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Nemo aliquid ualet sine suis: Classical and Medieval Latin Versions of "The Belly and the Members" across Literary Genres

Abstract: This paper focuses on the unique combination of literary genres that characterizes the reception of "The Belly and the Members" across Classical and Medieval Latin sources. Attested in the *Collectio Augustana* (Aesop. 130 P. [= 132 Hsr.; 160 Ch.]), this apologue is not extant in Phaedrus, but its main motifs feature in works in other literary genres, such as historiography (Livy; Dionysius of Halicarnassus), Socratic dialogues (Xenophon's *Memorabilia*), anecdotal warfare literature (Polyaenus' *Stratagems*), and political biography (Plutarch). Although it is adapted to the patterns of each genre in which it is resituated, "The Belly and the Members" is acknowledged, either directly or indirectly, to be Aesopic material. After traveling across several literary genres, in the Medieval *Romulus* (*RG*), "The Belly and the Members" returns to being a fable on its own terms and (again) finds its place in a collection of fables.

1 Introduction

The apologue generally known as "The Belly and the Members" tells that one day there was a dispute between the stomach and one or more other body parts.[1] The body part(s) maintain that their role is more important for the body than that of the stomach; as soon as the function of the stomach is explained, the limbs understand that the body cannot work without a belly that can receive nourishment. Certain sources indicate that this understanding comes too late, namely when the limbs get so weak that the whole body perishes. This chapter examines several versions of this tale, which has had a wide reception across the ages and literary genres, partly changing its meanings and functions in the process. I start my survey with the "Aesopic" fable attested in the *Collectio Augustana*, namely Aesop.

1 For the spread of the apologue under the label of Aesop's fable in popular culture, see the recent collection by Gibbs 2002. For the oriental origin of this fable, see Adrados 2000, 106–107; also Kaufmann 1996, 61; Gombel 1934, 1–27. The number and typology of the limbs mentioned in the narrative change according to the source, as I show later.

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130 P. [= 132 Hsr.; 160 Ch.].[2] Given the long-lasting and ongoing debate surrounding the figure of Aesop, the indication of "The Belly and the Members" as "Aesopic" does not refer to the origin of the fable. This definition is rather an acknowledgement of the traditional attribution of the motif of "The Belly and the Members" to Aesop as an emblematic figure for the genre of fables, and accordingly the equivalence between "Aesopic" and "belonging/pertaining to the genre of fables".[3] Aesop. 130 P. therefore functions as a starting point for the analysis of generic patterns and themes, as well as being the first term of comparison for other attestations of the story.[4]

After analysing Aesop. 130 P., I will navigate the presence of the motif of "The Belly and the Members" across Greek (Xenophon, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Polyaenus, and Plutarch) and Roman Classical authors (Livy), to conclude with the *Romulus*, a Medieval Latin collection of fables.[5] Through this survey,[6] I show how the nucleus of the fable is re-incorporated into other literary genres, and accordingly is transformed in its contents and nuances. While returning to again become part of a collection of fables in the Medieval *Romulus*, "The Belly and the Members" preserves several aspects of its journey across various sources and literary genres.

2 Although I start with Aesop, I do not necessarily imply the chronological priority of the Aesopic fable over the other versions: while the *Collectio Augustana* drew from and collected much older motifs and traditions, the uncertainty over its sources and date of composition (presumably 1st–2nd century CE) makes it impossible to establish definite chronological relationships between the Aesopic fables and other sources. For a discussion of the date and origin of the *Augustana*, see Adrados 1999, 60–74.

3 The highly conventional characterization of the genre of fables as "Aesopic" reflects the need within the Greek cultural framework to provide an inventor for each literary genre. A quasi-legendary figure, Aesop is mentioned for the first time by Herodotus (2.134–135), who speaks of him as a slave from Thrace, contemporary to Sappho. Aesop may well be a literary and cultural construction, but his name and the adjective "Aesopic" became synonyms for the genre of fables. For a summary of the use of the name of Aesop, see Zafiropoulos 2001, 10–12.

4 For the meaning, tradition, and wide reception of "The Belly and the Members", see Hale 1968, 377–388; Peil 1985 (see 8–17, for the fable in Roman historiography); Zafiropoulos 2001, 101–102; Adrados 2003, 170–172; van Dijk 2015, 1049–1051.

5 For a critical edition of the Medieval *Romulus*, see Thiele 1910. More recently, two of the three redactions have been published separately: see Feller 2018; Martorana 2024.

6 In this chapter, I do not intend to examine all the occurrences of "The Belly and the Members", which is widely attested: see Dicke/Grubmüller 1987, 483–488 (n. 408); van Dijk 2015, 1049–1051. I will focus on the versions that exhibit a more obvious re-adaptation of the fable theme to the features of the genre within which the apologue is re-incorporated.

2 Livy, Xenophon, and Polyaenus: in the shadow of Aesop

Not attested in Phaedrus, "The Belly and the Members" has traditionally been ascribed to the Aesopic corpus, where it stands as follows:[7]

> Κοιλία καὶ πόδες περὶ δυνάμεως ἤριζον. παρ' ἕκαστα δὲ τῶν ποδῶν λεγόντων ὅτι τοσοῦτον προέχουσι τῇ ἰσχύι ὡς καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν γαστέρα βαστάζειν, ἐκείνη ἀπεκρίνατο "ἀλλ', ὦ οὗτοι, ἐὰν μὴ ἐγὼ τροφὴν προσλάβωμαι, οὐδὲν ὑμεῖς βαστάζειν δυνήσεσθε."
> Οὕτω καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν στρατευμάτων μηδέν ἐστι τὸ πολὺ πλῆθος, ἐὰν μὴ οἱ στρατηγοὶ ἄριστα φρονῶσιν.
>
> (Aesop. 130 P. [= 132 Hsr.; 160 Ch.])

> The belly and the feet were contending for power. But when the feet said on every occasion that their strength was so great that they could also support the stomach itself, the belly replied: "Yet, my dears, if I did not get food, you would not be able to support anything".
> In a similar way, also a great multitude is of no use to armies if the generals are incapable of making the best decisions.
>
> (Transl. S.M.)

In Aesop, the feet and the belly are the body parts involved in the action, and the only ones mentioned openly. After the feet have shown their intention to fight for supremacy, the belly engages in a dialogue with them: ἀλλ', ὦ οὗτοι, ἐὰν μὴ ἐγὼ τροφὴν προσλάβωμαι, οὐδὲν ὑμεῖς βαστάζειν δυνήσεσθε ("Yet, my dears, if I did not get food, you would not be able to support anything"). In the epimythium, the relationship between the belly and the feet is compared to the military sphere: ἐπὶ τῶν στρατευμάτων μηδέν ἐστι τὸ πολὺ πλῆθος, ἐὰν μὴ οἱ στρατηγοὶ ἄριστα φρονῶσιν ("a great multitude is of no use to armies if the generals are incapable of making the best decisions"). The agency of the body parts here replaces the humanization of animals, which is very common in the corpus of Aesop, as well as a prevailing — but certainly not exclusive — feature of fables as a genre.[8] Along with this agency, the contest within the human body is a central motif, which is developed further in other sources and literary genres.

Among the various ways the fable of Aesop has been interpreted, Hale has singled out two main approaches:[9] the elemental, whereby the apologue exempli-

7 For the text of the fable, see Perry 1952, 371–372.

8 Recently see Lefkowitz 2018, 57–62; Korhonen 2019, 211–231.

9 Hale 1968, 377–380; see also Hale 1971, 18–32 for the connection between this fable and the idea of the body politic across Greek, Roman, and Christian sources; Zafiropoulos 2001, 101–102.

fies the harmony among the four elements or bodily humours; and the structural (or socio-political), where the fable is interpreted as a metaphor for political balance, thus articulating the concept of *homonoia* (ὁμόνοια), the political agreement that unites the Greek *polis*.[10] This political and metaphorical reading is central to most of the sources that incorporate the motif of "The Belly and the Members", which acknowledge, or at least imply, that it belongs to the genre of fable. In Livy's *Ab urbe condita* (2.32), for instance, the fable is used by Menenius Agrippa to persuade the plebs to return to Rome after their secession in 494 BCE.[11] Menenius reportedly compares the stability and well-being of the state to the health of a human body.[12]

> Placuit igitur oratorem ad plebem mitti Menenium Agrippam, facundum uirum, et quod inde oriundus erat, plebi carum. Is intromissus in castra prisco illo dicendi et horrido modo **nihil aliud quam hoc narrasse fertur**: **tempore quo** in homine non, ut nunc, omnia in unum **consentiant**, sed singulis membris suum cuique **consilium** suus sermo fuerit, indignatas reliquas partes sua cura suo labore ac **ministerio** uentri omnia quaeri, uentrem in medio quietum nihil aliud quam datis uoluptatibus frui; **conspirasse** inde ne manus ad os cibum ferrent, nec os acciperet datum, nec dentes quae acciperent conficerent. hac ira dum uentrem fame **domare** uellent, ipsa una membra totumque corpus **ad extremam tabem** uenisse. inde apparuisse uentris quoque haud segne ministerium esse, nec magis ali quam alere eum, reddentem in omnis corporis partes hunc quo uiuimus uigemusque, diuisum pariter in uenas, maturum confecto cibo sanguinem. **Comparando hinc quam intestina corporis seditio similis esset irae plebis in patres, flexisse mentes hominum**.
>
> (Livy, 2.32.8–12; emphases mine)

> They therefore decided to send as an ambassador to the commons Menenius Agrippa, an eloquent man and dear to the plebeians as being one of themselves by birth. On being admitted to the camp *he is said merely to have related the following* (apologue), in the old-fashioned and uncouth style of that age. *In the days when* man's members did not all *agree* amongst themselves, as is now the case, but had each its own *ideas* and a voice of its own, the other parts were angered that they should have the worry and the trouble and *the task* of providing everything for the belly, while the belly remained quietly in their midst with nothing to do but to enjoy the good things which they bestowed upon it. They therefore *conspired* together that the hands should carry no food to the mouth, nor the mouth accept any-

10 The development of the motif of "The Belly and the Members" was reconstructed by Wilhelm Nestle's early study (1927, 350–360), which centres on the sources of Menenius Agrippa's apologue in Livy. For the reception of this fable in later authors, see Peil 1985; Patterson 1991, 111–137; for an overview of the versions of this fable, see Adrados 2003, 170–172.

11 See Gardner 2019, 50–51; Pieper 2016, 161–164. For an analysis of the fable in relation to its historical context, see Emberger 2020, 77–91; for the role of Menenius' apologue within the narrative structure of Livy's work, see Chaplin 2003, 195–213.

12 The text and translation (with minor changes) are from Foster 1919.

> thing that was given it, nor the teeth grind up what they received. While they sought in this angry spirit to *starve* the belly *into submission*, the members themselves and the whole body were reduced to *the utmost weakness*. So it had become clear that even the belly had no idle task to perform, and was no more nourished than it nourished the rest, by giving out to all parts of the body that by which we live and thrive, when it has been divided equally amongst the veins and is enriched with digested food — that is, the blood. *Drawing a parallel from this to show how alike was the internal dissension of the bodily members to the anger of the plebs against the Senators, he convinced the minds of his listeners.*
>
> (Transl. after Foster, with minor changes)

Menenius' story is a rhetorical speech within Livy's historiographical work, which succeeds in changing the minds of the people listening to him: cf. *comparando hinc quam intestina corporis seditio similis esset irae plebis in patres, flexisse mentes hominum*, where the gerund *comparando* articulates the exemplary nature of the story, whereas the perfect infinitive *flexisse* evokes the context of rhetorical treatises. In fact, Menenius does not make the comparison himself, but, rather, his speech is reported indirectly by Livy's authorial persona. On the one hand, this choice enhances the overlap of literary genres, as the tale combines historiography, oratory, and fable; on the other hand, indirect speech suggests that the story is a well-known and traditional one, thus stressing its exemplary and metaphorical significance. The highly metaphorical meaning of the tale is also conveyed by certain linguistic choices that recall a political vocabulary: cf. *consentiant*, *consilium*, *conspirasse*, *domare*, *ministerium*, all of which have a political meaning;[13] *tabes* would be used in later sources to "connote the putrid decay ubiquitous in Rome beset by plague";[14] *intestina* […] *seditio* is a well-known phrase to indicate civil war.[15]

Building upon this political connotation, Andrew Feldherr interpreted Menenius' speech as the articulation of a new relationship between the individual and the body politic, which reflects Livy's perception of the passage from the Republic to the Principate.[16] Similarly, Hunter Gardner understands the apologue as an example of how bodily fragmentation foregrounds social and political dissolution.[17] Harvey considers Menenius' speech to be the archetypical model for the subsequent parallels between society and the human body, which would be widely used in political and literary discourse in the centuries to come.[18] Furthermore, the

13 Cf. OLD s.v. c*onsentio, consilium, conspiro, domo, ministerium*.

14 Gardner 2019, 51.

15 Cf. ThlL online VII 2.5.58–11.15, s.v. *intestinus*: "in imag. vel translate (ad corporis similitudinem spectantur vel res publica vel aliae societates […])" (VII 2.9.42–43).

16 Feldherr 1997, 136–157.

17 Gardner 2019, 50–51; see also Hale 1971, 26–32.

18 Harvey 2007, 4–10; *passim*.

apologue can be read in relation to ancient medical theories. In Hippocratic medicine, which was "transplanted" to Rome (to re-adapt an expression of Vivian Nutton),[19] the body was seen as a ὁμοεθνίη (namely, an "organic unity"), and the notion of a physical organism was merged with the idea of the human being as a structural whole.[20] Accordingly, the corruption or idleness of one part of the body was thought to affect the whole organism — including its abstract components. This theory can be fruitfully applied to Menenius' conception of the Roman state, where the lack of *concordia* may cause the ruin of the Republic.

In Livy's historiographical work, the nucleus of the Aesopic fable is thus adapted to the political context and to the canons of historiography, while incorporating certain features of other genres, as well as medical knowledge. The apologue is cast as a rhetorical speech and is characterized by military and political vocabulary; it is a digression, but it has a structural function within the historical narrative; it also evokes ancient medical theories. Moreover, Menenius' parable draws on the genre of fables. First, on a narratological level, the apologue is clearly introduced as a separate story within a larger story, namely Livy's *Ab urbe condita*, as the expression *narrasse fertur* suggests.[21] The introduction of the apologue ("when man's members did not all agree amongst themselves [...] but had each its own ideas and a voice of its own") stylistically recalls the genre of fables, which are placed in an undefined past through the use of formulaic language; indeed, *tempore quo* has been linked to the beginning of a Greek αἶνος (cf. ἦν ποτε χρόνος ὅτε), namely a fable.[22]

The (covert) recognition of the motif as Aesopic material is confirmed by a later passage of Quintilian (*Inst.* 5.11.19–20). While referring to Aesopic *fabellae* as a way to persuade the simple-minded and uneducated, Quintilian mentions the fable of "The Belly and the Members", and links it to the speech by Menenius Agrippa.[23] This reference not only underscores the connection between the Aesopic

19 Nutton 2013, 160–173.

20 Cf. *Epid.* 2.1.6; *Loc.Hom.* 1; *Mul.* 2.174; *Vict.* 1.6; *Nat.Hom.* 3; *Morb.* 4.32, with Craik 2020, 188–190. For a general discussion on holism in ancient medicine, see the contributors to Thumiger 2020.

21 The apologue must have been known in Roman history earlier than Livy, but there is no agreement on when exactly the tale firstly appeared; see Ogilvie 1965, 312–313; Pieper 2016, 162–164, with notes.

22 Ogilvie 1965, 312–313.

23 Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 5.11.19: *Illae quoque fabellae quae, etiam si originem non ab Aesopo acceperunt* (*nam uidetur earum primus auctor Hesiodus*), *nomine tamen Aesopi maxime celebrantur, ducere animos solent praecipue rusticorum et imperitorum, qui et simplicius quae ficta sunt audiunt, et capti uoluptate facile iis quibus delectantur consentiunt: si quidem et Menenius Agrippa* [...] ("Consider also those fables which, though not originating with Aesop — for Hesiod seems to be the

fable and Menenius' speech, but may also allude to Livy's version, as Quintilian states that "it is recounted" that Menenius Agrippa "reconciled plebs and patricians by means of the famous story of the quarrel of the limbs against the belly" (*si quidem et Menenius Agrippa plebem cum patribus in gratiam traditur reduxisse nota illa de membris humanis aduersus uentrem discordantibus fabula*).[24] While *traditur* can be read as an Alexandrian footnote to the apologue in Livy, the *nota illa* […] *fabula* reveals that the story must have been well-known, as well as being connected to Aesop, as Quintilian's previous remarks confirm (cf. *Inst*. 5.11.19).[25] Livy does not openly say that Menenius is drawing from an Aesopic fable, but the use of stylistic features and vocabulary that belong to the genre of fable, as well as Quintilian's reference to the connection between Menenius' apologue and Aesop's fables, imply an acknowledgment of "The Belly and the Members" as a fable theme.

Livy's implied acknowledgment aligns with other re-elaborations of the fable, such as those of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (2.3.18) and Polyaenus (3.9.22). In the former, while engaged in dialogue with Chaerecrates, Socrates mentions *en passant* the example of "a pair of hands" refusing "the office of mutual help" and of "a pair of feet" neglecting "the duty of working together."[26]

> Νῦν μὲν γὰρ οὕτως, ἔφη, διάκεισθον, ὥσπερ εἰ τὼ χεῖρε, ἃς ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ τῷ συλλαμβάνειν ἀλλήλαις ἐποίησεν, ἀφεμένω τούτου τράποιντο πρὸς τὸ διακωλύειν ἀλλήλω ἢ εἰ τὼ πόδε θείᾳ μοίρᾳ πεποιημένω πρὸς τὸ συνεργεῖν ἀλλήλοιν ἀμελήσαντε τούτου ἐμποδίζοιεν ἀλλήλω.
>
> (Xen. *Mem.* 2.3.18)

first author of them — are best known under Aesop's name: they often attract the mind, particularly that of the uneducated and rustics, who listen to fiction in a simpler spirit and, in their delight, readily assent to things that they enjoy hearing. So Menenius Agrippa […]"). For the text and translation (with minor changes), see Russell 2002.

24 On the didactic aim of fables, see Quint. *Inst*. 1.9.2: *Igitur Aesopi fabellas, quae fabulis nutricularum proxime succedunt, narrare sermone puro et nihil se supra modum extollente, deinde eandem gracilitatem stilo exigere condiscant* ("Let them learn then to tell Aesop's fables, which follow on directly from their nurses' stories, in pure and unpretentious language; then let them achieve the same slender elegance in a written version").

25 Quintilian continues by giving a definition of the fable as a genre: Αἶνον *Graeci uocant et* Αἰσωπείους*, ut dixi,* λόγους *et* Λιβυκούς*, nostrorum quidam, non sane recepto in usum nomine, apologationem* ("the Greeks call this an *ainos* ['tale'], and speak of Aesopic fables as I said and 'Libyan fables'; some Roman writers use the word *apologatio,* though the name has not been accepted in common use", *Inst*. 5.11.20).

26 The text and translation (with minor changes) of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* are from Marchant/Todd/Henderson 2013.

> "Now what if a pair of hands," he said, "refused the office of mutual help for which the god made them and tried to thwart each other; or if a pair of feet neglected the duty of working together, for which they were fashioned, and took to hampering each other?"
>
> (Transl. after Marchant/Todd/Henderson, with minor changes)

The motif of the struggle within the body is incorporated within Xenophon's Socratic dialogue, thus acquiring a functional role within Socrates' argument.[27] While a surface-level reading suggests that there are no open references to the genre of fable, Socrates has been acknowledged to have connections to Aesop, and, accordingly, to (Aesopic) fables: not only is his life linked to Aesop's, but he is also known as a storyteller,[28] and he features in Phaedrus' collection.[29] As Socrates is linked to Aesop and therefore to the fable as a genre, his mention of the motif of "The Belly and the Members" enhances his role as a fable-teller. Within the context of a philosophical dialogue, this role may serve to remind the reader of Socrates' rhetorical strategy, which is based on exemplary stories, among other things.[30] In a similar way, in Polyaenus' *Stratagems*, a work combining warfare and anecdotal literature, the motif of "The Belly and the Members" is implicitly connected to the genre of fables.[31]

> Ἰφικράτης τὴν σύνταξιν τῶν στρατοπέδων εἴκαζε τῷ σώματι. θώρακα ἐκάλει τὴν φάλαγγα, χεῖρας τοὺς ψιλοὺς, πόδας τὴν ἵππον, κεφαλὴν τὸν στρατηγόν. "τὰ μὲν δὴ ἄλλα ὅταν ἐπιλείπῃ, χωλὸν καὶ πηρὸν τὸ στρατόπεδον· ὅταν δὲ ὁ στρατηγὸς ἀπόληται, τὸ πᾶν ἄχρηστον οἴχεται."
>
> (Polyaenus, *Strat*. 3.9.22)

> Iphicrates compared the composition of armies to the body. He called the phalanx the breast, the light-armed troops hands, the cavalry feet, and the general the head. "When the

27 In these sections of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Socrates discusses the importance of kindness, friendship, and cooperation (cf. Xen. *Mem*. 2.3.14–19).

28 On the one hand, Aesop as a figure is linked to Socrates, particularly in Plato; on the other hand, his *mythoi* represent a model in style and content for Plato's mimetic Socratic dialogues; see Kurke 2006, 6–52; McPherran 2012, 50–60; Capra 2019, 89–113; Luchetti, in this volume. While the parallel between the two figures is characterized by both similarities and differences, and an overlap between them is sometimes denied (see e.g. *Phd*. 60c, with Luchetti and Bottini, in this volume), the existence of a tradition where Socrates was linked to Aesop confirms his connection to the genre of fables as a whole; see Zafiropoulos 2011, 203–216.

29 Cf. Phaed. 3.9 Z. [= G.], which is about friends, as well as *app*. 25 Z. [= *app.* 27 G.].

30 For the rhetorical implications of Socrates as a narrator in Plato's dialogues, see e.g. Bowery 2007, 82–110.

31 Polyaenus was active in the 2nd century CE. The text of Polyaenus' *Stratagems* is from von Woelfflin/Melber 1887; the translation is mine.

> other parts were lacking, the army was defective and flawed; but when the general was lost, it was totally useless."
>
> (Transl. S.M.)

The human breast, hands, feet, and head are compared to different components of the army (respectively, the phalanx, the foot soldiers, the cavalry, and the general), with a motif that recalls the morality of Aesop's apologue: if the head, namely the general, is lacking, the whole army is bound to be defeated. As in the previous examples, the fable theme serves the purpose of Polyaenus' work, as well as adhering to the canons of the genre. With the Aesopic version, Polyaenus shares the military context, as well as the fight within the body, thus perpetuating the image of civic strife. At the same time, the belly is replaced by the head, which more clearly hypostasizes the idea of (military) leadership and responsibility. The head also articulates hierarchical power, which characterizes the army and, in many cases, the state as well. While the motif seems to be entirely incorporated and translated into the new genre, there is a linguistic hint at the tradition that saw "The Belly and the Members" as a fable, namely the verb εἰκάζω, which can here be translated as "to compare".[32] Alongside pointing out the exemplary meaning of the comparison, εἴκαζε also recalls Livy's *comparando* closing Menenius' apologue. Accordingly, the verb inscribes Iphicrates' comparison (at least to some extent) into a tradition that saw the fight between the limbs and the central system (either the belly or the head) as an element pertaining to the genre of fables. At the same time, through its inclusion in the work of Polyaenus, the fable acquires further anecdotal aspects, which can be ascribed to the general's personal experience, while keeping its metaphorical and figurative as well as exemplary meaning.

In the instances mentioned so far, we have seen how the motif of "The Belly and the Members" develops across three sources, being re-incorporated into different literary genres while also fulfilling their aims: in Livy, the fable has an exemplary and metaphorical meaning, serving Menenius' rhetorical strategies; in Xenophon, it enhances Socrates' status as a philosopher by establishing a connection with another semi-legendary sage, namely Aesop; in Polyaenus, it helps to convey further anecdotal nuances to the narrative. While the sources analysed in this section show an implicit awareness of the tradition of "The Belly and the Members" as a fable, the next section will explore case studies where the apologue is more openly acknowledged as "Aesopic".

32 See LSJ s.v. εἰκάζω.

3 Dionysius and Plutarch: in the light of Aesop

A more direct mention of "The Belly and the Members" as Aesopic material can be found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Roman Antiquities*. Active in the first century BCE, Dionysius is roughly contemporary to Livy.[33] When introducing Menenius' speech, Dionysius expressly mentions the proximity between Menenius' story and the Aesopic tradition, by stressing how "at the end of his speech he is said to have related a kind of fable that he composed after the manner of Aesop (εἰς τὸν Αἰσώπειον τρόπον) and that bore a close resemblance to the situation of the moment, and by this means chiefly to have won them over" (τελευτῶν δὲ τῆς δημηγορίας λέγεται μῦθόν τινα εἰπεῖν εἰς τὸν Αἰσώπειον τρόπον συμπλάσας πολλὴν ὁμοιότητα πρὸς τὰ πράγματα ἔχοντα, καὶ τούτῳ μάλιστ᾽ αὐτοὺς ἐλεῖν, Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.83).[34] The story reads as follows in Dionysius:

> Ἔοικέ πως ἀνθρωπείῳ σώματι πόλις. σύνθετον γὰρ καὶ ἐκ πολλῶν μερῶν ἐστιν ἑκάτερον· καὶ οὔτε δύναμιν ἔχει ἕκαστον τὴν αὐτὴν τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς μερῶν οὔτε χρείας παρέχεται τὰς ἴσας. εἰ δὴ λάβοι τὰ μέρη τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου σώματος ἰδίαν αἴσθησιν καθ᾽ αὑτὰ καὶ φωνήν, ἔπειτα στάσις ἐν αὐτοῖς ἐμπέσοι καθ᾽ ἓν γενομένοις τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασι πρὸς τὴν γαστέρα μόνην, καὶ λέγοιεν οἱ μὲν πόδες, ὅτι πᾶν ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῖς ἐπίκειται τὸ σῶμα· αἱ δὲ χεῖρες, ὅτι τὰς τέχνας ἐργάζονται καὶ τὰ ἐπιτήδεια ἐκπορίζουσι καὶ μάχονται πολεμίοις καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ὠφελήματα παρέχουσιν εἰς τὸ κοινόν· οἱ δὲ ὦμοι, ὅτι τὰ ἄχθη πάντα ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῖς κομίζεται· τὸ δὲ στόμα, ὅτι φθέγγεται· ἡ δὲ κεφαλή, ὅτι ὁρᾷ καὶ ἀκούει καὶ τὰς ἄλλας αἰσθήσεις περιλαβοῦσα πάσας ἔχει δι᾽ ὧν σώζεται τὸ πρᾶγμα· εἶτα φαῖεν πρὸς τὴν γαστέρα· Σὺ δ᾽, ὦ χρηστή, τί τούτων ποιεῖς ἢ τίς ἐστιν ἡ σὴ χάρις ἡμῖν καὶ ὠφέλεια; ἀλλὰ σύ γε τοσοῦτον ἀπέχεις τοῦ πράττειν καὶ συγκατορθοῦν ἡμῖν τι τῶν κοινῇ χρησίμων ὥστε καὶ ἀντιπράττεις καὶ ἐνοχλεῖς καὶ, πρᾶγμα ἀφόρητον, ὑπηρετεῖν ἀναγκάζεις καὶ φέρειν ἀπανταχόθεν εἰς τὴν ἐκπλήρωσιν τῶν σεαυτῆς ἐπιθυμιῶν. φέρε, τί οὐ μεταποιούμεθα τῆς ἐλευθερίας, καὶ τῶν πολλῶν ἀφιέμεθα πραγματειῶν ἃς ἕνεκα ταύτης ὑπομένομεν᾽; εἰ δὴ ταῦτα δόξειεν αὐτοῖς καὶ μηδὲν ἔτι δρᾴη τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἔργον, ἔσθ᾽ ὅπως ἂν ἐπὶ πολὺ διαρκέσαι δυνηθείη τὸ σῶμα, ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἂν ἐντὸς ὀλίγων ἡμερῶν τῷ κακίστῳ τῶν μόρων ἀναλωθείη, λιμῷ; οὐκ ἂν ἔχοι ἄλλως τις εἰπεῖν. τὸν αὐτὸν δὴ τρόπον ὑπολάβετε καὶ περὶ πόλεως […].
>
> (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 6.86)

> A commonwealth resembles in some measure a human body. For each of them is composite and consists of many parts; and no one of their parts either has the same function or per-

33 For Dionysius of Halicarnassus and his context, see Hunter/de Jonge 2018; for an example of the differences in stylistic and historiographical techniques between Dionysius and Livy, see e.g. Oakley 2010, 118–138; for the relationship between Livy and Greek historians, see Champion 2014, 190–204 (198–201 for Dionysius of Halicarnassus more specifically).

34 The text and translation (with minor changes) of the *Roman Antiquities* are from Cary 1943. For a recent analysis of Menenius' apologue in Dionysius, see Pieper 2016, 164–170.

> forms the same services as the others. If, now, these parts of the human body should be endowed, each for itself, with perception and a voice of its own and a sedition should then arise among them, all of them uniting against the belly alone, and the feet should say that the whole body rests on them; the hands, that they ply the crafts, secure provisions, fight with enemies, and contribute many other advantages toward the common good; the shoulders, that they bear all the burdens; the mouth, that it speaks; the head, that it sees and hears and, comprehending the other senses, possesses all those by which the thing is preserved; and then all these should say to the belly, "And you, good creature, which of these things do you do? What return do you make and of what use are you to us? Indeed, you are so far from doing anything for us or assisting us in accomplishing anything useful for the common good that you are actually a hindrance and trouble to us and — a thing intolerable — compel us to serve you and to bring things to you from everywhere for the gratification of your desires. Come now, why do we not assert our liberty and free ourselves from the many troubles we undergo for the sake of this creature?" If, I say, they should decide upon this course and none of the parts should any longer perform its office, could the body possibly exist for any considerable time, and not rather be destroyed within a few days by the worst of all deaths, starvation? No one can deny it. Now consider the same condition existing in a commonwealth [...].
>
> (Transl. after Cary, with minor changes)

The apologue is much longer in Dionysius than in previous or contemporary accounts, and has a more dialogic structure, with the parts of the body (feet, hands, shoulders, mouth, head) directly addressing the belly. The speech of the body parts makes the Dionysian apologue quasi-comedic, which further connects it to fables, as comedic features also characterize the fable as a genre.[35] At the same time, Dionysius' narrative combines patterns from the genre of historiography with rhetorical elements, showing a closeness to Livy.[36] Similarly to Livy, Dionysius has Menenius draw on stylistic and thematic features of the genre of fables, giving more authority to his speech and incorporating it into the narration of historical events. In Dionysius, however, the inclusion of the apologue within the genre of Aesopic fables is stated more openly, specifying what was left implicit in Livy. This direct mention makes the blending of literary genres (historiography, oratory, fable, as well as comedy) appear more explicit, and, plausibly, it may have made it more easily recognizable by, and engaging for, the readers.

In the later version of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (*Coriolanus* 6), an example of political biography, the awareness that the story of "The Belly and the Members"

35 For the interactions between fable and comedy, see e.g. Adrados 1999, 240–286; Hall 2013, 277–297; Pütz and Gärtner, in this volume.

36 For an overview of the intersections between oratory and historiography in the Roman period, see Laird 2009, 197–213; on speeches in Classical historians, see also Marincola 2007, 118–132 (126–127 for Dionysius).

originates in the genre of fables appears to have consolidated even further, as Menenius Agrippa is said to have "concluded his discourse with a celebrated fable" (τελευτῶντι τῷ λόγῳ περιῆλθεν εἰς σχῆμα μύθου διαμνημονευόμενον).[37]

> ἔφη γὰρ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὰ μέλη πάντα πρὸς τὴν γαστέρα στασιάσαι, καὶ κατηγορεῖν αὐτῆς ὡς μόνης ἀργοῦ καὶ ἀσυμβόλου καθεζομένης ἐν τῷ σώματι, τῶν δ᾽ ἄλλων εἰς τὰς ἐκείνης ὀρέξεις πόνους τε μεγάλους καὶ λειτουργίας ὑπομενόντων· τὴν δὲ γαστέρα τῆς εὐηθείας αὐτῶν καταγελᾶν, ἀγνοούντων ὅτι τὴν τροφὴν ὑπολαμβάνει μὲν εἰς ἑαυτὴν ἅπασαν, ἀναπέμπει δ᾽ αὖθις ἐξ αὐτῆς καὶ διανέμει τοῖς ἄλλοις. "Οὕτως οὖν," ἔφη, "καὶ τῆς συγκλήτου λόγος ἐστίν, ὦ πολῖται, πρὸς ὑμᾶς· τὰ γὰρ ἐκεῖ τυγχάνοντα τῆς προσηκούσης ἐπιμελείας καὶ οἰκονομίας βουλεύματα καὶ πράγματα πᾶσιν ὑμῖν ἐπιφέρει καὶ διανέμει τὸ χρήσιμον καὶ ὠφέλιμον."
>
> (Plut. *Vit. Cor.* 6)

> He said, namely, that all the other members of the human body once revolted against the belly, and accused it of being the only member to sit idly down in its place and make no contribution to the common welfare, while the rest underwent great hardships and performed great public services only to minister to its appetites; but that the belly laughed at their simplicity in not knowing that it received into itself all the body's nourishment only to send it back again and duly distribute it among the other members. "Such, then," said Agrippa, "is the relation of the senate, my fellow citizens, to you; the matters for deliberation which there receive the necessary attention and disposition bring to you all and severally what is useful and helpful."
>
> (Transl. after Perrin, with minor changes)

As has been demonstrated,[38] Plutarch may have drawn on both Livy and Dionysius, as Menenius' speech is reported in indirect speech and the vocabulary employed is characteristic of political or legal discourses, as well as evoking civic strife: cf. στασιάσαι, κατηγορεῖν, λειτουργίας.[39] Contrary to Livy, Plutarch has the belly laugh (καταγελᾶν) and reply to the body parts. This alteration may be due to the influence of the Dionysian version, which is more dialogic and comedic, or may simply be a variation on the Livian model. The laughter may also be a result of interest in anecdotal evidence, which to some extent characterizes Plutarch's biographical work more significantly than more strictly historiographical works (cf. Livy and Dionysius). This difference is important for generic interactions: while acknowledging the apologue's similarity to, or identity as, a fable (μύθου), Plutarch incorporates a laugh within it, that is, a motif of the genre of comedy as well as a stock motif of anecdotal literature. This coexistence demonstrates the permeability of fables as a genre, as observed throughout this chapter.

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37 Text and translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* are from Perrin 1916 (with minor changes).

38 See e.g. Russell 1963, 21–28.

39 Cf. LSJ s.v. στασιάζω, κατηγορέω, λειτουργία.

Not extant in Phaedrus' corpus, implicitly attributed to the genre of fables in Livy, Xenophon, and Polyaenus, and more explicitly acknowledged as Aesopic material in Dionysius and Plutarch,[40] "The Belly and the Members" features again, at a later stage, in a collection of fables: the Medieval *Romulus* (*RG*).

4 The Medieval Latin *Romulus* (*RG*): back to (Aesopic) fables?

The last example of the evolution of the motif of "The Belly and the Members" is fable 3.16 [= Thiele 66] of the *Recensio Gallicana* (*RG*) of the Latin *Romulus*.[41] An anonymous collection of fables from the Middle Ages,[42] the *Romulus* draws mainly on the corpus of Phaedrus and the Latin translations of Aesop that circulated in the Medieval period. The *Romulus* has been divided by its principal editor, Georg Thiele, into three main redactions: the *Recensio Gallicana* (*RG*), the *Recensio Vetus* (*RV*), and the *Recensio Wissenburgensis* (*RW*).[43] I base my analysis on the text of *RG*, which is the most famous of the three redactions and which I recently published as an updated critical edition. In *RG*, "The Belly and the Members" reads as follows:

> Qui suos stulte deserit, se potius decipi sciat.
> Nemo aliquid ualet sine suis, ut partes corporis humani. De quibus dicitur indignatas esse manus et pedes, et uentri cibum dare noluerunt eo quod sine ullo labore repleretur, illo sedente otioso. Manus autem et pedes aduersus eum indignantes laborare noluerunt et negauerunt seruitium. Venter uero esuriens clamabat. At illi per paucos dies nihil dare uoluerunt. Ieiuno autem uentre membra omnia lassauerunt. Postea uero, cibum dare

40 Another interesting occurrence of the motif of "The Belly and the Members" can be found in biblical writings, specifically in Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians* (12.12–26). Here, the body symbolizes Christ and the Christian Church, whose parts should maintain unity as the bodily members do. For the connection between Livy's Menenius and St. Paul's letter, see Pérez López (2014), 1087–1093; for biblical parables as fables, see Strong in this volume.

41 For the Latin *Romulus*, see Thiele 1910; for a more concise overview of the tradition of the *Romulus*, see Martorana 2024, 3–9.

42 For some discussions of the date and place of composition, as well as authorship, of the *Romulus*, see Thiele 1910, X–XXXVI, CXV–CXXIX; Mann 2014, 113–140; more recently, Zago 2016, 1–35; 2017, 351–362.

43 Thiele drew on the work of Léopold Hervieux. Hervieux (1884/99 vol. I, 330, 685–707) had made a distinction between the *Romulus ordinaire* and the *Romulus de Vienne* which, to some extent, anticipate Thiele's *RG* and *RV*, respectively.

> uolentes, recusauit uenter, quia iam clauserat uias. Sic membra et uenter simul lassa intereunt.[44]
>
> (*Rom.* [*RG*] 3.16 [= 66 Thiele])

> Those who foolishly abandoned their fellows must know that they, first of all, deceive themselves. Nobody is capable of doing anything without their members, such as the parts of the human body. Concerning those, the hands and feet were said to be angered, and did not want to give food to the belly, since it was filled without making any effort, but simply sat lazily. So, the hands and feet, being angered at the belly, did not want to carry out their task and denied their service. Accordingly, the belly, hungry, started complaining; but they did not want to give anything (to it) for several days. Since the stomach was empty, however, all the limbs became weak. Later, as they truly wanted to give food, the belly rejected it, since it had already closed the access. Thus, the limbs and the belly died together, exhausted.
>
> (Transl. S.M.)

While the main model for most of the fables contained in the *Romulus* must be sought in the collection of Phaedrus, this apologue is not preserved among his extant fables, as already mentioned. This absence does not mean that "The Belly and the Members" was never included in Phaedrus' corpus, since it may have been lost in the process of textual transmission; yet the fact that we cannot currently draw any comparisons with the text of Phaedrus encourages us to seek other models. In terms of sources, it is very unlikely that the *Romulus* drew on the Greek text of the Aesopic fable (since in Medieval western Europe the Greek language was mostly unknown); the text is more plausibly based on one of the many paraphrases of Aesop or Phaedrus in Latin that circulated in the Middle Ages. In this fable, *RG* may also have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Livian account.[45]

Among similarities to previous versions, it is worth noting that the fable of *RG* features specific parts of the human body, namely hands and feet, echoing the feet that are the only parts of the body mentioned in Aesop. 130 P. Moreover, the notion that at some point the belly rejected food is found only in *RG*. This rejection may be an indirect reminiscence of the words uttered by the belly in Aesop: "if I did not get/accept food, you would not be able to support anything" (indeed, the Greek verb προσλαμβάνω can be translated as "to accept", "to take in", or "to get").[46] An influence from the Livian account may be gathered from what we can loosely define as an intertextual link: both in *RG* and Livy, the parts of the body are described as "angered" (*indignatas*). Moreover, further thematic similarities

44 The Latin text is from Martorana 2024.

45 Cf. Thiele 1910, LIV–LV.

46 See LSJ s.v. προσλαμβάνω.

can be observed in the description of the belly's idleness (*uentrem in medio quietum nihil aliud quam datis uoluptatibus frui*, Livy 2.32; *eo quod sine ullo labore repleretur, illo sedente otioso*, *RG*), and in the collapse of the body as a whole (*ipsa una membra totumque corpus ad extremam tabem uenisse*, Livy 2.32; *ieiuno autem uentre membra omnia lassauerunt*; *sic membra et uenter simul lassa intereunt*, *RG*). Distinct from other sources, *RG* does not report a concluding statement to explain the meaning of the fable. In his edition, by contrast, Thiele adds an epimythium (*monet haec <fabula> famulos esse fideles, quia per hoc fortes sunt et manent*, "this fable advises that the servants be loyal, since in this way they can be and remain strong");[47] yet this epimythium is not found in the witnesses of *RG*, with one notable exception.[48]

At the thematic level, *RG* seems to include different patterns that "The Belly and the Members" incorporated throughout the ages and across different literary genres. At the same time, after crossing several literary genres, "The Belly and the Members" has returned to being a proper fable in *RG*, where it presents features that are distinctive to the fable as a genre: the moral (expressed in the promythium); an emphasis on the independent agency of the body parts (which goes back to Aesop. 130 P.); and phrases that contribute to the construction of the quintessential framework of fables (e.g. *de quibus dicitur*).

5 Conclusion

This chapter has, I hope, shown how the Aesopic motif of "The Belly and the Members" develops across literary genres. The nucleus of the fable is, from time to time, expanded upon or modified according to generic patterns, serving the aims and scope of the work in which it is re-incorporated. In Livy, the fable serves Menenius' rhetorical strategies, as well as representing a break in the narration of historical events in the form of an exemplary digression; in Xenophon, it enhances Socrates' status as a philosopher and as a legendary figure; Polyaenus uses the motif to add authority and at the same time an anecdotal flavour to his narrative; both Dionysius and Plutarch state the origin of the tale more openly to emphasize the overlap in literary genres that is intrinsic to their works. After various trans-

47 Thiele 1910, 220–223. For further observations on the text of this fable in (what is now commonly defined as) *RG*, see Gombel 1934, 50–52.

48 This is S, the *incunabulum* of Heinrich Steinhöwel (1476); see Thiele 1910, CLII; Martorana 2024, 18.

formations and adaptations, "The Belly and the Members" is found again in a collection of fables, namely the *Romulus*.[49] "The Belly and the Members" thus exemplifies how malleable and adaptable fables can be, to the point of being frequently re-incorporated in other works. This re-incorporation has often led to changes in many aspects of the story. At the same time, although it features in other genres and presents at times significant alterations, "The Belly and the Members" is still acknowledged (either directly or indirectly) as Aesopic material, that is, as a motif pertaining to the genre of fables. It is precisely this metamorphic and adaptive trait that has allowed the fable theme to survive over time.

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49 The fable has a wider reception in the Middle Ages and would go on to have a reception in modern and contemporary literary contexts, which I cannot explore in this contribution; for some references see van Dijk 2015, 1049–1051.

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