

The Dynamics of *Fastidium* and the Ideology of Disgust*

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Late in the pages of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* an upright young man finds himself in a terrible fix (10.2–12). Having rejected the advances of his Phaedra-like stepmother, he is soon faced with a murder charge; for when the stepmother's biological son intercepts a poisoned potion intended for the stepson, the *noverca* and a conniving slave frame the young man for the crime. On their telling of the story it was the youth who made a pass at his stepmother and, angered by her refusal, took vengeance by poisoning his half-brother. This is the version that the slave perjurally recounts in his testimony as the story builds to its climax (10.7):¹

Made indignant by his stepmother's *fastidium*, the young man had summoned [the slave] and, seeking vengeance for the insult (*iniuria*), had ordered him to murder her son, first offering a generous reward for his silence, then threatening him with death when he refused. The young man mixed the poison himself and gave it to [the slave] to administer; but when he came to suspect that [the slave] had neglected his office and had kept the cup as evidence for a criminal charge, he finally gave the boy the poison with his own hands.

*Research for this paper was conducted in the library of Oriel College, Oxford, where I enjoyed a visiting fellowship in 1999: my great thanks go to the Provost and Fellows of Oriel for that privilege, and especially to Chris Kraus for all her kindnesses. I am also grateful to Jonathan Beere, Joshua Katz, Matthew Roller, and Peter White for detailed comments on an earlier version, and to the members of the Program in Political and Moral Thought at The Johns Hopkins University for lively and heartening discussion. Marilyn Skinner and Cynthia Damon both gave the paper careful editorial attention: my thanks to them, and to two of *TAPA*'s referees.

¹Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

The lying tale is awash in emotions, expressed and implied—the youth’s *indignatio* and desire for revenge, prompting his cajolements, threats, and suspicions—but it starts from an emotion attributed to the stepmother, her *fastidium*: what, exactly, should the tale’s audience (we as *lectores* and, within the story, the jury) suppose that she felt?

Or consider another story of high emotion, this time an incident witnessed by Valerius Maximus on the island of Ceos while traveling with Sextus Pompeius (*cos.* 14 C.E.), a governor of Asia under Tiberius (2.6.8).² In one of the island’s towns a very old and very distinguished lady had decided that it was time to die; and following the local custom, she proposed to do so in public, by taking poison, having first given an account of her reasons to her fellow-citizens.³ Because she thought that Pompeius’ presence would add distinction to the event (*mortem ... suam Pompei praesentia clariorem fieri magni aestimaret*), she begged him to attend; and being a man of perfect *humanitas*, Pompeius did just that, first attempting to dissuade her from suicide, then respecting her resolve and allowing her to proceed. And so, arrayed in finery on a litter, she gave a blessing to Pompeius—“May the gods repay you because you did not feel *fastidium* at (the thought of) either urging me to live or watching me die” (*... quod nec hortator vitae meae nec mortis spectator esse fastidisti*)—then said her farewells to her family, took the poison with a steady hand, and reported its effects as it passed through her body, until her daughters performed the *supremum officium* of closing her eyes. Pompeius and Valerius left the scene stunned and deeply moved (*nostros autem [sc. oculos], tametsi novo spectaculo obstupefacti erant, suffusos tamen lacrimis dimisit*). But what, exactly, was the emotion—the *fastidium*—that the woman blessed Pompeius for *not* feeling?

I put the question concerning the *fastidium* common to these two stories (to which we shall return) as a way of presenting a larger question: how can we understand, as fully and authentically as possible, the emotion-language of another culture removed in time, in a way that does not entail either simplification (by reducing the emotion to a convenient lexical package in our own language) or projection (by answering the question according to the emotion we

²Identification of Pompeius with the homonymous consular has sometimes been questioned, most recently by Wardle 1, on no good ground; the notion that he “may [have been] a humble unknown” (*ibid.*) is contradicted by the tenor and central details of Valerius’ story.

³On this custom, see Kaster 325–26 (on Suet. *Gram.* 30.6).

might feel in the same circumstance)?⁴ This question of course incorporates the question how one can plausibly “translate” a given emotion-term in a given setting (“scorn,” for example, would be a reasonable, if oversimplifying, choice in both examples above);⁵ but it is broader than and distinct from just the concerns of lexical “equivalence.” It is this paper’s aim to present one possible answer to this question.

We can start from the fact that the Romans’ language of emotions is not our own: their *amor* is not quite our “love,” their *odium* still less our “hate.” Of course we can and must try to flesh out the lexical correspondences with appropriate supplements and nuances: we have only the Romans’ words (complemented occasionally by images), and the words must be our starting point. But an understanding that remained at the level of lexical correspondence would not be sufficient. Take the case that I have chosen for this study: *fastidium*, the Latin term that most closely approximates the English concept of “disgust.”⁶ In its

⁴For approaches to this question see, e.g., Ricks, Harré and Finlay-Jones, Heelas, Cairns, Miller 1993 esp. 175–201, 1995, 1997 esp. 15–21, 143–78, and for further references and a valuable overview, Shweder.

⁵“Scorn” is in fact the choice in Hanson’s Loeb Apuleius, cf. Vallette’s “dédain.” Other translators of Apuleius, when they do not fall back on some cognate (“fastidiousness,” Taylor; “fastidio,” Seroni), generally choose to convey the idea of a more or less vigorous refusal, without regard for its emotional characteristics: so “repulse” (Graves), “repulsion” (Lindsay), “rejection” (Butler), “[the youth’s] anger at being rejected” (Walsh), “rifiuto” (Carlesi), “Zurückweisung” (Helm).

⁶I treat together the noun *fastidium* and its derivatives, the verb *fastidire*, “to feel or express *fastidium*,” and the adj. (adv.) *fastidiosus* (-e), “characterized by a feeling or expression of *fastidium*” (adv. “in a manner characterized by ...”); in a few instances the adj. can be read dispositionally (“prone to feeling or expressing ...”: Pl. *Mil.* 1233, *Rhet. Her.* 4.32, Cic. *Brut.* 207, *Rep.* 1.66–67, Col. 8.8.6, Sen. *Ep.* 47.17, 77.6), but there seemed no gain in distinguishing these instances from the occurrent usages. The noun is commonly accompanied by a genitive denoting the object of aversion, a construction also found in some early uses of the verb (e.g., Pl. *Aul.* 245, *St.* 334, Lucil. 293, 654 Marx) and very occasionally with the adj.; the verb otherwise occurs absolutely, with an accusative object, or (from Livy on) with an infinitive. Plural forms of the noun (nom./acc., dat./abl.) appear to denote something on the order of “feelings of *fastidium*”: two-thirds of the plural forms occur in verse, a phenomenon no doubt encouraged by the fact that nom./acc. pl. *fastidia* (with the gen. sing. form *fastidi*) is the only form of the word readily used in a well-formed hexameter line (the other pl. forms cannot be used at all; the sing. forms in -ium, -ii, -io can be used only if the last syllable is elided before a light syllable with initial short vowel, a form of elision that is vanishingly rare when the elided syllable is itself preceded, as in this case, by a light syllable).

most basic and straightforward sense—the sense it has, for example, when used of creatures not burdened with self-awareness—the word denotes a feeling or reaction of aversion: so *fastidium cibi*, which can most aptly be translated as “aversion to food,” is the expression used dozens of times by agricultural writers to describe the state or behavior of farm animals that go off their feed and by medical writers to describe the feeling of people who become ill and do not wish to eat.⁷ “Aversion for food” is the first meaning that you will find given for the word in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, and that is right and fine as far as it goes. It does not, however, go very far, especially for the contexts of greatest interest to most readers of classical Latin texts, where not only self-awareness but self-awareness deployed in personal and social interaction is crucial. Those are the contexts in which the dictionary’s sub-entries branch out into “disgust,” “contempt,” “fastidiousness,” and a variety of other “meanings” that all clearly converge on the idea of “aversion” but yet are significantly different from one another. How to understand that difference? And how to understand that that “difference” is only a difference that exists in English, because these “meanings” are all, in Latin, *fastidium*?⁸

One could, in effect, repeat the work of the lexicists, reviewing the word’s occurrences instance by instance—inquiring whether *fastidium* in a given case is “disgust,” or some milder form of “aversion,” or perhaps “contempt,” or “scorn,” and so on—in an attempt to devise criteria for making such distinctions. But the attempt (which I have made) leads one to realize that the process is, if

⁷Animals: Cato *Agr.* 103.1, Var. *R.* 2.5.15, 3.7.6, 3.9.21, Col. 6.6.1, 6.8.1, 2, 6.34.1, Plin. *Nat.* 8.52, 8.101, 25.91, 29.38, 100. Humans: Cels. 2.3.3, 2.4.4, 2.7.35, 2.8.5, 23, 3.6.11, 4.14.1, 4.22.3, 4.23.3, 6.6.17, 7.3.1, 7.26.5h–i, 8.4.12; Col. 10.1.1 (178–82); Plin. *Nat.* 19.127, 20.34, 21.157, 22.109, 155, 23.8, 10, 54, 161, 26.41, 27.48, 29.79, 32.43, 64; cf. Sen. *Ep.* 2.4, [Quint.] *Decl.* 5.15.

⁸The article s.v. *fastidium* is structured as follows in *OLD*: “**1** Aversion for food, distaste, lack of appetite, squeamishness ... **2** Aversion engendered by satiety, weariness ... **3** Repugnance, repulsion, disgust ... **4a** Haughtiness, pride. **b** Disdain, scorn, contempt ... **5** A critical attitude, fastidiousness, niceness.” Cf. the organization of the article in *TLL* 6: 314.1 ff.: “**I** generatim: **A** praevallet notio aspernandi respuendi recusandi detrectandi: **1** i.q. *taedium* ... **2** i.q. *satietas nimis* ... **3** fere i.q. *detrectatio* ... **4** i.q. *despectus* ... **B** praevallet notio fastidiose, delicate, **eligendi, iudicandi** ... **C** praevallet notio **fastus, arrogantiae, superbiae**” (the second segment of the article then categorizes *speciatim* some common elicitors of *fastidium*, such as odors, food, etc.). Both articles tend to “define” *fastidium* by identifying it with affective states—e.g., *taedium* (cf. n. 19 below), *superbia*—that would more precisely be counted among its causes or its antecedent and concomitant conditions.

not merely futile, then at least unsatisfactory. First, there is often little reason to think that one's own sorting would match that of other English-speakers (to say nothing of French-speakers, German-speakers, ...), both because there are very frequently insufficient clues in a given context to provide a sound basis for one's own sorting and because it is highly likely that no two English-speakers (et al.) will sort "aversion" vs. "disgust" vs. "contempt" vs. "scorn" in quite the same way. (Numerous conversations on the topic leave me in no doubt of this.)⁹ Moreover, such an approach only tends to replicate the impression conveyed by the lexica, that in any given place *fastidium* "means" only one of those sorted senses, that it just "is" disgust but not disdain or choosiness at the same time. (This is certainly false.)¹⁰ Finally, and most important, the approach does not even touch the core problem: while one's English might do its sorting this way and that, the Romans expressed no difference, no explicit sorting of any kind. It was all *fastidium* to them.

We can take this last fact, then, to suggest that the Romans defined this corner of their emotional terrain differently, including under the single heading *fastidium* a cluster of affective experiences that we (English-speakers) currently distinguish by a variety of terms. To explore this fact further, I propose that we suspend concern with lexical "meaning" and instead think about *fastidium* (the word) just as the end-product of a cognitive process: the lexicalized residue of what happens when the data of life are processed in a certain way—through a sequence of perception (sensing, imagining), evaluation (believing, judging, desiring), and response (somatic, affective, pragmatic, communicative)—to produce a certain kind of emotionalized consciousness, a certain set of thoughts and feelings.

⁹Readers might test this proposition by matching their own understanding of English emotion-terms against the sorting of terms included in (or omitted from) Johnson-Laird and Oatley 107–22 ("A Corpus of 590 Emotional Words and their Analyses ..."). In the case of *fastidium* it is not difficult to find the lexica sorting the same usages rather differently: for example, while *OLD* tucks Liv. 3.1.7 (*fecit statim, ut fit, fastidium copia adeoque pauci nomina dedere ut ad explendum numerum coloni Volsci adderentur*) under the rubric "aversion engendered by satiety," *TLL* places it under *detrectatio*, not *satietas*; and while *OLD* sees in Cic. *Phil.* 12.20 (*non possum animo aequo videre tot tam importunos, tam sceleratos hostis; nec id fit fastidio meo, sed caritate rei publicae*) an instance of "repugnance, repulsion, disgust," *TLL* takes Cicero to be expressing *despectus*.

¹⁰This fact constitutes not so much a criticism of the lexica—which are simply doing the job that lexica are supposed to do—as a reminder that a lexicon is not the language. *TLL* slightly softens the misleading impression through the implications of the phrase *praevallet notio* ... in its main sub-headings.

Let me elaborate briefly some elements of this proposal. By “lexicalized residue” I mean that if you are a Roman monitoring your emotions, you will register the playing out of this process by saying (something like) *hui! fastidium!* Typically, you will also link this registering closely with the last stage of the process, the response, and in particular a somatic response (say, gagging and/or nausea), or an affective response (say, distress and/or disdain), or a pragmatic response (say, an actual turning away), or some combination of these. The “emotion” rightly so-called, however, is the whole process and all its constituent elements, the script that gets enacted from beginning to end; or what Richard Shweder calls “the unitary experience of the whole package deal.”¹¹

Now “packages” of somewhat different shapes and contents can have the same label attached to them, and in this respect *fastidium* behaves no differently from many emotion-terms in both Latin and English. For example, the *amor* experienced by sexual partners and the *amor* experienced by members of a family converged, for the Romans, on a cluster of responses (thoughts and feelings having to do with “attachment,” “concern,” and the like) that were sufficiently homogeneous to motivate the use of the same label; similarly (but in English), my response to having a really great dinner and my response to having a good idea can comfortably accept the same emotional label—say, “joy” or “happiness”—because the experiences converge on a cluster of responses (thoughts and feelings having to do with “contentment,” “satisfaction,” and the like) that share a certain surface likeness.

But of course sexual *amor* and familial *amor*, or the joy of good eating and the joy of good thinking, are not one and the same thing, either as psychosomatic sensations or as scripts—the sequences of experience that include judgments, beliefs, and desires: the cluster of generally similar responses to which the label *amor* or “joy” gets attached is just the point on which the different scripts converge. The differences between the scripts can be variously drawn;

¹¹Shweder 425. So my “fear” can be understood only as a little drama in which my perceptions, evaluations, responses are all essential: remove any of those elements, and the emotion does not exist. I also take it that the evaluations in any such drama—e.g., my judgment that the large dog running toward me is intent not on play but on my throat—need not register consciously as evaluations at all, so quickly can they occur (accelerated, perhaps, by past evaluations that leave me disposed to suspect the worst of large running dogs): it might seem an “instinct” or “reflex,” as much a product of the autonomic nervous system as the quickened pulse that will soon follow. All this said, it will be plain that I take a cognitivist line (as opposed, say, to a Cartesian/Jamesian, behaviorist, or psychoanalytic line) when it comes to the emotions: in this regard I have found Lyons and Gordon especially useful.

and one of the most culturally interesting ways we can draw the differences is by considering how the relevant judgments, beliefs, and desires are constituted: what are their goals and implications, and how do they deploy some of the fundamental distinctions that we construct to make sense of the world—"body" vs. "mind" or "self" vs. "other" or "nature" vs. "culture"?

I propose that we understand *fastidium* along the lines just sketched. On the one hand, it is a label given to a cluster of thoughts and feelings that share a certain surface likeness having to do with "aversion" ("This person/object/state of affairs is repellent—he/she/it makes me want to turn away—I *will* turn away"): an evaluative belief or judgment yielding an intention, accompanied by some psychosomatic agitation. On the other hand—as in the case of "joy" or "happiness" or *amor*—the processes of judgment and belief that converge on "aversion" are constituted and experienced differently in different cases. Once the matter is considered in these terms, some productive questions suggest themselves. How are such processes represented, when the Romans speak of *fastidium*? What different processes could constitute the experience that a Roman would denote as *fastidium*? Reviewing the texts with such questions in mind, I have found that in general only two kinds of process are needed to account for the production and representation of *fastidium*.¹²

One of these can for the sake of convenience be labeled a "per se reflex" ("absolute and autonomic" would do as well). This is the *fastidium*-reaction that sick people have to food: it is not this kind (quality, quantity) of food as opposed to that kind (quality, quantity) for which they feel an aversion, it is food per se, and the aversion seems to arise autonomically, as something independent of will and choice—it is simply "there," willy-nilly and "naturally." But it is also the *fastidium*-reaction that, for example, the elder Pliny registers in response to bedbugs (*Nat.* 29.61) or to the thought of eating a green lizard for medicinal purposes (*Nat.* 30.90): it is not this bedbug (lizard) as opposed to that bedbug (lizard) that causes the reaction, it is bedbugs (lizards) as such, and Pliny makes it quite clear that the response does not proceed from any sort of conscious deliberation—it is visceral and seemingly reflexive, it is just the way these things make him feel (BAD). And it is also quite clear that this reaction occurs (to the Roman mind) in response not only to things but to people or situations as

¹²This conclusion is based on a study of all passages in classical Latin (Plautus through Apuleius) in which some form of *fastidium*, *fastidire*, and *fastidiosus* appears. The survey of these passages, which number well over 400 (*TLL* gives only selections in the case of *fastidium* and *fastidire*), was vastly facilitated by the Packard Humanities Institute's compilation of Latin texts (CD ROM 5.3).

well, including ethical situations: we will have a chance to consider examples below.

On the other hand, there is the pattern of engagement that might be labeled “deliberative and ranking.” This is the *fastidium*-reaction that people experience when they have considered at some level of consciousness the relative value or status of two or more things (or people)—including very often their own value or status relative to some thing (or person)—and have decided to rank one of those things (or people) so low as to have an aversion to it (or him). This is the *fastidium* that a connoisseur might feel toward this example of poetry (music, food) as opposed to that, or that a person of a certain social status might feel toward being offered this particular honor (gift, friendship) as opposed to that: it implies an act of choice and will and proceeds by tacit or explicit evaluation relative to some standard. In the case of both reactions, what counts for our understanding of *fastidium* is how the process and its outcome are perceived and represented (something for which our texts give much evidence), not how the process “actually” unfolded in a subject’s mind (something for which there is no evidence).¹³

The remainder of this paper will attempt to sustain these claims and elaborate the processes of *fastidium*. Sections 1–3 will give a sampling of the evidence on which the claims are based.¹⁴ Section 4 will then draw out a few of the implications, which should be of some interest for our broader understanding of Roman mentality and culture.

The Dynamics of *Fastidium* (1): “Per se Reflex”

We can start with the kinds of aversion that concern basic animal drives. Foremost among these is the drive for food. As was remarked above, the frustration of this impulse by sickness, which turns natural appetite into aversion, is one of the most common types of reflexive *fastidium* (n. 7); it is also a type of *fastidium* that can be manipulated by human beings, for example in the aversive

¹³I stress that throughout this paper I am concerned only with the ways in which the relevant experiences are represented: terms like “reflexive” or “autonomic” refer to the modes expressed or implied in the texts, not to my own views on the feelings’ constitution (I take it as obvious that even emotional reactions I myself might represent as “reflexive”—say, disgust at the thought of eating a cockroach—arise from learned, culture-dependent evaluations; see also n. 11).

¹⁴Even if space permitted, any attempt to give an exhaustive survey of the evidence would produce in the reader the sort of *fastidium* typically associated with satiety and *taedium* (see at n. 19 below). I would, however, be pleased to share with interested readers the data on which my analysis is based.

conditioning that will keep birds from eating a planter's grapes.¹⁵ The sex-drive, too, can become pathologically blocked, as when a stallion experiences *fastidium* at mounting a mare: we could safely assume that this *fastidium* was not the expression of deliberative connoisseurship on the stallion's part even if the cure for the problem (touching his nostrils with a squill that has been wiped on the mare's genitals) did not appeal to the horse's autonomic responses.¹⁶ On the other hand, some kinds of sexual aversion in animals are entirely "natural": so the elder Pliny tells us that "it is natural for the ram to feel *fastidium* for lambs and to make for old sheep" (*Nat.* 8.188 *arieti naturale agnas fastidire, senectam ovium consectar<i>*).¹⁷ It happens that Martial notes a similar preference in a certain Bassus, only to point out, in effect, that what is "natural" in a ram is not in a man (3.76.1 *arrigis ad vetulas, fastidis, Basse, puellas*): note that Martial's dig at Bassus frames the matter not as a deliberative preference, but as an overpowering reaction, the "mad" response of Bassus' "wacky dick" (3.76.3 *Hic, rogo, non furor est, non haec est mentula demens?*). Less colorfully, humans are subject to the same *fastidium cibi* known to animals as a consequence of illness (n. 7), and to feelings of *fastidium* associated with pregnancy, including the queasiness and nausea (our "morning sickness") that are among the early signs of conception.¹⁸ Humans also know the aversion to food associated with what

¹⁵Col. 8.5.23 *eos ... [sc. cibos = ficum aut uvam immaturam] ut fastidiant efficit uva labrusca de vepribus inmatura lecta, quae cum hordeo triticeo minuto cocta obicitur esurientibus, eiusque sapore offensae aves omnem spernantur uvam*, cf. Plin. *Nat.* 14.99 *si prius quam tota inarescat uva incocta detur cibo gallinaceo generi, fastidium gignit uvas adpetendi*.

¹⁶Var. *R.* 2.7.8 *si fastidium salendi est, scillae medium conterunt cum aqua ad mellis crassitudinem: tum ea re naturam equae, cum menses ferunt, tangunt; contra ab locis equae nares equi tangunt*.

¹⁷Compare the *fastidium* of *columbae* for filthy coops: Col. 8.8.6 *locus [sc. columbarii] ... subinde converri et emundari debet. nam quanto est cultior, tanto laetior avis conspicitur, eaque tam fastidiosa est ut saepe sedes suas perosa, si detur avolandi potestas, relinquat*. As often, the animal is treated anthropomorphically (cf. *laetior*): the birds' *fastidium* is presumably conceived as comparable to a human's finding repugnant a dwelling filled with excrement (cf. on defecation at the end of this section).

¹⁸Plin. *Nat.* 7.41 *a conceptu decimo die dolores capitis, oculorum vertigines tenebraeque, fastidium in cibis, redundatio stomachi indices sunt hominis inchoati*. Vergil has the *fastidium* of pregnancy in mind when he tries to coax a smile from the baby of *Eclogue* 4: 60–61 *incipere, parve puer, risu cognoscere matrem / (matri longa decem tulerunt fastidia menses)*; cf. Serv. ad loc., *alii 'abstulerint' legunt, ut sit: si riseris, abstulerint decem menses matri tuae longa fastidia*, to which DServ. adds *quia praegnantem solent fastidia pati*.

we would call depression, the condition unmistakably described by Ovid writing from Tomis (*Pont.* 1.10.5–8):

I feel no pain, nor am I parched by fevers that leave me
gasping; my pulse is steady as ever it was.
But my palate is dulled, the courses laid before me stir up *fastidia*,
and I lament when the hated dinner-hour has arrived.

This absolute aversion to food as such (9–10 *quod mare, quod tellus adpone, quod educat aer, / nil ibi quod nobis esuriatur erit*) is figured as a “dead weight upon the stomach” (14 *stabit et in stomacho pondus inerte diu*): as we shall see, the description is typical of the way in which *fastidium* of the “per se reflex,” specifically, is represented as being embodied.

Maladies of body and mind aside, one of the most common kinds of reflex *fastidium* is the aversion that results from a feeling of satiety or the closely related feeling of monotony: in short, the feeling that you have “had it up to here” and cannot take it any more—like the priest’s slave in the simile of Horace, who simply could not stand to look at one more sacrificial cake.¹⁹ Animals can experience this form of *fastidium*, for example from the force-feeding used to fatten fowl or from a simple lack of variety in their diet.²⁰ But the human form of this aversion is more commonly encountered and is certainly more varied, capable of being elicited by just about any common presentation to the senses, including those that are not initially perceived as at all repellent. Since this type of *fastidium* is obviously conceived as reflexive—a matter not of deliberative choice

¹⁹Hor. *Ep.* 1.10.10 *utque sacerdotis fugitivus liba recuso*, with Porph. ad loc.: *sic, inquit, fastidium me adsiduae urbis tenet et rus egeo et amo, quem ad modum fugitivus sacerdotis, qui liba sit edere consuetus, cum fugit, fastidio longo libaminum panem tantum desiderat et laudat*. This form of aversion-reaction aligns *fastidium* with *taedium*: an affective discomfort caused by being at the limit of what is physically or psychologically endurable, produced by prolonged or intense exposure to a thing (person, state of affairs) and experienced as some combination of weariness, boredom, or annoyance, *taedium* is often among the constitutive elements of *fastidium*, standing in relation to the ultimate “turning away” as cause to effect. See below at n. 76, on Ov. *Rem.* 537–42, and cf., e.g., Sen. *Con.* 10 pr. 1, Sen. *Dial.* 9.2.15–3.1, Quint. *Inst.* 1.12.5; on the possible etymological link between *taedium* and *fastidium*, see n. 72 below.

²⁰Force-feeding: Var. *R.* 3.9.21 *quidam et triticeo pane intrito in aquam, mixto vino bono et odorato, faciunt, ita ut diebus xx pingues reddant ac teneras. si in faciendo nimio cibo fastidiunt ...* (with remedy following), sim. Col. 8.7.4–5. *fastidium* induced by monotony of diet: Col. 7.3.20 *nec tamen ulla sunt tam blanda pabula aut etiam pascua, quorum gratia non exolescat usu continuo, nisi pecudum fastidio pastor occurrerit praebito sale ...*, 8.10.4 *multi varietatem ciborum, ne unum fastidiant, praebendam putant*.

but of spontaneous reaction to “the last straw”—it should be sufficient to give only a few examples.²¹

Even the most pleasant or rewarding sensations or states can arouse this *fastidium*. Cicero notes the apparent paradox when he says that “it is difficult to explain why the things that especially stir our senses with pleasure at their first appearance should most quickly affect us with a certain *fastidium* and satiety and cause us to turn away,” and the same thought is used to advantage in both the moralizing of Seneca and the natural science of the elder Pliny.²² Similarly, it pleases a declaimer to suggest that success, when it continues too long, can cause the fortunate man *fastidium* ([Quint.] *Decl.* 17.14 *ex nimia prosperitatis continuatione fastidium*), and Livy makes Q. Fabius Maximus argue that glory itself can have the same effect (28.40.6–9):

In dissenting from that hasty crossing to Africa, I know full well that I must face two charges: first, of an innate tendency to delay ...; second, of a jealous desire to detract from [Scipio's] fame as it grows day by day. But if my former life and character do not free me from such suspicion, together with the dictatorship and five consulships I've held, and so much glory won in war and peace that I am closer to feeling *fastidium* for it than yearning (*desiderium*), then at least my age should acquit me: for what rivalry could exist between me and a man who is not even my son's age?

As with sensations and states, so with persons and their activities in the public eye. Speaking of the face-to-face relations of Republican politics, Cicero notes the difficulty of balancing the advantage and *gratia* derived from being “in the sight” of the people against the *fastidium* and *satietas* one risks arousing by being constantly in their sight—and on into the principate it is just this risk that is mentioned as a possible reason for Tiberius' retirement to Rhodes.²³ In a

²¹Cf. the separate sub-heading devoted to *satietas* at *TLL* s.v. *fastidium*, 6: 314.12–29. For interesting observations on the role that surfeit plays in our contemporary experience of “disgust,” see Miller 1997: 120–27.

²²Cic. *de Orat.* 3.98 *difficile enim dictu est, quaenam causa sit, cur ea, quae maxime sensus nostros impellunt voluptate et specie prima acerrime commovent, ab eis celerrime fastidio quodam et satietate abalienemur* (cf. *ibid.* 100 *sic omnibus in rebus voluptatibus maximis fastidium finitimum est*), Sen. *Ben.* 7.2.2 *dicat sibi ipse: 'voluptas fragilis est, brevis, fastidio obiecta, quo avidius hausta est citius in contrarium recidens,'* Plin. *Nat.* 12.81 *ad hunc ergo [sc. nidorem] sanandum styracem in foliis petunt hircinis suffiuntque tecta: adeo nulla est voluptas quae non adsiduitate fastidium pariat.*

²³Cic. *Mur.* 21 *primum ista nostra adsiduitas, Servi, nescis quantum interdum adferat hominibus fastidi, quantum satietatis. mihi quidem vehementer expedit positam in oculis*

different sphere of endeavor, the elder Pliny is repeatedly (and no doubt justifiably) worried that he will arouse *fastidium* in the reader of his *Natural History*, whether by treating again material that is all too familiar, or by reeling off long lists of names, or just by telling his readers more than they really want to know.²⁴ And as a teacher, Quintilian is similarly concerned, first to vary the student's lessons at the earliest stage (by alternating reading and writing) so that "he will be refreshed by the change, just as a variety of food restores the digestion and provides a wider range of nourishment with less *fastidium*," and later to make certain that the would-be orator knows the pitfalls of creating *fastidium* through one monotonous habit or another.²⁵ When orators use the same ploys in case after case, he says, they, like a serving of cold leftovers, stir up *fastidium* (*Inst.* 2.4.29 *fastidium moveant velut frigidi et repositi cibi*).

For the most part the *fastidium* of satiety and monotony is caused by objects or activities that are not ordinarily repellent but become repellent through excessive repetition or glut: *crambe* once is at least tolerable, *crambe repetita* is a different matter. But with Quintilian's simile of (specifically) *cold* leftovers, we edge closer to the last major type of per se and reflexive *fastidium*: the aversion to things that are perceived as distasteful and noisome per se, the *fastidium* of "thick, greasy life."²⁶

esse gratiam; sed tamen ego mei satietatem magno meo labore superavi et tu item fortasse; verum tamen utrique nostrum desiderium nihil obfuisse; Suet. *Tib.* 10.1 ... *ut vitato assiduitatis fastidio auctoritatem absentia tueretur atque etiam augeret*. Cf. the declaimer who rather depressingly remarks, along the same lines, *fastidium fatum est coniugii* ([Quint.] *Decl.* 18.5).

²⁴Familiarity: Plin. *Nat.* pr. 14 *alia vero ita multis prodita, ut in fastidium sint adducta* (cf. *ibid.* 15, the difficulty of giving *fastiditis gratiam*). Lists: Plin. *Nat.* 3.28 (cf. Serv. *ad Verg. G.* 4.336, on the names of sea-nymphs). Excess information: Plin. *Nat.* 10.79, cf. Plin. *Ep.* 2.5.4 (seeking advice on revising a speech that he fears is too long), Porph. *ad Hor. Ep.* 1.20.7–8 '*Et scis in breve te cogi.*' *Hoc est: nec totum nec per ordinem recitari fastidio poscent* <u>m.

²⁵Variety of lessons: Quint. *Inst.* 1.12.5 *ideo et stilus lectione requiescit et ipsius lectionis taedium vicibus levatur mutatione recreabitur sicut in cibis, quorum diversitate reficitur stomachus et pluribus minore fastidio alitur*. Monotonous habits: Quint. *Inst.* 9.1.21 (monotony and *satietas*), 9.3.3 (on the *cotidiani ac semper eodem modo formati sermonis fastidium*); sim. *Rhet. Her.* 4.32 (with n. 22 above, on the quickly cloying effect of *voluptas*), Cic. *de Orat.* 3.193, Tac. *Dial.* 19.5.

²⁶I borrow the phrase from a chapter-title in Miller 1997. The following few paragraphs only skim the surface of the Roman sense of the noisome and the ways it is constituted.

To answer the question “How do you make a Roman retch?,” let us count a very few of the ways, beginning with the most intimate involvement of the senses and moving on to more “abstract” causes. For taste and smell, the elder Pliny is a particularly fertile source. Olives grown in a damp climate, or excessively sweet substances, or potions made of goat’s urine are all, on his telling, the sort of thing to arouse *fastidium*²⁷; so similarly the smell of asses’ urine in a cure for thinning hair, or of a particular kind of wood, or of impure euphorbea when it is burnt.²⁸ Among the other senses, sound (interestingly) seems hardly implicated in *fastidium*, and the same is true (more interestingly still) of touch²⁹; but sight is very much involved. So when Horace, for example, remarks “the great feelings of *fastidium* [that are stirred up] in the stomach, if the slaveboy has pawed the winecup with greasy hands while stealing a sip, or if a noisome deposit has stuck to the old mixing bowl,” he evokes a feeling of repugnance that has nothing directly to do with taste, touch, or smell.³⁰ Similarly, Martial’s advice on the preparation of cabbage—“Lest the pallid leaves stir feelings of

²⁷Plin. *Nat.* 17.231 *riguis ... etiam si non cecidere, fastidiendis*, 24.3 *praedulcium fastidium sal temperat*, 28.256 *potu hirci urinae admixto propter fastidium nardo*; cf. Columella’s assurance that bread made of millet can be ingested without *fastidium* if it is eaten before it cools (2.9.19 *panis ex milio conficitur, qui ante quam refrigescat sine fastidio potest absumi*).

²⁸Plin. *Nat.* 28.164 *capillum putant ... densari et asinini pulli <illit>um urina; admiscet nardum fastidii gratia*, 12.91 *ipsum vero lignum in fastidio propter origani a<c>rimoniam, xylocinnamomum vocatur*, 25.79 *discernitur igni; id enim, quod sincerum non est, fastidiendum odorem habet*.

²⁹I have found only one text that seems to associate *fastidium* with sounds perceived as repugnant per se: a declaimer’s account of Phalaris (Sen. *Con.* 5.8.1 [exc.]), *qui inclusos aeneis tauris homines subiectis urebat ignibus, ut mugitum ederent, verba non possent. o hominem in sua crudelitate fastidiosum, qui, cum vellet torquere, tamen nolēbat audire!* (the *fastidium* associated with monotonous sound effects in oratory, n. 25 above, is a different matter); cf. the remarks of Miller 1997: 82–85 on the small role played by hearing in the arousal of disgust more generally. In noting the absence of “touch-*fastidium*” I am thinking of the response to touching non-human objects (e.g., the sorts of slippery, slimy, squishy, or wriggly things that elicit aversion in the average North American today); for *fastidium* produced by contact with certain persons, see at n. 37, on Ov. *Ars* 2.323–24, and n. 78, on Sen. *Cl.* 2.6.2.

³⁰Hor. *S.* 2.4.78–80 *magna movet stomacho fastidia, seu puer / unctis tractavit calicem manibus, dum furta ligurrit, / sive gravis veteri creterrae limus adhaesit*. I take it that the first elicitor mentioned has mainly to do with the trace of greasy hands, independent of the fact that the hands were those of a slave (mainly, but perhaps not exclusively: see below at n. 78). In any case the second elicitor seems purely visual.

fastidium in you, let the cabbage be made green with a solution of potash” (or some other alkali)³¹—seems to be motivated purely by considerations of appearance: the difference between cabbage leaves that are repellent because they *look* “dead” (*pallens* as an adjective associated with sickness or death) and those that are enticing because they *look* “fresh and alive” (*viridis* as an adjective associated with the color of growing vegetation).³²

These examples concern, specifically, the connection between sight and ingestion, a connection that seems generally to be present in cases of reflexive sight-*fastidium* (at least when the object is not another person: see below). Moreover, it appears to be the case that *fastidium* can be aroused by the mere *thought* of ingesting something noisome. Consider Pliny on the medicinal use of green lizards: *Nat.* 30.90 *lacerta viridis cum condimentis, quae fastidium abstergeant, ablatis pedibus ac capite*. Remove the head and feet, he says, and add seasoning to “wipe away” *fastidium*³³: what, exactly, is the purpose of these *condimenta*, and what, exactly, is the cause of *fastidium*? It is plainly not the *fastidium* of satiety or the *fastidium cibi* induced by illness: it is an aversion to eating something that you would not ordinarily eat and that you find it difficult to eat when you must (when it is “good for you”). Further, the seasonings do not appear to be needed to conceal a disagreeable taste (the honey-on-the-cup-of-bitter-medicine ploy): there is no indication that green lizards actually taste bad, and in any case the *fastidium* (in Pliny’s representation) already exists, it is “there” as a thing to be “wiped away,” prior to the tasting. It appears that the seasonings are needed as a source of appetite, to overcome an a priori aversion to putting in your mouth something that you think is repugnant; or more bluntly, the seasonings are meant to keep you from gagging as the lizard crosses the hedge of your teeth.³⁴

³¹Mart. 13.17.1–2 *Ne tibi pallentes moveant fastidia caules, / nitrata viridis brassica fiat aqua*.

³²Cf. the sight-*fastidium* of the gourmand described by Seneca (*Ep.* 78.24), for whom *in reposito ... pectora avium (totas enim videre fastidium est) congesta ponentur*, and the reaction of the elder Pliny’s highly anthropomorphized elephants at *Nat.* 8.29, *animalium maxime odere murem et, si pabulum in praeseptis positum attingi ab eo videre, fastidiunt*.

³³On the metaphor, see below at n. 47.

³⁴The same considerations may be at work in the directions Pliny gives for the medicinal use of the tortoise at *Nat.* 32.118 (... *vel testudo decisis pedibus, capite, cauda et intestinis exemptis, reliqua carne ita condita, ut citra fastidium sumi possit*) and of frogs at *Nat.* 32.80 (*decocuntur et ranae singulae in aceti heminis, ut dentes ita colluantur contineaturque in ore succus. si fastidium obstaret, suspendebat pedibus posterioribus*).

Certainly, Pliny elsewhere gives clear testimony to the power of mere thought to arouse this type of *fastidium*, even when it is not a question of eating the object in question. So we can almost see him writhe when he must talk about bedbugs and a certain kind of beetle:

Some things, though shameful to talk about (*pudenda dictu*), are recommended so insistently by our authorities that it would be just wrong to pass them by (*ut praeterire fas non sit*) ...: so, for instance, the nature of bed-bugs—utterly foul creatures, one ought to feel *fastidium* at the very mention of them (*animalis foedissimi et dictu quoque fastidiendi*)—is said to be effective against snake-bites, especially that of the asp, and likewise against all other poisons (*Nat.* 29.61)

A third kind [of beetle]—loathesome because of its unbearable odor (*odoris taedio invisum*) and having a pointed tail—is said to heal otherwise incurable ulcerations, swollen glands, and abscesses when applied with pisselaeum for twenty-one days, and puncture wounds, bruises, malignancies, eczema, and boils when the feet and wings have been removed. (142) I feel *fastidium* even hearing about these things; but, my God, Diodorus says that he has prescribed [the beetles] with resin and honey even in cases of jaundice and orthopnoea. So powerful is the craft [of medicine] when it comes to prescribing whatever it wishes as a treatment! (*Nat.* 29.141–42)

Even mentioning the *animal foedisimum* ought to be a cause of *fastidium*, here overcome only out of respect for the authority of his sources and his obligation as a purveyor of beneficial information: indeed, the opening reference to *quaedam pudenda dictu* suggests that at some level in Pliny's mind the *fastidium* that he feels has a positive ethical coloration—that it is not only normal, but even decent to feel this way.³⁵ The case of the foul-smelling beetle is more vivid still. After cataloging the remedies in which it can be used (with or without legs and wings), Pliny says, *nos haec etiam audita fastidimus*. The source of the repugnance is of course all in his mind: he has not, at the present moment,

eas Sallustius Dionysius, ut ex ore virus deflueret in acetum fervens, idque e pluribus ranis; fortioribus stomachis ex iure mandendas dabat). Cf. the seasonings (*blandimenta*) that supposedly would allow the legatee to consume the testator's flesh at Petr. 141.8, and below at n. 39.

³⁵Cf. the remark at *Nat.* 29.140, introducing the discussion of beetles that leads to the passage quoted in the text: *hoc quoque animal inter pudenda est, sed propter admirationem naturae priscorumque curae totum in hoc loco explicandum*. On the ethical dimension of per se *fastidium*, see below at n. 39.

smelled (seen, touched, tasted) the beetle, or the remedies made from it, or the ulcerous, scabby, and pustular surfaces to which the remedies are customarily applied. But what *is* the source of that repugnance (the referent of *haec*)? Having started (in his mind) with the *fastidium*-elicitor of smell, does Pliny retain that as the dominant stimulus? Does he modulate from the thought of the beetle's smell to the thought of applying the smelly substance to the various conditions, some of which are surely smelly themselves, as well as visually repugnant? Does the thought of the conditions themselves, which receive more words, at some point come to dominate? What role might the thought of handling the beetles (and the sores) play? All of the above?³⁶ We can best say that Pliny's *fastidium* here has more than one sufficient cause.

But bedbugs, beetles, and the like have no monopoly on the *fastidium* of the noisome. Humans can evoke the same reaction, most commonly through odor and sight³⁷: a woman's cloak that might retain the odor of her nether parts; one's own body odor or the smell of one's own crapulent breath; and the combined sensory assault of the hag who reeks of sweat while her makeup—a combination of chalk and crocodile dung—runs in a smeared stream across her face.³⁸ For sheer memorability, however, there is nothing like the *fastidium*

³⁶And if we say "all of the above," what exactly do we mean? Short of actual sensory hallucination, human beings cannot smell imagined smells or touch imagined touches in the same way that they can see imagined sights or hear imagined sounds: the character or style of the imagined repugnance will therefore differ from sense to sense.

³⁷Touch—specifically, ministering to the sick with one's own hands—seems to be the cause of *fastidium* at Ov. *Ars* 2.323–34 (advice to the lover when his *puella* falls ill) *nec tibi morosi veniant fastidia morbi, / perque tuas fiant, quae sinet ipsa, manus*, though the phrase *morosi ... morbi* might rather (or also) indict the invalid's crankiness as repellent. Old age is evidently the cause of per se *fastidium* at Juv. 10.201–2 (*usque adeo gravis uxori natisque sibi, / ut captatori moveat fastidia Cosso*; cf. Porph. *ad* Hor. *Carm.* 3.14.25, 4.13.1), as is "filth" at [Quint.] *Decl.* 14.7 (*cui non licet excludere debilitates, fastidire sordes*, of a prostitute who cannot refuse infirm or dirty clients), though the sense offended is not specified.

³⁸Respectively, Pl. *Men.* 166–69 (MEN.) *Agedum odorare hanc quam ego habeo pal-lam. quid olet? apstines? /* (PEN.) *Summum olfactare oportet vestimentum muliebre, / nam ex istoc loco spurcatur nasum odore † inlucido. /* (MEN.) *Olfacta igitur hinc, Peni-cule. lepide ut fastidis.* (PEN.) *Decet* (Peniculus' aversion, even after he has been offered a different part of the *palla* to smell, is well captured in the old school edition of C. M. Knight: "how prettily you shew your disgust"); Plin. *Nat.* 12.81 *ex Syria revehunt styra-cem, acri odore eius in focus abigentes suorum* [sc. *odorum*] *fastidium*; Sen. *Ep.* 95.25 *Quam foedi itaque pestilentesque ructus sunt, quantum fastidium sui exhalantibus crapulam veterem! scias putrescere sumpta, non concoqui*; Hor. *Epod.* 12.1–16 (esp.

caused by the prospect of eating human flesh: “All my legatees besides my freedmen will receive their bequests,” says the testator in the *Satyricon*, as he sets his brilliantly grisly terms, “only on the condition that they butcher my body and eat it before the people in assembly I’m not worried that your stomach will rebel: it will follow orders as long as you promise it a rich reward in return for a single hour’s *fastidium*. Just close your eyes and make believe that you’re eating, not human flesh, but HS 10,000,000.”³⁹

But (the reader might say) there must be more at stake in this last tableau than in the physical noxiousness of body odor or the gag-making prospect of eating a lizard whole: the thought of eating a lizard, repugnant though it might be, is ethically neutral; the thought of eating your neighbor is not. Indeed, and so the subject of cannibalism brings fully to the fore a matter that was raised glancingly by Pliny’s reaction to creepy-crawlies: the reflexive *fastidium* caused by things or acts that are *ethically* noisome, that in fact amount to “taboos.” Cannibalism is one such taboo. Defecation and cowardice are two others, nicely linked in a story told by Valerius Maximus (9.13.2):

Gnaeus Carbo, too, is a great embarrassment to the annals of Rome (*magnae verecundiae est Latinis annalibus*). Having been led off to execution in Sicily at Pompey’s orders ... [82 B.C.E.], he begged the soldiers abjectly and tearfully to be allowed to relieve himself before dying, that he might prolong the wretched light of life; and he drew

4–11 *namque sagacius unus odoror, / polypus an gravis hirsutis cubet hircus in alis, / quam canis acer ubi lateat sus. / qui sudor vietis et quam malus undique membris / crescit odor, cum pene soluto / indomitam properat rabiem sedare neque illi / iam manet umida creta colorque / stercore fucatus crocodili*).

³⁹Petr. 141.2, 6–7 *omnes qui in testamento meo legata habent praeter liberos meos hac condicione percipient quae dedi, si corpus meum in partes conciderint et astante populo comederint de stomachi tui recusatione non habeo quod timeam. sequetur imperium, si promiseris illi pro unius horae fastidio multorum bonorum pensionem. operi modo oculos et finge te non humana viscera sed centies sestertium comesse*. In its inspired misanthropy the stipulation bears comparison with Guy Grand’s “offer” in Terry Southern’s *Magic Christian* (20–27): on a busy street-corner of Chicago’s Loop, passers-by can help themselves to a fortune in cash, if only they will pluck it, one \$100 note at a time, from a heated vat of cattle blood, urine, and feces (they do); and cf., in turn, Petr. 43.1 *paratus fuit quadrantem de stercore mordicus tollere*. For the *fastidium* of cannibalism, see also Ov. *Ibis* 427–28 *Nec dapis humanae tibi sint fastidia; quaque / parte potes, Tydeus temporis huius eris*, [Quint.] *Decl.* 12.2 *at iste interim stat, ut videtis, longa via saginatus et satur atque habundans publico commeatu; ad mentionem ciborum nostrorum plenum fastidio vultum trahit* (the person in question makes a face “full of *fastidium*” because his fellow citizens were compelled by famine to commit cannibalism).

the business out so long that they cut off his head while he sat in the place of filth (*sordido in loco*). As I relate such a *flagitium* my very words are in conflict: they find silence uncongenial, because the tale should not be covered up, yet they do not feel at home with the telling, because one ought to feel *fastidium* at saying such things (*quia dictu fastidienda sunt*).

That *cupiditas vitae* (Valerius' theme here) should cause a notable man to die this way, clinging cravenly to life while (or: *by*) emptying his bowels, is a blot on the history of Rome, one that leaves both Valerius' words and his impulses at war with one another, as his sense of responsibility to his authorial task is pitted against his sense that such things are just not decent to talk about. The conflict is framed in terms almost identical to those used by Pliny when he talks about bedbugs and beetles⁴⁰; and though in both cases the writer's "sense of responsibility" wins out, he must make the gesture of registering his *fastidium* at using the words needed to record an indecent subject.⁴¹

Yet another instance of *fastidium*-as-ethical-reflex concerns incest—for it is here, I suggest, that we can best understand the passage of Apuleius with which we began. You will recall the perjurious tale told by the slave (*Met.* 10.7): "Made indignant by his stepmother's *fastidium*, the young man had summoned [the slave] and, seeking vengeance for the insult, had ordered him to achieve her son's murder" (*se vocasset indignatus fastidio novercae iuvenis, ... ulciscens iniuriam filii eius mandaverit necem*). Though the *fastidium* ascribed to the stepmother is a lie within a lie, as part of a lie it should signify something useful to the liars: what sort of *fastidium* would that be? It plainly cannot be any sort of *fastidium* due to "ranking." On no construction of the story could the stepmother's aversion be thought to be based on some ordinal judgment such as "Sorry, dear, you're just not X enough" (where X = some value adjective like "tall," "dark," or "handsome"). The aversion must be absolute just because of what the youth is (her *privignus*), and the whatness of the youth is itself not relevantly defined in terms of hierarchical status relative to the person experiencing the aversion. (The category *privignus* is not "lower" than or "inferior" to the category *noverca* according to any ranking criterion relevant to the transaction, as (e.g.) the category *servus* would be relative to the category *dominus* or *ingenuus*.) Furthermore, what the youth is is hedged about by known and absolute ethical notions: simply, it is always wrong for a *noverca* to have sex with a

⁴⁰With the last sentence in Valerius' account compare Plin. *Nat.* 29.61 and 29.140, quoted at n. 35 above.

⁴¹For defecation and *fastidium* see also Sen. *Ep.* 58.32, discussed in section 3.

privignus. Nor can the *noverca* plausibly (for the purposes of the story) be thought to have deliberated, even fractionally, in her response to the stepson's supposed approach. The response must be thought to have been reflexive and even visceral, the equivalent of finding a cockroach instead of dinner on your dinner-plate: in reacting, you do not distinguish this cockroach from some other (taller, darker, etc.) cockroach, nor is your reaction informed by a desire to maintain or establish some hierarchical status relative to cockroaches, singly or as a group; in fact you do not *do* anything but recoil, turning away or closing your eyes immediately and without hesitation, so that you will no longer see the cockroach. In short, the stepmother's response must be (imagined to be) a reaction of ethically reflexive *fastidium*. That the *iuvenis* would nonetheless be "indignant" at such a reaction and regard it as an *iniuria* calling for revenge not only provides him with a motive for murder, according to the lie, but also effectively blackens his character still further: it shows him to be, in fact, some very large variety of ethical cockroach.⁴²

Cannibalism, defecation, and incest are all "big" taboos, subjects of intense and deep-seated aversion in most human cultures: it is not surprising to see them appear among the Roman responses of per se *fastidium*. But we do, perhaps, learn a bit more about the specifically Roman character of this response when we find their company shared by cowardice, or by another taboo deeply rooted in Roman social and political culture: the taboo against boasting. So Quintilian's reminder on this subject: *Inst.* 11.1.15 *in primis igitur omnis sui vitiosa iactatio est, eloquentiae tamen in oratore praecipue, adfertque audientibus non fastidium modo sed plerumque etiam odium*. Hearing someone boast not only makes the audience feel like turning away, it often (*plerumque*) makes them hostile as well: it is apt to elicit not just aversion but also aggression.⁴³ The hostile reac-

⁴²Cf., conversely, Juv. 10.323–29 '*sed casto quid forma nocet?*' *quid profuit immo / Hippolyto grave propositum, quid Bellerophonti?* / <*hospita cum stuprum suaderet sive noverca*>, / *erubuit nempe haec ceu fastidita repulso / nec Stheneboea minus quam Cressa excanduit, et se / concussere ambae. mulier saevissima tunc est / cum stimulus odio pudor admovet* (Markland's suppletion in 325, *nempe haec*, obelized in some editions, is sound): having made her offer of *stuprum*, Phaedra became the object of Hippolytus' *fastidium*, which arose from his morally serious way of life (*grave propositum*); having borne this *fastidium*, Phaedra herself then felt shame (*erubuit*, *pudor*), anger (*excanduit*), and hostility (*odio*). On the *auxesis*, from *fastidium* to *odium*, see immediately following.

⁴³For the relation between *fastidium* and *odium*, cf. Porph. *ad Hor. Ep.* 2.1.22 (*fastidit et odit*) *auxesis*; *plus enim 'odit' quam 'fastidit'* (Brink, on the same passage, quotes Quintilian and translates "not only tedium but often disgust," which I believe misses both

tion, being more vigorous and pointed, is no doubt more undesirable when it occurs; but what one can always expect (Quintilian implies) is the absolute aversion of ethical *fastidium*.⁴⁴ In the dynamics of that feeling, we might say that boasting is structurally equivalent to defecating in public, while being the object of a boast is comparable to being shat upon.



The manifestations of *fastidium* considered so far—whether elicited by maladies, by satiety, or by physical and ethical presentations perceived as noisome in themselves—all share the same dynamic, as products of a per se and reflexive response. Not surprisingly, they are all also conceived as being embodied in the same way: they are centered in the stomach, especially, where they are experienced as a “dead weight” or a form of upset,⁴⁵ or in the eyes, when the object of *fastidium* is visual, prompting the urge to turn away from a repellent sight.⁴⁶ The recurrent metaphors applied to the feeling figure it as a physical presence that is “moved” or “stirred up” at its inception and that can be removed by being “wiped away”; at other times it is spoken of as something that “befalls” or “oppresses” a person, as though from the outside and beyond voluntary control.⁴⁷ In

fastidium and *odium*), and n. 42 (on Juv. 10.323–29). For the expectation that boasting would arouse *fastidium* in the sense relevant here, cf. Liv. 38.50.11–12; for boasting (*gloriari*) as the object of *fastidium* see Sen. *Con.* 4 pr. 2.

⁴⁴*iactatio* has these effects (Quintilian goes on to explain) because the listeners see themselves being devalued by someone playing ranking games: *ibid.* 16 *habet enim mens nostra natura sublime quiddam et erectum et inpatiens superioris at qui se supra modum extollit, premere ac despicere creditur nec tam se maiorem quam minores ceteros facere*. The remark makes plain why we should diagnose the *fastidium* here as reflexive, for it is taken to proceed from our very “nature”; a deliberative and ranking response, by contrast, would imply that there are some ways of being treated with contempt that you actually find attractive.

⁴⁵Ov. *Pont.* 1.10.7, Hor. *S.* 2.4.78, Petr. 141.6, Plin. *Nat.* 32.43, 80 (associating *fastidium* with *cruditas*: cf. Col. 6.6.1, Plin. *Nat.* 26.41, 27.48, 29.79, 32.43, Porph. *ad* Hor. *S.* 2.2.44).

⁴⁶Petr. 141.7 (*operi modo oculos*), cf. Cic. *Fam.* 2.16.2 (*nosti enim non modo stomachi mei ... sed etiam oculorum ... fastidium*).

⁴⁷*fastidium* (-ia) *movere*, Ov. *Pont.* 1.10.7, Hor. *S.* 2.4.78, Quint. *Inst.* 2.4.29, Mart. 13.17.1, Juv. 10.202; *fastidium de-(abs-)tergere*, Col. 8.10.5, Plin. *Nat.* 20.34, 26.41, 27.48, 30.90. “Befall” or “oppress”: Plin. *Nat.* 32.43 (*fastidium ... incidat*), Cels. 3.6.11 (*fastidio urgetur*). Cf. also the physicality of *fastidium* implied by idioms like *fastidium detrahare* (Plin. *Nat.* 22.155), *fastidium auferre* (23.10), *fastidia discutere* (23.54), *fastidium abigere* (23.161).

its aetiology, dynamics, and representation, the *fastidium* of absolute and autonomic aversion is distinct from the other type of *fastidium*-response, to which we can now turn.

The Dynamics of *Fastidium* (2): “Deliberative Ranking”

The response considered above did not entail considerations of rank or status, self-awareness or self-concern (beyond, perhaps, a concern to avoid a noisome presentation), or the conscious exercise of thought and will. The type of *fastidium*-reaction about to be considered typically is composed of all these elements. At the same time, the *fastidium* of absolute and autonomic response was correlated not only with a fairly wide range of objects, but also with several different states, and there were some specific linkages between states and objects: the *fastidium* associated with being ill resulted from presentations (typically, food or sex) that in most other circumstances would arouse not aversion but appetite, while the *fastidium* associated with satiety and monotony was evoked by some phenomena (for example, certain repetitious sounds) that would have no particular repugnance for sick people as such. The *fastidium* of deliberative ranking, by contrast, seems to involve but a single disposition and a single impulse, and it certainly involves a narrower range of objects. Accordingly, although this type of *fastidium* is more commonly represented in our texts (by a ratio of roughly 3:2), no lengthier discussion is required.

This is the *fastidium* of aversive connoisseurship: it typically entails a judgment, represented as “refined,” made on objects—predominantly items of daily intimate use (food, clothing, furnishings), or products of the literary culture, or people—when consuming those objects has significance for the consumer’s status, affirming that status (when the aversion is registered) or questioning it (when it is not).⁴⁸ In the area of quotidian consumables, it is the *fastidium* of diners who would refuse the upper part of any bird (save the *ficedula*) and the lower part, too, unless it is stuffed, and who might sooner go hungry than eat anything but peacock or turbot; it is the *fastidium* felt by the town mouse, with his “proud tooth,” for his country cousin’s table.⁴⁹ But the re-

⁴⁸I speak of “objects” and “consuming” advisedly, though the referents include “people”: the choice is borne out, at least metaphorically, by the evidence below.

⁴⁹Gel. 15.8.2 *is nunc flos cenae habetur inter istos, quibus sumptus et fastidium pro facetiis procedit, qui negant ullam avem praeter ficedulam totam comesse oportere; ceterarum avium atque altilium nisi tantum adponatur, ut a cluniculis inferiore parte saturi fiant, convivium putant inopia sordere, superiorem partem avium atque altilium qui edint, eos palatum <non> habere*, Hor. S. 1.2.114–18 (touching on the three basic drives, for food, drink, and sex) *num, tibi cum faucis urit sitis, aurea quaeris / pocula?*

sponse is not confined to the elite (human or murine): the standard of judgment moves along a sliding social scale, as Juvenal suggests when he speaks of the vegetables once taken as a sufficient meal by the ascetic hero Curius, now subjected to the *fastidium* of a filthy ditch-digger who remembers the greater delights of a cheap delicatessen.⁵⁰ And because the standards of judgment, and so the judgments themselves, are cultural constructs at any social level, they are liable to be represented as deviations from or corruptions of “natural” appetite. That sort of deviance is the target of Horace’s satiric imperatives at *Sermones* 2.2.14–16:

When toil has pounded the *fastidia* out of you, when you’re thirsty
and empty, go on and spurn cheap grub, don’t drink anything but honey
of Hymettus thinned by Falernian wine

And what the Epicurean Horace only implies, the Stoicizing Seneca makes explicit, again and again.⁵¹ It is a point to which we will return.

The pathologies of consumption associated with *fastidium* are not the concern only of moralists informed by philosophical doctrine: hence the popular verses aimed (Suetonius reports) at Tiberius (*Tib.* 59.1):

The bastard feels *fastidium* for wine, because now he thirsts for blood:
this he drinks as greedily as he used to drink wine unmixed with water.

As the second line shows, Tiberius’ *fastidium* for wine is not figured as a per se reaction to something that he would normally (“naturally”) be averse to con-

*num esuriens fastidis omnia praeter / pavonem rhombumque? tument tibi cum inguina,
num, si / ancilla aut verna est praesto puer, impetus in quem / continuo fiat, malis ten-
tigne rumpi?, S. 2.6.86 ... cupiens varia fastidia cena / vincere tangentis male singula
dente / superbo.*

⁵⁰Juv. 11.79–81 ... *holuscula, quae nunc / squalidus in magna fastidit conpede fossor,
/ qui meminit calidae sapiat quid volva popinae.* Cf. the *fastidium* felt by Horace’s bailiff toward his farm (*Ep.* 1.14.1–2 *vilice silvarum et mihi me reddentis agelli / quem tu fastidis ...*): as we subsequently learn, this judgment, too, is informed by a memory of urban pleasures (24–26 *nec vicina subest vinum praebere taberna / quae possit tibi, nec meretrix tибicina, cuius / ad strepitum salias terrae gravis*); and since we also learn that the same man hankered for the country when he was in the city (14 *tu mediastinus tacita prece rura petebas*), we are to understand that his *fastidium* is that of the man who perpetually measures what he has by the standard of what he thinks he is missing.

⁵¹See, e.g., *Ep.* 110.12, 119.15, 123.2, and below at nn. 84–85. After Seneca, who is the undisputed maestro of the emotion, Horace is the author who most often revisits themes of deliberative, ranking *fastidium*—perhaps because as a freedman’s son, he had so often been the object of it himself.

suming, but as an aversive dispreference, a ranking, and subject to change over time: the pathology consists in the fact that the preference for wine has been displaced by a preference for blood, a drink that *should* cause per se *fastidium*.

The representation of such *fastidium* itself obviously implies a point of view, a judgment conveyed by a selective framing of the data. It implies, in fact, a point of view shaped by *fastidium*. Consider how Valerius Maximus frames the story of the consul Q. Tubero Catus, who sent a delegation of Aetolians packing when they offered gifts of silver *vasa* to replace the poor pottery objects (*fictilia*) they had noticed on his table (4.3.7):

When he had warned them against supposing that his self-control (*continentiae*) required the sort of subvention owed to poverty, he ordered them to leave with their baggage. How well had he done in preferring domestic to Aetolian goods, if only this later age would have wished to follow his frugal example! But now where have we come to? You can scarcely get slaves to overcome their *fastidium* for the sort of household wares that a consul did not blush to use (*a servis impetrari vix potest ne eam supellectilem fastidiant, qua tunc consul uti non erubuit*).

As represented by Valerius, Tubero himself was plainly engaged in a game of ranking, judging goods of material value against goods with ethical significance; and in his “admonition” of the legates he could with no distortion be described as *fastidiosus*. Yet his (virtuous) part in the game is characterized in terms of a mere “preference” (*praetulerat*), while in the moral that Valerius draws, the uppity latter-day slaves are taxed with a pretentious *fastidium*—even as they are made the object of Valerius’ own tacit *fastidium*.⁵² There is a game-within-the-game implied in Valerius’ account, as the *fastidiosi* become objects of *fastidium* (we will see this reversal frequently in the following few paragraphs and return to it in Section 4). The same game appears on the surface early in the *Satyricon*, when our heroes, believing that they have lost a cloak with a wallet of money sewn inside, see it turn up in the hands of a peasant (13.1–2):

What a lucky break! The rustic had not yet put his prying hands to the seam, but was even offering the thing up for sale *fastidiose*, as though it had been ripped off a beggar’s back (*tamquam mendici spolium*). (2) When Ascyltus saw that the stash was undisturbed, and saw too the *personam vendentis contemptam*, he led me a little way from the

⁵²The framing of the tale, contrasting the ascetic hero of old with the *fastidium* of lower-class types “today,” is identical to that of Juv. 11.79–81 above; compare also the jeremiad of Plin. *Nat.* 33.152.

crowd and said, "Brother, do you realize that the treasure I was just now mourning has returned to us? ... What do we do now? How do we lay our rightful claim to the thing?"

The scene is filtered through at least two different layers of perception, both informed by a deliberative, ranking *fastidium*. Unaware of the concealed wind-fall, the *rusticus* flogs the tunic with an expression of *fastidium*, as though it belonged to a person even lower than himself on the social ladder (Heseltine's "with a condescending air," for *fastidiose*, conveys the idea nicely in the Loeb); whereas Ascylltus regards the *rusticus* as a *persona contempta*—that is to say, regards him *fastidiose*. As we shall see in greater detail, such a regression is in principle open-ended, from the bottom to the top of the social pyramid: the "beggar's" cloak is regarded with *fastidium* by the *rusticus*, who in turn is regarded with *fastidium* by Ascylltus, who in turn could be regarded ...

The dynamics of deliberative and ranking *fastidium* in respect of ordinary items of consumption scarcely differ from *fastidium* expressed in respect of products of the literary culture. To experience this type of *fastidium* toward one's own productions is unproblematic, even commendable, as Cicero implies when he tells Atticus that he would not have dared send along one of his compositions if he had not vetted it "slowly and with *fastidium*"⁵³; but those who express *fastidium* toward Latin literature in general, avoiding it because they rate it low relative to Greek, receive very different treatment at Cicero's hands.⁵⁴ The ranking game comprises both substance and style. Listen to the elder Pliny as he speaks about the "level" of subject matter he is about to address at *Naturalis Historia* 11.4:

But we wonder at elephants' shoulders, carrying towers of war, the necks of bulls and the fierce tossings [of their heads] high in the air, the predation of tigers and the manes of lions, although nature is nowhere more wholly herself than in her smallest creatures. Accordingly, I ask my readers—seeing that they despise many of these creatures—not to condemn with *fastidium* my account of them as well (*ne legentes, quoniam ex his spernunt multa, etiam relata fas-*

⁵³Cic. *Att.* 2.1.1 *quem [sc. librum] tibi ego non essem ausus mittere nisi eum lente ac fastidiose probavissem*; such *fastidium* would be acceptable from intimates as well, cf. the rather labored joke at Plin. *Ep.* 7.12.3.

⁵⁴Cic. *Brut.* 247 C. Memmius L. f. *perfectus litteris sed Graecis, fastidiosus sane Latinarum*. In principle one could presumably find *litterae Latinae* repellent per se, but the juxtaposition with *litterae Graecae* shows the standard to which judgment is referred in this case; the concern recurs in other works by Cicero from the same period (*Opt. Gen.* 12, 18, *Fin.* 1.4–5, 10).

tidio damnent), for in the contemplation of nature nothing can appear superfluous.

Because the subject is insects, Pliny fears that he will lose readers who think insects insignificant and superfluous (*supervacuum*) compared to elephants and bulls and tigers and lions. He therefore seeks to restrain the readers' ranking impulse by telling them that it literally runs contrary to Nature, an argument he later repeats in even more forceful terms in a similar context, when the authority of Nature, now supplemented by that of Vergil and Homer, is again mobilized to beat back the forces of *fastidium*.⁵⁵

Such literary *fastidium*, when directed to matters of style and diction,⁵⁶ is perhaps most vividly and instructively captured by the younger Pliny, when he recounts his *indignatiuncula* at the behavior of certain men at a recital (*Ep.* 6.17.1–5, trans. Radice):

The work being read was highly finished in every way, but two or three clever persons—or so they seemed to themselves and a few others—listened to it like deaf mutes. They never opened their lips, stirred a hand, nor even rose to their feet if only as a change from sitting still. What is the point of all this dignity and learning, or rather this laziness and conceit, this want of tact or even good sense, which makes you spend a whole day giving offence and leaving an enemy in the man you came to hear as your dearest friend? Are you cleverer than he is? All the more reason not to envy him his success, for envy is a sign of inferiority (*tanto magis ne invideris; nam qui invidet minor est*) Personally, I always respect and admire anyone who achieves something in literature: *est enim res difficilis ardua fastidiosa, et quae eos a quibus contemnitur invicem contemnat*.

The offenders were (on Pliny's interpretation) taking on airs, spurning the presentation offered to them because they wished to appear "learned" and "wise," superior in judgment to both the reciter and the rest of the audience: they be-

⁵⁵Plin. *Nat.* 29.28 *haec fuerint dicenda ... contra attonitas quorundam persuasiones, qui prodesse nisi pretiosa non putant. neque enim dubitaverim aliquis fastidio futura quae dicentur animalia, at non Vergilio fuit nominare formicas nulla necessitate et curculiones ac 'lucifugis congesta cubilia blattis,' non Homero inter proelia deorum improbitatem muscae describere, non naturae gignere ista, cum gignat hominem. proinde causas quisque et effectus, non res aestimet* (the concern with ranking judgment is made explicit by *pretiosa ... putant* and *aestimet*).

⁵⁶Cf. Suet. *Aug.* 86.2 (the emperor's *fastidium* for the novel affectations of Maecenas and the archaism of Tiberius), Sen. *Ep.* 58.1, 6, Quint. *Inst.* 8.3.23 (*fastidium* in respect of word-choice).

haved, in a word, *fastidiose*. But Pliny does not apply that word to them, instead reading their posture in terms of *invidia* (in this case, amounting to an unintended betrayal of inferiority by a pose of superiority).⁵⁷ Rather, Pliny applies the word to the idea of literary activity itself, as a *res difficilis ardua fastidiosa*, and he thereby achieves a kind of one-upsmanship in the game-within-the-game. For the exact modality of the *res fastidiosa* is picked out by the relative clause that follows: it is “the sort of thing that despises in return those by whom it is despised.” Who “those” are in this case of dueling *fastidium* is clear: the offenders are put in their (proper, lowly) place before the *res difficilis ardua fastidiosa*, as the epithet *ardua* not only reinforces the preceding *difficilis* (as a near-synonym) but also anticipates *fastidiosa*, suggesting that literary activity sits enthroned upon a “sheer” pinnacle from which it has the superior vantage point to render its ranking judgment, *de haut en bas*.

The behavior of the *fastidiosi* in this episode had social consequences beyond offending Pliny. They left as an enemy the man (the reciter) whom they had visited as a dear friend, primarily because they had violated the presumption (or pose) of equality that was central to the ethos of *amicitia*: they had committed the cardinal social sin of being *in aequos et pares fastidiosus*.⁵⁸ It was improper to have that feeling toward peers precisely because the feeling fueled the engine of social hierarchy, drawing persons and classes apart and ensuring that they stayed that way. Like any powerful fuel, it required proper calibration and precise distribution by the right people. Far more often than not, according to our texts, this was treatment it did not receive.

We caught a glimpse of *fastidium*’s part in this social dynamic above, in Petronius’ tale of the peasant and the cloak. The same dynamic was active from the base to the pinnacle of the social pyramid. Slaves, it goes without saying, were the object of this *fastidium*, being ranked below everyone else. This is obvious to Seneca, for example, when he considers categories of persons against whom we refrain from expressing anger (*Dial.* 5.32.1): “Different considerations should deter us in different cases: fear in some, respect in others, *fastidium* in

⁵⁷Cf. the elder Seneca’s characterization of the rhetor Albucius Silus, *Con.* 10.1.13 *fastidiosus auditor eorum quibus invidere poterat*.

⁵⁸*Rhet. Her.* 4.52, a veritable catalog of what the Roman mind regarded as the worst vicia: *frequentatio est, cum res tota causa dispersae coguntur in unum locum, quo gravior aut acrior aut crinosior oratio sit, hoc pacto: ‘a quo tandem abest iste vitio? quid est, cur iudicio velitis eum liberare? Suae pudicitiae proditor est, insidiator alienae; cupidus intemperans, petulans superbus; impius in parentes, ingratus in amicos, infestus cognatis; in superiores contumax, in aequos et pares fastidiosus, in inferiores crudelis; denique in omnis intolerabilis.’*

others again (*quibusdam timeamus irasci, quibusdam vereamur, quibusdam fastidiamus*). It would really be a great accomplishment, wouldn't it (*magnam rem sine dubio fecerimus*), to toss some paltry, wretched slave in the workhouse!" The argument, in the case of the slave, is based not on his person (which is, in effect, beneath contempt), but on the person of the master, according to the criterion of what constitutes a significant action for him to perform (*magnam rem facere*).⁵⁹

Slaves arouse an easy and almost offhand *fastidium* just because their abasement was a matter of consensus. The feeling is more intense in the case of that ambiguous figure, the freedman. Here is Velleius Paterculus on Menas and Menecrates, freedmen of Pompey the Great in the service of his son Sextus (2.77.3):

[The pact of Misenum] restored to the state, among other highly distinguished men, Claudius Nero and M. Silanus, Sentius Saturninus and Arruntius and Titius. But as for Staius Murcus, who had doubled Pompey's forces when he arrived with his very large fleet (cf. 2.72.4)—Pompey had had him killed in Sicily, after he was covertly attacked with false allegations, because Menas and Menecrates had conceived a feeling of *fastidium* (*fastidierant*) at having such a man as their colleague.

fastidierant here is a caustic verb: the thought is that Staius Murcus, a *vir praetorius imperatorque* (2.69.2), would have been far more justified in feeling *fastidium* for the freedmen than the freedmen were in feeling *fastidium* for him.⁶⁰ In general, Velleius is highly critical of Sextus' use of slaves and freedmen to achieve his ends, and Menas and Menecrates are among the foremost symbols of that use: his bitter ascription of *fastidium* to the pair not only characterizes their impropriety toward Staius but also constitutes the expression of his own implied *fastidium* toward them.

We have seen this kind of "reversal" before, and we see it again when the younger Pliny vents his indignation (lively even at half a century's remove!) over the praetorian *ornamenta* and other honors awarded to Claudius' freedman Pallas (*Ep.* 8.6.14):

⁵⁹The distinctive self-concern of deliberative *fastidium* is discussed further below. Common *fastidium* toward slaves is implied, though deprecated, by V. Max. 3.3.ext.7 (affirming that virtue is *non fastidioso aditu*, admitting even a slave), sim. Sen. *Ep.* 47.17 (against the *fastidiosi* who would forbid geniality toward slaves).

⁶⁰Cynthia Damon nicely compares the attitude toward *liberti* in the political and military spheres expressed or implied at Tac. *Hist.* 1.76.3 and 3.12.3.

It was resolved that all the honors of the *fastidiosissimum mancipium* be inscribed on bronze, both those that he had refused and those that he had taken up Upon our immortal public monuments were incised and engraved the praetorian insignia of Pallas—yes, just like ancient treaties, just like sacred laws.

Among the many galling aspects of this transaction, as Pliny represents it, is Pallas' own exercise of deliberative *fastidium*, accepting some honors, ranking others too low to be worth taking up: the point of the oxymoronic phrase *fastidiosissimum mancipium* is that Pallas, as mere "chattel," was himself a worthy object of the sort of *fastidium* he displayed.⁶¹ And at the same time that Pliny is outraged by the *fastidium* of a freedman toward honors he did not deserve, he is no less outraged at the *fastidium* shown toward senators by the emperors before Trajan's happy rule (*Pan.* 24.5):

Previous emperors had lost the use of their own feet, out of *fastidium* for us (*fastidio nostri*) and a certain dread of equality. Accordingly, they were borne along above our heads on the shoulders and necks of slaves; but *you* are borne aloft, above the emperors themselves, by your fame and glory, by the devotion (*pietas*) of the citizenry, by freedom; *you* are raised to the stars by that ground that you share [sc. with us], by the princely footsteps mingled [sc. with our own] (*te ad sidera tollit humus ista communis et confusa principis vestigia*).

Pallas' *fastidium* expressed his refusal to accept his proper, subordinate station; in expressing their *fastidium* for senators by being carried by slaves in their midst, the emperors acted out a refusal to accept the founding myth of the principate, that the *princeps* was only *primus inter pares*. In their deliberative rankings, the freedman and the emperors all got the deliberations wrong and so claimed a rank that was not theirs, in a misguided celebration of self. In that respect, the action of the emperors was as gross as that of Caligula, who at a dinner party expressed his *fastidium* by loudly observing to an *amicus*, the consular Valerius Asiaticus, that Valerius' wife wasn't very good in bed.⁶²

⁶¹Contrast Pallas' attitude with the proper attitude toward honors that Pliny praises in Trajan, *Pan.* 55.4 ... *quae qualiaque aut decernimus nos aut tu non recusas!—ut adpareat non superbia et fastidio te amplissimos honores repudiare, qui minores non dedigneris*. Indeed, Pallas managed to behave not only like a wicked freedman, in getting above himself, but also like a wicked emperor, since his *fastidium* for the honors implied a *fastidium* for the senate that bestowed them: cf. Plin. *Pan.* 24.5 immediately following.

⁶²*Sen. Dial.* 2.18.2 *Asiaticum Valerium in primis amicis habebat, ferocem virum et vix aequo animo alienas contumelias laturum: huic in convivio, id est in contione, voce clarissima qualis in concubitu esset uxor eius obiecit. di boni, hoc virum audire, princi-*

It is in the context created by *fastidium* as an often abused force in the definition of hierarchy that we must understand our other introductory text, Valerius Maximus' tale of Sextus Pompeius and the *grande dame* of Ceos. As Valerius tells the story, it is not only drenched in emotion but also informed, in detail after detail, by a concern with rank and status: the lady was herself of *summa dignitas*, the *lectulus* on which she lay was spread in an exceptionally fine way ("lectulo cotidiana consuetudine cultius strato"), and she judged it worth a lot (*magni aestimaret*) that her death be distinguished (*mortem ... clariorem*). But however grand the lady was, Pompeius as consular and governor was vastly grander. His higher status is the reason the lady wished him to attend her death, to add to its luster; and his higher status is the reason that the lady blessed him in the terms that she did, *quod nec hortator vitae meae nec mortis spectator esse fastidisti*. One so grand *would* be expected to feel and show *fastidium* at such an occasion, regarding it as *infra dignitatem*; but Pompeius did the unexpected. Because of his *virtus* and *humanitas* (on Valerius' telling), he showed himself to be free of *fastidium* and, with it, of the self-regard that enlivens this form of the feeling.⁶³

Ranking *fastidium* implies an instrumental view of its objects: the persons and things subjected to it, and the very transactions that arouse it, are simply the means for the *fastidiosus* to act out his *amour-propre* or achieve self-satisfaction. It matters little what the objects are. They might be gifts that you do not think worth taking up or cases at the bar that you refuse because they are beneath you or will detract from your reputation.⁶⁴ They might be the unfortu-

pem scire, et usque eo licentiam pervenisse ut, non dico consulari, non dico amico, sed tantum marito princeps et adulterium suum narret et fastidium!

⁶³Note the importance of the whole context in judging which process is at issue. Were the lady represented as saying only *quod mortis spectator esse non fastidisti*, we might reasonably treat the episode as an ambiguous case (cf. n. 73 below), for we could also plausibly take the text to mean that Pompeius would be expected to feel an absolute and reflexive revulsion at the prospect of watching her die. But because being a *hortator vitae* could not plausibly be thought to arouse such revulsion, and because the narrative as a whole so strongly emphasizes both the lady's concern with status and Pompeius' virtue—and so, by implication, his intentional acts—the deliberative-ranking orientation of the thought is plain.

⁶⁴Gifts: Sen. *Ben.* 1.11.1, 2.15.3, 2.24.2. Cases at the bar: Quint. *Inst.* 12.9.7 *nec illo fastidio laborabit orator non agendi causas minores, tamquam infra eum sint aut detractura sit opinioni minus liberalis materia*, and cf. Cic. *Brut.* 207 *Antonius, qui maxime expetebatur, facilis in causis recipiendis erat; fastidiosior Crassus, sed tamen recipiebat.*

nate, whose appearance merely prompts deliberation about your own fortunes.⁶⁵ They might be persons who provide an opportunity to aestheticize virtue, allowing you to judge what is good by the standard of what you find personally pleasing.⁶⁶ They might be—and often are—those who seek your affections; for this self-concern is not least evident in the *fastidium* of love. The would-be beloved quails before the *elegantia* of the other, fearing that it will produce *fastidium* and the judgment “Not good enough for me.”⁶⁷ When it does, we have Corydon’s lament in Vergil’s second *Eclogue*, an extended meditation on the *fastidium* of love from the object’s point of view,⁶⁸ or Ovid’s shrewd characterization of the feeling from the perspective of the self-involved *fastidiens*, in the utterly fitting person of Paris (*Ep.* 16.95–100):

Not only did the daughters of kings and generals set their sights on me,
but nymphs too felt the pang of love for me.
Whose lovely face should I admire beyond Oenone’s? In all the world
there’s not another—after you—worthier of being Priam’s daughter-
in-law.

⁶⁵Curt. 5.5.11–12 ... *nec ulla tam familiaris est infelicibus patria quam solitudo et status prioris oblivio. nam qui multum in suorum misericordia ponunt, ignorant, quam celeriter lacrimae inarescant. Nemo fideliter diligit, quem fastidit: nam et calamitas querula est et superba felicitas. Ita suam quisque fortunam in consilio habet, cum de aliena deliberat.*

⁶⁶Sen. *Ep.* 66.25 *aut si hoc est, magis diliges ex duobus aequae bonis viris nitidum et unctum quam pulverulentum et horrentem; deinde hoc usque pervenies ut magis diligas integrum omnibus membris et inlaesum quam debilem aut luscum; paulatim fastidium tuum illo usque procedet ut ex duobus aequae iustis ac prudentibus comatum et crispulum malis.*

⁶⁷Cf. Pl. *Mil.* 1233–35 (Acroteleutium speaks) *ergo iste metus me macerat, quod ille fastidiosus est, / ne oculi eius sententiam mutent, ubi viderit me, / atque eius elegantia meam extemplo speciem spernat.*

⁶⁸Verg. *Ecl.* 2.14–19 *nonne fuit satius tristis Amaryllidis iras / atque superba pati fastidia? nonne Menalcan, / quamvis ille niger, quamvis tu candidus esses? / o formose puer, nimium ne crede colori: / alba ligustra cadunt, vaccinia nigra leguntur. / despectus tibi sum, nec qui sim quaeris, Alexi,* with the reassurance in the final verse (71), *invenies alium, si te hic fastidit, Alexin.* Cf. Tib. 1.8.67–70, Ov. *Rem.* 305, 537–42 (discussed in section 3 below), and Porph. *ad Hor. Carm.* 1.19.7, 2.12.25–26, *S.* 1.2.105–6. For this kind of *fastidium* in erotic contexts the term *fastus* (cf. n. 72) is preferred, particularly by poets, who doubtless found it metrically more tractable than *fastidium*: first attested at Catullus 55.14 and especially favored by Propertius (11 instances), it appears in prose first in the mid-1st century C.E. (Petr. 96.7, cf. 131.2–3, Sen. *Nat.* 3.18.2–3) and only very rarely thereafter.

But feelings of *fastidium* for all of them come upon me, now that
there's hope, Tyndaris, of marriage with you.⁶⁹

Princesses and nymphs? Not nearly good enough, once something better—more satisfying to the subject—has come along. In fact, where *fastidium* guides *amor*, only one happy outcome seems possible: a love that results from reciprocal ranking games, when *both* parties assume the role of *fastidium*'s object (Petr. 127.1–3):

In her delight she smiled so alluringly that I thought a full moon had shown its face from behind a cloud. Presently ... she said, "If you do not feel *fastidium* for a woman well turned out, one who has known a man for the first time this year, then I give you, dear young man, a sister.⁷⁰ Indeed you do have a brother (nor was I loath to inquire on this point), but what keeps you from adopting a sister as well? I come to you in the same degree of relation. Only may you deign to acknowledge, when it pleases you, my kiss as well (*tu tantum dignare et meum osculum ... agnoscere*)." "Oh no," said I, "rather do I beg you by your beauty not to feel *fastidium* at admitting a foreigner among your worshippers. You will find me scrupulous in my observances, if you shall allow yourself to be venerated (*te rogo ne fastidias hominem peregrinum inter cultores admittere. invenies religiosum, si te adorari permiseris*)."

Each would-be lover asks the other not to "look down" on her or him, not to feel and express *fastidium*. At the same time, in a conciliatory gesture, each assumes a submissive posture that pre-empts the other's deliberation by making plain the ranking that exists in the speaker's mind: she asks him to "deign" to accept her kiss; he presents himself as her "worshipper." The happy result (here, at least) is *gratia conciliata* and *concordia* (ibid. 5).



The differences between this form of *fastidium* and the per se sort will be considered in detail in Section 4; here I can note one contrast that concerns their "style" of representation. As you recall, per se *fastidium* is associated with a set of metaphors that consistently suggests its physicality, and it is repeatedly repre-

⁶⁹In 97 I accept *quam super Oenones faciem mirarer? in orbe* as a stop-gap for the corrupt text (*quas super Oenonem facies mutarer in orbem*) offered by Stephanus Corallus' edition of 1477, our only witness for *Ep.* 16.39–144; the general sense is anyway clear. *Sed* at the beginning of 99 resumes the narrative interrupted at 89 *interea sero*

⁷⁰For *soror* and *frater* as euphemisms for "sexual partner," see *OLD* s.vv. 1d and 3b, respectively.

sented as being embodied in the eyes and, especially, the stomach. The *fastidium* of deliberative ranking, by contrast, is scarcely spoken of in ways that suggest its physicality—perhaps precisely because it was experienced predominantly as deliberative, or perhaps (more importantly) because those who speak of it are most often not representing an experience of their own at all but are ascribing the experience to another (see Section 4). Further, when its physical embodiment is touched upon, it is associated with different parts of the body: the lips and, especially, the nose rather than the eyes and the stomach. Quintilian says that “we express almost nothing in a becoming manner by using the nose and lips, although derision, contempt, and *fastidium* are usually signified in this way.”⁷¹ The association with *derisus* and *contemptus* suggests that Quintilian has in mind the sort of *fastidium* with which we have just been concerned, and the suggestion is corroborated by a couple of Porphyrio’s comments on Horace. When the phrase *naso suspendis* occurs at *Sermones* 1.6.5, Porphyrio glosses it by saying *quod vulgo dicunt: ‘desanas,’ id est, per fastidium quoddam derides*, where the nose, derision, and *fastidium* are linked as they are by Quintilian. More evocative still is a comment in which Porphyrio gets Horace wrong, but in a revealing way: *DVCI VENTRE LEVEM, NASVM. ‘nasum’ pro ‘derisore’ posuit, ‘nidorem’ pro ‘risu,’ a quo verb<um> fit ‘renideo’. SVPINO. ‘fastidio.’* The phrase in question (only partly represented in Porphyrio’s lemmata) occurs at *Sermones* 2.7.37–39:

‘etenim fateor me’ dixerit ille
‘duci ventre levem, nasum nidore supinor,
inbecillus, iners, siquid vis, adde, popino.’

Horace’s speaker, a *parasitus*, confesses to being “fickle, led about by [his] belly, tilting back [his] nose by reason of [i.e., to catch] the aroma” of a free meal, like an animal testing the wind. Porphyrio, however, is bent on associating this nasal imagery again with “derision” and *fastidium*, and in so doing, he nicely shows that the *fastidium* of deliberative ranking is thought to reside not merely in the nose, but specifically in the *upturned* nose. Porphyrio’s error sug-

⁷¹Quint. *Inst.* 11.3.80–81 *naribus labrisque non fere quicquam decenter ostendimus, tametsi derisus contemptus fastidium significari solet. nam et ‘corrugare nares,’ ut Horatius ait, et inflare et movere et digito inquietare et impulso subito spiritu excutere et diducere saepius et plana manu resupinare indecorum est, cum emunctio etiam frequentior non sine causa reprimatur. labra et porriguntur male et scinduntur et adstringuntur et diducuntur et dentes nudant et in latus ac paene ad aurem trahuntur et velut quodam fastidio replicantur et pendent et vocem tantum altera parte dimittunt.*

gests that this *fastidium* is first cousin to the wonderfully evocative English derivative from “snout”: “snootiness.”

The Dynamics of *Fastidium* (3): Instructive Ambiguities

The *fastidium* described and analyzed in sections 1 and 2 is produced (that is, is represented as being produced) by two distinct ways of engaging experience, constituted by cognitive processes that are complementary: the “absolute” or “per se” element of one has as its counterpart the “ranking” (ordinal, relational, selective) element of the other; the “reflex” component of one is the antithesis to the “deliberative” component of the other. In purely formal terms, then, it is not implausible that the two complementary reactions together could be more or less comprehensive in explaining how *fastidium* is produced in the Roman mind as a single end-product.⁷² This is not to say that there are no ambiguous instances: *fastidium* as we are able to know it is only a discursive representation, and no discourse is wholly free of ambiguity. It is the case, however, that some kinds of ambiguity are more instructive than others.

In a few instances, the context simply gives too little information for sure judgment: when the elder Pliny tells us only that Sicilians feel no *fastidium* toward the artichokes native to their island, we cannot know whether he means that they do not find artichokes absolutely repellent or that they do not rank them so low, relative to other foods, as to have an aversion to them.⁷³ In some

⁷²An “absolute and deliberative” reaction (a considered judgment that a person or thing causes *fastidium* per se) is in principle possible, though I have found no obvious cases represented in our texts; a “ranking and reflexive” reaction seems more difficult to conceive. In either case, possible instances of such responses would probably better be analyzed in terms of the “parasitic” *fastidium*-reactions discussed below. That the range of *fastidium*-reactions is constituted, and limited, as I have described would be consistent with the derivation *fastidium* < **fasti-tidium* (= *fastus* + *taedium*: so OLD s.v., after Walde-Hoffman 1: 460, Ernout-Meillet 219; differently TLL 6: 313.55–60): if that etymology is correct, *fastidium* would by origin bundle together the deliberative ranking typical of *fastus* (cf. n. 68) and the absolute and autonomic response typical of *taedium* (cf. n. 19). I am grateful to my colleague Joshua Katz for helping me be more respectful of this etymology than I once was.

⁷³Plin. Nat. 21.97 *et cactus quoque in Sicilia tantum nascitur, ... nec fastidiunt in cibis inveteratos <quo>que*; cf. the anthropomorphized trees at Nat. 16.134–35 *namque non omnia in omnibus locis nasci docuimus nec tralata vivere. hoc alias fastidio, alias contumacia, saepius inbecillitate eorum quae transferantur evenit, alias caelo invidente, alias solo repugnante. fastidit balsamum alibi nasci, nata <As>syria malus alibi ferre, nec non et palma ubique nasci aut nata parere vel, cum promisit etiam ostenditque, educare, tamquam invita pepererit* The following passages seem to me capable of

other instances, the *fastidium* represented in the text seems overdetermined: it not only *can* be understood as a product of either reaction, it perhaps *should* be understood as a product of both. For example, when Juvenal urges trade as a profitable alternative to the toil and terror of military service, he gives this advice (14.200–205):

Buy what you can sell
for half as much again: don't let feelings of *fastidium*
come upon you (*nec te fastidia ... subeant*) for wares that must be
banished beyond the Tiber,
and don't believe that some distinction is to be drawn between
fine perfumes and tanning: profit smells good, no matter
what its source.

Tanning (*corium*) was one of the smelly and polluting industries relegated to the right bank of the Tiber, and it is the absolutely repellent stench of the trade that Juvenal clearly invokes in the last two clauses.⁷⁴ Yet tanning (like most trades) was also less socially respectable than soldiering, the alternative source of income just discarded, and so was a possible cause of “ranking” *fastidium* as well: Juvenal is probably playing on both nuances of the feeling at once.⁷⁵

More revealing for the dynamics of *fastidium*, however, are three other sorts of ambiguity, associated with responses that can be labeled “focalized,” “parasitic,” and “perverse.” It is worth considering each of these in some detail. “Focalized” ambiguity results from the fact that the same presentation can be perceived and evaluated differently by different people. For example, when speaking about the rhythms to be used in speech, Quintilian remarks that the ears respond to (“judge”) both good and bad effects, including “excessive and extravagant” effects that produce *fastidium* (9.4.116): *optime autem de illa iudicant aures, quae plena sentiunt et parum expleta desiderant, ... et stabilia probant, clauda deprendunt, redundantia ac nimia fastidiunt. ideoque docti rationem*

being read with equal plausibility either way, or as instances of one or another type of ambiguity considered below: Cic. *Pis.* 68, Anon. *Lydia* 134–40, Sen. *Con.* 2.1.21, 2.5.5, Sen. *Ben.* 6.16.4, *Dial.* 9.2.4–5, 12.7.10, Plin. *Nat.* 3.28, 16.134–35, 21.97, Mart. 2.61, Suet. *Tib.* 49.1, [Quint.] *Decl.* 8.6, Serv. *ad Verg. G.* 4.519.

⁷⁴Cf. Suet. *Ves.* 23.3 (= Cassius Dio 66.14.5), on another smelly source of income: *reprehendenti filio Tito, quod etiam urinae vectigal commentus esset, pecuniam ex prima pensione admovit ad nares, sciscitans num odore offenderetur; et illo negante: 'atquin,' inquit, 'e lotio est.'*

⁷⁵If the stench of tanning is taken to be the *cause* of its low social standing relative to soldiering, this would be a case of “parasitic” ambiguity: see below. For other possible examples of “overdetermined” *fastidium*, cf. Quint. *Decl.* 306.18, Apul. *Met.* 8.23.

componendi intellegunt, etiam indocti voluptatem. The final sentence suggests that whereas a given effect will produce the same basic response—pleasure or displeasure, attraction or aversion—regardless of the audience’s sophistication, the response will be produced differently—that is, will follow from a different mode of evaluation—according to individuals’ differing degrees of learning: the *docti* will be able to use *ratio*—they will refer the effects to a standard of judgment in an informed and systematic way and so (in the case of *redundantia et nimia*) they will experience a deliberative and ranking *fastidium*; but it appears that the *indocti* will have an immediate—in fact, “instinctive”—reaction to the sensation itself.

There are also instances to remind us that *fastidium*, when it has another person as its object, is a form of social relations, and that its understanding is therefore apt to be a relative matter. Consider, for example, the following passage from Ovid’s *Remedia Amoris*, recommending a strategy for getting over the “malady” of an affair (537–42):

Go ahead, enjoy your girlfriend to the full—let no one stop you—
 let her account for all your nights and all your days.
 Try to feel that you’ve had it up to here with your woe (*taedia quaere mali*): such feelings too bring an end (*faciunt et taedia finem*).
 Presently, even when you think you can do without her, keep at it,
 Until you’ve glutted yourself, until overabundance destroys your passion,
 until there is no pleasure in being at her house, which has become
 an object of *fastidium* (*et fastidita non iuvet esse domo*).

The “teacher” is plainly recommending a form of aversive conditioning: in similar terms, you can cure an unhealthy craving for bonbons by eating them until you are sick and tired of them—for the next time someone offers you a bonbon, you are likely (at a minimum) to say “Uff! bonbons—no thanks, couldn’t touch another one!” If we then ask what sort of cognitive process results in the *fastidium* here—in the girl’s *domus* becoming *fastidita* in the lover’s eyes—the answer also seems plain enough: having had it “up to here” with the girl, the lover feels an absolute and autonomic aversion to any further contact. But if we think a bit further about the process—if we bear in mind that the reaction it represents involves two parties, and that the *domus* here is merely an objectifying metonymy for the *puella* herself—we might see that the process has a different appearance according to the party through whom it is focalized. For the recipient of the advice, who is “in on” the strategy, the *fastidium* in question is indeed the product of an absolute and autonomic response, the sort usually asso-

ciated with mere satiety:⁷⁶ he has simply had enough, the response is now beyond his choice and will, and the *fastidium* (as far as he is concerned) carries no ethical charge. If, however, we read against the grain for a moment, we see that to the *puella*—now suddenly home alone, and presumably not at all pleased to be home alone—it will no doubt appear that she has been dumped, whether in favor of another to whom she has been found inferior or simply, disdainfully dumped, as unworthy of the lover: *she* is likely to conclude that she has been subjected to *fastidium* of the deliberative, ranking variety, and draw quite different ethical conclusions about the lover's conduct.⁷⁷

In other instances, involving the perceptions, evaluations, and responses of a single individual, it appears that one type of *fastidium*-reaction is secondary to and parasitic on the other. Here is Seneca in two passages from *de Clementia*:

You should deal with citizens, with the obscure and lowly, all the more moderately the less you have to gain from afflicting them. Some you should spare gladly, others you should feel *fastidium* to chastise, just as the hand must be drawn back from small creatures that dirty you if you crush them (*a quibusdam te vindicare fastidias et non aliter quam <ab> animalibus parvis sed opterentem inquinantibus reducenda manus est*); but you should use the opportunity for clemency toward those whose preservation or punishment will be a subject of talk in the town. (1.21.4)

All the other things that I wish those who feel pity to do he will do gladly and magnanimously: he will bring succor to another's tears, not join in them; he will give a hand to the shipwrecked, shelter to the exile, a coin to the needy—not the insulting sort of offering that most of those who want to appear compassionate just toss away, feeling *fastidium* for those they help and afraid of being touched by them, but a coin given by one human being to another from a common stock (*non hanc contumeliosam, quam pars maior horum, qui misericordes*

⁷⁶As often, the satiety-response finds *taedium* (line 539) associated with *fastidium* as cause to effect: see n. 19 above.

⁷⁷Cf. Mart. 5.44, on the parasite Dento: lines 1–7 concern the parasite's implied *fastidium* for the speaker's table, which (though once energetically sought) he now ranks lower than another, richer one; whereas lines 8–11, in which Dento is figured as a *canis*, evoke the (presumably) reflexive *fastidium* that the new host will feel once he recognizes Dento for what he is (... *et maior rapuit canem culina. / iam te, sed cito, cognitum et relictum / cum fastidierit popina dives, / antiquae venies ad ossa cenae*). The levels of narrative complexity add interest to the focalization of *fastidium* at Apul. *Met.* 4.7 and 5.28.

*videri volunt, abicit et fastidit quos adiuuat contingique ab iis timet,
sed ut homo homini ex communi dabit). (2.6.2)⁷⁸*

In both cases it seems clear that the *fastidium*-response is represented as an absolute and autonomic reaction: in the first passage, a reflexive drawing back from crushing a small creature—a bug, say—that would dirty your hand; in the second, a reflexive shuddering at the thought of contact with (as the contrasting injunction *sed ut homo homini* ... implies) something not quite human. But in both cases it is equally clear that the object of *fastidium* is *not* a bug or some other sub-human creature: the object is a person who must first be classified—that is, deliberately ranked—as no better than a bug, as a precondition for the response to occur. This is a familiar pattern of prejudice-formation: having ranked X as so far inferior a specimen as to be deemed worthy of aversion, you then feel a visceral and reflexive aversion at the sight, smell, touch, or even thought of X. (Once the prejudice has taken hold, of course, you might at future encounters move directly to reflexive aversion, drawing back from the bug that you now “know” X to be.) The *fastidium* that Seneca represents is in fact fundamentally indistinguishable from the visceral aversion that George Orwell recalled feeling for lower-class army recruits as a result of his “lower-upper-middle-class” background:⁷⁹

When I was not much past twenty I was attached for a short time to a British regiment. Of course I admired and liked the private soldiers.... And yet, after all, they faintly repelled me; they were common people and I did not care to be too close to them. In the hot mornings when the company marched down the road, myself in the rear ..., the steam of those hundred sweating bodies in front made my stomach turn. And this, you observe, was pure prejudice. For a soldier is probably as inoffensive, physically, as it is possible for a male white person to be But I could not see it like that. All I knew was that it was *lower-class* sweat that I was smelling, and the thought of it made me sick.

The “Whites Only” drinking fountains of the segregated American South can be understood in terms of the same sequence of *fastidium*, and readers will think of other prejudices that can be similarly understood.

In other cases it is the *fastidium* of deliberative ranking that rides piggy-back upon the *fastidium* of absolute and autonomic aversion. In a discussion of

⁷⁸Cf., e.g., Curt. 8.3.5–6. For the general principle stated in the first sentence of *Cl.* 1.21.4, cf. *Dial.* 5.32.1 at n. 59 above.

⁷⁹Orwell 143 (original emphasis).

suicide Seneca finds occasion to retail how a gladiator was able to liberate himself by taking his own life (*Ep.* 70.20):

Just recently, in a training school for beast-fighters, one of the Germans went off to relieve himself when he was being got ready for the morning show—only this was he allowed to do all by himself, without a guard. There he took a stick with a sponge attached to it for cleaning off the filth, and he stuffed the whole thing down his throat and choked himself to death. That’s what I call slapping death in the face (*hoc fuit morti contumeliam facere*).

And Seneca rounds the lesson off by anticipating a possible response: “Oh yes, absolutely,” he says, “that wasn’t a very elegant or very comely (*ita prorsus, parum munde et parum decenter*) way to die: *quid est stultius quam fastidiose mori?*” The stupid objection of those who would prefer to die with *fastidium* is incongruously and mockingly cast as a matter of deliberative ranking, insofar as the repeated adverb *parum* implies a standard—a *satis*—to which judgment in such matters could be referred. But of course the precondition for such an effete aestheticized and distancing response is a different sort of *fastidium*, an absolute and reflexive horror at the thought of shoving a shit-stained sponge down your own throat. Lucan trades on a cognate horror when he describes the aftermath of the battle at Pharsalus (7.838–46):

Often, above the victor’s upturned face and impious standards,
gore or rotting flesh splashed down from high heaven,
and the carrion birds let drop limbs from claws grown weary.
So the entire host was not reduced to bones, was not
torn apart to become beast-fodder; the greedy birds
do not bother with the inmost tissue or suck all the marrow:
they browse on joints. The greatest part of the Latin throng
lies *fastidita*: sun and rain and time’s
long passing made it mingle with the fields of Macedon.

The scene is no doubt calculated to induce *fastidium* per se—to make the reader’s gorge rise—as a rain of clotted blood, decaying tissue, and even whole limbs is let loose upon the victors at Pharsalus by the birds who have feasted upon the dead. But the aversion represented within the passage—the *Latiae pars maxima turbae* lying *fastidita*, unburied and yet uneaten as the object of the scavengers’ *fastidium*—is of a different and slightly more complex sort. It is again fundamentally a reflexive *fastidium*—the *fastidium* of satiety—that follows from there being simply too many corpses for the scavengers to consume. But this satiety has a secondary effect. The creatures do not bother (*non ... curant*) to go after the internal organs and the marrow but merely “browse

on”—taste and sample (*degustant*)—the exposed flesh. They behave in the manner of languid connoisseurs—the archetypes of deliberative *fastidium*—exercising a choosiness at once dainty and grisly.⁸⁰

In Lucan’s imagination an obscene abundance produces in the scavengers a kind of behavior that is perverse, even unnatural: that is just not the way scavengers normally act. Such a deviation from the “normal” brings us to the last and most consequential type of ambiguity, involving situations in which human tastes and behavior are represented as being similarly transformed. It is a type especially beloved of moralists. To understand it, we can begin by thinking about chickens.

There is this type of hen from Africa (a speaker in Varro’s dialogue on husbandry tells us), large and multicolored and hump-backed, which has very recently been introduced to the banquet-menu because of people’s *fastidium*: the birds are pricey because they’re rare.⁸¹ The last detail suggests that this is primarily the *fastidium* of connoisseurship, of deliberative ranking: these are now regarded as the really choice hens, and people are willing to pay a lot of money to acquire them. It is certainly not the case *prima facie* that an absolute and autonomic aversion to this variety of hen has kept them from being served until very recently. Nor does it seem that their recent introduction is due to an absolute aversion to eating ordinary kinds of hen—such hens could generate no sort of *per se* revulsion that any normal person would feel.

But were the people who paid high prices for African hens “normal”? A Roman moralist (the guise in which Varro momentarily speaks) would have his doubts. Luxury—conceived as a reaction against sameness, familiarity, and monotony, leading to a search for novelty underwritten by wealth—made people strange. For such people the threshold of “monotony” or “sameness” was so low, the experience of the quotidian was so aversive *per se*, and the index of self-concern and satisfaction was so high, that they could express, and perhaps even feel, a kind of *per se* reaction comparable to “satiety” or the “*fastidium cibi*”—response of the ill: “Oh no,” we might imagine someone thinking, “I simply could not eat another of those common *gallinae*.” Hence the search for the new hen, at great cost; and the new hen, when purchased at great cost, will not surprisingly be thought to taste better, thereby “justifying” the preference for it.

⁸⁰For other likely examples of this kind of parasitism, cf. V. Max. 6.9.6, Sen. *Ep.* 58.32.

⁸¹Var. *R.* 3.9.18 *gallinae Africanae sunt grandes, variae, gibber[i]ae, quas meleagridas appellant Graeci. haec novissimae in triclinium cenantium [Keil: genanium codd.] introierunt e culina propter fastidium hominum. veneunt propter penuriam magno.*

(It might even taste better in fact; but that is not likely to account for its first being sought out.)

In fact, Varro knew such people, as his story of Marcius Philippus shows. When the guest of a certain Ummidius at Casinum, Philippus was served a common wolf-fish, and a lovely specimen it was (*lupum piscem formosum*); but having taken a bite, he immediately spat it out, declaring “I’ll be damned if I didn’t think it was a fish!” Here’s this fine piece of fish, and he reacts that way—I ask you (Varro’s tone implies), is that normal? Varro did not think so when he told the story to condemn the *luxuria* of his age, nor did Columella, when he retold the story to condemn both the *fastidium* of Philippus and the lesson that it taught in making men’s palates “learned and refined.”⁸² Unnaturally refined, we might say—or so Seneca suggests, in a similar jeremiad on the subject of fish (*Nat.* 3.18.2–3). People, he says, are nowadays subject to such *fastidium* (*tantum illis inesse fastidium*) that they won’t touch a fish unless it was caught that very day and had, preferably, flopped and shuddered out its life before their eyes: for these people, a fish already dead is as good as rotten (*iam pro putrido his est piscis occisus*). To react to a perfectly good piece of fish as though it were rotten is just crazy (Seneca further says): it’s a kind of madness that despises the customary usages of life (*furor usitata contemnens*). Such people’s thresholds of repugnance have been brought so pathologically low that they treat as “naturally” (absolutely) repellent what is simply ordinary.

The repugnance of the ordinary is a recurrent motif in moralizing invective against luxury.⁸³ It is a symptom of *luxus animi*, Gellius says, to feel *fastidium* for things readily at hand (*parata atque facilia*) because of an abnormal and

⁸²Var. *R.* 3.3.9–10 *non Philippus, cum ad Ummidium hospitem Casini devertisset et ei e tuo flumine lupum piscem formosum apposuisset atque ille gustasset et expuisset, dixit, ‘peream, ni piscem putavi esse’? sic nostra aetas in quam luxuriam propagavit leporearia[s], <h>ac piscinas protulit ad mare et in eas pelagios greges piscium revocavit.* Cf. Col. 8.16.3–4 *mox ... lautitiae locupletium maria ipsa Neptunumque clausurunt iam tum avorum memoria, cum circumferretur Marcii Philippi velut urbanissimum, quod erat luxuriose factum atque dictum. nam is forte Casini cum apud hospitem cenaret, appositumque e vicino flumine lupum degustasset atque expuisset, inprobum factum dicto prosecutus, ‘peream,’ inquit, ‘nisi piscem putavi.’ hoc igitur periurium multorum subtiliorem fecit gulam, doctaque et erudita palata fastidire docuit fluvialem lupum, nisi quem Tiberis adverso torrente defetigasset.*

⁸³On this invective, considered from other points of view, see recently Barton 114–22 and Edwards 173–206.

wicked feeling of satiety.⁸⁴ We bring all manner of difficulty upon ourselves, Seneca says in much the same terms, because of an unnatural *fastidium* for consumables that are easily obtained.⁸⁵ And he returns to the thought again and again, to speak of the *animus* that has become used to feeling *fastidium* for the customary and to regarding the usual as “filthy.”⁸⁶ But because such a mind soon finds even the unusual ordinary, it finally leaves no room for novelty: feelings of satiety and monotony overwhelm it, until the thought “How long the same old thing?” inspires *fastidium* for life and the world.⁸⁷ The feeling in question is perhaps best understood as a perverse hybrid, combining the toxic level of self-concern typical of deliberative, ranking *fastidium* with a warped version of the normal, reflexive response to satiety.

This is the *fastidium* that Tacitus, for example, ascribes to Messalina, to explain her turn from “ordinary” adultery to unheard-of lust (*Ann.* 11.26.1 *iam Messalina facilitate adulteriorum in fastidium versa ad incognitas libidines profuebat*). *fastidium adulteriorum* could in another woman be a positive quality—a form of reflexive ethical revulsion, like aversion to incest, discussed in Section 1—but it is here made a vice by the perversity of Messalina. Indeed, in this sphere of activity her threshold of satiety was so low and her perception of monotony so reflexive that (as Tacitus soon tells us) she summoned a handsome Roman knight to her bed and kicked him out the same night, “with a wanton

⁸⁴Gel. 6.16.6 ... *repertas esse non per usum vitae necessarium, sed per luxum animi parata atque facilia fastidientis per inprobam satietatis lasciviam*.

⁸⁵Sen. *Ep.* 90.18 *non fuit tam iniqua natura ut, cum omnibus aliis animalibus facilem actum vitae daret, homo solus non posset sine tot artibus vivere ad parata nati sumus: nos omnia nobis difficilia facilius fastidio fecimus. tecta tegimenta et fomenta corporum et cibi et quae nunc ingens negotium facta sunt obvia erant et gratuita et opera levi parabilia*.

⁸⁶Sen. *Ep.* 114.10 *cum adsuevit animus fastidire quae ex more sunt et illi pro sordidis solita sunt* On *fastidium* vs. the “natural” cf. also *Ep.* 110.12, 119.15, 123.2, and on Hor. *S.* 2.2.14–16 at n. 51 above.

⁸⁷Sen. *Dial.* 9.2.15 *hoc [sc. vitium] quosdam egit ad mortem, quod proposita saepe mutando in eadem revolvebantur et non reliquerant novitati locum: fastidio esse illis coepit vita et ipse mundus et subit illud tabidarum deliciarum: ‘quousque eadem?’*; cf. *ibid.* 13. For the tag *quousque eadem?* see also *Ep.* 24.26, developing a similar theme (*quosdam subit eadem faciendi videndique satietas et vitae non odium sed fastidium, ... dum dicimus ‘quousque eadem?’*), and for the image of monotonous “revolution” cf. *Ep.* 77.6 (*per hunc circulum curritur*); cf. *Ep.* 28.5 and already at Lucr. 3.1050–75, where similar lessons are presented in terms of the *taedium* characteristic of satiety-reactions.

fickleness in her desires and in her feelings of *fastidium* alike.”⁸⁸ It is also the *fastidium* of Horace’s *dominus terrae fastidiosus* (*Carm.* 3.1.36–37), who builds his palace out into the sea because he feels an aversion for the earth itself (though that will not save him from Fear and Dread). The notion upon which Horace only touches is developed by a younger contemporary, the philosophizing declaimer Papirius Fabianus, who exploits it to contrast the unrecognized good of poverty with the rich man’s paltry wits.⁸⁹

Poverty, how little known a good are you! [Rich] men even ape mountains and woods in their rotting houses, green fields, seas and rivers amid the gloom and smoke. I can scarcely believe any of these people have seen forests, or green, grassy plains ...; or even seen from a cliff the seas either sluggish or, when winds stir them to their depths, stormy. For who could delight his mind with such debased imitations if he knew the reality? ... Small minds have no room for great things. So they pile up masses of masonry even on the seashore, stop up bays by heaping earth in the depths of the ocean. Others let the sea into the land by means of ditches. For truly they do not know how to enjoy anything real, but in their sickness they need unnatural fakes of sea or land out of their proper places to delight them. Do you still wonder that, in their *fastidio rerum naturae*, they now don’t even like children—except those of others?

The exorbitant building projects of the wealthy, through which they variously try to imitate or overcome nature, merely reveal their inability to grasp and take pleasure in real things: they are sick, and their falsified delights show that their sickness is constituted by an aversion to the very way things are, a *fastidium rerum naturae*. Drawing out the “unnatural” *fastidium* of the wealthy, the passage goes to the core of this perversely ambiguous form of the feeling.⁹⁰ These wicked rich folk, we are given to understand, really are not like you and me.

⁸⁸Tac. *Ann.* 11.36.3 *ne Trauli quidem Montani equitis Romani defensio recepta est. is modesta iuventa, sed corpore insigni, accitus ultro noctemque intra unam a Messalina proturbatus erat, paribus lasciviis ad cupidinem et fastidia.*

⁸⁹Sen. *Con.* 2.1.13 (trans. Winterbottom), from a theme in which a *dives*, having disowned his three biological sons, attempts to adopt a poor man’s son and is opposed by the would-be adoptee; Papirius, a follower of the philosopher Q. Sextius and a teacher of the younger Seneca, was born ca. 35 B.C.E. For the building mania of the wealthy as a symptom of weird or unhealthy *fastidium*, cf. also Quint. *Decl.* 337.13.

⁹⁰For other texts that can be read in the same terms, see Col. 12 pr. 9 (on the *fastidium* of effete *matronae* for homespun garments), Sen. *Dial.* 5.35.5 (*fastidium oculorum* at

4. The Ideology of Disgust

There is, I think, a philological gain in regarding the *fastidium*-family from the perspective of “process,” a gain in understanding what the words signify in their cultural context: attending to the dynamics of *fastidium*, rather than one or another lexical “equivalent,” can yield a richer and more nuanced way of reading, if only because one must pause to consider exactly what kind of human response the text is attempting to represent. It is clear that some English lexical items (like “satiety” and “contempt”) align themselves more or less predictably with one process or the other, while others (like “disgust” and “scorn”) are a good deal less predictable in this regard. The point, however, is that there is now less need to fret about the denotation of the English words and how one sorts them (or how they would be sorted if someone else were doing the sorting): the English words are not the concern, and the focus on process is more flexible, more multivalent, and truer to the Latin. But there is more than a philological lesson to be learned from this analysis; for a cultural dynamic of some interest emerges as well.

Consider the following set of oppositions entailed in the two processes, picked out and assembled here from the traits already noticed in the analyses above:

<i>per se reflex</i>	<i>deliberative ranking</i>
natural	cultural
involuntary	intentional
self not at stake	self to the fore
object-centered	subject-centered
universalizing	individualizing
centripetal	centrifugal

Implied in these oppositions is what might be called a Roman theory of disgust, a structure of ideas useful for organizing and interpreting the facts of aversive behavior. The *fastidium* represented as absolute and autonomic is an apparently immediate (“instinctive,” “natural”) reaction, of the sort that any “normal” person would have if placed in the same circumstances and faced with the same presentation. The response, seemingly, is not learned, nor is it a product of any script involving conscious choice or will: it is, by definition, just not “up to you” as you experience it. In part because of its involuntary character, it need imply no valuation of your self, beyond the valuation implied in being “normal”; in

home and abroad), Plin. *Nat.* 19.137 (on sprout cabbages, the *luxuria* of Apicius, and the chastisement of Tiberius), 33.152 (on the *fastidium* of women who use silver bidets).

fact, because of its involuntary character it cannot be something that you identify with—something that you choose as your own—and so it cannot be something that identifies *you*, as a person distinct from others. Nor do you aim at any purpose through the response, beyond that of putting some distance between yourself and the *fastidium*-inducing object. That object is therefore the center of attention in the transaction, and the center of power: *it* has the upper hand over *you*, and you can only react. Furthermore, just because it is “normal,” the response is something that you can be presumed to share with all other “normal” people, as a token of your common human make-up: at the same time that it distances you from the object, it unifies you with all other subjects who are in the same boat when it comes to body-odor, bedbugs, or lizards—and to defecation, incest, or boasting as well.

Deliberative, ranking aversion is in every respect the other side of the coin. This is the *fastidium* that concerns differentials of status and invokes standards of judgment that are all cultural constructs. The response is therefore part of a symbolic structure far larger than itself; at the same time, the center of the structure—the point about which all else for a moment revolves—is your own act of volition. The response is by definition entirely up to you, as a certainly intentional and probably calculated expression of your will, and the point of expressing your will in just this way has entirely to do with your self-conception: the conception of where you stand relative to others, what you deserve as a result of that standing, or what will prove most satisfying to you, aesthetically or otherwise. Because the response is in this sense self-centered, you as subject are more important than, and have power over, the object of the response: the *fastidium* itself is the expression of that power, treating the object as a means of satisfaction or an instrument to measure the subject’s higher value. Furthermore, and accordingly, your response is the result not just of your volition but of a second-order volition: you not only wish to do or have (or not do or have) some thing (or another), but you also wish such wishes to become effective (or not), having weighed them on some scale of value or applied some other standard of judgment.⁹¹ By willing a desire to be effective, you make it specifically your own, as a thing that you identify with—that you cannot disown or claim “just came over” you—and that therefore identifies *you*: the act of volition mediating between perception and response must express something central about your self. And because the response is thus highly personalized and individualizing, it registers what distinguishes you from others, not what you share

⁹¹On second-order volition and its role in defining a person: Frankfurt, Taylor 111–12.

with them. It is in this respect a form of boasting: an enactment of your higher rank or value and of your “*fastidium* for the shared way of life.”⁹²

It is plain, however, that each side of this opposition not only represents and interprets the way things are but says something about the way things ought to be: each form of *fastidium* has ethical implications, and the theory of behavior that they together signify is a normative theory, which we might as well call an ideology. This ideology is expressed in our texts by the way in which persons experiencing *fastidium* are represented in a good, bad, or indifferent ethical light, prompting the reader to think well or poorly of them, or to draw no ethical conclusions at all; and the pattern of these representations is absolutely clear. In over 90% of the relevant texts, reflexively registering aversion in circumstances where any “normal” person would do the same is no worse than ethically neutral, and it is sometimes ethically positive, as when the aversion is the correct response to some taboo: even when another person is made the object of aversion—whether because of smell, sight, or mere satiety—the reader is at least left room to think “Of course, I understand: I’d feel the same way in those circumstances.”⁹³ By contrast, and with even greater frequency, deliberately registering aversion as a way of asserting your higher status—especially when another person is the object of aversion—is represented as just wrong, whether because it is so strong an assertion of self, or because it treats its objects instrumentally, or because it deviates from what is “natural,” or because the deliberation is unjust, or for all these reasons.⁹⁴ Taken together, these two tendencies

⁹²The phrase is Seneca’s, from his diatribe on the sort of people who cultivate a nocturnal way of life, *Ep.* 122.18: *causa tamen praecipua mihi videtur huius morbi vitae communis fastidium. Quomodo cultu se a ceteris distinguunt, quomodo elegantia cenarum, munditiis vehiculorum, sic volunt separari etiam temporum dispositione.*

⁹³The instances of “perverse” ambiguity discussed in section 3 are not exceptions to this rule, since they involve the per se reactions of the denatured rich, who are by definition not “normal.” For other instances where per se *fastidium* is both negatively valued and a trait of persons otherwise deemed “crazy” or depraved, see Sen. *Con.* 2.1.21, 2.5.5, 5.8.1 (exc.), Mart. 3.76, Apul. *Met.* 4.7.

⁹⁴Cases in which deliberative, ranking *fastidium* has a positive coloration mostly involve circumstances where status is not seriously at stake (in *fastidium* toward one’s own or a friend’s writings, see at n. 53 above; in *fastidium* toward a slave, see at n. 59 above), or where a “Callimachean” aversion for common poetic inspiration is meant (Hor. *Ep.* 1.3.11), or where the exception proves the rule, since the *fastidium* is felt toward external goods that *should* be spurned (Sen. *Con.* 4 pr. 2, Curt. 4.1.16–18, Sen. *Dial.* 1.6.5, Tac. *Dial.* 8.4). The only truly interesting exception is Cicero’s characterization of M. Pupius Piso Frugi’s *ingenium liberumque fastidium* at *Brut.* 236.

underwrite a normative state in which shared experience is preferable to distinction, wealth is not used to “unnatural” ends, zero-sum games of ranking—like explicit boasting—are deplored, and the dynamics of social distance are not distorted or placed under strain. That is to say, your inferiors regard themselves as no better than they are, your peers seek no advantage over you, and your superiors pretend they are your peers.⁹⁵

That, at any rate, seems to be what is happening on the surface. There is, however, a final facet of deliberative, ranking *fastidium* that muddies the surface a bit. Whereas the *per se* reaction is either expressed by the voice in the text or ascribed by that voice to another—with no different implications in either case—the *fastidium* of deliberative ranking is very rarely expressed but almost always ascribed: it is what someone else feels, not what you feel yourself. Further, unlike a third-party ascription of *per se* and reflexive aversion, which can be a factual report based only on observable physical symptoms (the phenomenology of illness, satiety, revulsion), the ascription of deliberative *fastidium* (absent some report by the subject) must be an interpretation, entailing inferences about intention, disposition, and other internal processes or states. And as we saw time and again in Section 2, not only is that interpretation usually unfriendly, but it also frequently serves the interests of the interpreter, as a move in the “game-within-the-game” that the text enacts. The snarky or sniffy voice deploring the other’s feeling can itself reasonably be said to express the feeling that it deplors: attributing deliberative *fastidium* is commonly a way of displaying deliberative *fastidium*. As such, it offers a way to stake out the ethical high ground, and so claim superiority, without actually being seen to boast. (Perhaps this is why the maneuver is beloved of moralists.) If the *fastidium* of deliberative ranking amounts to a kind of *iactatio*, then ascribing that *fastidium* to a deplorable other often amounts to *iactatio* carried on by other means: less directly but not less effectively, it makes the speaker greater by making the others less.⁹⁶ In this way the surface ideology of *fastidium* is undercut, to a degree, by the manner of its representation.

⁹⁵Matthew Roller helpfully supplements this thought (*per litt.*): “... this normative state is itself focalized by the status of the subject. So when Juvenal whines that his superiors are not pretending to be his peers, those superiors would take the view that they are simply refusing to be complicit as a bunch of underlings get uppity. Both views represent the norm ..., but thanks to the asymmetry of that norm, it leads to social conflict when maintained simultaneously by parties of different rank.”

⁹⁶Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 11.1.16 at n. 44 above.

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