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## **Adaptations of Aesopian “Fancy” and Didactics of the “Wisdom” of His Moral in the Works of Prominent Fabulists**

In the ancient society judging by the principles of aestheticism (in which the human appearance was almost crucial), *homo de plebe*, strikingly ugly Aesop must have been an object of constant ridicule and oppression until his mental potential was fully comprehended. The evidence of the fact can be found in Herodotus' *Histories*.<sup>1</sup> According to them, Aesop had been a slave of a wealthy Samian man Iadmon before he was eventually freed. However, the Delphians insulted by his fables charged him of gold bowl theft from the temple and sentenced him to death. In *The Wasps*, Aristophanes says that Aesop is an outstanding person whose fables should be necessarily read. The comic dramatist also informs us about the slander of the treacherous Delphian priests who accused Aesop of stealing the Divine Vessel.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, some other sources confirm that in the sixth century BC, he happened to be in the kingdom of Croesus who sent him to Delphi where he was perfidiously executed.<sup>3</sup> We also know that at first Aesop lacked the freedom of speech because of his humble social status. That was why he applied to allegory and created fables where the animals spoke and behaved like human characters. Speculating about the creative

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<sup>1</sup> Herodotus, *Works*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press. London: W. Heinemann, Loeb Classical Library, 1, 1946.

<sup>2</sup> <http://royallib.com/>.

<sup>3</sup> Aesop, *Fables*, Introduction by V. Baakashvili, Tbilisi 1979 (in Georgian).

work of Aesop, S. Radtsig admitted: 'the artistic effect of the allegorical satire is based on decoding its implication.'<sup>4</sup> As for the significance of appearance in olden times (which might have caused serious problems for the ugly fabulist), we come to know about it even due to Homer's epos *Iliad* where he speaks about Thersites. It is Thersites, who attacks Agamemnon with insulting words and puts serious blame on him; the very Thersites, who is a man with numerous physical defects – lame, squint-eyed, with a head that comes to a point.<sup>5</sup> It is also admitted (with a great repugnance and sarcasm) that Thersites is a loathsome hunchback. Aesop too had an ugly hump 'which rose like a mount on his short torso.'<sup>6</sup> Thersites justly points out that the riches and fame, which came to Agamemnon in the Trojan War, had been gained by the hard labour of the others. For Aesop the human appearance was not the matter of great interest; he was interested in the spiritual riches of the humans rather than in their looks and physical beauty, and appreciated wit and wisdom most of all. To justify this assumption, it would be enough to recall Socrates – 'the personification of Philosophy'<sup>7</sup> of all times, the reviser of the human destination, the ugliest of men<sup>8</sup> – who was said to be entertaining himself by rhyming Aesop's fables while imprisoned.<sup>9</sup> Quasimodo is one of the most impressive and outstanding characters in the world literature. As a prominent literary character, he personifies tremendous strength, inner greatness, high moral and boundless humanness. Despite his ugliness, he is likable and stirs up great sympathy in the reader. Among the writers, it is Aesop, who evokes the same sentiments. He is acclaimed a great writer not only in his native land, but also worldwide. Aesop is imitated, his plots are adopted by the foreign fabulists linking them with their own mode of life and creating wonderful pieces of literature. As for the good looks, in different epochs they were interpreted differently. It would be enough to recall Albert Camus' opinion about the abundant beauty and

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<sup>4</sup> Radtsig S., *The History of Ancient Greek Literature*, Moscow 1958 (in Russian).

<sup>5</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, Cambridge: University Press. London: W. Heinemann. Loeb Classical Library, v. 1, 1965.

<sup>6</sup> Aesop, 1979.

<sup>7</sup> Fisher S., Dorbaush R., *Economics, USA*, 1992.

<sup>8</sup> Losev A., *Socrates*. See: *Plato, Works*, v. 1, 5 (in Russian).

<sup>9</sup> Aesop, 1979, 4.

overwhelming impatience that are the permanent companions of the transient riches.<sup>10</sup>

Aesop shifts the emphasis from the external appearance of the humans to their internal ugliness, which brings shame and ill fate to the mortals. This is the leading motif of two of his fables – *Aesop on the Deck* and *The Fox and the Leopard*. In the latter one, the fox and the leopard argue which of them is more beautiful. The leopard is proud of his spotted body, while the fox claims his priority for having a refined spirit.<sup>11</sup> The moral of the fable is that the well-trained mind is better than the hollow physical beauty. Creating the allegorical images, Aesop showed his practical wisdom, which provided a model for subsequent European writers. The French version of the spiritual poverty is ridiculed in La Fontaine's fable *The Fox and the Mask*. La Fontaine, like Aesop, emphasizes the uselessness of solely physical beauty. The story of the fox, which comes across a mask anciently used by actors, is interesting for the final remark of the viewer: 'So full of beauty, so empty of brains!' The moral of the fable is that a person may have an outstanding appearance admired by all but lack brains thoroughly.<sup>12</sup> We come across the same motif in Aesop's fable *Aesop on the Deck*, which describes how patiently Aesop bore the mockery of the sailors. To prove their improvidence, Aesop told them: 'chaos came first and water next into being. Then Zeus sent another element – the earth – whom he commanded to swallow everything in three gulps. First, the earth swallowed the highlands, next were the lowlands and when the third gulp is taken, no one will need your professionalism any longer.'<sup>13</sup> The moral of the fable features how the unworthy people hold up to mockery the worthy ones thus giving rise to terrible misfortunes brought around by narrow-mindedness. In other words, the fable describes the situation when in a sound body there is not a sound spirit. Imprudence again is the didactic theme referred to by Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani in one of his fables – *The Imprudent Swimmer* – from his collection of tales *Wisdom of Fancy*. The drowning man is beseeching God to save him, and his friend advises him to use his own hands for that purpose. Here the author

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<sup>10</sup> Albert Camus, *Noces*, ed. Gallimard. 1958 (in French), translated into Georgian by G. Ekizashvili, 2003, 44.

<sup>11</sup> Babrius and Phaedrus, *Fables*, Loeb Classical Library, 1990.

<sup>12</sup> La Fontaine, *Fables* (in French), 1668, N1-6; 1675-1679, N7-9; 1694, N12.

<sup>13</sup> Babrius and Phaedrus, 1990.

teaches us that mortals should find the way out themselves in any dangerous situation.<sup>14</sup> Aesop too describes the story of a swimming boy in one of his fables. When the boy caught in a current is going to drown, the passer-by does not help him. Instead, he starts scolding him for his carelessness. The moral of the fable is – 'Do not scold the others, just be helpful to them!'<sup>15</sup>

The matter of the social background is also very important in Aesop's fables. The fable *The Fox and the Monkey* is concerned with this very problem. Desire of gaining priority 'due to the origin' is quite evident in it. There is a bitter argument between the fox and the monkey since both assert to be of a nobler origin than the other is. In the end, the cunning fox starts groaning aloud and shedding tears looking at the numerous gravestones. When the monkey asks him what is the reason of his grief, the latter answers proudly that those are the graves of the slaves of his ancestors. The monkey knows that the fox is telling a lie but he also knows that it cannot be proved as the dead will not rise from their graves and the truth can never be established.<sup>16</sup> Aesop, like many of his subsequent fabulists, often chooses a fox for a main character when speaking about insidiousness. Here we will not analyze such popular fables as *The Crow and the Fox*, *The Fox and the Grapes* and many others that were translated by such outstanding writers as La Fontaine and Krilov word for word; we will only try to find out the common motifs among the characters depicted in the texts. The plot of the following fable is based on the same theme of the noble origin, but this time the partner of a fox is a crocodile. Aesop describes an eloquent fox, who argues with a crocodile. Aesop's crocodile speaks enthusiastically about his ancestors who held high positions and were very well educated 'gymnasiarchs'. The witty reaction of the fox is funny indeed: he says that the skin of the crocodile reflects very well how hard-working students they have been.<sup>17</sup>

Relationship of the strong and the weak is one of the leading themes of Aesop's fables causing a great resonance in the literature worldwide. Aesop thinks that the strong should never neglect the problems of the

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<sup>14</sup> Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, Jubilee collection, *Fables*, 1959; also *Works in Four volumes*, Tbilisi 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Babrius and Phaedrus, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

weak, that they should always help them not only because it is right but also because life is full of surprises and nobody knows what the future has in store for them. This idea is carried out in Aesop's fable *The Lion and the Mouse*. In one of its versions, the trapped lion starts thinking of the mouse whom he did not help when the latter was in trouble, and who might free him from the trap now by gnawing through the rope.<sup>18</sup> In another version of the same fable with the happy end, the noble lion lets the little mouse in his claws go and, in return, the mouse gnaws through the knot in the net and sets free the king of the beasts.<sup>19</sup> The same story of big and small animals (i. e. the adaptation of the plot of this fable) is unfolded in a different composition in the *Panchatatra*. The eighth story of book one tells how the little rabbit manages to save not only his own life from the huge greedy lion but also the lives of other animals. The didactics of the moral is that 'the clever creature, however small it is, can triumph over the big one', as it happened in the case of the clever rabbit who managed to draw the lion in the well. The theme of kindness bringing reward in the future is particularly prominent in Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani's parables. From this viewpoint, *The Dexterous Arab* is very special. It tells the story of the Caliph of Baghdad who buys a wonderful horse for a thousand silver coins. The newly bought horse is immediately kidnapped by the Arab who sold it, but he brings the horse back to the owner on the third day. The Arab, in excuse, says the following: 'The silver is heavy and I had no horse to carry it. But I had to return the horse because Allah would never forgive me if I paid back for the kindness with an evil deed'.<sup>20</sup> Now we will analyze the plot of the fable which, after Aesop, his subsequent writers adopted, and which gave start to the stories with one and the same scheme and characters. The strong cannot always save the weak. This is when the strength of the 'Aesopian language', his mercilessness, his struggle against injustice come fully into play. Aesopian language is often described as 'the system of interrelation between the author and the reader in which the idea is hidden from the censor.'<sup>21</sup> It is a fictional language – the code ciphered with the help of allegory, irony and other

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Gigauri Ts., *Latin and Terminology Bases*, Tbilisi 1996, 65 (in Georgian).

<sup>20</sup> Babrius and Phaedrus, 1990.

<sup>21</sup> Grushko E., *Language of Aesop*, Dictionary of Russian Literature, 1997, 516-555 (in Russian).

means – where the characters have contextual pseudonyms.<sup>22</sup> In other words, it is a kind of disguised speech. The fable of *The Wolf and the Lamb* is a good example. There the only guilt of the lamb is that it is good food for the hungry wolf. This theme encouraged many writers to defend the people low in the social scale. It gained especially prominent place in the Russian literature. We come across it in the works by Trediakovski, Sumarokov, Derzhavin and the celebrated fabulist Krilov. As the expert of Krilov's creative work, V. Kanevich admits: 'fabulists, like any translators of other genres, often interpret the texts adapting them to their own language and style, altering the idea, representing the scenes differently and giving the story quite a new shade'.<sup>23</sup> However, this is not the case with *The wolf and the Lamb* where neither modifications of the idea nor new details added to the text can be traced. La Fontaine and Krilov have so intimately adopted the content of the fable and made such brilliant translations that they look like the original texts. The theme of the fable is so important and its language is so rich in poetic forms, that its plot (like those of some other popular fables such as *The Peasant and the Wiper*, *The Grasshopper and the Ant*, the fables with foxes etc.) has fitted perfectly into the world literature without any necessary changes. Another fable by Aesop – *The Cat and the Cock* – is of the similar trend. It describes how the cat tries to assure the cock that his existence is senseless, that he is harmful to the others. Cat's dialogue blaming the cock is of great interest. In it, he claims that the cock keeps awake everyone around by his loud cock-a-doodle-doo. The latter protests saying that he is very useful to everybody, since he wakes them up in time not to be late for their work. When the cat accuses him of incestuous relations with his mother and sisters, the cock answers that he does it for the sake of giving them a chance to lay more eggs. In the end, the cat's 'verdict' sound like that of the wolf's, who blames the lamb because of his own hunger – not being able to prove anything, he simply tells the cock that he is going to eat him.<sup>24</sup> The moral of the fable is that if the strong desire they can always defeat the weak, but they should not desire injustice for the fear of the natural laws. Aesop preaches humanness and modesty in his fables. He is sure that in the end,

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<sup>22</sup> Losev L., Language of Aesop, Theatre: Magazine 1992, B-5-6; 164 (in Russian).

<sup>23</sup> Bibliographical and Historical Notes on Krilov's *Fables*, 1878, 10 (in Russian).

<sup>24</sup> Babrius and Phaedrus, 1990.

kindness will always win and cruelty will bring to a tragic aftermath. In the fable *The Eagle and the Bug*<sup>25</sup> mentioned in Aristophanes' *The Wasps*, Aesop speaks himself. The greedy eagle is punished, he is leveled to ground, despite the fact that Zeus sympathizes with him and tries to defend his future offsprings. The author underlines the fact that a physically feeble, small but clever creature can triumph even over the king of the world. When the desperate rabbit beseeches the bug to help him, he is like a drowning man clutching at straws. It would be no wonder if the bug refused to help him as a physically feeble creature cannot cope with the eagle following its prey. However, the bug does his best and beseeches the eagle not to eat the poor bunny. With this, the author speaks about mercy, pity and sympathy. The eagle pays dear for 'a bite of food' – the bug crashes all the eggs in his nest and even makes Zeus drop them together with the dung balls placed next to them. In his fable *The Man and the Wiper*,<sup>26</sup> Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani tells a story of ungratefulness: a man saves a wiper stuck in a burning tree in the field. In return, the ungrateful wiper tries to kill him. The tree and the ox in the field take the side of the wiper and do not try to help the man. They say that kindness never pays back. It is the cunning fox that helps the man by killing the wiper with a tree-branch. The saved man then likes the fur of the fox and decides to kill him.<sup>27</sup> In another of his fables – *The kind Wiper* – Sulkhan-Saba teaches us that kindness should never be paid back by evil. In this parable, he features several themes. We know that the word 'wiper' is often replaced by relevant epithets and metaphors as the word itself is linked with fear and disgust. This creature is mostly associated with ruthlessness, treason and death for it can give you a poisonous bite or choke you. But this story shows that it can give you a world of good as well. If in the previous fable the fox 'executs' the wiper justly, here the kind wiper thanks his saviour generously by giving him treasure. The author's idea about the colours is of interest as well. As we know, black is often associated with something unpleasant and sinister, while red is associated with something good and pleasant. If not the beggar, the evil would triumph over good – the black

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani, 1959.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

wiper would defeat the red one.<sup>28</sup> Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani also tells us that not all the species are able to pay kindness back with the same. In the fable *The Tortoise and the Scorpion*, the latter says that one should bite both the friends and the enemies alike.<sup>29</sup> The tortoise dives into the water and drowns the scorpion saying that he has to wash out the poison. The moral of the fable is that you should neither do the evil things nor be afraid of them. The merciless attitude of the author towards the treacherous people is shown well in the fable *The Wild Goats and the Shepherd*. The greedy shepherd sacrifices his own goats giving priority to the wild ones, for he thinks they would bring him more profit. He feeds them in bad weather, looks after them carefully to tame them. But when the weather conditions change for the better, the wild animals escape to the mountains. The moral of the fable is that those who do not take care of the most precious thing in life – the devoted friends – are destined to solitude.<sup>30</sup> In Aesop's fable *The Fox and the woodchopper*, the double-dealing is denounced. The double-faced woodchopper gives shelter to the fox chased by the hunters. When the hunters come to his place looking for their prey, the woodchopper denies seeing the fox but gestures towards its hiding place. The hunters do not understand his gesture and go away. When the woodchopper reproaches the fox for not thanking him, the fox answers: 'I would thank you cordially if your words and your gestures were not so incoherent.'<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the work analyses the ways in which the wise and kind-hearted fabulist instructs his reader how to live a proper life. He does it featuring some important motifs of appearance, background, kindness, friendship, devotion, narrow-mindedness and relationship between the weak and the strong in his fables, which are as popular today as ever before.

### **Abstract**

The article reviews how Aesopian literature's legacy – "Fancy" and didactics of "Wisdom" were assimilated by world famous fabulists. Main motive for Aesop is dominance of a "sophisticated mind" over physical beauty. Aesop, who was of lowly origin *homo de plebe* and was strikingly ugly, had an outstanding mental potential. Herodotus' "Histories" contain biographical facts about the fabulist; Aristophanes considers unknowing of his fables unacceptable; Wise Socrates was

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Babrius and Phaedrus, 1990.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid..

said to rhyme Aesop's fables to entertain himself while imprisoned. Aesop's social status led to him using allegory and creating fables where the animal world spoke like humans. The article reviews Aesop's aspirations, that a human must have spiritual values, wit (fables *Aesop on the Deck*, *The Fox and the Leopard*). The theme of spiritual poverty had an influence on La Fontaine (*The Fox and the Mask*). Human foolishness is displayed in the fable *A Swimming Boy*, wherein a passer-by sees a boy caught in the current and about to drown, instead of helping he scolds the youngster for his carelessness. We find a similar motive in Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's fable *Imprudent Swimmer*, who beseeches God for help, his friend advises him to use his own hands to survive. Aesop rejects origin, nobility in fables: *The Fox and the Monkey*, *The Fox and the Crocodile*. The main role is given to the interrelation problem between the strong and the weak, which had a great resonance in the writings of many countries. A significant place is given to the following fables: *The Lion and the Mouse*, *The Wolf and the Lamb*, *The Cat and the Cock*, *The Eagle and the Bug*. In the first fable the king of the predators is freed by the mouse. The following two fables present a similar "verdict" by the wolf and the cat, both of them find the blame for the innocent because they are hungry. The fable *The Wolf and the Lamb* was assimilated so well first by La Fontaine and then by Krilov that they leave the impression of an original text. As for *The Eagle and the Bug*, Aristophanes mentions it in *The Wasps*. The eagle ignored the bug's pleas and ate the rabbit, which cost it the future children's lives. The defeat of the mighty lion by the weak, small rabbit and the rescue of other animals is also present in *Panchatantra*, Book I, tale VIII.

Aesop relentlessly battles against lies and duplicity (*The Fox and the Woodchopper*) with hidden meanings, allegory, irony and use of other means to teach the generations how to live a proper life.