**BOOK REVIEW**

*The Ancient Emotion of Disgust*. Edited by Donald Lateiner and Dimos Spatharas. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xiii + 320. Hardcover, $85.00. ISBN 978-0-19-060411-0.

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he defecating dog from a 6th century bce drinking cup that decorates the cover of this volume might provide reason enough for why disgust has long been neglected in the arena of emotion studies. The consequences of the cognitive and physical reaction elicited by such images, however, is precisely why the editors believe that disgust is an indispensable tool for comprehending certain mentalities in antiquity. “By virtue of its visceral nature, disgust canonizes behavior and constructs social hierarchies by imposing prohibitions.” (1) This collection of thirteen essays, arising out of a 2014 conference, successfully demonstrates how the use of disgust in the literature of a broad span of eras and genres, Greek and Roman, does more than simply shock the senses. Disgust can lead to a greater apprehension of the human condition and encourage ethical development; it can also dehumanize an entire segment of society.

Based on research in the fields of psychology and philosophy, the editors identify two fundamental types of disgust in the Introduction supported by the volume’s authors: core disgust, an aversion elicited by anything vile that attacks the five senses, and moral disgust, provoked by human behaviors and ideologies deemed immoral. The two, however, are rarely exclusive in the literature explored here and in fact depend upon each other for effect. Ancient authors could marginalize individuals they considered morally degenerate by associating them with something that elicits core disgust, a frequent phenomenon the editors identify as “projective disgust” (23).

In the opening “Hellenic” section, George Kazantzidis observes that the Hippocratic corpus avoids using words of disgust to describe what are foul manifestations of the body. The suspension of disgust labels encourages the physician to do unemotionally what others find revolting. Feeling empathy, the corpus suggests, may in fact eliminate feelings of disgust. Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* is the focus of Emily Allen-Hornblower’s engaging essay that considers the play’s ironies through the lens of disgust. At a point when Philoctetes thinks Neoptolemus has reached the limits of his pity and can no longer avoid feeling disgust, Neoptolemus feels moral disgust at himself for betraying the vulnerable Philoctetes. Since marginalization of the offender is a feature of this emotion, Neoptolemus’ moral disgust at himself reveals that he has alienated himself from his own true nature.

Daniel Levine’s chapter looks at the connotations of *aiboi*, an exclamation of both pleasure and disgust found in Aristophanes and Menander, suggesting that the two emotions exist on the same emotional spectrum. Nick Fisher and Dimos Spatharas closely study the use of disgust in Demosthenes and Aeschines, respectively. While Demosthenes encourages jurymen to feel anger or hatred in his speeches against Androtion and Meidias, Fisher argues that it is disgust for the anti-democratic actions of these men that precedes such feelings. Spatharas identifies Aeschines’ use of projective disgust to portray Timarchus’ private life as disgusting which then sullies his public persona. The section concludes with the argument by Floris Overduin that disgust is a part of the aesthetic aim of Nicander’s didactic poetry. A lack of detail about certain elements of a snake bite replaced by extensive descriptions of the victim’s suffering suggests that Nicander was more interested in acquiring fame for the disgusting yet fascinating description of the bite’s effects rather than in educating his pupil.

The “Greek and Roman Imperial” half of the work begins with Robert Kaster’s detailed and illuminating analysis of “*piget”* in order to confidently assert its place among the emotions that Romans feel. Eschewing English labels for “*pig-”* verbs, Kaster classifies the various scenarios, or “scripts,” in which the word appears. Ayelet Lushkov takes on *fastidium* in Livy, a term used in contional speeches to identify an aversion that one could possibly feel but does not—an “emotional absent presence” (176)—that consequently highlights certain political norms. Debbie Felton’s chapter suggests that the portrayal of witches, a preoccupation of post-Augustan writers, may have been a part of efforts to deter Romans from procuring abortions from midwives who themselves could resemble these fictive characters in appearance and behavior.

Donald Lateiner presents an extensive and useful survey of the moments in Petronius and Apuleius that would have evoked disgust in a Roman, comparing the two authors at the end of the chapter. Marika Rauhala looks at how Hellenistic and Roman poets reinforced the elite status of their male audiences and how Romans in particular dehumanized eunuch priests through depictions of their unusual rituals and behaviors as disgusting. Utilizing two philosophical models in conjunction with *pharmakoi* rituals, Tom Hawkins’s chapter on the *Life of Aesop* argues that Aesop’s disgusting appearance and behaviors lead other characters to better understand the human condition and subsequently to accept Aesop rather than treat him as the scapegoat. Mali Skotheim asserts that Suetonius’ descriptions of Nero as actor are disgusting and unappealing in Roman terms. This then infects the text’s image of Nero as a whole and thereby suggests Suetonius’ own moral disgust with Nero.

Despite the provocative cover, there are unfortunately no essays on disgust in art. The editors acknowledge this in the last section of their Introduction, however, and briefly discuss a few visual works with hopes that another volume will fill the void. In the meantime, this collection provides a valuable foundation for further study of an indecorous topic that will resonate with a wide audience of scholars and students who may discover many modern parallels.

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