

THE INTERSECTION OF POETIC AND IMPERIAL AUTHORITY IN PHAEDRUS' FABLES¹

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 John Henderson and Edward 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 featuring 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 innovative 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 was in fact a freedman, perhaps from Augustus' estate, whose writings under Tiberius led to a conflict with Sejanus.³

In 2005, however, Edward Champlin redated Phaedrus' work to some time 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

¹ My thanks to Ted Champlin, John Henderson, Robert Kaster, Joshua Katz and John-Paul Young 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 text of Phaedrus is that of B.E. Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus* (Cambridge, MA, 1965).

² I refer repeatedly to the following recent studies of Phaedrus: J. Henderson, *Telling Tales on Caesar: Roman Stories from Phaedrus* (Oxford, 2001); J. Henderson, 'Phaedrus' fables: the original corpus', *Mnemosyne* 52.3 (1999), 308–29; E. Champlin, 'Phaedrus the fabulous', *JRS* 95 (2005), 97–123. I also refer to two recent studies of the ancient fable: F.R. Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable* (3 vols.), tr. L.A. Ray (Leiden, 1999, 2000 and 2003) and N. Holzberg, *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction*, tr. C. Jackson-Holzberg (Indiana, 2002). There is also a new bibliography as well as a new commentary: R.W. Lamb, *Annales Phaedriani: Rough Notes Towards a Bibliography of Phaedrus* (Lowestoft, 1995) and E. Oberg, *Phaedrus-Kommentar* (Stuttgart, 2000).

³ For this traditional biography, see P.L. Schmidt, 'Phaedrus', *Der Neue Pauly* 9 (2000), 708–9. H. MacL. Currie, 'Phaedrus the fabulist', *ANRW* II 32.1 (1984), 497–513, at 501, offers a similar biography but cautions that 'sure interpretation [of Phaedrus' autobiographical hints] is not easily achieved'.

⁴ Champlin (n. 2), particularly 101–2.

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 *Latinis ... pretium litteris* (4 epil. 6). 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 colours his depiction 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, both poems 3.10 and 2.5 represent the emperors positively as just and wise leaders. I say surprisingly because it is one of Phaedrus' most frequent morals in his 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 travellers come to a territory occupied by apes, and the chief of the apes decides to act *sicut viderat imperatorem aliquando*.⁷ 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 traveller 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, face 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 the one hand, we might assume that the host of negative lessons about *imperium* from the animal kingdom is meant to colour 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, however, we will see how Phaedrus has complicated our question by aligning his portrayal of imperial authority with the poetic authority that he constructs for himself as a fabulist. In the end, we will understand better how this intersection of imperial and poetic authority allows Phaedrus simultaneously to denounce and to defend the emperors who wield power in his historical fables.

⁵ Champlin (n. 2), 117.

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

⁷ It should be noted that the body of Fable 4.13 survives only in a prose paraphrase.

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 account of Tiberius is the story of the Eagle, the Crow and the Tortoise (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, in which 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, | brevi docebo. Servitus obnoxia, | quia quae volebat non audebat dicere, | affectus proprios in fabellas transtulit, | calumniamque fictis elusit iocis* ('now I will tell briefly why the kind of thing called a fable was invented. The slave, being subject to punishment, because he did not dare say what he wanted to say, transferred his own feelings into fables, and used made-up jests to escape blame', 3 prol. 33–7).⁸

In a similar vein, Phaedrus again and again stresses 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* ('how much usefulness you will find in trifles! They are not always what they seem to be. A facade can deceive many, and only a rare mind understands what has been hidden carefully in an inner corner', 4.2.4–7). Furthermore, I count at least eighteen fables in which the moral tucked away in allegory is itself geared to teach us that appearances cannot be trusted and that the wisest are those who best see through deception.⁹ 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. The lesson of 4.13 may be 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

⁸ Here, *fictis* has a clever double meaning, since it refers to the fictitious nature of fables while also pointing out that this fictitious nature of fables is itself a fiction. In other words, the jokes of the fabulist are fictional in two ways: on the one hand, they are based on fictional stories, but on the other hand, they are not simply jokes, because they do convey truth. Henderson (n. 2, 2001), 59 preserves the double meaning in his translation: 'jollied away incrimination with fictional fun'. This play with *fictis* retrospectively adds another level of meaning to the opening lines of the prologue to Book 1, where Phaedrus assures would-be critics that he is only joking (*iocari*) with made-up fables (*fictis fabulis*).

⁹ 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, 7, 8, 17.

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 favourably presented in these poems. The reason is that Phaedrus gives each emperor the ability to see through a potentially deceptive pretence. Tiberius in 2.5 sees through a flatterer's obsequious attentions and chastises him, while Augustus mystically clears up a very puzzling murder-suicide case in 3.10. 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 portrayals of Augustus and Tiberius seem to Phaedrus' own self-presentation. The intersection of poetic and imperial authority that emerges will complicate that first ironic reading of 2.5 and 3.10 and push toward the opposite perspective. Perhaps the portrait of the *simius tyrannus* in 4.13 is not meant to liken all human rulers to apes, but only 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 centre 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: *Aesopus ibi stans, naris emunctae senex, | Natura numquam verba cui potuit dare, | 'si procurare vis ostentum, rustice, | uxores' inquit 'da tuis pastoribus.'* ('Aesop was standing there, the old keen-nosed man whom Nature was never able to fool. He said, "If you wish to avert this portent, farmer, then 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, or literally 'clean', *naris*. For Phaedrus, this nose for truth is the defining trait of the fabulist. In the prologue to Book 3, we saw Phaedrus explain the origin of the fable as allegory used by slaves to convey their feelings. Still, 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 prol. 1). Furthermore, as mentioned above, a large number 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 chooses 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.¹⁰ As a compromise, finally, he must find a way to teach his audience how to read the lessons that are obscured in his fables.¹¹ In the end, we as audience learn that life must be interpreted very carefully, and we also have the chance to practise 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 exercise of extracting morals from fables 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, and Phaedrus explains that this *virgo furens* is *furens profecto, nam quae dixit perdidit* ('truly in a frenzy, for she wasted what she said', 17).¹² When read together, Appendix 7 and 8 imply that the Pythia's moral commandments are bound to slip away, while the hidden truths in allegories will be actively interpreted and remembered by the worthy. It seems that in the world of a fabulist, telling the truth too straightforwardly is not only unsafe, but also ineffective. To accomplish the necessary manipulations of truth, then, a fabulist must be a hermeneutic expert like Aesop. He must be able to see things clearly himself as well as to obfuscate the truth, while none the less finding ways to make his intended meaning clear.¹³ In short, the fabulist should be a better riddler than the Pythia herself.

¹⁰ We see the danger of telling the truth in e.g. Fable 4.13 and App. 17.

¹¹ 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.

¹² The phrase *furens profecto* is a pun on the Pythia's traditional prophetic insanity; as the anonymous reader for *CQ* puts it, "'crazy" all right, she wasted her breath'.

¹³ Modern definitions of the 'Fable' often include this seeming contradiction that a fable is an untrue story meant to teach the truth, e.g. H.J. Blackham, *The Fable as Literature* (London, 1985), preface and xi–xii. As Blackham notes in his preface, 'a fable is a story invented to tell the truth, not a true story'. See also: J. Henderson *Aesop's Human Zoo* (Chicago, 2004), 19–20; Perry (n. 1), xxi–xxii; G.-J. Van Dijk, *AINOI, LOGOI, MYTHOI* (Leiden, 1997), 113; C.A. Zafiroopoulos, *Ethics in Aesop's Fables: the Augustana Collection* (Leiden, 2001), 1–3. 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 (Leipzig, 1854, repr. 1966): *Μῦθος ἐστὶ λόγος ψευδὴς εἰκονίζων ἀλήθειαν*. Finally, see n. 8 above for Phaedrus' own way of summarizing the problem with a play on the word *factis*.

2.2 PHAEDRUS' CLAIM TO AUTHORITY AS A FABULIST

We can now move to considering how Phaedrus appropriates these Aesopic characteristics that we have just identified, that is, how he constructs his *own* authority as a fabulist. As we shall see, Phaedrus goes even further than positioning himself as an heir to Aesop's talents. There is a narrative, progressing over the prologues of each book, in which Phaedrus claims increasing independence from and eventually superiority over his model Aesop.¹⁴ 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* ('I have polished into Senarian verse the material that Aesop found as an author', 1–2). In the prologue to Book 2, we see Phaedrus 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 varietas, | bonas in partes, lector, accipias velim* ('I will indeed preserve with every care the old man's custom; but if it is pleasing to add something, so that the variety of expression should tickle your fancy, I would like you, Reader, to take it in good part', 8–11). 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* ('I have made a highway where Aesop made a footpath, and I have come up with more 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* ('[fables] which I call Aesopic rather than Aesop's, because he told a few, but I am making up more, using the old form but new subjects', 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* ('if I insert anywhere the name of Aesop, to whom I have already now given whatever I owed, know that it is for the sake of his *auctoritas*', 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.¹⁵ Moreover, the use here of *interposuero* echoes the prologue to Book 2, where Phaedrus asks his readers to bear with him if he should 'insert something' into Aesop's fables (*si libuerit aliquid interponere*). The repetition of the same verb *interpono*, in a similar conditional construction, highlights the reversal that Phaedrus hopes has taken place over the course of the last four books of fables. Here in Book 5, instead of apologizing for inserting a bit of Phaedrus into Aesop's fables, Phaedrus apologizes for inserting a bit of Aesop into his own fables.

Nor is this progression the whole story. We have seen how Phaedrus claims in these prologues to surpass 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 the ability to seek out truth, which we have seen to be crucial for the fabulist. In each of Books 2–5, Phaedrus tells a

¹⁴ This narrative inscribed in the prologues has been noted by several modern critics: Adrados (n. 2, 2000), 171; Champlin (n. 2), 107; Henderson (n. 2, 2001), 60–1 and (n. 2, 1999), 317; Holzberg (n. 2), 45.

¹⁵ Henderson (n. 2, 2001), 153 remarks that Aesop is used here 'as a designer label'.

fable whose moral he then revises since it may ultimately be untrue in real life.¹⁶ In 2.1, for example, a lion guards his dinner from a robber, but willingly offers a portion to a modest *viator*. Phaedrus, however, concludes: *exemplum egregium prorsus et laudabile; | verum est aviditas dives et pauper pudor* ('this is truly an excellent and praiseworthy example; the truth is, though, that avarice is rich and decency poor', 11–12). Since there is very little Aesopic material extant before Phaedrus' time, it is hard to know for sure what is Aesopic and what is Phaedrus' innovation. Still, the technique of revising morals seems not to have been a part of the Aesopic tradition before Phaedrus.¹⁷ A separate question is whether the four fables in need of revision are themselves genuinely Aesopic. Although the current consensus is that all four are first found in Phaedrus, it is nevertheless clear that the fables are constructed to look like Aesop's and could fit quite seamlessly into an Aesopic collection.¹⁸ By giving the lie to these pretty, but ultimately untrue morals, Phaedrus is able to claim perhaps even more authority than his model Aesop, whom he uses 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 EMPERORS: POEMS 3.10 AND 2.5

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 of the fabulist. It will be useful to take a brief look now at Phaedrus' treatment of the Republican general Pompey, who was in many ways the predecessor of Augustus and Tiberius. 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

¹⁶ The four poems with this revised moral are 2.1, 3.4, 4.13 and 5.4.

¹⁷ See Adrados (n. 2, 2003), 502 and (n. 2, 2000), 163–4, where Fable 3.4 is included in a discussion of Phaedrus' innovative techniques because its *epimythium* denies that 'the moral world he recommends exists in practice'. In addition, Perry (n. 1), lxxxv includes Fable 2.1 in his list of Phaedrus' 'outright *ad hoc* inventions', in part because of its 'artificial and unreal hypothesis'.

¹⁸ 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 (n. 2), 3–4 dates it in the second or third centuries A.D. These particular fables with revised morals, however, do not appear in any of the anonymous collections catalogued in A. Hausrath, *Corpus fabularum Aesopicarum* (Leipzig, 1940), and are therefore classified as 'not-H' in the coding system used by Adrados (n. 2, 2000), 151–62. So far, then, it seems that these four fables are known to us only through Phaedrus.

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 in my sight to swing his hips so lewdly?', 15–6). When the *cinaedus* is identified as the author Menander, Demetrius, a fan of his plays, suddenly changes his tune and proclaims: *homo ... fieri non potest formosior* ('no man could possibly be more handsome', 18). We have, then, another fable about a ruler's need for keen judgement 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 misjudgement 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.¹⁹ 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 Fable 3.10, and we will find that these challenges are closely connected with questions of Augustus' imperial authority in the poem.

Summary of Fable 3.10

Phaedrus begins with the *promythium* that it is dangerous both to believe and not to believe (*periculosum est credere et non credere*). One must, he explains, carefully search out the truth before rushing to foolish judgments. Phaedrus offers two examples to illustrate his point: Hippolytus died because his stepmother was believed, and Troy fell because Cassandra was not believed. Still, in case we have trouble taking ancient legends seriously, says Phaedrus, he will give us an example that happened within his own memory (*sed, fabulosam ne vetustatem eleves, | narrabo tibi memoria quod factum est mea*).

There was a certain *paterfamilias* who loved his wife and son dearly. But, just before he celebrated his son's sixteenth birthday, he was taken aside by a wicked freedman, who was scheming to set himself up as heir. The freedman falsely accused the chaste wife of adultery and concocted a story that her lover was making nightly visits to the house. Enraged, the *paterfamilias* plotted to catch his wife in the act. He pretended to leave for the country but hid in town instead. The next night, he rushed into his wife's bedroom unannounced. What the *paterfamilias* did not know, however, was that his wife had forced their son to sleep in her bed that night, so that she could safeguard his new adulthood (*aetatem adultam servans*). In the pitch-black dark, the husband felt two bodies in the bed and assumed that he had caught the adulterer. He groped around blindly to find the one with the short head of hair, and slew him on the spot. When the servants brought a light, however, he saw his wife sleeping innocently and realized that he

¹⁹ It is true, however, that the fables of the Appendix Perottina are not assigned securely to any one original book of Phaedrus. We cannot, then, be completely certain that the portrait of Pompey came after the portrait of Demetrius as part of a narrative of progression.

had killed his own son. In desperation, the *paterfamilias* killed himself with the very sword he had unwittingly used to slay his own son. Yet, since the wife was about to inherit all of her husband's property, she now attracted a great deal of suspicion. Her accusers dragged her in front of the Centumviral Court at Rome, but the judges were so perplexed by the case that they appealed to *divus Augustus* for help. Miraculously, Augustus divined the truth and 'dispelled the shadows of false accusation' (*tenebras dispulit calumniae*, 42).

At this point in the poem, Phaedrus puts into Augustus' mouth seven verses of direct speech, in which the emperor proclaims the wife's innocence, orders the freedman to be punished, and warns us all never to believe anything without investigating it carefully (44–50). Directly following Augustus' speech, Phaedrus restates his own moral once more: *nil spernat auris, nec tamen credat statim, | quandoquidem et illi peccant quos minime putes, | et qui non peccant inpuignantur fraudibus* ('let the ear dismiss nothing, but nor should it immediately believe everything, since those whom you least expect can be at fault, and those who are not at fault may be fraudulently attacked', 51–3).

What is immediately striking about this poem is the fictional flavour of the supposedly historical story – a fictional flavour 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 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.²⁰ 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.²¹ 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.²² S.F. Bonner explains that many declamation topics used stock characters that he believes came from New Comedy.²³ 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 *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, which was most likely written in the first century A.D.²⁴ The following story begins the novel's adventures: A group of former suitors of the beautiful Callirhoe plot against the young man, Chaereas, who finally won her as his bride. The suitors tell Chaereas that his bride is having

²⁰ As Henderson (n. 2, 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 (n. 2, 2001), 47–8 and G. Thiele, 'Phädrus-Studien. 2', *Hermes* 43 (1908), 337–72, at 368.

²¹ Sen. *Controv.* 1.4: *Fortis Sine Manibus: Adulterum cum adultera qui deprehenderit, dum utrumque corpus interficiat, sine fraude sit. Liceat adulterium in matre et filio vindicare. Vir fortis in bello manus perdidit. Deprehendit adulterum cum uxore, ex qua filium adulescentum habebat. Imperavit filio ut occideret; non occidit; adulter effugit. Abdicat filium.*

²² The paradox that fictional, absurd declamation themes were supposed to help train lawyers was noticed and derided in antiquity, too. See Petron. *Sat.* 1, and Quint. *Inst.* 2.10.3–6.

²³ S.F. Bonner, *Roman Declamation in the Late Republic and Early Empire* (Liverpool, 1949), at 36–8.

²⁴ The interplay between declamation and prose fiction is central to D. van Mal Maeder, *La fiction des declamations* (Leiden, 2007). For the influence of rhetorical training on *Chaereas* and *Callirhoe* specifically, see K. de Temmerman, 'Chaereas revisited. Rhetorical control in Chariton's 'ideal' novel *Callirhoe*', *CQ* 59.1 (2009), 247–62.

an affair, and he decides to catch her in the act by pretending to go off to the country. While Chaereas keeps watch on the house, the suitors arrange for a young man who has seduced Callirhoe's maid to knock at the door and gain admittance. Chaereas, of course, wrongly assumes that it was his wife, not her maid, who opened the door. In his anger, he rushes in and kicks Callirhoe – seemingly killing her. Callirhoe, in a death-like stupor, is then buried in a grand tomb; but she soon wakes up, only to be rescued/stolen by timely grave robbers.²⁵

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 the *promythium* 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.²⁶

Phaedrus seems to have 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 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 alleged 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.²⁷ 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.

²⁵ For another example from the novel, one can look to the neat inversion of Phaedrus' story in Heliod. *Aeth.* 1.11–12. There, a young man is fooled into thinking that his father is off in the country while 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. This motif is classified as K1611 in S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols. (Indiana, 1955–8) and as 1119 or 327B in H.-J. Uther, *The Types of International Folktales*, 3 vols. (Helsinki, 2004). 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.

²⁶ Declamatory themes that touch on mother-son incest: [Quint.], *Decl.* 18–19.

²⁷ See above, n. 13.

Yet, it is 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 able to interpret baffling portents, Augustus, while the rest were at a loss, miraculously *tenebras dispulit calumniae, | certumque fontem veritatis repperit* ('dispelled the shadows of false accusation and found an unerring 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 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.²⁸

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.²⁹ Augustus finishes his speech by saying of the father that *'si mendacium | subtiliter limasset, a radicibus | non evertisset scelere funesto domum'* ('"if he had finely investigated the tale, he would not have wholly destroyed his house with a deadly crime"', 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 impugnantur fraudibus* ('let the ear dismiss nothing, but nor should it immediately believe everything, since those whom you least expect can be at fault, and those who are not at fault may be fraudulently 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.³⁰ 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 this poem, then, the two seem meant to be taken as an entity, with their twin 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 the voices of Phaedrus and Tiberius.

Est ardalionum quaedam Romae natio,
trepide concursans, occupata in otio,
gratis anhelans, multa agendo nil agens,
sibi molesta et aliis odiosissima.
Hanc emendare, si tamen possum, volo
vera fabella; pretium est operae attendere.
Caesar Tiberius cum petens Neapolim

5

²⁸ W.M. Bloomer, *Latinity and Literary Society at Rome* (Philadelphia, 1997), 93 touches on the link between Phaedrus' freedman *persona* and the emperor Augustus as he subtitles a section of his chapter on Phaedrus' rhetoric as a freedman, 'Preventers of fraud: patriarch, poet and audience.' In Bloomer's view, Phaedrus presents two different solutions for resisting fraud. The first is appealing to a just patriarch, like Augustus in 3.10, and the second is to learn from Phaedrus himself how to 'appreciate the identity and the methods of the *fraudator*'.

²⁹ Henderson (n. 2, 2001), 54 has noted this blending by referring to Augustus as 'Phaedrus-Augustus' in his discussion of the end of 3.10.

³⁰ Thanks to Denis Feeney, my co-presenter at the 2006 Phaedrus Symposium at University of Pennsylvania, for discussion of the problem of where to mark the end of Augustus' speech.

in Misenensem villam venisset suam,
 quae monte summo posita Luculli manu
 prospectat Siculum et respicit Tuscum mare, 10
 ex alte cinctis unus atriensibus,
 cui tunica ab umeris linteo Pelusio
 erat dstricta, cirris dependentibus,
 perambulante laeta domino viridia,
 alveolo coepit ligneo conspargere 15
 humum aestuantem, iactans officium comes;
 sed deridetur. Inde notis flexibus
 praecurrit alium in xystum, sedans pulverem.
 Agnoscit hominem Caesar remque intellegit:
 'Heus!' inquit dominus. Ille enimvero adsilit, 20
 donationis alacer certae gaudio.
 Tum sic iocata est tanta maiestas ducis:
 'Non multum egisti et opera nequiquam perit;
 multo maioris alapae mecum veneunt.' (Fable 2.5)

There is a certain tribe of busybodies at Rome, anxiously running every which way, always busy without having any business, huffing and puffing, and, with great fanfare, accomplishing nothing. They are both annoying to themselves and hateful to others. I want, if I can, to put this tribe right with a true fable. It is worthwhile to listen.

Tiberius Caesar was traveling to Naples and had reached his country house at Misenum, which, built by the hand of Lucullus on the top of the mountain, surveys the Sicilian sea in front and the Tuscan sea behind. There was one of those high-girt stewards there, and he was wearing his tunic drawn down from his shoulders with Pelusian linen complete with hanging fringes. This steward begins, while his master Tiberius strolls through the lush greenery, to sprinkle the hot earth with water from a wooden pot, making a big show of his duty as an attendant; but people laugh at him. From there, he runs ahead using shortcuts into another promenade and begins settling the dust again. Caesar recognizes the man and realizes what he is after. 'Hey!' says Master Caesar, and the attendant, of course, jumps right over to him, quick with the anticipation of a sure reward. Then, His Royal Majesty teased him, saying: 'you did not accomplish much, and your effort was not at all worthwhile; with me, manumission comes at a much greater cost.'

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.³¹ 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.³² Or, should 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 begs a corpse to bring a message to the dead Augustus about Tiberius' mismanagement.³³ Tiberius then has the man killed and wittily adds, 'Now go tell

³¹ E. Champlin, 'Tiberius the wise', *Historia* 57.4 (2008), 408–25, argues, however, for a contemporary view of Tiberius as a folkloric 'wise king' distinct from historiography's unflattering portrait of a cruel, reclusive Tiberius.

³² In the infamous story of the fish and the crab, a fisherman approaching to offer the emperor a fish catches Tiberius by surprise. The startled emperor orders the fisherman's face to be scrubbed with the fish as punishment. When the fisherman thanks heaven that he brought a fish rather than a crab, however, Tiberius orders his face to be lacerated with a crab as well. See Suet. *Tib.* 60.

³³ See Dio Cass. 57.14 and Henderson (n. 2, 2001), 194, note 7.

Augustus your message yourself!' Here in 2.5, however, Tiberius is able to deliver the final remark, and he does not accompany it with the sort of ruthless punishment that we have come to expect from him.³⁴ 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 efforts.

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'.³⁵ This final remark, *opera nequiquam perit*, is especially crucial as it connects with the frame for the story that Phaedrus had set up in the beginning of the poem.³⁶ 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 demands the parable for cure'.³⁷ 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"'.³⁸ 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 effort to learn what will not be worth your effort'. 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 effort.

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 join so seamlessly that one cannot stand without the other. The good opinion of Augustus in the poem rests on the veracity of his interpretation, which Phaedrus also sanctions. 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 see Augustus' authority as beneficial. Still, Phaedrus as the extradi-

³⁴ Although, of course, the threat of physical punishment still lurks behind Tiberius' reference to *alapae*, the ceremonial slaps on the cheek that a slave received upon being manumitted.

³⁵ Henderson (n. 2, 2001), 19.

³⁶ Henderson (n. 2, 2001), 19.

³⁷ Henderson (n. 2, 2001), 19.

³⁸ Henderson (n. 2, 2001), 29.

egetic³⁹ author has set traps for his interior narrative voice in 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 his introduction to *Aesop's Human Zoo*, Henderson emphasizes the intrinsic duplicity of fables, which 'frame as well as expose authority'.⁴⁰ Here, we have explored the workings of a mechanism that helps to lend this double edge to Phaedrus' poetry. Strangely, 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 defence. In other words, Phaedrus' insistence on the importance of careful interpretation is what may lead us to see these positive portraits 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. Our original question asked whether Phaedrus meant these poems to shield or to attack the emperors, but the fables' ambivalence has made it impossible to arrive at a straightforward answer. Instead, we have found a complicated interpretive game in the fables that continuously pits liberty against authority; a game requiring more literary and court sophistication than we might at first have suspected of Phaedrus and showing how liberally Phaedrus will repay the scholarly attention he has begun to receive in the last decade.

Princeton University

BRIGITTE B. LIBBY
bllibby@princeton.edu

³⁹ By 'extradiegetic' I mean the voice of Phaedrus as *auctor*, which one can sense lurking behind his narrative voice in the poem.

⁴⁰ Henderson (n. 13), 10. See also Henderson (n. 2, 2001), 2, which stresses how each fable can be read from two perspectives, walking a 'two way street between throne and gutter'. The double-edged nature of the fables is also cleverly reflected in the dual illustrations with which Henderson heads each chapter. Phaedrus himself calls attention to the *duplex dos* of fables in line 3 of the prologue to his first book.