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The Intersection of Poetic and Imperial Authority in Phaedrus' Fables

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Brigitte B. Libby

Princeton University

Abstract: Phaedrus wrote two fables featuring Roman emperors. In Fable 2.5 we find Emperor Tiberius giving a busybody his deserved come-uppance, and in Fable 3.10 Augustus miraculously solves a murder-suicide case. Yet couched among so many of Phaedrus' fables that criticize authority figures, these positive portrayals of the emperors come as a surprise to the reader and present a significant problem of interpretation. In exploring the different possible readings of the two poems, this paper follows Phaedrus through a complex interpretive maze and shows how the fabulist's own self-portrayal intersects with and colors his portrayal of the first two Roman emperors.

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Introduction

Despite Phaedrus' status as the first versifier of the Aesopic corpus, and the first to structure these fables in a single poetic book, he has sparked little scholarly interest in the field of Roman poetry until the past decade. With the recent studies by J. Henderson and E. Champlin, however, Phaedrus has garnered both attention and praise not merely for his role in the Aesopic tradition, but also for his own achievement as an innovative fabulist.² Most of Phaedrus' fables are traditional Aesopic stories starring a variety of animals and plants, but several fables are considered original to Phaedrus, as they deal with more historical or typically Roman themes such as public figures or law courts. Also an innovation is the choice to frame each of the five books of fables with prologues and epilogues that appear to offer us the poet's own personal reactions to the progress he is making in his ongoing poetic project. In these prologues and epilogues Phaedrus describes himself as a Greek freedman struggling against all odds (and, he claims, against Sejanus) to make a name for himself in poetry. Traditionally, the biography constructed for the real Phaedrus uses his "autobiographical references" and assumes that our poet

¹ My thanks to Ted Champlin, John Henderson, Bob Kaster, and Joshua Katz for reading and improving this paper. I would also like to thank Denis Feeney, my co-presenter at the 2006 Phaedrus Symposium at University of Pennsylvania, for useful discussion of Fable 3.10. The translations and text of Phaedrus are taken from B.E. Perry (1965).

² J. Henderson (2001) is wholly devoted to Phaedrus, as are two important articles: E. Champlin (2005) and J. Henderson (1999). There is also a new bibliography and a new commentary, R.W. Lamb (1995) and E. Oberg (2000) respectively. For more general recent studies of the ancient fable, see F.R. Adrados (1999-2003) and N. Holzberg (2002).

was in fact a freedman, perhaps from Augustus' estate, whose writings under Tiberius led to a conflict with Sejanus.³

In 2005, however, Ted Champlin re-dated Phaedrus' work to sometime under Claudius or Nero.⁴ Furthermore, Champlin posited that Phaedrus was not a Greek freedman, but rather a "member of the Roman elite masquerading as a man of the people."⁵ One of the great strengths of Champlin's argument is that it finally draws deserved attention to Phaedrus' skill in constructing his poetic *persona*. To focus too much on the historical veracity of the biographical detail in the prologues is to miss how adeptly Phaedrus uses them to engineer his self-portrayal and to stake a place in the literary tastes of the present and future, as long as there still remains a *pretium* for *Latinis litteris* (epilogue to Bk. 4). As we will see, the prologues of each of the five books work together as a poetic statement to chronicle Phaedrus' progression from a simple imitator of Aesop to an innovative fabulist who will dare to treat new, more Roman themes. This paper will focus on two of these Roman themed poems and will show how Phaedrus' carefully calculated self-portrayal intersects with and colors his portrayal of the first two emperors, Augustus in 3.10 and Tiberius in 2.5.

1. The Problem: A good emperor in Phaedrus' world of tyrants?

Surprisingly, the emperors seem to enjoy rather positive portrayals in both poem 3.10 and 2.5. I say surprisingly because it is one of Phaedrus' most frequent morals in his

³ For this traditional biography, see P.L. Schmidt (2000) in *Der Neue Pauly* 9, 708-9. H. MacL. Currie (1984) 500-4 offers a similar biography but approaches the task with much more caution, admitting that "sure interpretation [of Phaedrus' autobiographical hints] is not easily achieved." (501)

⁴ Champlin (2005), see particularly 101-2.

⁵ *ibid*, 117

animal-themed fables that kingship and authority lead to cruel abuse of power. At least nine of the fables deal explicitly with the evils of losing one's liberty to a sovereign.⁶ In Fable 4.13, for example, two travelers come to a territory occupied by apes, and the chief of the apes decides to act *sicut viderat imperatorem aliquando*. The Ape King sits on a throne, orders his fellow apes to line up on either side of him, and calls the two humans before him. He asks the two men *Quis sum ego?* One man lies, and responds, *tu es imperator*, and he is rewarded. The other man reasons that if a lie was so well rewarded, then the truth will be even more appreciated; so he responds *tu es vere simia*. Unfortunately, the apes in their anger proceed to tear this second traveler to pieces for his honesty. Clearly, the animal *imperatores* are not leaders worthy of praise according to Phaedrus.

Readers of Fables 2.5 and 3.10, then, are faced with a discrepancy between Phaedrus' portrayal of the Roman emperors and his usual picture of *imperium* cruelly wielded by animals. Consequently, our interpretation of the portrayal of the emperors in poems 2.5 and 3.10 will lie somewhere between two opposite poles. On one hand, we might assume that the host of negative lessons about *imperium* from the animal kingdom is meant to color our reading of these human emperors. On the other, we might posit some difference between the Roman emperors and the animal rulers that validates the power of the humans while leaving the animals open to censure. As we look closely at these two poles of interpretation, we will see how Phaedrus has gone out of his way to complicate matters for us, and we will find ourselves forced to take a closer look at Phaedrus' construction of his poetic *persona*. In the end, it will become clear that

⁶ *Imperium* is undesirable: 1.2, 1.5, 1.31, 2.6, 3.7, 4.4, 4.13, 4.14, and Appendix 3

Phaedrus has carefully aligned his portrayal of imperial authority with the poetic authority that he constructs for himself as a fabulist.

Let us begin with our first interpretive option, in which poems 2.5 and 3.10 seem to be undercut by the many other poems of the collection that decry figures of power. In this view, we read the animal poems as expressions of Phaedrus' true opinion of rulers, an opinion that Phaedrus must then edit in poems where his criticism is no longer couched in the oblique terms of an animal fable. Perhaps, then, these two poems about Augustus and Tiberius are guarantees of deniability to the imperial court, showing, of course disingenuously, that the negative portrayal of animals with *imperium* has no bearing on real live, human, Roman emperors. As support for this view, we could mention that the poem directly following the portrayal of Tiberius is the story of the Eagle, the Crow and the Turtle (2.6), in which we learn that though the powerful are dangerous, the powerful advised by the wicked are even more so. Following the Tiberius poem as it does, this moral might seem all too pointedly directed at Sejanus figures who whisper into the imperial eagle's ear. As even further support for this first interpretation, we can look to the prologue to Book 3, where Phaedrus explicitly explains that the origin of fables was to provide a way for slaves to express their feelings in a non-threatening mode that would not lead to punishment. *Nunc, fabularum cur sit inventum genus, brevis docebo. servitus obnoxia, quia quae volebat non audebat dicere, affectus proprios in fabellas transtulit, calumniamque fictis elusit iocis.* (Now I will explain briefly why the type of thing called fable was invented. The slave, being liable to punishment for any offence, since he dared not say outright what he wished to say, projected his personal sentiments into fables and eluded censure under the guise of jesting with made-up stories. 33-37)

In a similar vein, Phaedrus emphasizes again and again that a fabulist does not directly say what he means, and that his audience must be able to see through the allegories of the fables. As he says in poem 4.2, *quantam in pusillis utilitatem reperies! non semper ea sunt quae videntur: decipit frons prima multos, rara mens intelligit quod interiore condidit cura angulo*. (What a lot of practical instruction you will find in tiny affairs! They are not always just what they seem to be. Many people are deceived by the façade of a structure; it is the unusual mind that perceives what the artist took pains to tuck away in some inner nook. 4-7) Furthermore, I count at least 18 fables in which the moral tucked away in allegory is itself directed at teaching us not to trust appearances in the real world, and teaching us that those who are wisest are the best at seeing through deception.⁷ With these cautionary lessons about the fabulist's hidden agenda in mind, we might easily read the *Simius Tyrannus* of 4.13 as giving the lie to the Tiberius and Augustus poems. Perhaps the lesson of 4.13 is that even human emperors, including Augustus and Tiberius from 3.10 and 2.5, are at essence apes playing ruler and abusing their power.

As tidy and fashionable as that reading may sound, we must also consider the other option, that the praise of the Roman emperors is meant more sincerely. This second reading actually also relies heavily on Phaedrus' obsession with themes of deception. We have so far left unsaid exactly why Tiberius and Augustus seem on the surface so favorably presented in these poems. The reason, which may have seemed too obvious to belabor, is that Phaedrus gives each emperor the ability to see through a potentially deceptive pretense. Tiberius sees through the flatterer's obsequious attentions and chastises him, while Augustus mystically clears up a very puzzling murder-suicide case.

⁷ Fables whose moral is about seeing through deception: 1.14, 1.19, 2.1, 2.4, 2.5, 3.3, 3.4, 3.10, 3.13, 4.2, 4.5, 4.13, 5.5, 5.7, app.5-6, app.7, app.8, app.17

Phaedrus' choice to assign hermeneutic talent to the emperors is particularly interesting as it is this same trait that Phaedrus uses to justify both his own poetic authority and that of his model, Aesop. In fact, if we now look closely at the strategies used by Phaedrus to build his authority as a fabulist, we will see how similar the description of Augustus and Tiberius seems to Phaedrus' own self-portrayal. The alignment of poetic and imperial authority that emerges will complicate that first ironic reading of 2.5 and 3.10 and push us toward the opposite perspective. Perhaps the *Simius Tyrannus* in 4.13 does not implicitly liken all human rulers to apes as we suggested above. Instead, it may simply liken to apes those who would misguidedly *imitate* a true emperor like Augustus.

2.1 The Poetic Authority of a Fabulist

Before launching into a discussion of how poetic and imperial authorities are linked in our poems, we will need to explore two questions. First, we must consider how Phaedrus constructs the poetic authority of a fabulist in general, a question that will lead us to Phaedrus' treatment of his model, Aesop. Second, we must see how Phaedrus then works to claim that fabulist's authority for himself. These questions will temporarily take our focus away from Tiberius and Augustus, but we will soon be able to apply what we have learned from Phaedrus about the role of the fabulist to a closer reading of the role of the emperors in 2.5 and 3.10. As the first sentence of Book 1 announces, Phaedrus will look to Aesop as his literary predecessor in writing fables. Indeed, not only will Aesop's stories find their way into Phaedrus' verse, but Aesop himself will appear several times as a character. By involving his model Aesop directly in the fables, Phaedrus gives himself the perfect opportunity to showcase the wisdom of the founder of his genre. It is

important to note that Aesop's wisdom, when he appears, will center on his ability to clear up mystery or trickery. In 4.5, Aesop alone can crack the secret of the "enigmatic will," and in 3.3, he is the only one out of a crowd of soothsayers who can explain why ewes are bearing lambs with human heads. As Phaedrus explains, *Aesopus ibi stans, naris emunctae senex, Natura numquam verba cui potuit dare, 'Si procurare vis ostentum, rustice, uxores' inquit 'da tuis pastoribus.'* (Aesop happened to be standing by, an old man of keen discernment, whom nature could never deceive; said he: 'if you wish to take proper measures to avert this portent, farmer, give wives to your shepherds.' 3.3.14-17) If we look back to the prologues of books 1-3, we can see that Phaedrus has good reason for emphasizing Aesop's refined *naris*. For Phaedrus, as we will see, this nose for truth is the defining trait of the fabulist.

In the prologue to Book 3, Phaedrus explains the origin of the fable as allegory used by slaves to express themselves. Despite this explanation, Phaedrus does not mean to say that fables are simply expressions of a slave's frustration. In numerous other poems, including the prologues to Books 1 and 2, Phaedrus explicitly calls attention to the didactic intent of his fables. Aesopic fables are meant primarily, he explains, to teach from example: *Exemplis continetur Aesopi genus* (2.1). Furthermore, as mentioned above, a great deal of these *exempla* aim to point out the need for hermeneutic sophistication in a world full of deception and obscurity. It seems, then, according to Phaedrus' definitions of fables and the morals he aims to present, that a fabulist's relationship with truth is particularly complicated. On the one hand, the fabulist must teach his readers to see through ambiguities that they will encounter in real life. On the other hand, since speaking the truth directly is unsafe, the fabulist must paradoxically

present these lessons about truth in an allegorical and even deceptive way.⁸ As a compromise, finally, he must find a way to teach his audience how to read the obscured lessons in his fables.⁹ In the end, we as audience learn that life must be interpreted very carefully, and we also have the chance to practice the very skills of interpretation that we will use to put the lesson to work.

Fables 7 and 8 of the Appendix work together to demonstrate that this process of extracting morals from fables also helps us to retain what we have learned better than if the moral were told on its own. In Appendix 7, Phaedrus explains that antiquity deliberately chose to wrap the truth (*involvere veritatem*, 17) in the allegories of myth. According to Phaedrus, the myth of Ixion teaches (*docet*, 2) the revolving nature of fortune, Sisyphus shows the unending toil of mankind, and Tantalus warns against miserly impulses. The wise, says Phaedrus, will understand these allegorical lessons, although the ignorant will not. By contrast, in Appendix 8, we find the Pythia issuing a long list of bare, unmasked morals for men to live by, such as *amicos sublevate, miseris parcite* and *bonis favete* (11-12). In the last couplet, however, the Pythia collapses in a frenzy, and Phaedrus explains *furens profecto, nam quae dixit perdidit* (frenzy indeed, for what she said was said in vain. 17) When read together, Appendix 7 and 8 imply that the Pythia's straightforwardly expressed moral commandments are bound to slip away, while the hidden truths in allegories will be interpreted and remembered by the worthy. It seems that in the world of a fabulist, telling the truth straightforwardly is not only unsafe, but also ineffective. To accomplish the necessary manipulations of truth, then, it is a

⁸ We see the danger of telling the truth in Fable 4.13 and App.17, for example.

⁹ See 4.2 and App. 7, where Phaedrus clearly states that both fables and myths are allegorical. In addition, we might see the use of a *promythium* or *epimythium* in many of the poems as an answer key for our training exercise of decoding the fables.

prerequisite for a fabulist to be a hermeneutic expert like Aesop. He must be able to see things clearly himself as well as to obfuscate the truth, while nonetheless finding ways to make his intended meaning clear.¹⁰ In short, the fabulist must be a better riddler than the Pythia herself.

2.2 Phaedrus' Claim to Authority as a Fabulist

We can now move to considering how Phaedrus appropriates these Aesopic characteristics we have just identified; that is, how he constructs his *own* authority as a fabulist. As we will see, Phaedrus goes even further than positioning himself as an inheritor of Aesop's talents. There is a narrative progressing over the prologues of each book in which Phaedrus claims more and more independence from and eventually superiority over his model Aesop.¹¹ In the prologue to Book 1, Phaedrus claims originality not for any content, but only for choosing the form of verse. He writes *Aesopus auctor quam materiam repperit, hanc ego polivi versibus senariis*. (Aesop is my source. He invented the substance of these fables, but I have put them into finished form in Senarian verse. 1-2) In the prologue to Book 2, we see Aesop taking a few cautious liberties with the subject matter as well: *equidem omni cura morem servabo senis; sed si libuerit aliquid interponere, dictorum sensus ut delectet varieta, bonas in partes, lector, accipias velim...* (I shall indeed take every care to preserve the spirit of the famous old man; but

¹⁰ Modern definitions of the "Fable" often include this seeming contradiction that a fable is an untrue story meant to teach the truth. See H.J. Blackham's preface and xi-xii: "a fable is a story invented to tell the truth, not a true story."(preface) See also Zafiroopoulos (2001)1-3, Van Dijk (1997) 113, Henderson (2004) 19-20, and Perry (1965) xxi-xxii. For a similar ancient definition of the fable see Theon's *Progymnasmata*, specifically p.72, line 28 in L. Spengel's *Rhetores Graeci*, vol. 2: Μῦθος ἐστὶ λόγος ψευδῆς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν.

¹¹ This narrative inscribed in the prologues has been noted by many modern critics, including Adrados (2000) 171, Champlin (2005) 107, Henderson (2001) 60-61 and (1999) 317, and Holzberg (2002) 45.

if I choose to insert something of my own, in order that the variety of expression in details may please your taste, I would have you, Reader, take it in good part. 7-11) These liberties seem to have paid off by the prologue to Book 3, where Phaedrus now claims *ego illius pro semita feci viam, et cogitavi plura quam reliquerat*. (Where Aesop made a footpath, I have built a highway, and have thought up more subjects than he left behind. 38-9) In the prologue to Book 4, we find the poet beginning to loosen Aesop's grasp on the genre of fable itself. There, Phaedrus explains that he prefers to call fables Aesopic rather than Aesop's: *quas Aesopias, non Aesopi, nomino, quia paucas ille ostendit, ego plures sero, usus vetusto genere sed rebus novis...* (which I call Aesopic rather than Aesop's, since he brought out only a few, and I compose a larger number using the old form but treating new themes...11-13) Finally, in the prologue to Book 5, Phaedrus begins, *Aesopi nomen sicubi interposuero, cui reddidi iam pridem quicquid debui, auctoritatis esse scito gratia*. (I have already paid to Aesop whatever I owed him by way of acknowledgement, and if I bring in his name hereafter anywhere, you must know that it is for the sake of his prestige. 1-3) Naming Aesop, then, is now simply a branding ploy, devoid of any other meaning for Phaedrus, who has finally paid off his debt to his model.

Nor is this progression the whole story. In these prologues, Phaedrus portrays himself as surpassing Aesop in both his poetic inspiration and the amount of material that he can invent. In between these prologues, however, Phaedrus makes the case that he surpasses Aesop also in that ability to seek out truth, which we have seen to be crucial for the fabulist. In each of Books 2-5, Phaedrus tells a fable whose moral he then revises since it may ultimately be untrue in real life. In 2.1, for example, a lion guards his dinner from a robber, but willingly offers a portion to a modest *viator*. Phaedrus concludes, however, *Exemplum egregium prorsus et laudabile; verum est aviditas dives et pauper*

pudor. (This is a shining example altogether, and worthy of praise; but the truth is that greed is rich and modesty poor. 11-12)¹² As there is very little extant of the Aesopic tradition before Phaedrus' time, it is hard to tell whether the four stories whose morals Phaedrus now questions are genuine Aesopic material or not.¹³ But even if these fables in need of revision were Phaedrus' own invention, they are certainly constructed to look Aesopic. By giving the lie to these pretty, but ultimately untrue morals, Phaedrus is able to claim perhaps even more authority than his model Aesop. Phaedrus, then, uses Aesop as a framework on which to construct his poetic authority as a fabulist. Gradually, Phaedrus outgrows his supporting scaffolding by polishing the stories into verse, by finding more material, and finally, by being an even more careful hermeneutic critic.

3. Back to Augustus and Tiberius: Poems 3.10 and 4.5

Now that we understand more fully Phaedrus' conception of his authority as a fabulist, we can begin to see how his portrayal of Augustus and Tiberius as good interpreters is a step toward aligning the emperors with himself, or at least with the figure

¹² The four poems with this sort of revised moral are 2.1, 3.4, 4.13, and 5.4. See Henderson (2004) 58-60 for a translation of and comment on 3.4. There does not seem to be any evidence that this technique of revising a moral was part of the Aesopic tradition before Phaedrus. See Adrados (2003) 502 as well as (2000) 163-4, where Adrados includes Fable 3.4 in a discussion of Phaedrus' innovative techniques because its *epimythium* denies that "the moral world he recommends exists in practice." In addition, B.E. Perry (1965) includes Fable 2.1 in his list of Phaedrus' "outright *ad hoc* inventions," in part because of its "artificial and unreal hypothesis." (lxxxv-lxxxvi).

¹³ The *Collectio Augustana* is our oldest of several anonymous collections of Aesopic fables in prose. Scholars have not agreed on a date for the *Augustana* collection, but Holzberg (2002) 3-4 dates it in the 2nd-3rd centuries AD, and Zafiroopoulos (2001) 23 places it in the 1st-3rd centuries AD. These particular fables with revised morals, however, do not appear in any of the anonymous collections catalogued in Hausrath (1940) and are therefore classified as "not-H" in Adrados' coding system. So far, these four fables are only known to us through Phaedrus. Fable 2.1 is coded as "not-H.133" in Adrados 2003 p. 463-4; Fable 3.4 is "not-H.198" on p. 502; Fable 4.13 is "not-H.283" on p. 555; and Fable 5.4 is "not-H.51" on p. 409. For Adrados' list of all "not-H" fables from Phaedrus, see Adrados (2000) 151-62.

of the fabulist. It will be useful to take a brief look now at Phaedrus' treatment of the Republican general Pompey, who was Tiberius and Augustus' predecessor in many ways. In Appendix 10, a soldier charged with theft is released because his feminine mannerisms fool Pompey into thinking that he would be too cowardly to steal. Later, this same soldier wins a glorious man-to-man combat, and Pompey realizes that he had misjudged the soldier. Like Augustus and Tiberius, then, Pompey is a protagonist in a "historical" fable with the moral that appearances can deceive. Here, however, the story shows how Pompey, unlike Tiberius and Augustus, allowed himself to be fooled by appearances. When we set Appendix 10 against the emphasis in 2.5 and 3.10 on the emperors' ability to see through appearances, Augustus and Tiberius seem much more sophisticated than their celebrated predecessor, Pompey. Still, Pompey himself seems a good bit wiser than an earlier ruler described in Phaedrus, the Hellenistic Greek tyrant Demetrius. In Fable 5.1, Demetrius spots a particularly effeminate man in line to greet him, and he asks with scorn, *quisnam cinaedus ille in conspectu meo audet cevere?* (Who is that catamite, who dares to swing his lewd hips in my presence? 15-6) When the *cinaedus* is identified as the author Menander, Demetrius, a fan of his plays, suddenly changes his tune and proclaims, *homo...feri non potest formosior.* (No man could be more fair to see. 17) We have, then, another fable about a ruler's need for keen judgment that probes behind appearances, but Demetrius, who relies on bystanders to clue him in, utterly fails the test. The Roman general Pompey, who at least realized his initial misjudgment on his own, now seems a step ahead of the Greek tyrant Demetrius. In turn, Phaedrus' Roman emperors, who cannot be fooled in the first place, will outstrip even Pompey. It should not be surprising if this step-by-step improvement in hermeneutic skill seems familiar to us by this point;

in fact, the increasing sophistication of the Roman rulers in these fables seems to have much in common with the effort we saw Phaedrus making to show his own progress vis-à-vis the original Greek Aesop. With this general link in mind, we can now look to specific moments in poems 2.5 and 3.10 where Phaedrus explicitly connects the role of the emperor and the poet. We will begin by considering the challenges to Phaedrus' poetic authority lurking in Poem 3.10, and we will find that these challenges are closely connected with questions of Augustus' imperial authority in the poem.

Summary of 3.10: The *promythium* of 3.10 warns that we should be careful to believe some things and not to believe others. Hippolytus, for instance, was killed because Phaedra was believed and Troy was razed because Cassandra was not believed. Phaedrus then goes on to offer another example, which he claims is a true story.

A freedman plots against his master, convincing him that his wife has a lover. The gullible master then pretends to go off to the country, while really still hiding in town. At night, he rushes in to the bedroom and feels a head with short hair in bed with his wife. Without even waiting for a light, he kills the man. But the intruder turns out to have been his own son who was being forced to sleep in his mother's room so as to safeguard his *aetatem adultam* (23). The master is so distraught that he kills himself, and his wife is accused because she has now inherited everything. The trial is brought to Augustus, who manages to see the truth, and the moral is again restated: that we should be careful to find the truth in things.

What is immediately striking about this poem is the fictional flavor of the supposedly historical story — a fictional flavor strong enough to call into question whether we can trust Phaedrus, the truth-sniffing fabulist himself, to tell us the truth in this poem. The plot of this fable immediately brings to mind the strange themes of the declamation schools, since stories about adultery gone horribly wrong were a standard theme in these

school exercises.¹⁴ We might look, for example, back to that odd case in Seneca's *Controversiae* 1.4 about the hero, *fortis sine manibus*, who is suing his own son for refusing to kill his mother and an adulterer caught in the act.¹⁵ One quick look through the titles of Seneca the Elder's collections is enough to see that despite being used to train lawyers, these exercises and the themes for them were not grounded in daily life, as the story in our poem purports to be.¹⁶ S. F. Bonner, explains that many declamation topics used stock characters that he believes came from New Comedy.¹⁷ These same types of stories and characters, argues Bonner, find their way into the ancient novel as well.

It is certainly very easy to find such plots in the novels, including in our earliest extant novel Chariton's *Chaireas and Callirhoe*, which was most likely written in the first century AD. The following story begins the novel's adventures: A group of former suitors of the beautiful Callirhoe plot against the young man, Chaireas, who finally won her as his bride. The suitors send a man to tell Chaireas that his bride is having an affair. Chaireas decides to pretend to go off to the country, and thus to catch her in the act. The suitors then arrange for a man who has seduced not Callirhoe but her maid to knock at the door and gain admittance. Chaireas, of course, wrongly assumes that it was his wife who

¹⁴ As Henderson (2001) 44 puts it, "a suite of *topoi* plugs the armature of the anecdote straight into the contemporary Roman *ethos* of declamatory histrionics." See also Henderson (2001) 47-8 and G. Thiele (1908) 368.

¹⁵ Elder Seneca, *Controversia* 1.4 *Fortis Sine Manibus: Adulterum cum adultera quiprehenderit, dum utrumque corpus interficiat, sine fraude sit. Liceat adulterium in matre et filio vindicare. Vir fortis in bello manus perdidit. Deprendit adulterum cum uxore, ex qua filium adulescentum habebat. Imperavit filio ut occideret; non occidit; adulter effugit. Abdicat filium.*

¹⁶ The paradox that fictional, absurd declamation themes were supposed to help train lawyers was noticed and derided in antiquity too. See Quintilian, *Inst. Orat.*: Book II. X. 3-6 *Eo quidem res ista culpa docentium reccidit ut inter praecipuas quae corrumperent eloquentiam causas licentia atque inscitia declamantium fuerit... Nam magos et pestilentiam et responsa et saeviores tragicis nouercas aliaque magis adhuc fabulosa frustra inter sponsiones et interdicta quaeremus.* See also Petronius, *Satyricon* 1: *Et ideo ego adulescentulos existimo in scholis stultissimos fieri, quia nihil ex his, quae in usu habemus, aut audiunt aut vident.*

¹⁷ S.F. Bonner (1949) 36-8.

let the other man in, and in his anger he kicks his wife—seemingly killing her. Callirhoe, in her death-like stupor, is then buried in a grand tomb; but she soon wakes up, only to be rescued/stolen by timely grave robbers. The adventures of the novel now begin.¹⁸

The story in Phaedrus' 3.10, then, is reminiscent of those in declamation (which were notoriously fake) and in the ancient novel (which is fiction). This seems like a very literary pedigree for a story that is being presented as fact: *narrabo tibi memoria quod factum est mea*. In the light of a fable about trusting and not trusting what one hears, it is fair, I think, to ask if these links to fiction should throw the truth of the story into suspicion. Furthermore, the mention of Hippolytus in line 3 might lead us to question whether the events, if we agree that they took place, have been misinterpreted. As it stands, the wife is proven innocent because she is not in bed with a strange man, but rather only with her son. With Hippolytus in the background, however, one might find the presence of the son proof of an even greater crime rather than proof of her innocence.¹⁹

It seems that Phaedrus has set up a sort of obstacle course here for his poetic voice to overcome, almost as a show of virtuosity. Somehow, despite the difficulties we have

¹⁸ For another example from the novel, one might look to the neat inversion of Phaedrus' story in Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*: Book 1, XI-XII. There, a young man is fooled into thinking that his father is off in the country and his stepmother is in bed with an adulterer. He rushes in to kill the man he finds in bed with her, but the man turns out to have been his father after all. An added incestuous twist to this version is that the stepmother herself masterminded the plot against her stepson in retaliation for his rejection of her sexual advances.

In addition, I owe to Ted Champlin the observation that Phaedrus' tale shares elements with the folklore motif of the ogre tricked into killing his own children. See K1611 in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, and 1119 or 327B in Aarne-Thompson-Uther's *The Types of International Folktales*. In this folktale, the ogre plans to kill guests in bed, but the guests have substituted his own children in their place, switching nightcaps with them. In the dark, the ogre can only feel around in the bed for his victims, and he slays his own children.

¹⁹ Declamatory themes that touch on mother-son incest: *Decl. Maiores*, 18-19

noted, Phaedrus expects the reader to trust the lesson that he teaches, even though that very lesson is to be wary of trusting. It is when we ask how this paradox could possibly work that we begin to see how Phaedrus' authority as a fabulist and Augustus' imperial authority as ruler overlap with each other in the poem. We have noted before how carefully Phaedrus shapes his claim to poetic authority, which is in large part based on his claimed gift to see through obscurity to the truth. Phaedrus has warned that he may be confusing in his expression of these truths, but he has emphasized that he personally cannot be fooled, and that if we can only interpret his allegories correctly, we will gain true insight as well. Even if this supposedly true story is just another allegory, then, we are still expected to give credence to the main lessons to be drawn from the story.²⁰ We must have developed by now a certain amount of faith that if Phaedrus is misdirecting us, it is in service of the truth. So even as he warns us to be careful of what we believe, we are to believe this lesson, to some extent, simply because it is Phaedrus who is teaching it.

Yet, interestingly for us, it's not just Phaedrus who "says so" in this poem. Augustus himself in the story draws the same moral and demonstrates the same sort of mystical power to dispel deception. Just as Aesop was the only man in the crowd to interpret the enigmatic will correctly, Augustus, while the rest were at a loss, miraculously *tenebras dispulit calumniae certumque fontem veritatis repperit*. (He had cleared away the shadows cast by calumny, and had found a sure source of truth. 42-3) One of the tools of the fabulist for scrutinizing the world is his stance as an underling. Aesop was a slave, and Phaedrus poses at least as a humble man, if not a freedman. This

²⁰ See note 10

subordinate position seems to allow the fabulist a particular, slanted view of the world that helps to accentuate his observations. Here, one might argue, *Divus Augustus* (39) benefits from a similar, though opposite, outsider perception of the world. Perhaps the view from the very top offers just as much clarity as the view from the very bottom.²¹

In fact, as he delivers his final speech, Augustus begins to sound so much like a fabulist that it is difficult to see where his speech ends, and where the poet takes up again.²² Augustus finishes his speech by saying of the father that *si mendacium subtiliter limasset, a radicibus non evertisset scelere funesto domum*. (If he had minutely sifted the false charge, he would not, by a deadly crime, have wrecked his house beyond repair. 48-50) Phaedrus then picks up by reiterating the moral: *Nil spernat auris, nec tamen credat statim, quandoquidem et illi peccant quos minime putes, et qui non peccant inpugnantur fraudibus*. (Let the ear spurn nothing, nor let it give credence all at once;... those whom you least suspect may be at fault, and those who are not at fault may be attacked. 51-3) If we remove the conventionally inserted quotation mark separating these two sentences in our text, we can hear the blending of the voices of Augustus and Phaedrus.²³ At some point between line 50 and the end of the poem, one realizes that the moral being drawn from the story is no longer spoken by Augustus admonishing the members of the court but by Phaedrus addressing the reader. Whether or not we believe Augustus and Phaedrus in

²¹ See W. Fitzgerald (2000) 26 on the slave as a philosopher “who knows how the world works through being at the bottom of the ladder.” See also W.M. Bloomer (1997) 91-93 on Phaedrus’ rhetoric as a freedman. Bloomer argues that Phaedrus presents two alternative solutions for resisting fraud: one defense is to appeal to a just patriarch, like Augustus in 3.10, and another is to learn from Phaedrus himself how to “appreciate the identity and the methods of the *fraudator*.”(93) Bloomer’s argument, then, allots similar authority to both emperor and poet.

²² Henderson (2001) 54 has noted this blending by referring to Augustus as “Phaedrus-Augustus” in his discussion of the end of 3.10.

²³ Thanks to my co-presenter at the 2006 Phaedrus Symposium at University of Pennsylvania, Denis Feeney, for discussion of the problem of where to mark the end of Augustus’ speech.

this poem, then, the two seem meant to be taken as an entity, with their authorities, poetic and imperial, performing the same work in the poem.

If we now turn to the Tiberius poem 2.5, we can see similar blending between Phaedrus' voice and Tiberius'.

Summary of 2.5: Phaedrus complains that there are too many *ardaliones*, or busy-bodies, at Rome, who huff and puff without achieving anything. They are always busy without actually having any business. To *emendare* this group, Phaedrus will tell a story, and he promises it will be worth our while to listen (*pretium est operae attendere*. 6)

When Tiberius was walking outside at his villa at Misenum, an attendant was watering down the dust in front of the emperor and making a big show of his effort. He meets with laughter, yet he runs ahead and resumes his sycophantic behavior. This time, Tiberius calls for attention and announces: *Non multum egisti et opera nequiquam perit; multo maioris alapae mecum veneunt*. (You haven't done much, and your efforts are labor lost; manumission with me stands at a much higher price. 24-25)

It was perhaps easier for Phaedrus to portray Augustus as a wise Aesop-figure in 3.10 than it was for him to do the same in 2.5 for Tiberius, an emperor who enjoyed a much less positive reputation. Certainly, Phaedrus seems to have gone out of his way to present Tiberius in a much more positive light than do the more commonly cited anecdotes concerning Tiberius.²⁴ In those more negative stories, Tiberius is often left reacting to another's witticism, as he does in the tale of the fish and the crab.²⁵ Or, should

²⁴ Champlin (2007) argues for a contemporary view of Tiberius as a folkloric "wise king" distinct from historiography's unflattering portrait of a cruel, reclusive Tiberius.

²⁵ In the infamous story of the fish and the crab, a fisherman catches Tiberius by surprise as he approaches to offer the emperor a fish. The startled emperor orders the fisherman's face to be scrubbed with the fish as punishment. When the fisherman thanks the gods that he brought a fish

he deliver a quip of his own, it is usually matched with a severe show of cruelty. We might remember, for example, the story of the man who whispered into a corpse's ear to send a message about Tiberius' mismanagement to Augustus.²⁶ Tiberius then has the man killed as he wittily adds—"Now go tell Augustus your message yourself!" Here in 2.5, however, Tiberius is able to deliver the final remark, and he does not accompany it with any ruthless punishment. More importantly, Tiberius does not simply ridicule the *atriensis* for his own enjoyment. Instead, his rebuke stands in for an *epimythium* and delivers the moral, that flatterers are wasting their labor.

In allowing Tiberius to speak his moral, Phaedrus draws attention to the link he is forging between himself and Tiberius in Fable 2.5. The Emperor and the fabulist share their impatience with, and ability to see through, the false attentions of overzealous flatterers. Henderson seems particularly to have appreciated this blending of Phaedrus and Tiberius, as he dubs Tiberius "Emperor Phaedrus" at one point in his discussion of the poem, and refers to the final remark as "Aesop-Tiberius' quip."²⁷ This final remark, *opera nequiquam perire*, is particularly crucial as it connects with the frame for the story that Phaedrus had set up in the beginning of the poem.²⁸ Phaedrus had said, *pretium est operae attendere*, that it would be worth our while to listen to the story of Tiberius and the *atriensis*. Now, taking up our poet's words himself, Tiberius signals the end of the poem.

As Henderson notes, "the opening cue retains its pertinence to the end, contrasting the jackpot pay-off for close-reading the tale with the colossal waste of energies that

rather than a crab, however, Tiberius orders his face to be lacerated with a crab as well. See Seut. *Tib.* 60.

²⁶ See Dio 57.14.2 and Henderson (2001) 194, note 7.

²⁷ Henderson (2001) 19.

²⁸ *ibid*

demands the parable for cure.”²⁹ In the end, however, Henderson wonders whether Tiberius’ final remark is a clever way of refusing the expected pay-off of both the attendant for his services and the reader for his attention. He suggests, “by *this* end of the tale, the reader’s ‘attention’ has fused with the flunkey’s ‘alacrity.’”³⁰ Yet the effort of a close reader looking for the final moral is not so completely frustrated. In fact, if Tiberius’ last line is allowed to finish Phaedrus’ opening sentence, the two uses of the word *opera* can fit together to form a final moral: in the end, “it is worth your labor to learn what will not be worth your labor.” Crucially, this moral implies that it is from such figures as Tiberius and Phaedrus that one can expect to learn what will or will not be wasted labor.

Conclusion

In closing, then, it would have been an easy interpretive call to take the more historical poems on imperial authority as disingenuous in their praise. Such a reading, however grows much more problematic once we realize how carefully Phaedrus works to align imperial authority with his own poetic authority. Particularly in 3.10, the two different types of authority are essentially linked together so that one cannot stand without the other. The good opinion of Augustus in the poem rests on whether his interpretation, which Phaedrus also sanctions, is correct. In this way, Phaedrus engineers his praise of Augustus to come with a condition. If Phaedrus is mistaken, then so was Augustus; but as long as Phaedrus’ poetic authority stands up to the test, we are free to

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ Henderson (2001) 29.

see Augustus' authority as beneficial. Yet, Phaedrus as the extradiegetic³¹ author has set traps for his interior narrative voice in the 3.10, and he does not eliminate the possibility that the authority of that poetic voice (and therefore of the emperor) is not strong enough to avoid those pitfalls. In the more traditional fables, it is relatively easy to tell when Phaedrus is being deceptive, since we all know that animals cannot really talk. Here, in the more historical poems, it has become harder to tell what is misdirection and what is genuine access to Phaedrus' coveted truth.

As we have seen, Phaedrus then seems to take great pains to make this task doubly hard. In his introduction to *Aesop's Human Zoo*, Henderson writes that fables "frame as well as expose authority."³² Here, we have explored the workings of a mechanism that helps to lend this double-edge to Phaedrus' fables. In the strangest way, Phaedrus manages to contort himself into shielding with his own body those whom we expect to be his targets. In a particularly clever move, Phaedrus' emphasis on how easily truth can be obscured serves both as the weapon used against the emperors and as their greatest defense. In other words, Phaedrus' insistence on the importance of careful interpretation is what may lead us to see these good portrayals of the emperors as disingenuous. But it is also the very same theme that seems to argue most strongly that the praise is genuine, since the emperors are distinguished for their ability to seek truth, like the poet. Although one cannot, I think, prove whether Phaedrus meant these poems to shield or to attack the emperors, I argue that there is a complicated interpretive game afoot here; a game requiring more literary and court sophistication than we might at first

³¹ By "extradiegetic" I mean the voice of Phaedrus as *auctor*, which one can sense lurking behind his narrative voice in the poem.

³² Henderson (2004) 10.

have suspected of Phaedrus and showing how liberally Phaedrus will repay the scholarly attention he has begun to receive in the last decade.

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