

Aesop and Animal Fable

Animals in Antiquity, Week 3



Fables

- Anthropomorphic animals
- Projects human behaviour onto animal protagonist
- What differentiates humans from animals?



History of Fable

- Starting point for investigating Greek and Roman ideas about animals
- Oral tradition (Near East)
- According to Greeks: of great antiquity – source of wisdom
- All are from later collections (2.c. AD) or sophisticated literary context (Aristophanes, Aristotle, Horace, Phaedrus)
- Earliest known collection of Aesopic fables is lost and was compiled by Demetrius of Phaleron in 4th ce. BC

Style

- Deliberate simplicity
- No artistry – air of archaism and authenticity
- Aesop left no writings – prominent as fable-teller – very specific genre



Sources – Categories of Evidence

- 1) Within various other genres of Greek and Latin literature (from 5th ce. BC)
- 2) Fable collections (lost Demetrios of Phalerum 4/3rd ce. BC)
- 3) Life of Aesop (anonymous, probably attached to a collection, fictionalized biography, 2.ce. AD, placing Aesop in 6/5th ce. BC)
- 4) Allusions and Intertexts (riddle, simile, metaphor, allegory, proverb – especially in Attic comedy, natural history and mock epic)

Approaches to Animal Fable

- Animals are present in 75% of fables in *Collectio Augustana*, 65% of Phaedrus, 80% of Babrius
- Not all Aesopic fables include animals, „Aesopic“ refers to a manner of telling stories not type of content



What can we consider a fable?

- 1) Text which is explicitly referred to as *ainos*, *muthos* or *logos* in Greek or *apologus*, *fabula* or *fabella* in Latin
- 2) It is ascribed to Aesop or collected under his name
- 3) It contains certain formulae and/or conventional narrative elements (specific opening and closing formulae, tripartite narrative structure, moral of the story)

Animals in Fable – Animals speak

- Problems with speech – differences between humans and animals
- Wolf and the Lamb – futility of speech (Perry 155) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ntycz339Bo>
- Wolf and the Sheep
- What are the similarities and differences? Contradiction?

Humans vs. Animal Interaction in Fable

- Fisherman and the fish (Perry 11)
- The swan and his owner (Perry 233)
- Comparison?



Animal stereotypes

- Lion, fox and the stag (Babrius 95) – knowledge of stereotypical traits becomes a theme of a fable – both fox and reader are aware of them

