Neoptolemos that we see being narrated in Pindar's *Nemean* 7, as also in *Paeon* 6, "confirms and supports the absolute propriety of sacrificial practice in Apollo's precinct." In terms of her formulation, such "propriety" characterizes sacrificial practice not only in the ritual present but also within the narrative of the myth. Kurke's formulation here and elsewhere does not take into account the distinction that the myth makes between a sacrifice gone wrong in the mythical past and the corresponding sacrifice that is being done right in the ritual present. True, the high-minded discourse of Pindar can attenuate to some degree the lack of decorum at the primal moment of the sacrificial scene where the would-be sacrificer becomes the sacrificial victim, since Pindaric discourse is orderly and decorous in its own right, but the point remains that the sacrificial scene as described in Pindar's two songs is in fact disorderly and indecorous and even shocking, as we have already seen.

§80. Still, I partly agree with Kurke (AC 77) when she describes the myth of Aesop's death as a low-minded and indecorous "parodic critique" of the myth of Neoptolemos. I say "partly" here because I agree with her only about the form of discourse that expresses the myth of Aesop's death, not about the myth itself. Unlike Kurke, I think that the myth, of and by itself, was potentially variable in register. In later phases of my argumentation, we will see that Aesopic myths and even Aesopic forms of speaking could participate in higher as well as lower registers of discourse.

§81. For the moment, however, my point is simply that the myth of Aesop's death, as an aetiology, did not necessarily have to be expressed in a lower form of discourse. The basic scenario of this aetiology, as we have seen, was this: Aesop died because he got into a quarrel

at a sacrifice. The primary function of this myth was aetiological, that is, it motivated the establishment of a hero cult for Aesop at Delphi. When we compare the myth about the death of Neoptolemos at Delphi, we see a parallel aetiology. Here too, as we have seen, the basic scenario of this aetiology was that Neoptolemos died because he got into a quarrel at a sacrifice. And here too, the primary function of this myth was aetiological, that is, it motivated the establishment of a hero cult for Neoptolemos at Delphi. In terms of my argumentation, the parallelism that we see here in the primary functions of these myths of Aesop and Neoptolemos as aetiologies indicates that these two myths are diachronically related to each other as cognates. By contrast, in terms of Kurke's argumentation (AC 93), even the status of Aesop as a cult hero at Delphi is called into question, and she seems to think that only heroes who are at the "apex" of society are honored in hero cults. But there are evident counterexamples, such as the ostentatiously lowly status of cult heroes such as Archilochus.

§82. Kurke (AC 93n119) berates those who "accept at face value the hero cult of Aesop at Delphi." As I have argued, however, there is specific evidence for the recognition of such a hero cult in the narratives of *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 1800, *Vitae G and W* (142), and elsewhere. In Kurke's own summary of the relevant evidence at a later point in her argumentation (pp. 189-190), she seems to accept my argumentation (for example, at p. 189n77 with reference to BA 284-290; here she refers also to the relevant arguments of Compton 2006:19-40).

§83. That said, there is no reason to deny that these two myths about Aesop and Neoptolemos are also historically interrelated with each other as a result of contacts that developed in the course of their historical coexistence in Delphi. And, in this historical context, the myth of Aesop could have a secondary function, besides its primary function as an aetiology. Such a secondary function, in terms of Kurke's explanation, was to parody the myth



of Neoptolemos. But the function of parody, I insist, does not exclude the dimension of ritual. Parody can be performed by way of ritual.

§84. Here I return to my expression of partial agreement with Kurke's (AC 77) description of the myth of Aesop's death as a low-minded and indecorous parody of the myth of Neoptolemos. I now propose to reformulate her formulation as follows: the myth about the death of Aesop developed a parodic relationship with the myth about the death of Neoptolemos in the historical context of a festival celebrated at Delphi, namely, the Theoxenia (BA 59-61, 123-126, 311; see also Kurke pp. 82-84). This festival of the Theoxenia, in terms of my formulation, is stylized as a ritual feast in the myths of both Aesop and Neoptolemos, and the narration of the deaths of these two heroes at that feast serves the aetiological function of motivating not only their hero cults at Delphi but also the coexistence of these cults in the historical context of seasonally recurring celebrations of the festival.

### **A diachronic complementarity of high and low discourse**

§85. It was not only the hero cults of Aesop and Neoptolemos that coexisted in the historical context of the Theoxenia at Delphi. Even the myths of these heroes, as I have argued, coexisted in this context. And such coexistence, I will now argue further, resulted not only from the historical contacts between the two cults in Delphi. It resulted also from a diachronic complementarity of high and low discourse corresponding respectively to the high and low social status of Neoptolemos and Aesop.

§86. In making this argument, I am saying that the low social status of discourse about the death of Aesop cannot be explained exclusively in historical terms, as Kurke would have it. For her, there is no diachronic complementarity between the high and the low discourse. Rather, she thinks that the low discourse about Aesop at Delphi came into being as a social movement that challenged and contested the high discourse that upheld the hegemony of Delphi. For

Kurke, this social movement was directed against Delphi and even against Apollo. She speaks of the myth of Aesop as an ideological “critique or parody of the high wisdom tradition” and as an outright challenge to “the Delphic god and his rapacious functionaries” (AC 47). I resist such an exclusively historicist approach, and I resist even more her description of her method as a “diachronic approach” (p. 46). She is engaging here in a historicist approach, not a diachronic one, as we see from her reconstruction of the *Life of Aesop* narrative by way of trying to explain its structural details in terms of historical details that she traces backward in time. What she reconstructs is supposed to add up to an overall social movement, described as a “resistance to Delphi” (p. 74), and this movement, from her historicist point of view, must have a beginning and an end in historical time. Searching for the beginnings as she tries to trace this hypothetical movement backward in time, she finds that she can reach back no further than the fifth century BCE (p. 46). As for a suitable ending, she seems to find no visible chronological signpost.

§87. By contrast, I argue that the low discourse represented by the *Life of Aesop* tradition is part of a larger system that includes high as well as low forms of discourse, and that this system integrates not only a lowly hero such as Aesop but also lofty heroes such as Neoptolemos or even Achilles. And, as we will see later, a diachronic analysis indicates an Indo-European foundation for such a system of discourse.

§88. In making this argument, I adopt a combination of historical and diachronic approaches, which I contrast with the exclusively historicist approach of Kurke. For her, as we have seen, the low-mindedness of Aesop is only a political challenge to Delphi as the paragon of high-mindedness. And, just as she divorces the myth about the death of Aesop at Delphi from the myth about the death of Neoptolemos by claiming that the first is not really a myth but only a parody or critique of a myth, she divorces also the lowly discourse about the low-

minded Aesop from the lofty discourse about the high-minded Neoptolemos as articulated by the correspondingly high-minded Pindar.

§89. For Kurke, then, the fact that the low-minded discourse represented by Aesop is opposed to the high-minded discourse represented by poets such as Pindar shows that these two opposite forms of discourse are not related to each other. Resisting such a divorce, I argue that these two opposite forms are complementary and even cognate with each other. The argument was first made in *The Best of the Achaeans*, where I studied the opposition between high and low social status in various forms of discourse dealing respectively with lofty and lowly heroes in respectively the first and the second halves of the book.

### **Variations in social status, from Aesop to Homer and back**

§90. The point I just made about high and low social status applies to Aesop in two ways. That is because Aesop is not only a character in myths that narrate his life and times, as we see in the *Life of Aesop* traditions: he is also the speaker of the medium that typifies him, which is the Aesopic fable. Aesop is the reputed author of the Aesopic fable. And, just as Aesop is a lowly character by contrast with the lofty characters of poetry such as Neoptolemos or Achilles himself, so also Aesop may be considered a lowly author by contrast with Homer, who is by consensus the loftiest author of them all in the classical period. The point I just made will be evident from a passage I am about to cite from Plato.

§91. Even before I cite that passage, this point about Aesop as a lowly author leads me to confront a question I must ask right now about the medium of Aesop, which is the fable. The question is this: given that the conventional form of the fables of this lowly Aesop was prose in the classical period, can we say that prose itself was lowlier than poetry? My answer, as we will see, is negative: prose was not by its very nature lowlier than poetry, even if the prose of Aesop was considered to be a lowlier form than other forms of prose in the classical period. In

general, I will argue that both poetry and prose, throughout the prehistory and history of Greek verbal art, could vary from the highest to the lowest possible grades of social status.

§92. I start, then, by citing a classic example of the conventional view of Homer and Aesop as respectively lofty and lowly authors in the classical period. The passage I have in mind comes from Plato's *Phaedo* (61a-b) as I analyze it in *Homer the Classic* (Nagy 2008|2009 3§81). In this passage from the *Phaedo*, Plato's Socrates is extolling the supremacy of philosophy as *mousikē*. This word *mousikē*, meaning 'the art of the Muses', conventionally refers to high poetry and song, especially to Homeric poetry, but Plato's Socrates refers to philosophy itself as the greatest form of *mousikē* (ὡς φιλοσοφίας μὲν οὔσης μεγίστης μουσικῆς), in comparison with any given poetic form of *mousikē*, which is by contrast provincial because it is 'local' or 'popular', that is, *dēmōdēs* (ταύτην τὴν δημώδη μουσικὴν ποιεῖν). As Socrates says here in the *Phaedo*, he had a dream in which an oracular voice kept telling him to make such a poetic kind of *mousikē*, and he then decided that such *mousikē* would in fact be quite appropriate for marking the occasion of Apollo's *heortē* 'festival—the end of which marks the occasion of his own death' So Socrates proceeded to compose two kinds of poetry as his swan song. One kind was a *Hymn to Apollo*, a form of poetry identified with Homer himself in the era of Plato. Appropriately, the part of the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo* that celebrates Apollo at Delos was most suited for performance at the festival of the god at Delos. And the other kind of poetry was a set of *muthoi* 'myths' by Aesop that Socrates turned into verse. This terminal gesture that Plato's Socrates makes toward the *mousikē* of poetry puts Homer in his place. The most exalted representative of poetry, Homer the Poet par excellence, is implicitly paired here in the *Phaedo* with his lowlife counterpart Aesop: both are described as exponents of *muthos*, which Socrates links with the discourse of poetry, contrasting it with *logos*, which he links with the discourse of philosophy.

§93. The pairing of the lofty Homer with the lowly Aesop in this context not only lowers the status of Homeric poetry, though only from the standpoint of the philosopher: it also at the same time raises the status of the Aesopic fable, which is represented here as potential poetry by virtue of being *muthos* ‘myth’. The use of this word by Plato’s Socrates here in the *Phaedo* is most revealing: it shows that *muthos* is ordinarily to be understood as poetry. And the use of the word *logos* here is just as revealing: it shows that *logos* is ordinarily to be understood as prose. I quote here the most relevant part of the overall passage:

μετὰ δὲ τὸν θεόν, ἐννοήσας ὅτι τὸν ποιητὴν δέοι, εἶπερ μέλλοι ποιητὴς εἶναι,  
ποιεῖν μύθους ἀλλ’ οὐ λόγους, καὶ αὐτὸς οὐκ ἦ μυθολογικός, διὰ ταῦτα δὴ οὓς  
προχείρους εἶχον μύθους καὶ ἠπιστάμην τοὺς Αἰσώπου, τούτων ἐποίησα οἷς  
πρώτοις ἐνέτυχον

Then, after finishing with the god [= after Socrates finished composing his *Hymn to Apollo* in his terminal role as a poet], here is what I [= Socrates] did: keeping in mind that a poet must, if he is really going to be a poet, make [*poieîn*] *muthoi* and not *logoi*, and that I was no expert in the discourse of myth [*muthologikos*], I took some *muthoi* of Aesop that I knew and had on hand, and I made poetry [*poieîn*] out of the first few of these that I happened upon.

Plato *Phaedo* 61b

§94. As we see here from the wording of Plato, the form of the Aesopic fable as *logos* is ordinarily prose in the era of Socrates—but the content of fable as *muthos* makes it compatible with poetry. The point that I am making here will be relevant to what I have to say later about Herodotus.

## The fable as *muthos* narrated in prose

§95. The connections of the Aesopic fable with *muthos* and the connections of *muthos* with poetry are highlighted in a passage I found in the writings of Philostratus (*Imagines* 3), where we read that *muthoi* are naturally attracted to Aesop, just as they are naturally attracted to Homer, Hesiod, and Archilochus (PH 13§24 = p. 393 with n63). And, as we read in Plato's *Protagoras* (320c), *muthos* can refer to the discourse of fable as opposed to the discourse of argumentation without fable (this distinction is noticed by Kurke, AC 286-287, 297n95, 313). In the context of this reference, Plato's Protagoras says that he is about to make an *epideixis* 'demonstration' of a point he wants to make in conversing with the young men who are his listeners at a symposium. This symposium is attended also by Socrates, who is still a young man at the time. Before Protagoras starts his demonstration, he is pictured as offering a choice to his young listeners:

ἀλλὰ πότερον ὑμῖν, ὡς πρεσβύτερος νεωτέροις, μῦθον λέγων ἐπιδείξω ἢ λόγῳ  
διεξιέναι;

Πολλοὶ οὖν αὐτῷ ὑπέλαβον τῶν παρακαθημένων ὁποτέρως βούλοιο οὕτως  
διεξιέναι. Δοκεῖ τοίνυν μοι, ἔφη, χαριέστερον εἶναι μῦθον ὑμῖν λέγειν.

“So, [says Protagoras,] I give you two choices. Shall I, as a senior person, make the *epideixis* by telling a *muthos* to you all as junior persons, or shall I go through the train of thought by using *logos*?”

Many of those who were seated next to him [= Protagoras] answered him that he should go through his train of thought by using whichever of the two. And then he said: “All right, then, I think it would be more elegant [*khariesteron*] for me to tell you all a *muthos*.”

The use of the term *khariesteron* ‘more elegant’ here indicates the lofty form and content of the fable that Protagoras is about to tell. As I have argued (Nagy 2008|2009 3§§164-166), the term *khariais* ‘graceful, elegant’ as we see it in such contexts was used in the classical era with reference to measuring various different degrees of sophistication in the practice and understanding of the verbal arts by *sophistai* ‘sophists’ (as we see for example from the context of Isocrates [12] *Panathenaicus* 18-19). Protagoras then proceeds to tell a fable about Prometheus and Epimetheus and Hermes. And, when Protagoras reaches the point where he is finished with the telling of his fable, he marks that point as the end of the *muthos*, which is what he had called his fable in the first place, before he proceeds to the rest of his argumentation, which will now be a fable no longer. Here is how he says it:

τούτου δὴ περὶ, ὦ Σώκρατες, οὐκέτι μῦθόν σοι ἐρῶ ἀλλὰ λόγον.

So, with regard to this [= the next phase of my argumentation], Socrates, I will no longer be telling you a *muthos* but a *logos*.

So, when Protagoras shifts from speaking prose in the form of a fable to speaking prose in other ways, he is shifting from *muthos* to *logos*. But I must emphasize that, even when Protagoras is speaking the fable, he is still speaking in prose. The point is, the fable as *muthos* can be poetic in content even when its form is prose.

§96. The point that I just made is relevant to the passage I quoted earlier from Plato’s *Phaedo*. When Plato’s Socrates converts the prose of Aesop’s fables overtly into poetry, it is not the poetic form that makes such fables qualify as *muthoi*. As we have seen from the passage I

quoted from the *Protagoras*, fables are intrinsically *muthoi* in any case. That is, fables are poetry in content even when they are prose in form. Or, to say it again by using the relevant Greek words, fables are *muthoi* even when they are *logoi*. But Socrates is playfully taking the *muthoi* at their word, as it were, by converting these *muthoi*, as fables, into poetry: if you intend to be poetic in content, he is saying, you should be poetic in form as well. Socrates now goes on to say that he is ‘keeping in mind that a poet must, if he is really going to be a poet, make [*poiēîn*] *muthoi* and not *logoi*’ (*Phaedo* 61b ἐννοήσας ὅτι τὸν ποιητὴν δεῖοι, εἴπερ μέλλοι ποιητῆς εἶναι, ποιεῖν μύθους ἀλλ’ οὐ λόγους). And, explaining playfully that he is no expert in *muthoi*, in other words, that he is no *muthologikos*, Socrates says that he literal-mindedly went ahead and turned the *muthoi* of Aesop into poetic form. As we will see, what Plato’s Socrates has managed to accomplish here is to make the fable revert from its current form as prose to its earlier form as poetry.

## The fable as *muthos* narrated in poetry

§97. I will now show that fable, including the Aesopic fable, can be *muthos* not only in content but also in form. That is, fable as *muthos* can be narrated not only in prose but also in poetry. There is no need to assume, as Kurke does (AC 76, 86, 242, 244, 252, 371n38), that the fable was restricted to the medium of prose. And what I just said, as we will see, applies not only to fable in general but even to Aesopic fable in particular.

§97a. My first example is a fable attributed to the preclassical lyric poet Stesichorus, “The Horse and the Deer” (*PMG* 281a), as I analyze it in my earlier work (PH 14§30 = p. 428). This fable, reportedly narrated by Stesichorus to the people of Himera on the occasion of their choosing the tyrant Phalaris as the leader of their polis, is cited by Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 2.1393b-1394a) as a parallel to the Aesopic fable “The Fox and the Hedgehog” (Fable 427 ed. Perry), reportedly narrated by Aesop to the people of Samos on the occasion of their impending



execution of a 'demagogue'. Aristotle's juxtaposition of these two fables is noted by Kurke (AC 150, 156, 255-256), who seems at a loss to explain how or why he could treat these two fables as parallels (at p. 256, she speaks of a "tension or misfit implied by the content" of these two fables). In terms of her theory, which requires the discourse of Aesop to represent only the lower levels of society and to be outside of and opposed to the higher levels, this parallelism between the fables of Aesop and Stesichorus is unexplainable. By contrast, I can explain this parallelism diachronically as an indication of the complementarity of higher and lower forms of discourse as integral parts of an overall cultural system of making fables.

§97b. My second example is a fable known as "The Fox and the Eagle" (Fable 1 ed. Perry), which is attested already in the preclassical poetry of Archilochus (F 174 ed. West). This fable is attested also in the classical poetry of Aristophanes: we see it in the *Birds* (651-653), and here the fable, spoken in verses, is attributed not to Archilochus but to Aesop himself (BA 239§18n2).

§98. The classical poetry of Aristophanes can accommodate not only the fables of Aesop but even the narrative frames of these fables. For example, the Aesopic fable known as "The Dung Beetle and the Eagle" (Fable 3 ed. Perry), which we find embedded within the framing narrative of the *Life of Aesop* (G+W 134-139), is signaled along with its narrative frame in the verses of the *Wasps* of Aristophanes (1445-1448; see also *Peace* 129-134), where the fable is explicitly equated by its narrator with the fable originally narrated by Aesop himself near the end of his life, at the moment when the people of Delphi were about to execute him after having falsely accused him of stealing a golden *phialē* 'bowl' of Apollo (BA 282-283).

## A closer look at Aesopic fables in Aristophanes

§99. I will now focus on another example of Aesopic fables embedded within the verses of Aristophanes. In this example, we will see once again the narrative frame of Aesop's own life and times. I will then follow up with a set of related examples.

§100. The fable I have chosen is “Aesop and the Bitch” (Fable 423 ed. Perry), which is attested only in the *Wasps* of Aristophanes (1400-1405). One evening, according to the fable as narrated here in verse, Aesop was walking along after having attended a *deipnon* ‘dinner’ (1401), and he encountered along his way a bitch that started barking angrily at him (1402). Aesop responded to the dog by saying to her, and the iambic verses quote his words, that she would be sensible if she were barking for the purpose of getting wheat as a payment for putting a stop to her barking (1403-1405).

§101. Why wheat and not meat? In terms of the convoluted logic of the narrative, it is because it would not make any sense for the bitch to be barking so furiously at Aesop unless it was wheat that she wanted as payment for putting a stop to her angry barking. I think it is the convolutedness of the logic here that makes the narrative amusing. The premise that is built into the narrative, I further think, is that dogs crave to eat meat, not wheat, and, presumably, there was meat to be eaten at the ‘dinner’ that Aesop had just attended. But the bitch is barking up the wrong tree, as it were, if what she really wants to get from Aesop is a cut of meat as a payoff for stopping her furious barking. Aesop has no meat to give to the bitch. And so the dog deserves to get nothing to eat by barking so angrily. In terms of such a convoluted logic, I think, the moral of the fable would be something like this: you can't always get what you want, no matter how hard you try.

§102. Here is the actual wording of the fable as the narrator tells it within the comedy:

Αἴσωπον ἀπὸ δείπνου βαδίζονθ' ἐσπέρας

θρασεῖα καὶ μεθύση τις ὑλάκτει κύων.  
κάπειτ' ἐκεῖνος εἶπεν· “ὦ κύον κύον,  
εἰ νῆ Δί' ἀντὶ τῆς κακῆς γλώττης ποθὲν  
πυροῦς πρίαιο, σωφρονεῖν ἄν μοι δοκεῖς.”

One evening, when Aesop was walking along after having taken his leave from a  
dinner,

an audacious and drunken bitch started barking at him.

And that famous man said: “Bitch, bitch,

I swear by Zeus, if you could somehow use that nasty tongue of yours  
to get paid off in wheat, then I think you would be sensible.”

Aristophanes *Wasps* 1400-1405

§103. Although it is not essential for sustaining my argument, I now add here a further point. I think that this narrative featuring the words that Aesop said to the angrily barking bitch while he was departing from a ‘dinner’ that he had attended is linked to the narrative in *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 1800 about the words that the same Aesop had said while attending a primal feast: in that narrative, as I already noted, Aesop reproached (ὀνιδίζων [sic]) and ridiculed (ἐπέσκωψεν) the wrangling and general strife he saw at a sacrifice in Delphi where sheep were being slaughtered and where bystanders at the sacrifice, carrying concealed *makhairai* ‘sacrificial knives’, competed at the altar with the initiator of the sacrifice and with each other by indiscriminately slicing for themselves with their *makhairai* whatever portions of the sacrificial meat they could capture and then taking their prizes back home with them. Presumably, when Aesop left that feast, he had taken no meat with him. So if a bitch were to

bark at Aesop angrily while he was leaving that feast, he would have no meat to give her as a payoff to put a stop to her barking.

§104. The scholia for the *Wasps* of Aristophanes (1445.5) preserve a relevant detail from the *Life of Aesop* tradition: it was said that the people of Delphi had resolved to kill Aesop because he insulted them by ridiculing (ἀποσκῶψαι) the fact that they had no land of their own for growing their own produce. Because they had no land for agriculture, according to the scholia here, the people of Delphi had to depend for their sustenance on the meat they obtained from the sacrifices made by visiting sacrificers. This insult, I think, is built into the fable of “Aesop and the Bitch,” where the dog who angrily barks to get meat is like the people of Delphi, who would be well advised to use their barking to get wheat instead of meat.

§105. Some think, however, that this fable “Aesop and the Bitch” is not a genuine Aesopic fable, explaining it instead as an *ad hoc* invention by Aristophanes. One reason given for such an explanation is that Aesop himself is featured here as a character inside the narrative of the fable (for more, see MacDowell 1971:312). But that is not a good reason, I think, for doubting that this fable is genuinely Aesopic. I can cite other examples of Aesopic fables where Aesop himself is featured as a character inside the narrative of the fable, as in the case of “Aesop and the Shipbuilders” (Fable 8 ed. Perry). Another example is “Aesop and the Corinthians” (Fable 424 ed. Perry), where we see two verses of an elegiac couplet being spoken by Aesop himself to the people of Corinth: according to Diogenes Laertius (2.5.42), who is our source here, Socrates himself had composed those verses.

§106. I should add, in arguing that this story of “Aesop and the Bitch” is a genuine Aesopic fable, that there is in the *Life of Aesop* narratives an attestation of another story about Aesop and a bitch. In this case, the action takes place on the island of Samos, and the dog is described as a purebred female house pet living in the residence of a philosopher named Xanthos, who is

at the time the master of the slave Aesop (*Vita G+W* 44-46). Summoning the bitch by calling out her name, *Lukaina* ‘She-Wolf’ (*Vita G+W* 45), Aesop proceeds to feed her a basketful of food that he had been instructed by Xanthos to give as a dinner gift ‘to her who loves me’. By giving the whole dinner to the bitch and not to the wife of Xanthos, Aesop has his revenge on a nasty aristocratic woman who had been tormenting him with her insults. In terms of this fable, then, Aesop has something of a reputation for giving generous handouts to bitches.

§107. Even if the story of “Aesop and the Bitch” as narrated in the *Wasps* of Aristophanes is a genuine Aesopic fable, as I think it is, it is a failure as a fable in the context of this comedy. What makes it a failure is the fact that it is badly applied. But that is actually good for comedy. The bad application is exactly what makes the fable work successfully in the comedy. The fact that the fable is badly applied is what gives the fable a comic twist. The narrator of the fable here has actually botched the application of his narrative to his own circumstances. And that is what makes the fable a failure in this context, since the narration of a fable can succeed only if its narrators are successful in applying it to suit their own intentions. As I have argued (BA 282§5n4), the moral of a fable must be applicable to the circumstances of the narrator of the fable. That is the synchronic reality of applying fables.

§108. In the case of this particular narration in the *Wasps*, as I will now show, the narrator of the fable fails badly in applying the myth for his own purposes, but the comic effect of this failure makes it a most successful application in comedy as comedy.

§109. The narrator of “Aesop and the Bitch” in the *Wasps* of Aristophanes is the unsophisticated character Philocleon. His comic name means ‘the one who loves Cleon’ and he is the comic antithesis of the sophisticated character Bdelycleon, who is the son of Philocleon and whose comic name means ‘the one who is disgusted with Cleon’. The unsophisticated father Philocleon is a populist who takes the side of the radical democrat Cleon, while the

sophisticated son Bdelycleon is an elitist reactionary who takes the side of those who are opposed to all forms of populism. In this comedy of Aristophanes, produced in the year 422 BCE, a prime political target for elitist reactionaries like the character Bdelycleon is the Athenian system of jury duty, which had been radically reshaped by Cleon in his role as the self-declared champion of populism.

§110. As the comedy progresses, the elitist son manages to persuade the anti-elitist father to abandon his democratic addiction. From now on, the father will no longer spend all his time as a juror in Cleon's jury system. Now the father will become an elitist reactionary, like his son. But now that Philocleon is persuaded to go over to the side of the elites, he becomes even more elitist than Bdelycleon. In a comic reversal of roles, the father Philocleon can now take on the role of a childish son while the son Bdelycleon can now take on the role of a somewhat more sensible father. Whereas Philocleon as a juror had been an advocate of the common people, he can now become a noisy parody of the elitist reactionaries.

§111. Philocleon gets drunk and rowdy while attending a symposium attended by drunken and rowdy aristocrats (*Wasps* 1299-1321), and, on his way home from the symposium, he gets into violent fights with common people he happens to encounter along the way (1322-1323). Then, the morning after, Philocleon is confronted by common people he had assaulted during his nighttime rampage, and he is being served summonses by these people. So Philocleon is now faced with the prospect of having to appear in court to answer charges and be judged by the same kinds of jurors he once had been himself before he went over to the other side.

§112. The first claimant to confront Philocleon with legal threats is a woman whose profession is selling bread, and she accuses him of violently knocking to the ground the loaves of bread she was carrying in her breadbasket. The alleged deed was committed by Philocleon in his drunken state of wanton violence as he was making his way home after attending the

symposium (*Wasps* 1388-1391, 1396-1398). Philocleon, now hoping to avoid being taken to court for damages, tries to assuage the angry woman (1393-1395). He does so by using, as he describes them, *logoi dexioi* 'dexterous words' (1394 λόγοι ... δέξιοι). He announces to her that he will now deliver a discourse, a *logos*, that is *khariais* 'graceful, elegant' (1398-1399 λόγον ... χαρίεντα). As I have already pointed out, this term *khariais* 'graceful, elegant' was used in the classical era with reference to measuring various different degrees of sophistication in the practice of verbal arts by *sophistai* 'sophists'. So the character of Philocleon is trying to act here like a sophisticated member of elite society. And it is at this point that Philocleon narrates the fable of "Aesop and the Bitch," which I have already quoted. Of course the fable as he tells it is not at all 'dexterous', not at all 'graceful' or 'elegant'. Just the opposite. And that is because the application of the fable is disastrously inappropriate and even malaprop. It is bad enough for the words of Philocleon to set up a parallelism between an angry bitch and the angry woman who had lost the bread she was selling, but the drawing of parallels gets even worse, since the angry bitch is now described further as a drunken bitch: she is *methusē* 'drunk' (*Wasps* 1402).

§113. Though Philocleon would have no motive here for insulting the woman, he manages to insult her anyway. In his pretentious attempt to assuage her by resorting to the sophisticated discourse of telling fables, he is stuck with using words that are typical of that discourse, and those words will only get him into further trouble. I now give three examples of such wording, which are all typical of the fable.

§113a. We know for a fact from other Aesopic fables that the word *methusos* 'drunk' used here to describe the bitch who barks angrily at Aesop is part of the vocabulary of fables (as in Fable 246 ed. Perry, "The Woman and her Drunkard [*methusos*] Husband") as also of comedy (Aristophanes *Clouds* 555).

§113b. And we also know from the evidence of Aesopic fables that the barking of dogs is associated primarily with anger: in the fable “The Years of Humans” (Fable 105.13 ed. Perry), the words used to describe dogs, ὀργίλους καὶ ὑλακτικούς ‘angry and barking’, highlight such an association. Further, as we read in traditional descriptions of potentially comic situations, aristocrats are prone to experiencing flashes of anger in public spaces whenever they experience chance encounters there with drunkards or barking dogs or other such annoyances (Plutarch *On the controlling of anger* 460f): ἀλλὰ καὶ πανδοκεῦσι καὶ ναύταις καὶ ὀρεωκόμοις μεθύουσι πολλάκις ὑπ’ ὀργῆς συμπίπτομεν οἴομενοι καταφρονεῖσθαι, καὶ κυσὶν ὑλακτοῦσι καὶ ὄνοις ἐμβάλλουσι χαλεπαίνομεν ‘we often get angry, feeling that we are being disrespected, whenever we get into nasty encounters with beggars or sailors or drunken mule-drivers, and we are similarly irked by barking dogs or by donkeys that bump into us’.

§113c. Finally, we can see that barking and getting drunk go together in comic descriptions of drunkards: for example, the comically drunken Herakles in the *Alcestis* of Euripides barks (760 ὑλακτῶν) rather than sings as he guzzles vast quantities of intoxicating wine (757 μέθυ).

§114. In short, the words used by the character of Philocleon in the *Wasps* (1400-1405) when he narrates the fable about a drunken bitch who barks at Aesop are all compatible with the world of fable, but they are comically incompatible with the situation of Philocleon himself. The only part of the fable that can be made compatible with his situation is where Aesop says that the bitch would be well advised to use her barking to get wheat. At least, this part is compatible to the extent that Aesop recommends wheat as a form of compensation. After all, wheat would be a suitable compensation for the woman who is suing Philocleon, since wheat is presumably the primary ingredient of the bread that she sells for a living. But the problem is, the intended parallel brings with it an unintended parallel. The intended parallelism between the need for wheat in the fable and the need for wheat in the present situation brings with it



an unintended parallelism between the bitch in the fable and the woman in the present situation. The woman is of course outraged when she hears that a parallel has been drawn between her and the angry bitch. So she responds to Philocleon by saying in effect: “This is adding insult to injury ... so now you are saying I’m an angry bitch!” And so, instead of succeeding in his attempts at assuaging the woman who is angrily threatening to take him to court, Philocleon has by now unintentionally guaranteed the certainty of his being sued for damages.

§115. Besides his narration of the fable “Aesop and the Bitch” (1400-1405; = Fable 423 ed. Perry), Philocleon narrates three other fables in rapid succession within the brief space of this comic scene in the *Wasps* of Aristophanes: “The Chariot Driver from Sybaris” (1427-1431; = Fable 428 ed. Perry), “The Woman from Sybaris and the Jug” (1435-1436, 1437-1440; = Fable 438 ed. Perry), and, finally, “The Dung Beetle and the Eagle” (1446-1448; = Fable 3 ed. Perry). The first two of these three tables are narrated by Philocleon to a man whom he assaulted on the previous night and who now claims he had suffered a skull fracture from the assault. And the only thing that these two fables have in common with each other and with the present situation of Philocleon is the idea of a fractured skull:

(1) In “The Chariot Driver from Sybaris,” a driver falls off his chariot and suffers a skull fracture; a friend who sees the injured man as he is lying there on the ground goes up to him and advises him to go and look for a different profession that better suits his abilities.

(2) In “The Woman from Sybaris and the Jug,” a woman accidentally drops a wide-mouth jug and breaks it; the personified Jug then sues the woman for fracturing the skull of his jug-head, but the woman says that it would have been

more advisable for the Jug to get some adhesive for fixing its skull fracture right away.

Finally, we come to the third example:

(3) In the case of “The Dung Beetle and the Eagle,” Philocleon is telling this fable to Bdelycleon while he is being dragged offstage by his son, who is now desperately attempting to prevent any further damage resulting from any further retellings of fables by his father. The parallelism in this case between the fable and the present situation of Philocleon is simply the idea that “The Dung Beetle and the Eagle” was a fable told by Aesop in response to the false charges made against him by the people of Delphi, just as this same fable is now being retold in response to the supposedly false charges made against Philocleon by the people of Athens.

§116. Having seen these three examples and having earlier seen the example of “Aesop and the Bitch,” we have by now reviewed all four of the fables narrated by Philocleon in the *Wasps* of Aristophanes. And we have seen that he fails in his narration of each one of these fables because he is simply unable to apply any of them in a sophisticated way. Seeing his lack of sophistication, we need to ask ourselves: where on earth would Philocleon have learned these four fables in the first place? The answer is, he learned them at that same symposium that got him so drunk on the night before—and that got him into so much trouble after he had left the party to make his way home. At that symposium, attended by the most sophisticated elites of Athens, Philocleon got to hear how these sophisticates tell fables and how they apply them. At an earlier point in the comedy, such an experience of learning fables at a symposium is previewed in an exchange between Philocleon and Bdelycleon, where the father is being

advised by the son to start consorting with elites at aristocratic symposia. At this earlier point in the comic action, the old man is still expressing some degree of hesitation about the young man's advice, but Bdelycleon finally persuades Philocleon by promising the old man that he will learn at such symposia the sophisticated art of telling fables:

1252 {Φι.} μηδαμῶς.  
κακὸν τὸ πίνειν. ἀπὸ γὰρ οἴνου γίγνεται  
καὶ θυροκοπῆσαι καὶ πατάξαι καὶ βαλεῖν,  
1255 κάπειτ' ἀποτίνειν ἀργύριον ἐκ κραιπάλης.  
{Βδ.} οὐκ, ἦν ξυνῆς γ' ἀνδράσι καλοῖς τε κάγαθοῖς.  
ἦ γὰρ παρητήσαντο τὸν πεπονθότα,  
ἦ λόγον ἔλεξας αὐτὸς ἀστεῖόν τινα,  
Αἰσωπικὸν γέλοισιν ἢ Συβαριτικόν,  
1260 ὧν ἔμαθες ἐν τῷ συμποσίῳ· κᾶτ' ἐς γέλων  
τὸ πρᾶγμ' ἔτρεψας, ὥστ' ἀφείς σ' ἀποίχεται.  
{Φι.} μαθητέον τᾶρ' ἐστὶ πολλοὺς τῶν λόγων,  
εἶπερ γ' ἀποτείσω μηδέν, ἦν τι δρῶ κακόν.  
ἄγε νυν, ἴωμεν· μηδὲν ἡμᾶς ἰσχύτω.

[Philocleon says in response to the advice that he attend symposia:]

1252 No,  
drinking is bad. Wine makes you  
break doors down or hit people or throw things at them.  
1255 And then, while you are still having your hangover, you have to pay money  
for the damages.

[Bdelycleon persists with his advice that Philocleon should attend symposia:]

No, that won't happen if you are in the company of the elites [*kaloi k'agathoi*].

For they can talk the plaintiff out of taking action.

Or you can tell a *logos* that is very sophisticated [*asteios*],

something funny that is Aesopic or Sybaritic—

1260 one of those *logoi* you learned at the symposium. And then you can turn into  
laughter

the whole affair, so the plaintiff will let you off and just go away.

Philocleon

So I've got to learn many of these *logoi*

if I want to make sure I don't have to pay anything when I do something bad.

Let's get going, then. I don't want anything to hold us back.

§117. As we see from this description of 'Aesopic' and 'Sybaritic' fables, called *logoi* here (*Wasps* 1258-1259 λόγον ... Αἰσωπικὸν ... ἢ Συβαριτικόν), they are considered to be a most sophisticated medium, suitable for performance at aristocratic symposia. And the fable is evidently a medium of choice to be used by the elites to advance their own purposes. That is why, later on in the comedy, Philocleon claims that the fables he is about to perform are most sophisticated: as we have already seen, he describes these fables as *logoi dexioi* 'dexterous words' (1394 λόγοι ... δέξιοι). And, as we have also already seen, he describes the first fable that he performs, "Aesop and the Bitch," as a *logos* that is *khariais* 'graceful, elegant' (1398-1399 λόγον ... χαρίεντα). As I pointed out earlier, this same term *khariais* 'graceful, elegant' is used by Plato's Protagoras in referring to his narration of a fable about Prometheus and Epimetheus and Hermes (*Protagoras* 320c).

§118. As I have shown, then, from the overall context of the four fables narrated in the *Wasps* of Aristophanes, such fables could be used as the elevated and sophisticated discourse of

powerful elites. To put it another way, such fables were not at all confined to the lowly discourse of disempowered non-elites. As for the distinction that is being made between ‘Aesopic’ and ‘Sybaritic’ fables in the *Wasps* (1258-1259 λόγον ... Αἰσωπικὸν ... ἢ Συβαριτικόν), we can find an explanation in the scholia for the *Birds* of Aristophanes (471): Aesopic fables concentrate on animals as characters, as we see in the first and the fourth of the four fables retold in the *Wasps*, whereas the Sybaritic fables concentrate on human characters, as we see in the second and the third fables. I have highlighted this distinction between Aesopic and Sybaritic fables in the course of analyzing these kinds of fables (PH 11§21 with n59; §35 = pp. 325, 334-335). And, as I have shown here, these kinds of fable can be viewed as aristocratic discourse in form as well as in content, even if the actual characters that figure in the narratives can range from the highest to the lowest in social status, as in the case of the Aesopic pairing of the eagle and the dung beetle, or in the case of the Sybaritic pairing of the woman and the wide-mouthed jug. I elaborate on this last point in a separate project, “*Homo ludens* and the Fables of Aesop” (2014), which is meant as a twin to the present project about diachrony and the case of Aesop. In the twin project, I also review my earlier research on the genre of the Sybaritic fable and on its relevance to the *Histories* of Herodotus (PH 11§21 = pp. 324-325, 11§35 = pp. 334-335).

§119. By now we have seen that fables, including Aesopic fables, are compatible with the poetic medium of Aristophanes. And what I have shown here with specific reference to one particular comedy of Aristophanes, the *Wasps*, can be extended to classical comedy in general. I argue, then, that the fables narrated in the classical poetry of comedy are cognate with the fables narrated in the preclassical poetry of figures like Stesichorus and Archilochus. And it would be unjustified, I further argue, to think that the medium of comedy is somehow imitating a performance that can only be imagined as a prose performance whenever a

character is narrating a fable. The fables we have already noted in the poetry of Stesichorus and Archilochus show clearly that fables could be narrated in poetry as well as in prose.

§120. It remains to ask why the word *logos* can be used with reference to the four fables performed by Philocleon in the *Wasps* of Aristophanes (1258, 1394, 1398). My answer is: the meaning of this word does not confine fables to the medium of prose. As I show at a later point, poetry uses *logos* to refer to verse as well as prose.

### **An Indo-European precedent for narrating the fable as poetry**

§121. Up to now, I have used only the internal evidence of the ancient Greek verbal arts in arguing that the fable in the classical period and earlier could be narrated not only as prose but also as poetry, and that the use of the fable was not at all confined to the lower strata of society. But now I will extend the argument by examining the comparative evidence of fables as narrated in Indo-European languages other than Greek. From a diachronic point of view, as we will now see, the complementarity of poetry and prose as also of high and low discourse in the narrating of the ancient Greek fables we have considered so far can be traced back all the way to a common Indo-European era, as we can see for example from the cognate evidence of Indic fables.

§122. In the vast array of fables collected in such ancient Indic compilations as the *Jātakas*, the *Pañcatantra*, and the *Hitopadeśa*, we find a wide range of narratives fluctuating between lower and higher levels of discourse. And these Indic narratives of fables regularly show a mixture of poetry and prose, with the parts composed as poetry tending toward older and higher levels of discourse while the parts composed as prose tend toward newer and lower levels (Witzel 1997, especially p. 388). In a typical Indic fable, the part composed in poetry tends to be the moral of the story, while the part composed in prose is the story itself (Hanson and Kiparsky 1997:37).

§123. The frame narratives of the three Indic compilations I have mentioned indicate that a primary function of the fables contained in these compilations, whether these fables gravitate toward higher or lower levels of discourse, was to provide instruction for the ruling classes; and the same can be said about the translations of the Indic version into Syriac, as also about the translations of the Syriac version into Arabic and from the Arabic version into Persian. A shining example is the Arabic version, known as the *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, which had been translated into Arabic by a Persian named Ibn al-Muqaffa<sup>c</sup> in the middle of the eighth century CE.

§124. In all these versions, I repeat, what we see is the embedding of fables within a narrative frame designed to instruct the ruling classes. From a comparative point of view, the combination of these embedded fables and the narrative that frames them can be described by way of the conventional term *speculum principum* or ‘Mirror of Princes’. And I will use another conventional term here for describing the form of expression where fables composed in verse are combined with a framing discourse composed in prose: this form, as we see it at work in the Indic compilations I have already mentioned, is known as *prosimetrum*. I should add that we can also find in Indic traditions some far earlier forms of *prosimetrum* where the variety of narratives ranging from lower to higher levels of discourse is even more pronounced (Witzel 1997). Finally, I note that both these terms *speculum principum* and *prosimetrum* are regularly used in the study of medieval European literature, with reference to both Latin and vernacular forms (Ziolkowski 1997).

## **Reconstructing the fable backward and forward in time**

§125. In both *The Best of the Achaeans* (1979|1999) and *Pindar’s Homer* (1990a), I was reconstructing backward in time the relatively late forms of the Aesopic fable, connecting them with the earliest attested forms of the fable in Greek verbal art. Examples of these

earliest forms are “The Hawk and the Nightingale,” which we find embedded in the Hesiodic *Works and Days* (202-212), and “The Fox and the Eagle,” as embedded in the iambic poetry of Archilochus (F 174 ed. West). We find in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus (717-736) another relatively early example of a fable, “The Royal Family and the Lion Cub”: here the referent to whom the fable applies shifts in the course of the dramatic action from Paris to Agamemnon to Clytemnestra and even to Orestes (I interpret this fable in PH 10§52 = pp. 310-311, with citations of the relevant contributions of other interpreters).

§126. Besides reconstructing backward in time, I was also reconstructing the forms of the ancient Greek fable forward in time, augmenting my reconstruction on the basis of what I had learned from comparative evidence I had gathered by having first gone backward in time. Within the limited space I have here, it would be impossible for me to summarize the results of all the work that I had put into my diachronic examination of this comparative evidence, but I do need to give an overall picture, using the broadest of brushstrokes, of the ways in which these results as published in the two books I mentioned stand up to the alternative explanations of Kurke (2011) concerning the Aesopic fable and the “invention” of prose.

## **Revisiting the word *ainos* and its derivatives**

§127. So here is the “big picture” as I see it. In terms of my explanation, the Aesopic fable is part of a larger system of discourse that is designated by the word *ainos*. This word is used for referring to fables such as “The Hawk and the Nightingale” in the hexameter poetry of the Hesiodic *Works and Days* (202) and “The Fox and the Eagle” in the iambic poetry of Archilochus (F 174). As I already pointed out at the beginning, *ainos* refers also to other forms of discourse such as the victory odes of Pindar (as in *Olympian* 2.96), and it refers even to “wisdom poetry” in general, as we see from the use of the derivative verb *ainissesthai* in the elegiac poetry attributed to Theognis of Megara (681-682). Also relevant is the context of the only attestation



of *ainos* in the Homeric *Odyssey* (xiv 508), which shows that this kind of discourse can disguise its moral nobility by way of external appearances (BA 235, 237; PH 14§§25-27 = pp. 425-427). Transcending any single genre, the form of the *ainos* has a split function: it is a way of speaking either positively or negatively. That is, the *ainos* can either praise or blame; and, ostensibly, it will praise what is good and blame what is bad (BA 250, 287-288).

§128. Referring to “Nagy’s insistence on synchronic semantic connections among all *ain-* derivatives,” including *ainissesthai*, Kurke (AC 374n54) objects to this explanation. I find her wording imprecise, since I insist on no such thing. Quite the opposite. Once again I find fault here with Kurke’s understanding of the terms synchronic and diachronic. The fact is, my analysis of semantic connections involving derivatives of the root *ain-* such as *ainos*, *epainos*, *aineîn*, *epaineîn*, *paraineîn* and so on is diachronic, not synchronic. When she refers to my “insistence on synchronic semantic connections among all *ain-* derivatives,” I think what Kurke means to say is that I am trying to create some kind of pseudo-synchrony. But that is not what I am doing. Rather, my procedure is to analyze each of these derivatives synchronically, in context, and then to build diachronic models for their semantic connections, tracing dissimilarities as well as similarities. And when she faults me for postulating “sameness through time” (p. 374) in a related context, she is redefining diachrony in a superficial way by rewriting what this word really means in the discourse of Saussure: in terms of that discourse, which I prefer to follow, a diachronic approach does in fact trace dissimilarities as well as similarities through time.

§129. In the same context where she objects to my explanation of *ainos*, Kurke (AC 374n54) also objects to my relevant interpretation of a fragment of Pindar (F 181), ὁ γὰρ ἐξ οἴκου ποτὶ μῶμον ἔπαινος κίρνεται ‘for praise [*epainos*] is by nature mixed with blame’. In making her objection, she refers to my analysis in one of my relevant books (BA 250) but not to my further

analysis in the other (PH 6§7 = pp. 149-50 with n20), where I defend the translation I have just given. It can be paraphrased this way: praise for one person or thing may be the same thing as blame for another person or thing. Thus the *ainos* can be at the same time negative about one point of view while being positive about the opposite point of view.

§130. Kurke (AC 374) says that this general interpretation of mine, which I link with the interpretation of the word *ainos* by Meuli (1954), means that my reading of this word “generalizes Meuli’s model to all of Homer, Hesiod, Archilochus and archaic iambic, archaic elegy including Theognis and Solon, and finally all of archaic and classical lyric, especially Pindar, while maintaining a link between *ainos* as ‘fable’ and Aesop.” She goes on to say, in this same context, that “for Nagy, everything is *ainos*.” It is disappointing to me that Kurke here is misreading globally all the work that went into my investigation of this word *ainos*. Throughout the second part of *The Best of the Achaeans* as also in *Pindar’s Homer*, I demonstrated that the mode of speaking known as *ainos* was actively used in all the forms of poetry that Kurke lists here, as also in the fables of Aesop. But that is not the same thing as saying that “everything is *ainos*.” What I do say instead is that the discourse of *ainos* can be deployed in all these forms of verbal art. (An outstanding example is the deployment of such discourse within epic, where epic makes it clear that it is not *ainos* itself but it simply deploys the *ainos*, as I state explicitly in PH 6§7 = pp. 149-150—a statement not noted by Kurke). And my interpretation of this word *ainos* as an indicator of either praise or blame was not “based largely on a single one-line fragment of Pindar [F 181],” as Kurke asserts (p. 374n54). It was based, in both books I cited, primarily on the overall comparative evidence of a multitude of examples that show, from a diachronic perspective, the complementarity of praise and blame in the verbal arts of the Indo-European languages.

§131. Far from saying that *ainos* is “everything,” as if it were unlimited in function, I have consistently emphasized in my work that this form of discourse had a limited function. That is, the *ainos* traditionally delimited itself as a code conveying a message that only those who were qualified could understand (PH 6§§5-7 = pp. 148-150). And the qualifications for understanding, as I showed by way of analyzing especially the relevant wording of Pindar, can be summed up this way:

The *ainos* is a “code” that “presupposes a restricted audience who ...

1. understand the message of the code that is the poetry.
2. have been raised on the proper ethical standards that are the message that the code of the poetry teaches.
3. are socially connected to the poet and to each other, so that the message of the code may be transmitted to them and through them ... .”

I have quoted here the wording of my summary as quoted in turn by Martin Schwartz (2003:383), who has shown that these three requirements for understanding the ancient Greek *ainos* are related to a cognate set of requirements for understanding the phraseology that he analyzes in the Zoroastrian texts of the ancient Iranian *Gāthās*, especially with reference to the *Yasnas* 30, 31, and 46 (pp. 383-384). Schwartz has thus found comparative evidence indicating, from a diachronic perspective, that the poetics of the *ainos* stem from Indo-European prototypes.

§132. In the ancient Greek evidence, the three requirements for understanding the *ainos* can be summed up in three words: the listeners must be *sophoi* ‘wise’, *agathoi* ‘noble’, and *philo*

‘near and dear’. Here is my explanation of these three words, in reverse order (I am drawing here especially on my analysis in PH 6§§5-7 = pp. 148-150):

§132a. The word *philoī* indicates that there needs to be a reciprocity between the listeners and the speaker, in that the listeners have to be notionally *philoī* ‘near and dear’ to each other as also to the speaker, who has to be *philos* ‘near and dear’ to them. That is to say, for communication to happen, there needs to be a sense of community, as we see most clearly in the praise poetry of Pindar (BA 241-242; PH 6§5 = p. 148).

§132b. As for the word *agathoi*, it indicates moral nobility, as we see most clearly once again in the praise poetry of Pindar (PH 6§5 = p. 148). But moral nobility may not always be visible on the surface and may be hidden inside a person. That is to say, outward appearances at times belie inner realities, and the *ainos* can expose those who are extrinsically noble but intrinsically base, just as it can vindicate those who are extrinsically base but intrinsically noble (PH 14§§25-27 = pp. 425-427). I note that such uses of the *ainos* for exposure and vindication are evident also in the *Life of Aesop* narratives. Kurke (AC 41) likewise notes “the theme of appearance versus reality” in the *Life of Aesop*, commenting on “the contrast between Aesop’s abject status and hideously ugly body, on the one hand, and the excellence of his mind and counsel, on the other,” but she misses the opportunity of connecting this theme with comparable themes we can find in situations where the discourse of *ainos* is activated in archaic poetry. A premier example is the discourse of *ainos* used by Odysseus while disguised as a lowly beggar in his verbal exchanges with the haughty suitors of Penelope (BA 237-238).

§132c. Finally, we come to the word *sophoi*. My translation of *sophoi* here as ‘wise’ is only scratching the surface, as it were. Ordinarily, I prefer to translate the word as ‘skilled’—that is, skilled in understanding poetry and verbal art in general. That is the programmatic sense of the word in the poetics of Pindar (PH 6§5 = p. 148). I use ‘wise’ here only because this word

*sophoi* applies in the plural to the wise men or ‘sages’ featured in the traditions of the Seven Sages as analyzed by Richard Martin (1998). These Seven Sages traditions are compatible not only with the discourse of the *ainos* (PH 8§44 = p. 243 with n122; 14§31 = p. 429) in general but also in particular with the figure of Aesop as a master of telling fables (11§22 = p. 326 with n64). As I showed in my analysis, Aesop is a sage in his own right, though he is differentiated from the Seven Sages because of his lowly social status: I cited as an illustration the scene in Plutarch’s *Banquet of the Seven Sages* (150a) where Aesop is pictured as narrating the fable of “The Lydian Mule” (Fable 315a ed. Perry) while sitting on a *diphros* ‘low chair’ situated next to the elevated sympotic couch where the high-minded Solon the Sage is reclining. Kurke (AC 203n4) cites this scene as dramatized by Plutarch, and she even refers to my analysis, but she treats the discourse of and about Aesop here merely as a parody of the discourse of and about the Seven Sages. By contrast, I interpret Aesopic discourse as not only a parodistic alternative version of socially higher forms of comparable discourse but also as an actual cognate of these higher forms. In this regard, I agree with the diachronic perspective of Martin (1998) in his analysis of the Seven Sages tradition and I disagree with Kurke’s implicit critique (AC 327n3) when she says that the “versifying” of Aesop is not comparable to the “versifying” of the Seven Sages.

## **The forms of *prosimetrum* and prose in Greek traditions**

§133. An early form of transmission for the Seven Sages narratives was the *prosimetrum* (PH 1§54 = p. 47; 11§§33-34 = pp. 333-334). As I noted earlier, *prosimetrum* is a combination of poetry and prose, where utterances composed in verse are embedded within a framing discourse composed in prose. As I also noted, there are cognate forms of *prosimetrum* attested in other Indo-European traditions, as in the Indic compilations of fables known as the *Jātakas*, the *Pañcatantra*, and the *Hitopadeśa*. In the case of the Greek narratives about the Seven Sages, I

now highlight the fact that, in these narratives as well, the utterances of the Sages could be composed in verse and could then be embedded within framing narratives composed in prose, as we see in the case of Plutarch's *Life of Solon*, where the verses of Solon (F 7 ed. West) are framed by the prose narrative about his life and times (PH 11§33 = p. 333 with n101, where I give further illustrations). Alternatively, the utterances of the Sages could be composed in prose and could then be embedded within a framing narrative that was also composed in prose, as in the case of quotations from Solon in the *Histories* of Herodotus (11§32 = p. 332, with further reference to 8§50 = p. 248). This alternative mode of embedding what is spoken in prose by the Sage within the prose of the framing narrative is parallel to what we see in the *Life of Aesop* narratives, where the fables of Aesop are likewise spoken in prose by Aesop within the prose of the framing narratives that tell about his life and times.

§134. Judging by the attestations of *prosimetrum* in the Lives of the Seven Sages tradition, which indicate that the Greek verbal arts have preserved combinations of prose and poetry that are cognate with the forms of *prosimetrum* that we find in Indic compilations of fables, I argue that the fables of Aesop in earlier phases of the *Life of Aesop* tradition could likewise be articulated in the form of *prosimetrum*. We find a wealth of relevant comparative evidence about such complementarity of prose and poetry in the verbal arts of other Indo-European languages, and the complementarity extends well beyond fables to a wide variety of other forms of verbal art. In the case of Indic traditions, for example, I have so far mentioned only the standard compilations of fables, but these traditions also reveal many other kinds of discourse that feature a mix of prose and poetry: I mention here only the best-known example, the *Brāhmaṇas* (Witzel 1997:388-389). We find further evidence for the workings of *prosimetrum* in other Indo-European traditions (West 2007:61-62). In the case of the Germanic traditions, for example, I highlight the Old Norse sagas, as also such special narratives as the *Prose Edda* of

Snorri Sturluson (these narratives and others as well are analyzed by Harris 1997); other outstanding examples include medieval Celtic narratives (as analyzed by Mac Cana 1997). In all these traditions, we find instances of verse embedded within the framing discourse of prose.

§135. Even aside from such comparative evidence for the function of prose as a framing discourse for poetry, the parallel comparative evidence for the existence of prose as a medium that is synchronically independent of poetry in the traditions we have just surveyed persuades me that it is ill-advised to think of prose as some kind of Greek “invention.” I will have more to say later about the relationship of prose and poetry from a cross-cultural point of view (with reference to the formulation of Hanson and Kiparsky 1997, especially p. 20 and p. 35n20).

### **A transition to further questions about the *ainos***

§136. By now we have seen that the *ainos*, from a diachronic point of view, is a most versatile medium in both form and function. In form, the *ainos* transcends any single genre; and it can be spoken in poetry or in prose. In function, the *ainos* can represent upper or lower strata of society; and it can be spoken in high-minded or in lowly ways.

§137. It remains to ask whether the lowly ways of speaking the *ainos*, as reflected in the fables of Aesop, are lowly also from a moral point of view. In other words, is the second of the three criteria for understanding the *ainos*, that is, the need to be *agathos* or morally ‘noble’, applicable to the *ainos* as an Aesopic fable? Or do we have to imagine an Aesop without morals? My answer to the second question is: no. And I link this answer with my answer to the first question: yes, the discourse of Aesop is noble—that is, it is noble on the inside, though it seems base on the outside. Here I highlight again the observation made by Kurke (AC 41) about “the theme of appearance versus reality” in the *Life of Aesop*, where she notes “the contrast between Aesop’s abject status and hideously ugly body, on the one hand, and the excellence of his mind and counsel, on the other.” And I repeat that Kurke could have connected this theme with

comparable themes we can find in archaic poetry, as in the case of the discourse of *ainos* used by Odysseus while disguised as a lowly beggar in his verbal exchanges with the haughty suitors (BA 237-238).

## Uses of *ainos* for praise or blame

§138. Such questions about the lowly as well as the elevated contexts of the *ainos* confront us with the historical realities of professionalization in the practice of verbal arts. When the *ainos* is used by professional practitioners of verbal arts, it tends to be viewed in different ways depending on differences in the social status of the practitioners. Such differences in social status have a bearing, as we will now see, on the uses of *ainos* for praise and blame.

§138a. My first example is the aristocratic medium of praise poetry as practiced by Pindar. In this case, the praise poem as an *ainos* is linked with the historically attested social status of Pindar as a praise poet. We see here the use of *ainos* for the special purpose of praising a patron as a *philos* or 'friend' (is an Pindar *Nemean* 7.61-63, with commentary in BA 237).

§138b. A second example is the use of *ainos* as a fable for the special purpose of blaming an opponent, as in the case of "The Fox and the Eagle," a fable embedded in the iambic poetry of Archilochus (F 174 ed. West): this fable as spoken by Archilochus serves to censure and to ridicule the figure of Lykambes as the speaker's opponent (Nagy BA 242-252).

§138c. A third example is what we see in the *Life of Aesop* narratives, where the fables as spoken by Aesop serve to censure and to ridicule a wide variety of opponents, including the people of Delphi, as we have seen. A primary point of comparison is the fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale," which we find embedded in the Hesiodic *Works and Days* (202-212), and which is overtly named as an *ainos* (202).

§139. So the *ainos* can in principle either praise or blame, as we have seen in the three examples I have shown so far. But there is something distinct about the *ainos* as used by a poet



like Pindar. Here the *ainos* is specialized as praise poetry, just as Pindar is a specialized praise poet. In his poetry, the *ainos* is restricted to praising 'friends'. It is generally not used for the purpose of blaming opponents. One exception to this last formulation, however, is the blame poet. The praise poet can freely blame the blame poet as a generic opponent of praise poetry. We see such blame in Pindar's words describing Archilochus himself as such a blame poet, imagined in the act of greedily fattening himself on hatreds stirred up by his own blame poetry (*Pythian* 2.55-56, with commentary in BA 244-245). By implication, then, any blame poetry that is used to censure and to ridicule deserves to be blamed by praise poetry. And, when it does engage in such blame, even the lofty *ainos* of the Pindaric praise poem can resort to fable in order to blame the blame poet, as we see in Pindar's allusive description of 'wolf steps' that will fend off the blame poetry represented by Archilochus (*Pythian* 2.83-85, with commentary in BA 242).

§140. When all is said and done, however, Pindar as a praise poet remains a praise poet even when he engages in blaming Archilochus as a generic opponent of praise. The fact is, Pindar does not become a blame poet by virtue of blaming the blame poet. And that fact, as I already said, has to do with the historical status of Pindar as a praise poet (on this point, I agree with Rosen 2007:99n54). But what about Archilochus, whose life and times as mythologized in the context of his hero cult at Paros are conventionally dated to the seventh century BCE, roughly two centuries before the historical life and times of Pindar? Can we really say that he is a blame poet? The answer is, we can say such a thing only from a diachronic perspective, not from a historical perspective. And we can say it only to the extent that the words of blame spoken by Archilochus are symmetrically the functional opposite of the words of praise that we see being deployed in Pindaric poetry.

§141. That said, we can also say that Archilochus is a praise poet when we consider diachronically his words of praise. A striking example is the praise he gives to Herakles for that hero's athletic victories at a prototypical scene of Olympic celebration (F 324 ed. West). In fact, these words of praise are recognized as the words of Archilochus himself in the poetry of Pindar at the beginning of his *Olympian* 9 (τὸ μὲν Ἀρχιλόχου μέλος φωνᾶεν Ὀλυμπία ...).

§142. Archilochus, then, is for Pindar a mythologized poet of the distant past who can either praise or blame. That is why the poetry of the historical praise poet Pindar can agree with the poetry of Archilochus when this poet engages in praise while disagreeing with it when this same poet engages in blame. From a Pindaric point of view, then, we can say that Archilochus is either a praise poet or a blame poet. Or, more simply, the figure of Archilochus can be viewed diachronically as a master of not only blame poetry but also praise poetry.

## **A debate about the model of Aesop as a poet**

§143. The formulation I have just applied to the figure of Archilochus can be applied to the figure of Aesop as well: on the basis of the *Life of Aesop* narratives, he can likewise be viewed as a master of both blame poetry and praise poetry. I say “poetry” here because Aesop, like Archilochus, can be viewed diachronically as a mythologized poet.

§144. We have already seen a number of examples in the *Life of Aesop* narratives showing Aesop in the act of blaming in the manner of a blame poet: for example, just as Archilochus blames by way of telling fables, so too does Aesop. And we have also seen in *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 1800 the story that told how Aesop blamed the people of Delphi by reproaching them (ὀνιδίζων [sic]) and ridiculing them (ἐπέσκωψεν) when he saw a prototypical version of their sacrificial practices.

§145. Just as Aesop can blame, he can also praise. We find an example in the *Life of Aesop* narratives where Aesop praises in the manner of a praise poet: it happens when he makes a

public appearance at the court of Nektanebo the pharaoh of Egypt, where he not only praises the king with words that earn the admiration of all but also offers sound advice (Vitae G+W 112-115), just as the generic praise poet can simultaneously praise and advise (as in Pindar *Pythian* 6.23, with commentary in BA 238-239).

§146. Kurke (AC 86, 242, 371n38) argues that it is wrong to view Aesop as a “blame poet,” with specific reference to my use of that term (BA 287-288). And, in terms of her argumentation, it follows that it would also be wrong to think of Aesop as a “praise poet.” Her thinking here is based primarily on the idea that the medium of Aesop was never poetry and, secondarily, on the idea that poetry would be too exalted a medium for the lowly Aesop. But we have already seen, on the basis of both internal and comparative evidence, that the medium of Aesop could in fact be poetry. And now we are about to see that prose could be an exalted medium in its own right.

## **A diachronic view of prose as it relates to poetry and vice versa**

§147. From a diachronic point of view, ancient Greek prose is a specialized form of verbal art that is predicated on another specialized form, which is poetry. This formulation, which sums up my overall argumentation about the diachronic relationship of ancient Greek poetry and prose (PH 1§§54-55 = pp. 46-47), can be applied to the evolution of poetry and prose in other traditions as well, whether or not these traditions are cognate with the Greek traditions (Harris and Reichl 1997b:6; see also Hanson and Kiparsky 1997, especially p. 20 and p. 35n20).

§148. In other Indo-European traditions besides the Greek, we find ample comparative evidence for the coexistence of prose and poetry as alternative ways of expressing a wide variety of discourse, ranging from the most elevated to the most lowly in social status. And here I must emphasize a fundamental fact about such a range in status: there is no evidence to indicate that poetry is by nature more elevated than prose, or that prose is by nature less

elevated than poetry. So we would be wrong if we assumed that poetry was by nature lofty and high-minded, or that only prose could be lowly and mean-spirited. There are countless examples of lowly poetry and lofty prose in the attested verbal arts of the Indo-European languages.

§149. In the case of poetry, perhaps the most telling comparative evidence comes from the medieval Irish traditions of verbal art as practiced in medieval Ireland—and from the attested medieval Irish laws delving into details about the honors due to masters of the verbal arts. To give an idea of the range of Old Irish poetry, I draw special attention to the legal text known as the *Uraicecht na Ríar* ('The Primer of the Stipulations'), dating from the second half of the eighth century CE: there it is stipulated that the *ollam*, which is the word for the highest-ranking of seven social grades of *filid* 'poets', must have 350 compositions to his name (Breatnach 1987:102-103). In later phases of Irish society, the *ollam* was the appointee of the king of the *túath*, which was the word for a social unit analogous to the *dēmos* in archaic Greek societies (for more on the *dēmos*, see PH 9§2 = p. 251 with n10), but in earlier Irish phases the *ollam* was the appointee of the *túath* itself (Breatnach pp. 92-93). Such a formal relationship between poet and *túath* is comparable to a detail we find in the *Odyssey* (xvii 383-387), where a generic *aoidos* 'poet' is described as a *dēmiourgos* 'craftsman of the *dēmos*' along with other craftsmen such as carpenters and physicians and seers (PH 2§12 = pp. 56-57); similarly in medieval Irish traditions, poets are categorized along with other craftsmen as *áes cerd* 'people of the crafts', who have juridical immunity as they travel from one *túath* to another (Kelly 1988:46). After the *ollam*, the next highest grade of poet in the medieval Irish hierarchy of poets is the *ánruth*, who is required to have 175 compositions to his name (Breatnach pp. 108-109). In a text known as the *Immacallam in dá thúarad* ('Colloquy of the Two Sages'), it is noted that the *ánruth* customarily has a silver branch held over his head, compared with a golden

branch for the *ollam* and bronze branches for all the other grades of poets (Breatnach p. 94).<sup>4</sup> As we consider the lower grades of poets in the *Uraicecht na Ríar*, we find no correlation of lower status with any greater propensity to engage in blame rather than praise, though the three subgrades of poets that are lower than the seven grades do seem to specialize in ridicule and buffoonery (text in Breatnach pp. 112-113). In any case, regardless of the poet's status, the performing of blame poetry by a poet is not considered a bad thing in medieval Irish law: what matters legally is whether a blame poem is justified or unjustified, and a blame poet is subject to penalties only if his blame poetry is legally proved to be unjustified (examples collected by Kelly p. 138).

§150. The high-ranking poets of medieval Ireland were required to be masters not only of poetry but also of prose (Kelly 1988:47; see also Mac Cana 1980:122-125). In the *Uraicecht na Ríar*, for example, it is stipulated that the *ollam*, as the highest-ranking poet, must be knowledgeable also *i cach coimgniu* 'in all historical science' (in one manuscript, this wording is glossed *scel* 'tales') and *i mbrithemnacht fénechais* 'in the jurisprudence of Irish law' (Breatnach 1987:102-103).

§151. As we have already seen, medieval Irish literature is replete with a wide variety of discourse composed in *prosimetrum*, where different kinds of poetry are embedded within a framing discourse composed in prose (as analyzed by Mac Cana 1997). Also, there are occasional attestations of both a poetic and a prosaic version of what is notionally the same composition (Mac Cana pp. 103-104 gives some examples from the *dindshenchas* or 'lore of eminent places' and from a variety of other medieval Irish traditions). And, in many of these cases, the prose is as elevated in tone as the corresponding poetry.

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<sup>4</sup> In another project, I hope to compare the medieval Irish ritual detail about the highest-ranking poet and the golden branch held above his head with the traditions about the Golden Bough as signaled in Virgil's *Aeneid* 6 (185-204).

§152. Such comparative evidence reaffirms what I said earlier, that we would be wrong to assume that prose in Greek or in any other related tradition is by origin a lowly medium, or that poetry is by nature a more elevated medium. Such unjustified assumptions can be linked with another assumption, that prose is somehow the equivalent of ordinary speech. This assumption is likewise unjustified. True, prose can create the illusion of ordinary speech, but it is actually at two removes from it, in that prose is predicated on poetry, which is at one remove from ordinary speech (PH 1§§54-55 = pp. 46-47; see also Hanson and Kiparsky 1997:20). We could even say that prose is at three removes from ordinary speech, in that song is also predicated on ordinary speech (PH 1§§23-24 = pp. 29-30), and it can be argued that poetry is predicated on song just as prose is predicated on poetry (PH 1§§54-55 = pp. 46-47). When poetry is the framing discourse for different forms of song, as in the case of Athenian drama, the form of the poetry can play the role of ordinary speech (see PH 1§56 = pp. 47-48 on the iambic trimeter) just as prose can play the role of ordinary speech when it serves as the framing discourse for different forms of poetry, as in the case of Seven Sages narratives that take the form of *prosimetrum* (PH 1§54 = p. 47; 11§§33-34 = pp. 333-334). I elaborate on this point in the twin project “*Homo ludens* and the Fables of Aesop,” where I explain my use of the expression play the role in referring to the imitative powers of both poetry and prose.

## **The relevance of the medium of Herodotus**

§153. The form of *prosimetrum*, as attested in the Seven Sages narratives, is comparable with the medium of Herodotus, where we see parallel patterns in the framing of poetry—in this case, oracular poetry—within the prose of the narrative (PH 11§§32-36 = pp. 332-335). This medium of Herodotus, featuring poetry framed within prose, is a kind of *prosimetrum* in its own right, but the kinds of poetry that are framed by the prose are limited. Aside from the instances where the narrative of Herodotus frames oracular poetry, most of the expected

poetic discourse that is being framed takes the form of prose, not poetry. Even the sayings of Solon, who figures as the most eminent of the Seven Sages, are formatted as prose rather than poetry within the framing prose narrative of the *Histories* (PH 8§50 = p. 248, 11§32 = p. 332). And, as I have already noted, this alternative mode of embedding what is spoken in prose by the Sage within the prose of the framing narrative is parallel to what we see in the *Life of Aesop* narratives, where the fables of Aesop are likewise spoken in prose by Aesop within the framing prose of the narratives about his life and times. I will now explore further the significance of this parallelism.

§154. The similarities between the media of Herodotus and Aesop are noted by Plutarch in his essay *On the Malice of Herodotus* (871d), where he notes wryly that the big difference between Herodotus and Aesop is that, whereas the fables of Aesop present us with talking apes and ravens, the *Histories* of Herodotus show more elevated talking characters who include not only humans such as Scythians or Persians or Egyptians but even the god Apollo himself in the act of speaking his oracular poetry (PH 11§19 = p. 322, 11§35 = p. 334). The talking humans in this negative reference correspond to characters in a genre of fable known as *Subaritikoi logoi* ‘discourse from Sybaris’, which I have already highlighted in my comments on relevant passages in the *Wasps* of Aristophanes (1258-1259). As we learn from the scholia for the *Birds* of Aristophanes (471), Sybaritic fables are distinct from Aesopic fables in that they feature talking humans as the main characters, not talking animals (PH 11§21 = pp. 324-325, 11§35 = pp. 334-335).

§155. In the case of Plutarch’s comment about the talking characters of Herodotus, I draw attention to the fact that he highlights Scythians, Persians, and Egyptians rather than Hellenes as the talking characters. The negative implication here is that Herodotus is disingenuously applying to non-Hellenes what really applies to Hellenes. As I have argued, however, such a

strategy of indirect application is what Herodotus himself had really intended: what is disingenuousness for Plutarch is in fact a refined sense of diplomatic strategy for Herodotus (PH 11§21 = pp. 324-325 with n59).

§156. The diplomacy of Herodotus in the use of *ainoi* as fables is a topic that I have explored at length in previous work (PH ch. 11). And I now explore it further in the twin project “*Homo ludens* and the Fables of Aesop,” especially with reference to the elements of fable inherent in the story of Hippokleides in Herodotus (6.126-130), which are cognate, in my view, with the elements of the fable of “The Dancing Peacock” as attested in the Indic *Jātakas* (I disagree here with Kurke AC 417, who thinks that the Greek version of the story was somehow borrowed from the Indic version).

§157. The point I just made about the diplomatic use of *ainoi* as fables by Herodotus, where the speaking characters may be Scythians or Persians or Egyptians even though the intended listeners are in fact Hellenes, is relevant to the use of the word *logios* by Herodotus, which we can translate loosely as ‘master of speech’ when it is a noun and ‘expert in speech’ when it is an adjective.

§158. The question, is, can we say that Herodotus is a *logios*? I have argued that Herodotus is in fact a *logios*, at least from a diachronic point of view (PH 8§§8-14 = pp. 221-225; for background, see Asheri et al. 2007:74). This word *logios*, in terms of my argument, is applicable to Herodotus in his capacity as a master of prose performance. I say applicable, not applied, because Herodotus (1.1.1) applies the word not to himself but to those who identify themselves with the Persians, not with the Hellenes, and who are therefore representatives of a world view that is different. Examining all the Herodotean contexts of the word *logios* (1.1.1, 2.3.1, 2.77.1, 4.46.1; comments in PH 8§13 = p. 224 with n54), I argue that *logioi* are masters of discourse about different world views as represented by Persians (1.1.1), Egyptians (2.3.1,



2.77.1), and Scythians (4.46.1). In terms of my argument, then, this word *logios* could apply only implicitly to Herodotus as a Hellene but it applies explicitly to non-Hellenes, just as the *ainoi* or fables of Herodotus could apply only implicitly to Hellenes but explicitly to Persians or Scythians or Egyptians.

§159. In support of my argument that the term *logios* in the sense of ‘master of speech’ applies implicitly to Herodotus himself, I have highlighted in my work (PH 8§13 = p. 224 with n54) the parallel semantics of the word *logopoios* ‘artisan of speech’, which Herodotus actually applies to Aesop himself (2.134.3), to be contrasted with the word *mousopoios* ‘artisan of song’, which he applies to Sappho (2.135.1). As in the case of the word *logios*, Herodotus does not apply the word *logopoios* to himself, but he does in fact apply it to his rival, the historian Hecataeus of Miletus (2.143.1, 5.36.2, 5.125). By implication, then, Herodotus is a *logopoios*, an ‘artisan of speech’, just like Hecataeus—and even like Aesop (PH 11§21 = pp. 324-325).

§160. In making this argument, I interpret the word *logios* in the sense of a ‘master of speech’ to refer to mastery of prose in contrast to song, just as the word *logopoios* ‘artisan of speech’ as applied to Aesop refers to mastery of prose in contrast to the word *mousopoios* ‘artisan of song’ as applied to Sappho, which refers to mastery of song. In this regard, I highlight the attestation of an explicit contrast between *logioi* ‘masters of speech’ and *aoidoi* ‘singers’ in a song of Pindar (*Pythian* 1.92-94), where the word *logioi* occurs in a phraseological context that is parallel with what we find in Herodotus (1.1.1). There are also examples of *logioi* in other songs of Pindar (*Nemean* 6.45, *Pythian* 1.92-94) where the word occurs in phraseological contexts that are once again parallel to what we find in Herodotus (1.1.1). My synchronic study of the linguistic evidence showing collocations of these words in their attested contexts was the basis for my arguing, from a diachronic point of view, that these contexts are cognate with each other (PH 8§§8-14 = pp. 221-225).

§161. Kurke (AC 375) says that the work of Boris Maslov (2009:10) has undone my explanation of a working opposition between *logioi* and *aidoi* as masters of prose and song respectively in the diction of Pindar. I don't think so. In terms of my explanation, the word *logioi* refers to masters of prose only in contexts where this word is juxtaposed with *aidoi*, which in turn refers to singers; otherwise, the word *logioi* alone can refer to masters of either prose or song, as we see from the context of a passage in Pindar (*Nemean* 6.45). With reference to this specific passage (PH 8§13n54 = p. 224 with n54), I have argued that the word *logioi* is the unmarked member of a working opposition between this word and *aidoi* in the sense of 'singers', which is the marked member; outside of such an opposition, however, *logios* can refer to masters of song as well as prose. In making this argument, I applied the "markedness theory" of Prague School linguists such as Jakobson (1957 [1984]:47). To that extent, I agree with the formulation of Nino Luraghi (2009:454) when he says that the word *logioi* in the usage of Pindar "can subsume the poets, but the poets can be distinguished from among the *logioi*." But I disagree with Luraghi when he calls into question the idea that *logioi* could be "masters of oral tradition in prose" (p. 453). As I showed earlier in my brief overview of the comparative evidence we find in other Indo-European traditions, especially the medieval Irish, the mastery of oral traditions could be professionalized in both poetry and prose. I disagree also with Maslov (2009:10) when he argues that the word *aidoi* as contrasted with *logioi* in the diction of Pindar refers only to the non-professional singers of the poet's choral odes: Maslov underrates here the range of mimesis in the referential world of choral performance, which can imitate a wide range of other kinds of performances, including epic performance.

§162. Up to now, my diachronic assessment of the word *logios* as used by Herodotus has led me to argue that this word applies to all masters of speech, even masters of prose. But this is not the same thing as saying that Herodotus would ever want to call himself a *logios*. There are

historical reasons we can find for explaining why he does not apply this word directly to himself. As I have argued (PH ch. 8 and ch. 9), these historical reasons have to do with the word *historia* itself, as Herodotus uses it in his *prooemium* (0.0.0) and elsewhere (the Ionic form is *historiē*). This word, as I have also argued, expresses the juridical and moral expertise of the speaker, which is relevant to times of political crisis requiring interstate arbitration. But it also expresses *scientific expertise*, which was highly valued in the historical context of Herodotus' own life and times. In my own work, I have stressed this *scientific* aspect of the semantics of the Herodotean word *historiē* (PH 10§53 = p. 311). So I agree with Rosalind Thomas (2000) when she argues for this *scientific* aspect of the word, though I disagree with her undervaluing of the *juridical* and *moral* aspects; and I am sympathetic with the efforts made by Bakker (2002) to reconcile all three aspects (as noted by Kurke AC 365n19).

§163. The word *historiē*, in terms of the argument I have presented, signals the scientific as well as moral and juridical superiority of the world view of Herodotus in contrast with the world view of the *logioi* who identify with the Persians instead of the Hellenes. This is not to say that *logioi* are unqualified rivals of Herodotus: after all, from a diachronic perspective, *logioi* too could deal with moral and juridical *aitiai* 'causes' or 'cases' (PH 8§9 = 121-122, with reference to Herodotus 1.1.1 and its organic relation to the preceding *prooemium*; see also Asheri et al. 2007:72-73, citing my discussion at PH ch. 8). Still, even if the *logioi* are qualified rivals, the point is that Herodotus as the master of *historiē* is even more qualified. Only Herodotus, by claiming mastery of *historiē*, could claim a superior authority not only in moral and juridical matters but even in science.

§164. From a synchronic point of view, then, the meaning of *historiē* in the usage of Herodotus is broader than the meaning of *logios* and is therefore more applicable to the medium of this author. From a diachronic point of view, the meaning of *historiē* can be seen as

newer for the medium of Herodotus, while the meaning of *logios* would be older for the practitioner of such a medium; and, though it is an older word that used to have a broader meaning, *logios* now develops a relatively narrower meaning in contrast to the broader meaning that has in the meantime been appropriated by the word *historiē*.

§165. Here I find it relevant to invoke the “fourth law of analogy” as formulated by Jerzy Kuryłowicz (1945-1949 [1966] 169) and as reformulated by myself (PH 0§13 = pp. 5-6) with reference to the semantics of secondary meanings taken on by older forms when the primary meanings of these forms have been taken over by newer forms. This “law” or diachronic model is in turn relevant to a formulation of Mikhail Bakhtin ([1984] 410): “The object that has been destroyed remains in the world but in a new form of being in time and space; it becomes the ‘other side’ of the new object that has taken its place” (PH 0§13 = p. 6 with n18).

§166. In terms of Bakhtin’s formulation, we can think of *logios* as a word that specializes in referring to the “other side” of *historiē*, an exotic side that is seemingly less appropriate to Hellenes and more appropriate to non-Hellenes. Herodotus uses the word *logioi* with specific reference to masters of discourse who are Persians (1.1.1.), Egyptians (2.3.1, 2.77.1), and Scythians (4.46.1). I find it relevant here to note again the wry remark made by Plutarch in his essay *On the Malice of Herodotus* (871d), where he mentions specifically the Scythians, the Persians, and the Egyptians as the talking characters of Herodotus, to be contrasted with animals such as apes and ravens who are featured as the talking characters of Aesop’s fables. Plutarch is in effect saying that any communication from such Scythians, Persians, and Egyptians, who as we have seen are described as *logioi* in the *Histories* of Herodotus, is a matter of hearing virtual fables. And, from a diachronic point of view, Plutarch is right, if we think of the telling of these virtual fables in the comprehensive sense of telling an *ainos* (PH 11§19 = p. 322, 11§35 = p. 334).

## Returning to the *ainoi* of Aesop

§167. I return one last time to this word *ainoi* here because, as we have seen, it fits not only the more elevated forms of discourse as represented by the *logioi* who are linked with virtual fables in the *Histories* of Herodotus, but it fits also the ostensibly lowlier forms of discourse as represented by the Fables of Aesop. As we have also seen, from a diachronic point of view, such *ainoi* could be performed not only as prose but also as poetry, even though we happen to find them attested exclusively as prose in both the *Histories* of Herodotus and the *Life of Aesop* narratives as preserved in the Vitae G and W.

§168. Here I also return one last time to the passage in Plato's *Phaedo* (61b) that actually shows the poetic potential of the fable as *ainos*. As we saw from the wording of Plato, the form of the Aesopic fable as *logos* is ordinarily prose in the era of Socrates—but the content of fable as *muthos* makes it compatible with poetry. And, as we also saw, the *muthos* of Aesopic fable could in fact be poetry in earlier phases of its existence. That is why Plato's Socrates can playfully take the *muthoi* of Aesop at their word by converting these *muthoi*, as fables, into poetry: if you intend to be poetic in content, he is saying, you should be poetic in form as well. And that is why I can now say that Plato's Socrates, by turning Aesop's fables into verse, has in effect made the fable revert from its current form as prose to its earlier form as poetry.

§169. Just as *muthoi* can be *logoi* in the case of Aesop's fables, so too they can be *logoi* as told by *logioi* in the case of the *Histories* of Herodotus. In other words, the virtual fables embedded in the framing discourse of the *Histories* can be considered to be *ainoi* in prose just as the fables of Aesop as we see them deployed in the attested *Life of Aesop* narratives are *ainoi* in prose.

## A path toward a reconciliation of opposing arguments

§170. As I bring this project to a close, I should note that I certainly do not expect everyone to agree with what I have argued. What I do hope, however, is that my argumentation will

promote further study of Aesop, which I am sure will continue to evolve. And I expect that my debate with Kurke about Aesop, especially about the different ways we use the term diachronic, will contribute to this evolution. When all is said and done, however, I think that my work on Aesop, especially as compared with Herodotus, is compatible with the relevant work of Kurke. And I think that our findings can be read together in many creative ways, despite our disagreements. In any case, our debate can remain friendly. I emphasize the friendliness of my debate because Kurke and I have been friends for well over two decades.

§171. In the spirit of this friendship, I find it apt here to apply a would-be fable that is relevant to the debate, and I hope that the application will be successful as a joke among friends. The context of the would-be fable is this: Kurke is commenting on three different definitions of the fable in three different works having to do in one way or another with Aesop. And here is what she says (AC 398-399): “At the risk of sounding like Goldilocks assessing the hospitality of the three bears, I would contend that van Dijk’s [1997] definition of fable is too snug, and Karadagli’s [1981] (and Nagy’s [PH = pp. 324-325 with n58]) too loose.”

§172. I don’t seem to have a bed of my own in this would-be fable. Not only that: I have to share a single bed with someone else. Surely this is an alarming situation for all concerned. I think we would all be better off if I could be assigned a bed of my own. And, since I have personally always identified with one particular character in previous retellings of the Goldilocks story, I now have a special request to make: I would like to be assigned the bed of Baby Bear. Unlike the beds of Papa and Mama, the bed of this third character is neither too hard nor too soft, and so it would be just right.

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