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Beneath the skin: investigating cutaneous conditions as somatisations of gendered emotions¹

di *Chiara Blanco*

A medium between the self and the external world, the skin was deemed to be one of the seats of human emotions in antiquity; nonetheless, its prominent role in ancient literature has been overlooked by scholars thus far. In this paper, I focus on the connection between cutaneous conditions and emotional alterations, as found in some of the best-known ancient authors, ranging from Hesiod to Hellenistic epigrammatists such as Meleager. The paper is divided into two parts. In the first part, I investigate literary texts in which cutaneous conditions appear to be a manifestation of psychological or emotional alterations. I begin by focusing on the somatisation of shame, with a specific focus on gendered emotions, and the role that skin played in experiencing, expressing and somatising this feeling in ancient Greek literature. I then examine medical treatises, more specifically Hippocratic works, with the aim of understanding whether the narrative that they provide is consistent with what is found in literary sources. In particular, I focus on the aetiology of cutaneous conditions and explore the extent to which skin diseases were linked to somatic and mental disorders.

In the second part, I investigate the itch and its connection with bodily pleasures. I begin my analysis with a focus on literary texts in which the itch is deployed as the physical manifestation of erotic feeling in order to investigate how this bodily

¹ I wish to thank Dr. Francesca Marzari and the anonymous referees for their very helpful comments on this paper.

discomfort was believed to be linked to one's mental and emotional sphere; I then continue by investigating the figurative use of itching and scratching as metaphors for bodily pleasure and pain. Finally, I demonstrate how this metaphorical association, which was employed extensively in ancient Greek literature, was also supported by medical sources. By analysing two distinctive facets of cutaneous conditions, namely their visible bodily manifestations and the disquieting feelings that they cause, I aim to shed new light on the connection between the skin and human emotions in ancient Greece.

1. *Shameful girls: the Proetides*

The earliest extant work that connects cutaneous diseases and emotions is Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*.² Fragments 131-133 M-W focus on the mythological account of the daughters of king Proetus of Tiryns, the Proetides, who were punished by a god, possibly Hera, for committing ὕβρις.³ The myth is also discussed in later texts, which vary with regard to the identity of the vindictive god, the geographical setting and the ending of the tale; more specifically, whereas the goddess Hera features in Hesiod's version, it is Dionysus or Aphrodite who punish the

² The skin was also linked to human emotions in the Homeric poems, although this association did not explicitly include cutaneous diseases. As Gavrylenko (GAVRYLENKO 2012, p. 494) argues, according to Homer's conception of the human body, «both flesh (skin) and internal 'organs'... constitute a kind of bodily unity, where there is no evident difference between the inner and outer body, or the depth and surface of the body». Furthermore, Gavrylenko (GAVRYLENKO 2012, pp. 492-493) points out that emotions such as grief or pain can affect the Homeric body by damaging the skin (*Od.* 2.376; 16.145) or melting it (*Od.* 19.204). Complexion was also altered by strong emotions such as fear and grief, as Pigeaud (PIGEAUD 2005, pp. 27-28) argues (see, for example, *Il.* 13.279; 17.733).

³ The supposed ὕβρις committed by the Proetides varies in the different accounts of the myth: the young women either offended Hera, according to Acusilaus (*FGrHist* 2 fr. 28), Bacchylides (*epin.* 11.50-52) and Pherecydes (*FGrHist* 3 fr. 114), or refuse to accept the sacred rites of Dionysus ([*APOLLOD.*] 2.2.2), or disparaged Aphrodite (*AEL.* *VH* 3.42). For a detailed reconstruction of the different variants of the myth see CAIRNS 2005, p. 40; COSTANZA 2009, pp. 1-14; MARZARI 2010, pp. 54-56. A different, yet interesting interpretation is provided by Silver (SILVER 2019, p. 76), who claims that «the Proitides prostituted themselves as franchisees for Hera's cult», further suggesting that the young women were initiated into the cult of Hera in Argos, and were therefore considered to be married to the god Dionysus, which would explain the presence of both gods in the different variants of the myth.

young girls in other accounts.⁴ Regardless of the identity of the god and the nature of their punishments, there is general agreement about interpreting the myth as a rite of passage for the girls from maidenhood to womanhood.⁵ Hesiod's account, which is also the earliest, is particularly interesting in that it provides the most complex description of the punishment inflicted upon the girls, who display lewdness and frenzy on one hand, and cutaneous diseases on the other. Due to the highly fragmentary state of the Hesiodic work, we cannot determine whether the girls' *μαχλοσύνη* is indeed the crime for which they are punished by Hera, (*fr.* 132 M-W= Suda μ 307 iii. 339. 4 Alder), or rather part of her divine punishment (*fr.* 132 in app. M-W= Philodemus *De Pietate* B 6529–33 Obbink). However, we are certain that Hera's punishment included mental frenzy, along with bodily ailments, of which fragment 133 M-W offers a detailed description:⁶

...
Καὶ γάρ σφιν κεφαλήσι κατὰ κνῆδος αἰνὸν ἔχειεν·
ἀλφὸς γάρ χροὰ πάντα κατέσχ<εθ>εν, αἱ δὲ νυ χάιται
ἔρρεον ἐκ κεφαλῶν, ψίλωτο δὲ καλὰ κάρηνα.

⁴ According to Hesiod, the young girls were punished by the goddess Hera; see CAIRNS 2005, p. 41: «the name of the goddess may be preserved in the obelized line 48 of *fr.* 129 M-W, but is in any case confirmed by two citations, one from Probus' commentary on Virgil *Eclogue*, 6.48 (*fr.* 131 M-W) and one from Philodemus' *On Piety*». Apollodorus' attribution of Dionysus to the Hesiodic version of the myth, Cairns concludes, must therefore be the result of a conflation between the Proetides myth and that of the women of Argos, which also caused the geographical ambiguity. See CAIRNS 2005, pp. 35–50; MARZARI 2010, p. 48, n. 7.

⁵ See CAIRNS 2005, p. 41: «All early versions of the Proetid myth therefore give it an initiatory character, concerned with girls' passage from maidenhood to marriage». See also MAEHLER 1982, p. 223; SEAFORD 1988, p. 118. According to Costanza (COSTANZA 2009, p. 4), the girls' baldness represents a rite of passage and evokes the lock of hair that Greek women had to cut and donate to a goddess before getting married.

⁶ The young girls are seized by madness (*ἡλοσύνη* in HES. *fr.* 37 M-W, 15), which causes them to behave like cows (HES. *fr.* 131 M-W = Probus in VERG. *Ecl.* 6.48); in some of the accounts, their healing process takes place simultaneously with their marriage (PHERECYD. = *FGrHist* 3 *fr.* 114; [APOLLOD.] 2.2.2; see CAIRNS 2005, p. 46 and MARZARI 2010, p. 48 n. 13). For restlessness as a manifestation of mental illness, see THUMIGER 2017, pp. 156–64; with specific reference to women, see in particular 157–8: «Restlessness and anxiety are treated as typically feminine in the literary presentation of female ecstatic and orgiastic behaviour». See, for example, Io's metamorphosis into a cow, and her frenzied wandering in [A.] *Pr.* 877–86; interestingly, Io is also said to be stung by the οἰστρος, which, like the Proetides' κνός, torments her skin and her mind simultaneously. On wandering as a sign of gynaecological ailment in medical literature, see in particular Hp. *Virg.* *Mul.* 1.2 and 1.8.

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Chiara Blanco, *Beneath the skin*

...

For onto their heads (s)he poured a dread itch;
for a scabby illness seized hold of all their skin, and their hair
fell from their heads, and their beautiful heads became bald.⁷

The Proetides are said to have been punished specifically with regard to their skin via two cutaneous ailments, ἀλφός, ‘dull-white leprosy’ and κνός, ‘itch’ (*LSJ s.v.*), resulting in their complete baldness, either in addition to, or because of, their lewdness.⁸ Although the Hesiodic version of the myth is the only one that includes hair loss in the punishment, the relevance of the girls’ baldness in the story is reiterated by iconographic evidence.⁹ Marzari has discussed the myth extensively, and elaborated on the ἀλφός that affects the young girls.¹⁰ In what follows, I aim to explore the connection of the Proetides’ multiple diseases (their lewdness, frenzy and cutaneous conditions) by focusing more closely on the emotional aspect of the mythological account.

Hesiod is the only author to mention cutaneous conditions along with the girls’ lewdness; however, even in later accounts, the healing process of the young women presupposes an intricate situation in which ancient religious beliefs and theories of the body are combined, which betrays the original complexity of their symptoms. Most of the ancient sources agree on assigning the role of the healer to Melampus, the seer son of Amythaon, although the modality of the healing process differs significantly. For example, whereas Bacchylides and Callimachus ascribe the young women’s renewed health to Artemis’ intervention, Apollodorus (2.2.2) reports two versions, according to which the Pro-

⁷ HESIOD, *The Shield, Catalogue of Women, Other Fragments*, edited by G.W. Most, Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, 2007, p. 155.

⁸ The reference to skin ailments in the myth is also found in *fr.* 132 in app. M-W (PHLD. *Piet.* B 6529–33 Obbink), in which the divine punishment is divided into the two phases of lewdness first (πρό[τερο]ν μὲν μάχλα- [δα] and skin ailments later (ὄσπερ)ον δ’ ἀλφούς).

⁹ See, for example, a Sicilian Calyx Krater from Canicattini, now at the Museo Regionale in Siracusa 47038. Ca 350-325 BCE.

¹⁰ MARZARI 2015, pp. 521-534.

etides were healed by Melampus by means of a ritualistic dance (μετ' ἀλαλαγμοῦ καὶ τινοῦ ἐνθέου χορείας), but also with the help of some purifying therapy (τὴν διὰ φαρμάκων καὶ καθαρμῶν θεραπείαν); the myth is also discussed in ancient scientific texts, which tend to provide more details about the therapeutic treatment, specifying that it consisted of cataplasms of hellebore and thermal baths.¹¹ As Marzari points out, the association between hellebore and the Proetides' conditions is of particular interest: hellebore features in the ancient Greek medical tradition as a purgative herb, recommended for a specific range of illnesses, among which mental diseases, as well as cutaneous ailments, are listed.¹² More specifically, the purgative effect of hellebore would make it the perfect candidate to address humoral imbalances, which would be responsible for both cutaneous conditions and mental derangements. In the Hippocratic treatise *Epidemics* 2.1.7, for example, loss of hair and cutaneous conditions are deemed to be caused by humoral imbalance, whereas 2.6.14 ascribes both folly and baldness to an excess of bile.¹³

¹¹ According to BACCHYL. *epin.* 11.92-109 and CALL. *hymn. Dian.* 233-236, the healer of the Proetides was Artemis, whose intervention was requested by Proetus himself. For treatments of the myth in scientific texts, see THPHR. *HP* 9.10.4, in which black hellebore is also called 'the hellebore of Melampus' (Μελαμπόδιον); similarly, PLIN. *HN* 25.21.47 mentions the *melampodion* and also adds that Melampus purified the Proetides with hellebore after noticing its purging effect on his goats. With regard to the use of thermal baths to cure cutaneous conditions, particularly in relation to the myth of the Proetides, see STR. 8.3.19. (C346-7) and PAUS. 5.5.10-1. For the purifying effect of baths and waters and their connection with the Proetides' myth, see also HÅLAND 2009, pp. 8-9.

¹² MARZARI 2015, p. 529. With regard to the effects of hellebore on the skin, see HP. *Aph.* 4.16, in which we read that hellebore causes convulsions in those with healthy flesh (τοῖσι τὰς σάρκας ὑγίαις ἔχουσι); hellebore is recommended in the case of injured skin and flesh, in which case it should be applied as a cataplasm (*Ulc.* 16). The fact that hellebore was renowned to cause spasms is also stated in HP. *Mul.* 2.17 (126 L.), in which the effect of a dose of hellebore to the patient is compared to the suffocation caused by uterine displacement. With regard to the use of hellebore as purgative in the Hippocratic Corpus, see *Int.* 10 (in which the disease is caused by an excess of phlegm) and 49 (in which the disease arises from putrefied phlegm), as well as *Mul.* 2.12 (121 L.) in which the patient is affected by an abnormal flux that causes swelling across her body. See also GAL. *Comp. Med. Loc.* 1.2 (12.403 K.), in which hellebore is recommended as a remedy for alopecia. With regard to the renowned use of hellebore to treat cases of madness, see THUMIGER 2017, p. 221, n.106: «Hellebore becomes notorious and attains antonomastic status as cure (and comic trope) for insanity in non-medical contexts (see e.g. Aristophanes, *Vesp.* 1489; the verb ἐλλεβορίζω, absent from the Hippocratic texts, which later means 'bring someone to his senses', as in DEM. 18.121)». See also OLIVIERI ET AL. 2017, p. 196.

¹³ Both cutaneous and mental diseases are discussed in *Aph.* 3.20, in which we read that these types of maladies tend to affect the patients in the spring. This concept is reiterated and expanded in PL.

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Chiara Blanco, *Beneath the skin*

The simultaneous presence of skin diseases and emotional and mental derangement in Hesiod's account is particularly remarkable, as it refers to an association much prior to humoral medical theories. I argue that the interpretation of the Proetides' symptoms in the *Catalogue of Women* is therefore twofold. On one hand, as I will explain more in detail below, the itch that afflicts them is the physical manifestation of their emotional disturbance; just as their minds are disquieted by erotic obsession, so is their skin, by means of the incessant itch that the goddess inflicts upon them. On the other hand, the ἀλφός and baldness are the visible markers of the shamefulness of their behaviour, whereby the god stigmatises their loss of female decency in a visual and immediate manner.¹⁴ This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the fact that, although baldness and skin ailments do not feature in later accounts of the myth,¹⁵ the authors nevertheless capitalise on the shameful behaviour of the young girls.¹⁶

Unsurprisingly, medical texts addressing cutaneous diseases do not consider these ailments as being god-inflicted; however, the shamefulness of such conditions is still a recurrent element, even in scientific texts.¹⁷ The Hippocratic treatise *Affections* 35, for example, capitalises on the stigmatisation of the affected patients, and even goes as far as not to consider skin ailments and hair loss as proper conditions, but rather as shameful manifestations:

Ti. 85ab, in which skin diseases such as ἀλφός and λεύκη are said to be caused by the excessive presence of phlegm, which the body attempts to purge by expelling part of the humour through the skin. However, if the excessive phlegm is mixed with black bile, the combination could cause epilepsy. With regard to the excess of phlegm causing cutaneous eruptions and epilepsy, see also *Hp. Morb. Sacr.* 8.

¹⁴ See MARZARI 2019, p. 112: «Ces taches épidermiques deviennent la projection visible d'autres taches, d'autres impuretés plus profondes – l'impudence de l'offense à la divinité, la lascivité effrénée – peut-être une allusion à une croyance qui associait la tache cutanée au vice».

¹⁵ With the exception of Philodemus, who reports Hesiod's version (*fr.* 132 in app. M-W= PHLD Piet. B 6529–33 Obbink).

¹⁶ See, for example, [APOLLOD.] 2.2.2 (μετ' ἀκοσμίας) and AEL. *VH* 3.42 (ἔδραμον, φασί, γυμναί μαινόμενα... παράφοροι οὔσαι ὑπὸ τῆς νόσου).

¹⁷ For the scientific, and not divine, nature of diseases, see *Hp. Morb. Sacr.* 5.

Λέπρη καὶ κνησμός καὶ ψώρα καὶ λειχήνες καὶ ἀλφός
καὶ ἀλώπεκες ὑπὸ φλέγματος γίνονται· ἔστι δὲ τοιαῦτα
αἴσχος μᾶλλον ἢ νοσήματα.

Λέπρη, κνησμός, ψώρα, λειχήνες, ἀλφός and ἀλώπεκες
arise because of phlegm. These are signs of shame/
disfigurements (αἴσχος) rather than diseases
(νοσήματα).¹⁸

Another case in point is provided by Theophrastus' *Characters* 19, and is concerned with δυσχέρεια, 'squalor'. When describing the main characteristics of a squalid person, Theophrastus lists λέπρα and ἀλφός, here considered as evidence of bodily neglect, from which the general character of the affected person could also be assumed:

Ἔστι δὲ ἡ δυσχέρεια ἀθεραπευσία σώματος λύπης
παρασκευαστική, ὃ δὲ δυσχερῆς τοιοῦτός τις, οἷος
λέπραν ἔχων καὶ ἀλφὸν καὶ τοὺς ὄνυχας μεγάλους
περιπατεῖν καὶ φῆσαι ταῦτα εἶναι αὐτῷ συγγενικά
ἀρρωστήματα.

Squalor is a neglect of one's body which produces distress. The squalid man is the sort who goes around with λέπρα and ἀλφός, with long fingernails, and says these are all inherited illnesses.¹⁹

Theophrastus' squalid man is described as being animalistic in his behaviour and appearance; details of his hairy and unkempt aspect follow the reference to cutaneous conditions, along

¹⁸ Text from É. LITTRÉ, *Oeuvres Complètes d' Hippocrate*, vol. 6, Paris, 1849 (repr. Amsterdam 1962), p. 246. The translation is my own. The word αἴσχος is alternatively read as ἀεικέα, 'disfigurements' in POTTER 1988. In either case, my argument would not change. The word ἀεικέα would still capitalise on the shameful appearance of the diseased skin. See the passage in GRMEK 1989, p. 166: «In a stationary—that is, chronic and not evolving—state, the skin's "leprous" appearance betokens neither abscession (*apóstasis*) nor disease (*nósema*) but merely represents an aesthetic blemish (*aíschos*)».

¹⁹ THEOPHRASTUS, *Characters*. HERODAS, *Mimes*. SOPHRON and *Other Mime Fragments*, edited and translated by J. Rusten and I.C. Cunningham, Cambridge, Massachusetts-London 1993, pp. 105-107 slightly modified. See also MARZARI 2015, pp. 525-526.

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with shameful behavioural traits, such as the inability to behave appropriately in public. The general assumption behind such a description is that one's aspect mirrors one's behaviour and character; the smoothness of the skin and general condition of the flesh are, together with the growth of hair, good indicators of one's moral conduct.²⁰ The same principle applies to the Proetides' account: skin that is spoiled by ἀλφός is a marker of divine punishment and simultaneously signals their shameful, non-human behaviour, which breaches the boundaries of bestiality.

2. Shameful skin

The fact that cutaneous conditions were linked to shame in ancient Greece is also proven by a passage from Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* (278-82) in which Orestes describes the punishment that the gods would inflict on him should he fail to avenge the death of his father:

Τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐκ γῆς δυσφρόνων μηνίματα
βροτοῖς πιφάσκειν εἶπε τάσδ' αἰνὰς νόσους,
σαρκῶν ἐπεμβατήρας ἀγρίαις γνάθοις
λειχηνας ἐξέσθοντας ἀρχαίαν φύσιν,
λευκὰς δὲ κόρσας τῆδ' ἐπαντέλλειν νόσῳ.

He revealed the effects of the wrath of hostile powers from under the earth against mortals, and spoke of these dreadful afflictions—leprous ulcers attacking the flesh, eating away its pristine appearance with savage jaws, and short white hairs arising on the disease site.²¹

²⁰ See, for example, [ARIST.] *Phgn.* 806a29-33: ἐκ τε γὰρ τῶν κινήσεων φυσιογνωμονοῦσι, καὶ ἐκ τῶν σχημάτων, καὶ ἐκ τῶν χρωμάτων, καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἡθῶν τῶν ἐπὶ τοῦ προσώπου ἐμφαινόμενον, καὶ ἐκ τῶν τριχωμάτων, καὶ ἐκ τῆς λειότητος, καὶ ἐκ τῆς φωνῆς, καὶ ἐκ τῆς σαρκός, καὶ ἐκ τῶν μερῶν, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ τύπου ὅλου τοῦ σώματος (ARISTOTLE, *Minor Works. On Colours, On Things Heard, Physiognomics, On Plants, On Marvellous Things Heard, Mechanical Problems, On Indivisible Lines, Situations and Names of Winds, On Melissus, Xenophanes, and Gorgias*, edited and translated by W.S. Hett, Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, 1936, p. 92).

²¹ AESCHYLUS, *Oresteia. Agamemnon, Libation-Bearers, Eumenides*, edited and translated by A.H. Sommerstein, Cambridge, Massachusetts-London 2008, pp. 247-249.

Following Hesiod's tradition, Aeschylus also considers skin ailments to be a divine punishment: the oracle of Apollo warns Orestes about the terrible diseases (αἰνὰς νόσους, 279) that would afflict him should he allow his father's murder to remain unavenged. As the oracle reveals, these diseases appear to be a manifestation of the wrath of the wretched souls in the underworld (ἐκ γῆς δυσφρόνων, 278), which Aeschylus represents through the image of leprosy provided with 'wild jaws' (ἀγρίαῖς γνάθοις, 280).²² Interestingly, skin afflictions are also used here to convey a shameful emotion: with λεύκη, white hairs would grow on Orestes' lesions, thus marking his skin as a visible reminder of his cowardly disrespect of his dead father. Aeschylus' description of the λεύκη is consistent with the Hippocratic account of the disease, as found in *Prorrhetic* 2.43:

Λειχῆνες δὲ καὶ λέπραι καὶ λεῦκαι, οἷσι μὲν νέοισιν ἢ παισὶν ἐοῦσιν ἐγένετό τι τούτων, ἢ κατὰ μικρὸν φανέν αὔξεται ἐν πολλῷ χρόνῳ, τούτοισι μὲν οὐ χρηὴ ἀπόστασιν νομίζειν τὸ ἐξάνθημα, ἀλλὰ νόσημα· οἷσι δὲ ἐγένετο τούτων τι πολὺ τε καὶ ἐξαπίνης, τοῦτο ἂν εἴη ἀπόστασις· γίνονται δὲ λεῦκαι μὲν ἐκ τῶν θανατωδεστάτων νοσημάτων, οἷον καὶ ἡ νοῦσος ἢ Φοινικὴ καλεομένη. αἱ δὲ λέπραι καὶ οἱ λειχῆνες ἐκ τῶν μελαγχολικῶν.

Λειχὴν, λέπρα and λεύκη: when one of these has arisen in a young person or a child, or when it appears it grows but little over a long time, you must consider the eruption not to be an ἀπόστασις, but a disease; whereas when one of them appears suddenly and over a large area, it is an ἀπόστασις. Λεύκη is among the most mortal of diseases, like the so-called Phoenician disease. Λέπρα and λειχὴν are melancholic.²³

²² For the concept of wild disease (ἀγρία νόσος), see JOUANNA 2012, pp. 82-84.

²³ HIPPOCRATES, *Places in Man, Glands, Fleshes, Prorrhetic 1-2, Physician, Use of Liquids, Ulcers, Haemorrhoids and Fistulas*, edited and translated by P. Potter, Cambridge, Massachusetts-London 1995, p. 289 slightly modified.

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Consistent with the discussion above, the passage explains that cutaneous conditions are caused by humoral imbalance, except when they arise in young children or when their development is slow, in which cases they are classified as proper diseases. The case of Orestes would be included in the first category, since his skin lesions would occur abruptly and in adulthood.²⁴ Whereas Aeschylus' description of cutaneous conditions pays particular attention to the medical manifestation of the related symptoms on one hand, skin lesions are still deemed to be the visible shameful markers of divine punishment on the other, which is consistent with Hesiod's account. What we can infer from both accounts is therefore twofold: 1) branding the skin is the gods' punishment of women and men who are guilty of committing some form of ὕβρις; a mutual correspondence is therefore established between the skin of the culprit and the emotion of shame; their shameful behaviour is punished by the infliction of skin ailments, which in turn will stigmatise the ὕβριστής. 2) Women and men are punished for different crimes, since the emotion of shame was generated in ancient Greece: whereas Orestes' societal and filial duty consists of avenging his father's death, the Proetides were required to comply with both their societal and their biological role.²⁵ By offending Hera, the goddess of marriage, they neglect their female role, and are therefore excluded from civilised society, relegated to roaming in the wilderness and in the grip of lewdness, while simultaneously losing their most feminine bodily characteristics, namely the beauty of their skin and their hair.²⁶

²⁴ Even more striking is the similarity between Aeschylus' description of λεύκη's symptoms and [ARIST.] *Col.* 797b13-17; see also ARIST. *HA.* 518a12-15.

²⁵ For sexual incontinence being described as 'shameful' for women, see Cairns 1993, pp. 120-126; see also E. *Cret. fr.* 472e12 Kannicht, in which Pasiphae describes her passion for the bull as αἰσχίστη νόσος; see also Gyges' speech at *Hdt.* 1.8: by removing her tunic, a woman also removes her αἰδώς (ἅμα δὲ κηθῶνι ἐκδουμένῳ συνεκδέεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή). For Gyges' speech, see CAIRNS 1996, pp. 78-83; for shame in ancient Greece and, more specifically, about the difference between αἰδώς and αἰσχύνη, see KONSTAN 2003, pp. 1031-1060. For a thorough examination of αἰδώς in ancient Greece, see CAIRNS 1993.

²⁶ Losing her fair skin and beautiful hair is the price that Theocritus' Simaetha has to pay for displaying excessive erotic desire. The protagonist of *Idyll* 2 describes how her body changed when she fell victim to lovesickness (88-110); in addition to fever and paleness, hair loss and changes

A strikingly similar symptomatology to that of the young daughters of Proetus is found in the detailed account by Aretaeus of Cappadocia, a medical writer who lived in the first to second centuries CE, of the so-called ἐλέφας or ἐλεφαντίασις, a disease that takes its name from the animal (elephant), either on account of its might, or due to the appearance of the patients' skin, which resembled that of an elephant.²⁷ The ἐλέφας consists of a congelation of the inner heat of the patient, which inevitably leads to their death.²⁸ While the disease is difficult to detect at first, as it primarily affects the internal organs, the general appearance of the sufferer is dramatically altered in the second stage of the ailment. First, cutaneous rashes that are likened to a bad 'signal-fire' attack the face and the rest of the body; later, the breath and digestion are also affected, an itchy sensation pervades the rest of the skin, and the hair falls out, as we read in *Chronic Diseases* 2.13:²⁹

2.13.13

Τρίχες ἐν μὲν τῷ παντὶ προτεθνήσκουσι, χερσί, μηροῖσι, κνήμησι, αὐθίς, ἦβη, γενείοισι ἀραιαί, ψεδναὶ δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ κεφαλῇ κόμαι· τὸ δὲ μᾶλλον πρόωροι πολιοὶ καὶ φαλάκρωσις ἀθρόη.

The hairs on the whole body die prematurely, on the hands, the thighs, the legs, and again on the pubes; scanty on the chin, and also the hairs on the head are scarce. And still more frequently premature hoariness, and sudden baldness.

in complexion and flesh are also mentioned. Furthermore, baldness and skin alterations signal Simaetha's passage from maidenhood to womanhood; as she specifies in lines 40-1, her lover has disgraced her by taking her virginity without making her his wife (ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τήνῳ πάσα καταίθουμαι ὅς με τάλαναν / ἀντὶ γυναικὸς ἔθηκε κακὰν καὶ ἀπάρθρον ἦμεν). For the symptoms experienced by Simaetha, see LAMBERT 2002, p. 72.

²⁷ For the disease known as ἐλεφαντίασις, see THUMIGER 2018, p. 258, n. 25.

²⁸ The inner heat, as Aretaeus explains, is altered by humoral imbalance, which also happens to be the indirect cause of the ἐλέφας, as we saw with regard to other skin diseases; Galen (*Tum. pr.nat.*13 [K. 7.727]) explains that the disease is πάθος μελαγχολικόν, caused by black bile, just like the ψώρα and λέπρα.

²⁹ The text and translation are from *The Extant Works of Aretaeus the Cappadocian*, edited and translated by F. Adams, London, 1856, pp. 369-372, slightly modified.

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2.13.15

Ἦν δὲ πολλὸν αἶρηταί τι ἀπὸ τῶν ἔνδοθεν, ἢ πάθη καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖσι ἄκροισι φαίνεται, λειχήνες ἐπὶ τοῖσι ἄκροισι δακτύλοισι, γούνασι κνησμοί, καὶ τῶν κνησμῶν ἄπτονται μεθ' ἡδονῆς.

But if the affection be much raised up from the parts within, and appear upon the extremities, λειχήνες occur on the extremities of the fingers; there is pruritus on the knees, and the patients rub the itchy parts with pleasure.

2.13.18

Σιτίων ὄρεξις οὐκ ἀγεννῆς, ἄποιος ἢ γεῦσις, οὐδὲ τερπνὸν ἢ ἔδωδὴ καὶ ἢ πόσις; ἀπάντων δὲ ὑπ' ἀχθηδόνοσ, μῖσος, ἀτροφίη, ἐπιθυμία λυσώδησ κόποι αὐτόματοι, μελέων ἐκάστου ιδέη βαρεία, καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀχθέει καὶ τὰ μικρὰ μέλεα.

...

2.13.19

Τοιοῦσδε οὖν ἔοντας τίς οὐκ ἂν φύγοι ἢ τίς οὐκ ἂν ἐκτραπέιη, κῆν υἱός, ἢ πατήρ ἔη, κῆν κασίγνητος τύχη-δέος καὶ ἀμφὶ μεταδόσιος τοῦ κακοῦ. Πολλοὶ γοῦν ἐπ' ἐρημίας καὶ ἐς ὄρεα τοὺς φιλάτους ἐξέθεσαν, οἱ μὲν ἐς χρόνον ἐπαρήγοντες τῷ λιμῷ, οἱ δὲ ἤκιστα, ὡς σφάεας ἐθέλοντες ἐκθανεῖν.

Appetite for food not amiss; taste indiscriminate, neither food nor drink affords pleasure; aversion to all things from a painful feeling; atrophy; libidinous desires of a rabid nature; spontaneous lassitude; the figure of each of the limbs heavy, and even the small limbs are oppressive to the patient.

...

When in such a state, who would not flee – who would not turn from them, even if a father, a son, or a brother? There is danger, also, from the communication of the ailment. Many, therefore, have exposed their most beloved relatives in the wilderness, and on the mountains, some with the intention of administering to their hunger, but others not so, as wishing them to die.

The similarity between the symptoms experienced by Hesiod's Proetides and Aretaeus' description of the ἐλέφας is striking; both accounts list:

- 1) baldness,
- 2) an incessant itch that results in a cutaneous condition (λειχήν),³⁰
- 3) uncontrollable sexual desire. The recommended therapy, described in detail in *Cures for Chronic Diseases* 2.13, is mainly based on purification by means of baths and the use of hellebore, and
- 4) the association with the wilderness, where the patients affected by the ἐλέφας are often left, is another mutual trait.

Although Aretaeus seeks to justify the brutal practice of abandoning sufferers in the wilderness by mentioning that the disease was highly contagious, he also adds that those close to the diseased flee from them or leave them to die due to the impossibility of coping with people in such a state (τοιούσδε οὖν ἔοντας), whose behaviour is described as being shameful and unhuman. Thus, skin ailments are considered to be a source of shame for the affected victims on one hand; on the other, they are also accompanied by other manifestations of shameful behaviour of which skin ailments represent the visible markers.

The general picture analysed above suggests a significant interaction and cross-influence between literary texts and scientific theories in ancient Greece. In the case of the Proetides, while the myth is progressively affected by medical literature – the religious and magical remedies that feature in earlier accounts are replaced by medicinal herbs in later scientific literature – the myth also influences medical texts in turn. For example, the pseudo-Hippocratic *Epistle* 16 refers to Melampus when discussing the healing properties of hellebore, while Aretaeus' description of the ἐλέφας seems to have been modelled on the Hesiodic myth.³¹ Similarly,

³⁰ See also [ARIST.] *Pr.* 7.8 (887a). See also GAL. *Tum.pr.nat.* 13 [K. 7.727].

³¹ See also THPHR. *HP* 9.10.4.

the terminology and accurate description of the symptomatology of skin diseases found in Aeschylus points towards the circulation of medical ideas at the time of the play. As discussed above, both Hesiod's and Aeschylus' accounts explain skin conditions as divine punishments for shameful behaviours; although there is no trace of the divine element in medical literature dealing with skin ailments, the connection with the emotional sphere is still vivid in scientific texts. More specifically, discoloured or damaged skin is a shameful disfigurement, while simultaneously being the marker of a dishonourable character. In the following section, I focus on another relevant aspect of cutaneous conditions that ancient Greeks linked to human emotions: the itch.

3. *Erotic Itches*

The itch, κνόσος, is one of the symptoms we find listed in Hesiod's account of the Proetides' punishment (*fr.* 133 M-W). More specifically, I argue that it expresses the erotic torments that the young women undergo in the account, thus representing their more tangible, physical manifestation. An extremely similar association can also be found in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, in which Heracles is afflicted by a cutaneous condition while also undergoing feminisation within the tragedy. The garment that Deianira smears with Nessus' blood adheres to Heracles' skin, thus triggering a cutaneous reaction that eventually leads to his feminisation and later death.³² This connection between Heracles and skin ailments was well established in ancient literature. For example, both Strabo and Pausanias ascribe the healing properties of the river Anigrus to the hero. According to both accounts, the river would be able to cure cutaneous diseases due to the venom that had been spread on Heracles' arrows, which a Centaur washed

³² For Heracles' cutaneous condition and his consequent feminisation in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, see BLANCO 2020, pp. 27-42. See also VON STADEN 1992, pp. 131-150 on Heracles' link with cutaneous conditions, and LORAUX 1995, p. 40, and CAWTHORN 2008, pp. 85-86 on Heracles' feminisation in Sophocles' tragedy.

from his wound in Anigrus' waters.³³ It is interesting that both authors provide another version, according to which it was Melampus who bestowed healing properties on Anigrus by throwing the unidentified means that he used to purify the daughters of Proetus into the river.

This association between the mythological accounts of the Proetides and that of Heracles is of particular interest: similarly to the daughters of Proetus, Heracles is affected by a cutaneous rash and consequent mental derangement, while simultaneously displaying signs of what has been interpreted as feminisation and excessive erotic desire.³⁴ Although Nessus and Deianira are the only responsible for Heracles' malady, his torments still stem from a punishment: before dying at Heracles' hands, Nessus gives Deianira his blood mixed with Hydra's venom, and makes her believe that this concoction is a powerful love potion. Neglected by her husband, Deianira smears the poisonous filter on Heracles' robe and thus triggers the series of torments that eventually cause his death. Furthermore, since both myths feature skin ailments and mental disturbances, their association with thermal baths is consistent with medical texts, in which hot baths are recommended in cases of cutaneous conditions and to treat mental illnesses.³⁵

Unlike the case of Orestes in Aeschylus's *Libation Bearers*, I argue that the link between Heracles and the Proetides is not to be found in the shame caused by cutaneous diseases, but in another distinctive feature of skin complaints, namely the tormenting itch that arises from them. In both accounts, the itch is intended to be the physical manifestation of a deeper discomfort which, in addition to affecting the bodies of the victims, disturbs their

³³ See STR. 8.3.19. (C346-7) and PAUS. 5.5.10-1.

³⁴ Although there is no explicit mention of the specific cutaneous condition affecting Heracles in the *Trachiniae*, there are good grounds to assume that it is linked to the so-called Heracles' ψώρα. As reported by the paremiographer Zenobius (6.49), Heracles was affected by the cutaneous condition known as ψώρα, from which the goddess Athena sought to heal him by providing hot baths for the hero. Zenobius also adds a reference to the seventh-century BCE poet Peisander, who allegedly wrote about Heracles' disease in his *Heracleia*. See BLANCO 2020, pp. 31-33.

³⁵ For hot baths as a therapy for mental illness, see HP. *Aff.* 10; *Int.* 10; 12; 13; 17; *Mul.* 2.14 (123 L.).

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minds. The folly and lewdness of the Proetides corresponds to Heracles' mental derangement and erotic needs; in other words, I take the itch to be the somatisation of emotional disturbance, of which it constitutes the most immediate bodily manifestation.

As pointed out by Thumiger, feelings of pricking and stinging are «a well-known metaphor or conceptualisation of the force of mental disturbance in Greek literature». This association is based on the assumption that these feelings are perceived throughout the body, and go «beyond the suffering of the individual body part», as they are «perhaps mental in nature».³⁶ Similarly, the relief obtained from the discomfort caused by the itch by means of scratching is interpreted as a pleasurable sensation for the body. A case in point can be found in Plato's *Philebus* 46d-47a, in which the cutaneous condition known as ψώρα is used as a metaphor; scratching the affected parts tormented by the itch is a combination of pleasure and pain for the body:³⁷

Λέγε δὴ τὰς μὲν, ὅταν πλείους λύπαι τῶν ἡδονῶν γίνωνται—τὰς τῆς ψώρας λεγομένας νῦν δὴ ταύτας εἶναι καὶ τὰς τῶν γαργαλισμῶν—ὅποταν ἐντὸς τὸ ζέον ἢ καὶ τὸ φλεγμαίνον, τῆ τρίψει δὲ καὶ τῆ κνήσει μὴ ἐφικνῆταί τις, τὰ δ' ἐπιπολῆς μόνον διαχέη, τοτὲ φέροντες εἰς πῦρ αὐτὰ καὶ εἰς τοῦναντίον, ἀπορίας μεταβάλλοντες ἐνίοτε ἀμηχάνους ἡδονάς, τοτὲ δὲ τοῦναντίον τοῖς ἐντὸς πρὸς τὰ τῶν ἔξω λύπας ἡδοναῖς ξυγκερασθείσας, εἰς ὅποτερ' ἂν ῥέψῃ, παρέσχοντο τῷ τὰ συγκεκριμένα βία διαχεῖν ἢ τὰ διακεκριμένα συγχεῖν καὶ ὁμοῦ λύπας ἡδοναῖς παρατιθέναι.

³⁶ See THUMIGER 2017, p. 195, who also mentions the character of Io in *Prometheus Bound*, affected by frenzy and simultaneously tormented by the οἶστρος, which also features in E. *Ba.* 32, 119, 665, 1229, together with the κέντρον (795), as a metaphor for Dionysiac frenzy; similarly, Euripides uses the οἶστρος at *HF* 862 to represent the frenzy induced by Lyssa.

³⁷ For pleasure in the *Philebus*, see GOSLING & TAYLOR 1982, p. 140; FREDE 1992, pp. 425-463; HAMPTON 1990, p. 73. The association between cutaneous conditions, the ψώρα in particular, and bodily pleasures that we find in Plato was so pervasive in classical Athens that it became proverbial. The same concept is reiterated in Pl. *Grg* 494c (καὶ πρῶτον μὲν εἰπέ, εἰ καὶ ψωρῶντα καὶ κνησιῶντα, ἀφθόνως ἔχοντα τοῦ κνήσθαι, κνώμενον διατελοῦντα τὸν βίον εὐδαμόνως ἔστι ζῆν), and we also find it in Luc. *Bis Acc.* 34.25-7: χαίρει γὰρ οὐκ οἶδ' ὅπως τὰ τοιαῦτα λεπτολογῶν καθάπερ οἱ τὴν ψώραν ἡδέως κνώμενοι.

In the case of the mixtures in which the pains are more than the pleasures—say the ψώρα, which we mentioned just now, or tickling—when the burning inflammation is within and is not reached by the rubbing and scratching, which separate only such mixtures as are on the surface, sometimes by bringing the affected parts to the fire or to something cold we change from wretchedness to inexpressible pleasures, and sometimes the opposition between the internal and the external produces a mixture of pains and pleasures, whichever happens to preponderate; this is the result of the forcible separation of combined elements, or the combination of those that were separate, and the concomitant juxtaposition of pains and pleasures.³⁸

On one hand, Plato's figurative use of the ψώρα to explain the mixed feelings of physical pleasure and pain confirms that the circulation of medical knowledge in classical Athens included skin conditions; on the other hand, it consolidates the association between cutaneous ailments and emotions, as first attested in Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*. Consistently with the account of the Proetides, Plato's passage capitalises on the itch in the discussion of pleasure: it is a continuous, obsessive, bodily discomfort, the relief from which is considered pleasurable per se. As Peponi explains, the passage presupposes that «physical illness guarantees more pleasure and intensified pleasure», as Plato hints at 45c, since it would presuppose the presence of strong desires, which a debilitated and unhealthy body is more likely to experience.³⁹ Even more interesting are the types of diseases that Plato lists in his analysis: as Socrates explains, to understand how bodily pleasures operate, we should consider those derived from the so-called shameful diseases (τὰς [ἡδονάς] τῶν ἀσχημίωνων); his speech continues with a discussion of the itch and the ψώρα

³⁸ PLATO, *Statesman, Philebus, Ion.*, edited and translated by H.N. Fowler and W.R.M. Lamb, Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, 1925, pp. 327-329 slightly modified.

³⁹ PEPONI 2002, p. 136.

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(46a5-11).⁴⁰ I argue that, by mentioning τῶν ἀσχημόνων, Plato intends to refer to those cutaneous ailments which, as discussed above, were called «shameful manifestations» even in the medical literature.⁴¹ Socrates continues his analysis by describing the case in which pleasure dominates the combination of sensations arising from such conditions (47a):

Οὐκοῦν ὁπόταν αὖ πλείων ἡδονὴ κατὰ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα
ξυμμιχθῆ, τὸ μὲν ὑπομεμιγμένον τῆς λύπης γαργαλίζει
τε καὶ ἡρέμια ἀγανακτεῖν ποιεῖ, τὸ δ' αὖ τῆς ἡδονῆς πολὺ
πλέον ἐγκεχυμένον συντείνει τε καὶ ἐνίοτε πηδᾶν ποιεῖ,
καὶ παντοῖα μὲν χρώματα, παντοῖα δὲ σχήματα, παντοῖα
δὲ πνεύματα ἀπεργαζόμενον πᾶσαν ἐκπληξιν καὶ βοᾶς
μετ' ἀφροσύνης ἐνεργάζεται;

And when the pleasure is the predominant element in the mixture, the slight tincture of pain tickles a man and makes him mildly impatient, or again an excessive proportion of pleasure excites him and sometimes even makes him leap for joy; it produces in him all sorts of colours, attitudes, and pantings, and even causes great amazement and foolish shouting, does it not?⁴²

This description has been interpreted as being a reference to sexual gratification, the pleasurable effects of which are compared to those of an itch that is finally relieved; the excitement deriving from such relief is described as the loss of lucidity, which leads to uncontrolled movements and unrestrained sounds.⁴³ As Peponi highlights, the association between skin conditions and sexual pleasure in Plato is consistent with the medical literature

⁴⁰ I disagree with PEPONI 2002, p. 137, who claims that «the term *askhêmones* attributed to the so-called “diseased” persons conveys an ethical undertone» as opposed to the medical one conveyed by the term ψώρα; instead, I argue that both expressions are consistent with medical (and literary) texts that link skin ailments with shame.

⁴¹ HP. *Aff.* 35.

⁴² PLATO, *Statesman, Philebus, Ion*, edited and translated by H.N. Fowler and W.R.M. Lamb, Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, 1925, p. 329.

⁴³ FREDE 1992, pp. 434-435.

of his time;⁴⁴ the late fifth-century Hippocratic treatise *Generation* 1.1-4 explains the connection between itch and pleasure as the result of sexual arousal:

1.1

Ἐχει δὲ οὕτω φλέβες καὶ νεῦρα ἀπὸ παντὸς τοῦ σώματος τείνουσιν ἐς τὸ αἰδοῖον, οἷσιν ὑποτριβομένοισι καὶ θερμαινομένοισι καὶ πληρευμένοισιν ὥσπερ κνησιμὸς ἐμπίπτει καὶ τῷ σώματι παντὶ ἡδονὴ καὶ θέρμη ἐκ τούτου παραγίνεται· τριβομένου δὲ τοῦ αἰδοίου καὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κινευμένου, τὸ ὑγρὸν θερμαίνεται ἐν τῷ σώματι καὶ διαχέεται καὶ κλονέεται ὑπὸ τῆς κινήσιος καὶ ἀφρέει, καθάπερ καὶ τᾶλλα ὑγρά ξύμπαντα κλονεύμενα ἀφρέει·

The matter is as follows: vessels and cords from the whole body lead to the penis, and these, as they are gently rubbed, warmed, and filled, are befallen by a kind of tickling sensation, and from this pleasure and warmth arise in the whole body. As the penis is rubbed and the man moves, the moisture in his body is warmed, turns to liquid, is agitated by his movement, and foams up, just as all other liquids foam when they are agitated.⁴⁵

1.4

Τῆσι δὲ γυναιξὶ <φημι> ἐν τῇ μίξει τριβομένου τοῦ αἰδοίου καὶ τῶν μητρῶν κινευμένων, ὥσπερ κνησιμὸν ἐμπίπτει ἐς αὐτάς καὶ τῷ ἄλλῳ σώματι ἡδονὴν καὶ θέρμην παρέχειν.

Now in women, I assert that as their vagina is rubbed and their uterus moved during intercourse, a kind of tickling sensation befalls these parts and gives rise to pleasure and warmth in the rest of their body.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ PEPONI 2002, pp. 153-154. Interestingly, Marzari (MARZARI 2010, pp. 61-62) mentions Soranus' description of the disease known as satyriasis, specifying that in women it causes a strong itch in the genital parts, along with madness (*Gynaec.* 3.3.4-10).

⁴⁵ 1.1. Text and Translation from HIPPOCRATES, *Generation, Nature of the Child, Diseases 4, Nature of Women and Barrenness*, Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, 2012, p. 7.

⁴⁶ 1.4. Text and Translation from Hippocrates, *Generation, Nature of the Child, Diseases 4, Nature of Women and Barrenness*, Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, 2012, p. 13.

Siculatorum Gymnasium

Chiara Blanco, *Beneath the skin*

Sexual arousal in both females and males is described similarly as a tickling sensation, generating pleasure and warmth in the entire body, which leads them to rub their intimate parts. This description supports the discussion in the literary texts, in which an itch is understood to be an obsessive sensation, generating pleasure, but also pain if not relieved. This association was well established by Plato's time, as references to cutaneous conditions were already being used metaphorically to express physical and, more specifically, sexual pleasures.

I argue that the same principle of association is behind the use of scratching and itching as erotic metaphors by Hellenistic epigrammatists.⁴⁷ The god Eros, traditionally pricking his victims with his arrows, was assigned an additional property in erotic epigrams, namely that of scratching his victims. For example, Meleager describes the 'sweet wound' of Love as the result of the god scratching his victims' hearts with his nails. Similarly, Pompey the Younger refers to erotic torments as κνίσματα, 'scratches' (*AP* 7.219):⁴⁸

Ἡ τὸ καλὸν καὶ πᾶσιν ἐράσιμον ἀνθήσασα,
ἡ μόνη Χαρίτων λείρια δρεψαμένη,
οὐκέτι χρυσοχάλινον ὄρᾳ δρόμον ἡελίοιο
Λαΐς, ἐκομήθη δ' ὕπνον ὀφειλόμενον,
κώμους, καὶ τὰ νέων ζηλώματα, καὶ τὰ ποθεύντων 5
κνίσματα, καὶ μύστην λύχνον ἀπειπαμένη.

Lais, whose bloom was so lovely and delightful in the eyes of all, she who alone culled the lilies of the Graces, no longer looks on the course of the Sun's golden-bitted steeds, but sleeps the appointed sleep, having bid farewell to revelling and young men's rivalries and lovers' scratches and the lamp her confidant.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ MEL. *AP* 12.126.

⁴⁸ See also *AP* 12.67.

⁴⁹ *The Greek Anthology. Book 7: Sepulchral Epigrams. Book 8: The Epigram of St. Gregory the Theologian*, edited and translated by W.R. Paton, Cambridge, Massachusetts-London, 1917, p. 125 slightly modified.

The expression τὰ ποθέοντων κνίσματα is particularly significant: consistent with Plato's passage and the medical and literary texts analysed above, the act of scratching also expresses physical discomfort that extends to the minds of the sufferers, particularly to their emotions; this is confirmed by the use of the verb ποθέω, which focuses on a specific aspect of erotic experience, namely the tormenting desire that it causes.

4. Conclusion

What we see in Hesiod's account of the Proetides is a twofold example of the connection between the skin and human emotions that permeates Greek literature: the disfigurement of the young girls' skin is connected with the emotion of shame, whereas the itch that torments them is the physical manifestation of their lewdness. The visible disfigurements caused by cutaneous conditions expose the afflicted victims, thus stigmatising their shameful behaviour. In Hesiod's account, cutaneous ailments are divine punishments, inflicted by the gods to reprimand crimes of ὕβρις. Discoloured and disfigured skin is thus the visible marker of the gods' wrath, which emphasises the illicit behaviour of the victims; while for men, such as Orestes, this coincides with their neglect of filial duty, the act of shame for the Proetides includes refusing to marry and displaying erotic desire.

Another distinctive element of cutaneous conditions that both literary and medical texts emphasise is the itch. The bodily discomfort that an itch causes expands to the entire body, thus being effectively considered as a mental disturbance; as a result, ancient Greeks associated it with erotic desire. More specifically, the discomfort caused by an itch, the relief from which brings pleasure to the body, has been compared to the torments of erotic desire which, if satisfied, cause pleasure. While this association was established by Plato's time, as also supported by medical texts, its first appearance in literary texts is considerably earlier, as we

can find it in Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*. This is yet another complex facet of ancient Greek representations of the human body and its connection with emotions, its proneness to experiencing a wide array of feelings, while simultaneously falling victim to their somatisation.

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