

Sic saepe ingenia calamitate intercidunt. New Approaches to Phaedrus. An Essay in Nine Chapters and One Preliminary Remark*

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ABSTRACT

The fables of Phaedrus have long been neglected or have received harsh criticism. If they have been focussed on at all, they were often regarded only as part of the history of motifs or were interpreted as statements of a freed-man who uses the fable as a means of veiled accusation against the ruling class though not calling an uprising but preaching adaptation. In this paper, this biographical approach is questioned. The aim is to show that almost all of these «personal» statements are *topoi* shaped by the Hellenistic poet Callimachus and picked up in a great number by the poets of the late republic and Augustan age. Phaedrus seems to play a witty game by taking up these *topoi*, exaggerating them and applying them to an inappropriate genre — the fable — to turn them upside down.

KEYWORDS: Phaedrus, Callimachus, Fable

0. Preliminary Remark

Giving a lecture about Phaedrus requires a certain amount of courage because scholars commonly make condescending remarks about this author. It

* The following paper is a summary and a continued development of my thoughts on Phaedrus; cf. GÄRTNER 2007, 2011 and 2015.

was not only LESSING who was often not particularly enamored of this Latin fable writer¹. For example, SCHANZ, a famous German scholar, wrote in 1913:

Phaedrus is no genius, he shows little poetic talents, he is nothing but a faithful worker. In addition, he is no superior character; he is lacking the serenity of the soul, and he bothers his readers with his lamentations; vanity is in control of his thinking and being and lets him be unjust even against him, to whom he owes his own fame, to the master Aesop².

THIELE spoke of the poorness of Phaedrus's poetry, CANKIĆ of the little verses of good old Phaedrus³. Over the last few years, a couple of new academic works on Phaedrus have been published, but most of the time they deal with the history of motives, especially the stoic and cynic background, or with the political and social classification of the «*libertus* (freedman) as poet» and the literary classification of the fables near to satire⁴. These texts were seldom treated as literary gems and there has been little serious focus on aspects that are taken for granted if we look at a poem by Catullus, Horace, Propertius or Ovid. But if we focus on Phaedrus' fables in this way, we find texts that have a place in literary tradition and in the discourse of their time in a playful, witty and original way and by doing this they become fables about poetry.

1. The *communis opinio* and my questions

The *communis opinio* about Phaedrus could be summarized like this: Phaedrus is said to be born around 20-15 BC in Greece, more precisely in Macedonia, coming to Rome as a slave, where he worked at the court in educational function and was set free by Augustus. It is believed that he wrote two books of fables, that he was accused by Seianus, the prefect of the praetorians, because Seianus, like many others, felt offended by the fables, and that Phaedrus published three other books after the death of Seianus, in which he showed growing emancipation from his model Aesop, but also growing pessimism and disappointment because of a lack of acknowledgement. Phaedrus is said to deal out moral criticism relentlessly; furthermore, we are allegedly given the opportunity to listen to the voice of the «man in the street»,

1. LESSING 1759, 413: «mit dem lateinischen Fabeldichter meist nicht so recht zufrieden».
2. SCHANZ 1913, 49: «Phaedrus ist kein Genie, er verrät wenig dichterische Anlagen, er ist nichts als ein treuer Arbeiter. Er ist auch kein hochstehender Charakter; ihm fehlt die Heiterkeit der Seele, und er belästigt den Leser mit seinen Klagen; die Eitelkeit beherrscht sein Denken und Sein und lässt ihn selbst dem gegenüber ungerecht erscheinen, dem er doch seinen Ruhm verdankt, dem Meister Aesop».
3. THIELE 1906, 575: «die Armseligkeit der Poesie des Phädrus»; CANKIĆ 1974, 261: «Verslein des guten armen Phaedrus».
4. For a survey, cf. GÄRTNER 2017.

who — being a freedman — feels involved with the *plebs* and knows how to use the fable as the only possibility for — veiled — protest, but at the same time he does not call for an uprising, but is preaching adaptation. This is more or less what you usually find in handbooks or introductions about Phaedrus' life and aims⁵.

However, there are no reliable documents on the life of our author. We have the fables themselves and, in the manuscripts from the 9th century, we find the note in the title, that Phaedrus was a freedman of Augustus. Martial gives us the enigmatic (and textually unclear) remark about the *improbi iocos Phaedri* (III 20, 5)⁶. And Seneca and Quintilian talk about fables in Latin Literature, but do not mention Phaedrus⁷.

The first clear traces of a reception are found in the poems of Avian, who wrote around 400 AD, as well as in the later prose paraphrases (mostly known as *Romulus*). These (non-existing) results lead to different conclusions.

In the majority of academic work on Phaedrus, scholars do not differentiate between the “I” and the narrator, meaning between the abstract or implicit and the empiric or real author. The remark found only in the manuscripts that Phaedrus was a freedman of Augustus then becomes the starting point to interpret the fables from the point of view of this alleged freedman and thus to gain more information about his biography. For example, one can cite LA PENNA who was very influential: «La schiavitù [...] è il primo dato biografico essenziale per capire l'opera»⁸. Even in more recent research on Phaedrus, the identity of the freedman is considered «authentic» and «exclusive» and becomes the basis for the whole interpretation⁹. Mostly, the poet is seen as the mouthpiece of the underprivileged. There have been attempts to fill the gaps in this constellation with biographic «facts» gathered from the fables. Such attempts range from cautious assumptions to the reconstruction of a whole fantasy novel by DE LORENZI¹⁰.

Considering these approaches, it must be stressed that almost all so called «information» about his person and life are conclusions drawn from the poems, where one should be very careful as many of those «facts» can be explained as literary motives. The remark in the manuscripts that Phaedrus was a freedman of Augustus, could be nothing else but an extrapolation from the text itself — a procedure very common in ancient biography¹¹. Furthermore,

5. Cf. e. g. LA PENNA 1968; CANCEK 1974; SCHMIDT 1979; CURRIE 1984; DEMANDT 1991; OBERG 2000; BLÄNSDORF 2000; BAEZA ANGULO 2011; HOLZBERG 2012a; RENDA 2012. For a survey, cf. GÄRTNER 2015, 21-36.

6. Cf. GÄRTNER 2015, 56-58.

7. Sen. *dial.* XI 8, 3; Quint. *inst.* I 9, 2; V 11, 19-20; cf. GÄRTNER 2015, 56-57.

8. LA PENNA 1968, VIII-IX; cf. LA PENNA 1961; BAEZA ANGULO 2011, XVI.

9. BLOOMER 1997, 73-77; RENDA 2012; cf. CANCEK 1974, 271-272; CHRISTES 1975 and 1979; CURRIE 1984; KÜPPERS 1990; MAÑAS NÚÑEZ 1998, 20-24; ADRADOS 1999, 120-126; MARCHESI 2005; COMPTON 2006, 304-305; CASCÓN DORADO 2005, 16-24; BAEZA ANGULO 2011, XV-XX.

10. DE LORENZI 1955; cf. HERRMANN 1950. Cf. fn. 29.

11. An example is the remark in the biography of Virgil, Don. *vita Verg.* 1, that his father was a beekeeper, surely an extrapolation from *georg.* IV.

the textual transmission is unclear as *libertus* could after all be just a confusion of the abbreviation of *lib.*, meaning *liber* not *libertus*.

Moreover, the method of extrapolating biographic facts from poetry is always questionable, but it is particularly difficult when working with fables, since a fable is — considering its nature — just an instrument to illustrate a context, as Aristoteles has already shown in his rhetoric¹². And this was how fables were used initially. The first collections of (prose) fables were made for orators to find fables fitting for their arguments. The collection of artful fables as a literary genre is a late development and it is Phaedrus who is the first to do so. One has always to consider that we now have — to put it simply — a collection of illustrations, but no context. That is why we are always tempted to contextualize fables, but we should be aware of the danger of circular reasoning.

My criticism of a biographical interpretation is due to this danger of circular reasoning: that Phaedrus is a freedman is, for the most part, a conclusion drawn from the fables, but it serves as a basis for the interpretation of those same fables, while more «evidence» for the social classification of poet and readers is found in the fables.

I also have many questions regarding the message of the fables. If Phaedrus dealt out moral criticism and preached adaptation, where did he do that? What was the communicative space of the fables? The relationship between poet and recipient in his fables is puzzling. In many fables, Aesop enters the scene and — intradiegetically — comments on certain events or tells his *audience* a fable; of course, we have to think of an oral presentation for a single listener or for a group¹³. Reading this, we are tempted to imagine a similar form of communication for Phaedrus himself and his own fables. However, here we have artful poems in written form. Whatever one might think about Phaedrus' poetological statements, it is obvious that he not only claims to write for a reading and well-read recipient¹⁴, but that he actually does that, for the meaning of many fables is only completely revealed to the reader through intertextual references. Besides, when he demands in his longest prologue (III), that the reader of his books should dedicate himself to *otium*¹⁵, this points to a «reading room» outside of the *res publica*. Influence on politics or society is therefore more or less impossible, because the recipients have to be considered in this context. Did the poet speak to suppressed slaves? Certainly not. Or to broad sections of the underprivileged *plebs* or the freedmen as is often argued? Certainly not, as only a very small proportion of these classes had access to literature. What remains is the well-educated member of the upper class (the *nobiles*) or the rich freedman; and surely they were not inclined to improve morally because they were reading fables.

12. Cf. Arist. *Rb.* 1393 a 23-1394 a 8.

13. Cf. I 2; 6; II 3; III 3; 5; 14; 19; IV 5; 18; app. 9; 12; 13; 17; 20.

14. Cf. e. g. III prol. 1; IV prol. 14-20.

15. III prol. 1-3: *Phaedri libellos legere si desideras, | uaces oportet, Eutyche, a negotiis, | ut liber animus sentiat uim carminis*; cf. III prol. 13; V 1, 7.

Also, did Phaedrus really choose the fable because he could thereby tell a 'veiled' truth? How are we meant to understand those statements where Phaedrus explicitly claims that he is hiding something in his fables? This raises the curiosity of the readers, prompting them to look for allusions. And this is what they have done ever since, above all the classical philologists, as we think that we know Phaedrus. Finally, it must be emphasized that Phaedrus himself points to the ambiguity or difficult interpretation of his poems (IV 2) and, at the end of one fable, he offers three interpretations, which, as he proudly says, the reader himself would never have guessed; and we as the readers do certainly agree (as all three of them seem bizarre)¹⁶. But if we take this claim seriously, the initial function of the fable, that is the illustration, would be reduced to absurdity. Therefore we have to ask whether Phaedrus is showing us, the readers, that «the right» interpretation of a fable is impossible, and we have to ask whether Phaedrus as the inventor of a «humble» new genre is mocking the pretensions of the highly allusive poetry of his predecessors in the late republic and Augustan age.

In the following eight chapters, we will look at some of Phaedrus' statements about «himself». The aim is to show that almost all of these «personal statements» are *topoi* shaped by the Hellenistic poet Callimachus and picked up in a great number by the poets of the late republic and Augustan age. However, in Phaedrus' fables we find them in an idiosyncratic form we have to examine.

2. *illitteratum plausum nec desidero*: Phaedrus' ideal Reader

Many passages show that Phaedrus was thinking of his recipients only as readers¹⁷. He claims (IV prolog. 20): *illitteratum plausum nec desidero*. He seems to follow the tradition of Latin poetry that began with Lucilius and Horace¹⁸. But Phaedrus demands more from his readers as we can learn from his requests to his patron Eutychus in the prologue of book III (1-16)¹⁹:

16. IV 11.

17. Cf. e. g. III prolog. 1: *Phaedri libellos legere si desideras*; 62: *induxi te ad legendum*; IV prolog. 14: *quartum libellum [...] perleges*. In contrast to Horace Phaedrus never talks about his recipients as listeners.

18. Cf. 17-20: *mibi parva laus est quod tu, quod similes tui | uestras in chartas uerba transfer-tis mea, | dignumque longa iudicatis memoria. | illitteratum plausum nec desidero*. Cf. Lucil. 591-3 K. (= 595-6 M.): *<ab indoctissimis> | nec doctissimis <legi me>*; *Man<ium Manil>ium | Persium<ve> haec legere nolo, Iunium Congum uolo*; Cic. *de orat.* II 25; *fin.* I 7; Hor. *sat.* I 10, 73-77: *neque te ut miretur turba, labores, | contentus paucis lectoribus. [...] nam satis est equitem mihi plaudere, ut audax | contemptis aliis explosa Arbuscula dixit*.

19. Cf. Lucr. I 50-53: *quod superest, uacuas auris <animumque sagacem> | semotum a curis adhibe ueram ad rationem, | ne mea dona tibi studio disposita fidei, | intellecta prius quam sint, contempta relinquas*. Ps.-Sen. *Oct.* 383-384: *ubi liber animus et sui iuris mihi | semper uacabat studia recolenti mea*.

Phaedri libellos legere si desideras,
vaces oportet, Eutyche, a negotiis,
ut liber animus sentiat vim carminis.

...

mutandum tibi propositum est ut vitae genus,
intrare si Musarum limen cogitas.

Callimachus' claim was formative (*Epigr.* II ,4 A = XXVIII, 4 PF): *σικχάινω πάντα τὰ δημόσια*.

The idea that the sphere of *otium* was the basic requirement for a poet has been a *topos* of Latin literature since Catullus at the latest²⁰. Another *topos* was that one philosophizes about different ways of living and that the poet chooses the world of the Muses for himself; just think of Horace's first ode. But that a poet demands that his *reader* changes his way of living just to read Phaedrus' poems and that he even enters the grove of the muses, is as new as it is astonishing. Phaedrus did certainly not misunderstand those Callimachean ideas as Koster suggested, because they were firmly embedded in Augustan literature²¹. And it is not unintentionally amusing that they now refer to an inappropriate subject²². On the contrary, Phaedrus is very well acquainted with the poetology of the Hellenistic poet and with its reception and transformation by the Latin poets. It has already been noticed that Phaedrus took his place in the discourse of poetology and that his poetry was determined by a *lusus poeticus*, a poetological game²³. However, the question whether his procedure was appropriate was not answered; it was even stressed that his claim was serious²⁴. I would go even further: I think that Phaedrus has detailed knowledge about the claims of Latin poetry, which refers to Callimachus, that he takes them over, exaggerates them and mocks or satirizes them. Therefore we have to ask: If Phaedrus shows the misconduct of the people in his fables and — using the fables — laughingly tells the truth, does he not hold a mirror up to his colleagues, by taking over their claims, by exaggerating them, by choosing an «inappropriate subject» — the fable — and by reducing them to absurdity, as we could see when he showed us his ideal reader? Could these poems not be understood as poems about poetology?

20. Cf. Catull. 50, 1-2; 51; Verg. *ecl.* 1, 6; Hor. *sat.* I 4, 138-139; *epist.* II 2, 65-66; *carm.* III 1, 1; Prop. II 23, 1-2; Ov. *trist.* II 223-224; Quint. *inst.* X 5, 15; ironized in Petron. 118.

21. KOSTER 1991, 70.

22. KOSTER 1991, 69.

23. Cf. DAMS 1970, 96-113; LAMBERTI 1980; HAMM 2000.

24. DAMS 1970 did not ask the question and took all statements seriously; LAMBERTI 1980 emphasized the playful character, but also took this seriously; HAMM 2000 recognized a certain self-irony, but did not understand *ludere* as 'l'art pour l'art'.

3. The Consecration

Since Hesiod, poets legitimated their work with a consecration by the muses or Apollo (*Tb.* 52-62):

Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο.
 τὰς ἐν Πιερίῃ Κρονίδη τέκε πατρὶ μιγεῖσα
 Μνημοσύνη, γουνοῖσιν Ἐλευθῆρος μεδέουσα,
 ληισοσύνην τε κακῶν ἄμπαυμά τε μερμηράων. 55
 ἐννέα γάρ οἱ νύκτας ἐμίσητο μητίετα Ζεὺς
 νόσφιν ἀπ' ἀθανάτων ἱερὸν λέχος εἰσαναβαίνων·
 ἀλλ' ὅτε δῆ ῥ' ἐνιαυτὸς ἔην, περὶ δ' ἔτραπον ὦραι
 μινῶν φθινόντων, περὶ δ' ἤματα πόλλ' ἔτελέσθη,
 ἦ δ' ἔτεκ' ἐννέα κούρας, ὁμόφρονας, ἧσιν αἰοιδῆ 60
 μέμβλεται ἐν στήθεσσι, ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἐχούσαις, ...

One can also think of Callimachus' dream (*Aet.* 2-4 A= 1a 18-26. 41-5; 2a; 2 Pf), of Horaces fantasy of rapture (*carm.* III 4, 5-8) or of Propertius' dream (Apollo) (III 3)²⁵. Phaedrus does not write anything like that. And it seems that he does not have to, because he tells us astonishing things about his origin. In the above-mentioned prologue to book III we read:

*ego, quem Pierio mater enixa est iugo,
 in quo tonanti sancta Mnemosyne Ioui
 fecunda nouies artium peperit chorum,
 quamuis in ipsa paene natus sim schola 20
 curamque habendi penitus corde eraserim
 et laude inuita²⁶ uitam in hanc incubuerim,
 fastidiose tamen in coetum recipior.
 quid credis illi accidere, qui magnas opes
 exaggerare quaerit omni uigilia, 25
 docto labori dulce praeponeus lucrum?*

The parallels to Hesiod are obvious; not only the origin of the muses is the same; as the muses have a heart free of sorrows (ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἐχούσαις 61), so Phaedrus has eliminated the *cura habendi* from his heart (21). But while in Hesiod the human and the divine sphere are clearly separated (57), Phaedrus turns this upside down and puts his mother on a level with Mnemosyne (cf. Hes. 52-53 – Phaedr. 17). Phaedrus carries on taking up well-known subjects: The world of the poet is the world of the muses (17-20), he makes a clear decision against the form of living striving after possession (20-21; 24-26)²⁷, rath-

25. Cf. Verg. *georg.* III 11; Prop. III 1, 17-18.

26. *inuita* P, *inuicta* DESBILLONS.

27. Cf. Hor. *carm.* I 1; III 29; Lucr. II 7-13.

er he chooses the poetry of the *doctus labor*²⁸, but nevertheless has to fight all the time against envy and is hardly accepted to the inner circle. At first glance, we seem to read a statement almost like that of Horace or even a collection of all Topoi of self-statements made by the poets before him. But Phaedrus does not only bundle together, but again he seems to exaggerate. He does not receive a consecration by the muses like Hesiod or Callimachus, he does not wish to receive the help of the muses like Horace, no, he has the right of approval, because he is born on the mountain of the muses! To my great surprise this is almost always taken word for word: It is believed to be a reference to Phaedrus' place of birth. You can read this for example in CURRIE's article:

17-19 are to be interpreted literally; he was born in Pieria — that is, in Thessaly in the Roman province of Macedonia. The plain sense of 20 is surely that he was born in the vicinity of a school (or lecture-room), which implies that his mother was the wife (or servant?) of a school-teacher, probably a *litterator*. We cannot say for sure whether his birth was legitimate²⁹.

If we knew nothing about Propertius except his claim in III 5, 19: *me iuuat in prima coluisse Helicon iuuenta*, would we think that he was born in Greece? I do not think so. But even in newer handbooks and similar writings we read that Phaedrus was born in Macedonia. Could it not be a joke, that somebody uses the proverbial «born in literature» seemingly autobiographically? Just think about Cicero calling the Greek *nati in litteris*³⁰. None of this is awk-

28. Cf. II epil. 8. 15; III epil. 7; Theoc. XVII 6; Catull. 1, 7; 35, 17; 65, 2; 95; Tib. I 4, 61; Prop. I 7, 11; II 13, 11; II 30, 16; Hor. *sat.* I 4, 9-13; I 9, 7; I 10, 67-75; *epist.* II 1; *ars* 289-294; *Ov. am.* III 9, 62.

29. CURRIE 1984, 501; cf. e. g. NIEDERMEIER 1919, 28; PRINZ 1906, 26-28; SCHANZ 1935, 447; FRITSCH 1990, 230; DE LORENZI 1955, made up a whole biography: Phaedrus was educated by a slave of the rhetorician Antipater of Thessalonica; after the military expedition of L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi, he came together with Antipater to Rome, and he was given to Augustus as a boy; Augustus took him to the court as a Greek speaking playmate for his grandson Lucius; there Phaedrus had the opportunity to become a pupil of the well-known grammarian Verrius Flaccus etc. Against a biographical interpretation, cf. already WÖLFFLIN 1884, 157; BALDWIN 1989, 7; cautiously HENDERSON 1999, 318, and 2001, 78-79. – *schola* must not be understood as «school», but metaphorically as a place for literature, for the Muses; it is probably a further reference to *otium* (= σχολή); cf. Prop. III 5, 19-20: *me iuuat in prima coluisse Helicon iuuenta | Musarumque choris implicuisse manus*; *Ov. trist.* V 3, 9-10: *quique prius mollem uacuumque laboribus egi | in studiis uitam Pieridumque choro*.

30. *de orat.* III 131 : *quo quidem magis dubito tibine plus laudis an Graecis uituperationis statuum esse tribuendum; cum tu in alia lingua ac moribus natus occupatissima in ciuitate uel priuatorum negotiis paene omnibus uel orbis terrae procuracione ac summi imperi gubernacione districtus, tantam uim rerum cognitionemque comprehenderis eamque omnem cum eius, qui consilio et oratione in ciuitate ualeat, scientia atque exercitatione sociaris; illi nati in litteris, ardentibus studiis, otio uero diffluentes, non modo nihil acquisierint, sed ne relictum quidem et traditum et suum conseruarint.* cf. *Iust.* VI 8, 9; *Sen. dial.* XI 2, 5; *Quint. inst.* I 10, 21; cf. HENDERSON 2001, 78-79.

ward; it is nothing else but absurd exaggeration and thereby a mocking or satirizing of the widespread topos of the consecration by the muses.

4. The Poverty

Poets are poor. Callimachus is poor; Catullus can only borrow a sedan chair and his purse is full of cobwebs.³¹ The writer of elegies have no chance to compete with the rich rival, Horace wants to remain a country-mouse, Martial has to write begging letters all the time — of course nothing but a topos, which should be considered not so much as a self-statement, but as roleplaying presenting the relationship between *patronus* and poet as a moral satire³². Phaedrus' epilogue of book III has caused a lot of astonishment. In a long passage in the middle of the poem, Phaedrus begs for money, behavior characterized as «comic-macabre», «embarrassing» or «almost unabashed»³³. And indeed Phaedrus sets his proposition forth awkwardly, that — considering the *do-ut-des* — he would prefer to receive the money from his *patronus* now, before age comes closer and the money is then no longer as useful. This is not embarrassing but funny: Phaedrus obviously twists the knife in the wound of every patronage³⁴ and exaggerates the topos of the poverty of poets³⁵.

5. The Envy

The motif of envy is very common in Latin literature as a Callimachean topos. Call. *Ap.* 113: χαίρει, ἄναξ· ὁ δὲ Μῶμος, ἴν' ὁ Φθόνος, ἔνθα νέοιτο. Not only Callimachus and after him Virgil, Propertius, Horace and Ovid, had to fight against *liuor* — envy and literary criticism. But Phaedrus has to fight against his enemies from the first prologue on like no one else. The most remarkable form of this topos is to be found again in the prologue of book III, where Phaedrus has to bring up comparisons with mythical poets like Orpheus or Linus to put envy in its place, surpassing even Callimachus (56-60)³⁶:

31. Call. *Epigr.* 32; Catull. 10; 13.

32. Cf. Call. *Epigr.* 7 (A = 32 PF); Tib. I 1, 5-6; Prop. III 5; Ov. *am.* III 8; Hor. *carm.* I 20; I, 2; II 16; II 18; II 20; III 1; III 16; III 24; III 29; *sat.* I 1; I 6; II 2; II 6; *epist.* I 5; I 7. – For Martial cf. HOLZBERG 2012b.

33. KOSTER 1991, 76-77.

34. The verses 24-25 also make the dependence from patrons a subject of discussion, as sometimes one has to chance them: *tuae sunt partes; fuerunt aliorum prius, | dein simili gyro uenient aliorum uices*. To utter this in a request to his current patron seems counter-productive and should be understood as irony. Horace had already exposed the problems of dependence in his fable of the mice (*sat.* II, 6; cf. *sat.* II 3, 314-326; *epist.* I 7, 29-33); cf. HOLZBERG 1991, 239-240; 2012a, 38-40.

35. Petronius seems to ironize the topos in a similar way; cf. Petron. 83, 8-84.

36. Cf. I prol. 5; II epil. 10-11; III 9, 4; IV prol. 15-16; IV 22; IV epil. 3-4; V prol. 9; app. 2; Call. *Aet.* I 17 (A = PF); *Ap.* 105-113; *Epigr.* 29, 4 (A = 21 PF); *Iamb.* 154 (A = 194 PF); Verg. *georg.*

*ergo hinc abesto, liuor, ne frustra gemas,
quoniam mihi sollemnis debetur gloria.*

6. The Road

The Roman poets hardly used any other metaphor from Callimachus as often as they did the metaphor of the road³⁷. Callimachus wrote that Apollo had given him the following advice (*Aet.* 1, 25-32 A = PF):

πρὸς δέ σε] καὶ τὸδ' ἄνωγα, τὰ μὴ πατέουσιν ἄμαξαι 25
τὰ στείβειν, ἑτέρων ἴχνια μὴ καθ' ὀμά
δίφρον ἐλ]ᾶν μῆδ' οἴμον ἀνά πλατύν, ἀλλὰ κελεύθους
ἀτρίπτο]υς, εἰ καὶ στειγοτέρην ἐλάσεις.»
τῶ πιθόμη]ν· ἐνὶ τοῖς γὰρ ἀείδομεν οἱ λιγὺν ἦχον
τέττιγος, θ]όρυβον δ' οὐκ ἐφίλησαν ὄνων. 30
θηρὶ μὲν οὐατόεντι πανεῖκελον ὀγκήσαιτο
ἄλλος, ἐγ]ῶ δ' εἶην οὐλ[α]χύς, ὁ πτερόεις,

Horace, Propertius, Persius and many others emphasize again and again that there is no wide road (*uia*) to the muses, but that one has to walk on a small new path (*semita*)³⁸. Finally Manilius has to observe a paradox (II 50): *omnis ad accessus Heliconos semita trita*.

Phaedrus writes — again in the prologue of book III — about the relationship to his predecessor Aesop (III prol. 38-40):

*ego porro illius semita feci uiam,
et cogitavi plura quam reliquerat,
in calamitatem deligens quaedam meam.*

Most of the time, this passage is interpreted as a further emancipation from the great model Aesop. In the prologue of book I, Phaedrus announces that he only versified the *materia* the Greek author offered; in the prologue of

III 37-39; Prop. III 1, 21-38; Hor. *sat.* II 1, 74-79; *carm.* II 20, 4-5; IV 3, 16; Ov. *am.* I 15, 1-2. 39-42; *rem.* 389; *trist.* 2, 531; cf. WIMMEL 1960, 61-64, 71-123.

37. One can ask whether these metaphors were already to be understood poetologically in Callimachus' poems; cf. ASPER 1997 and 2001.

38. Cf. Call. *Epigr.* 2 (A = 28 PF): 'Ἐχθαίρω τὸ ποίημα τὸ κυκλικόν, οὐδὲ κελεύθῳ | χαίρω, τίς πολλοὺς ὧδε καὶ ὧδε φέρει· | μισέω καὶ περίφοιτον ἐρώμενον, οὐδ' ἀπὸ κρήνης | πίνω· σικχαίνω πάντα τὰ δημόσια; Prop. II 23, 1-2: *cui fugienda fuit indocti semita uulgi*; III 1, 14: *non datur ad Musas currere lata uia*; 17-18: *sed, quod pace legas, opus hoc de monte Sororum | detulit intacta pagina nostra uia*; III 3, 17-26, 25-26: *dixerat, et plectro sedem mihi monstrat eburno, | quo noua muscoso semita facta solo est*; III 16, 30: *non iuuat in media nomen habere uia*; cf. also Hor. *epist.* I 19, 21-22; *carm.* IV 2, 25-32; *ars* 131-135; Pers. *prol.*; Petron. 118,4-5; cf. MARKUS 2000, 162-163. For basic information, cf. WIMMEL 1960, 103-111.

book II, he emphasizes that he maintained Aesop's *mos* (the way of writing), but inserted something for the sake of variety (*uarietas*)³⁹. So it is now often said that the metaphor of the road is an expression of the author's pride about his growing independence. On first inspection this might seem to be true, but the metaphor of the road has to catch our attention. Once again, Phaedrus seems to allude to a Callimachean statement, which resonated widely in Rome, while turning it upside down⁴⁰. Explicitly he walks on the broad road his predecessor made and even makes it wider. We have to conclude that he does not chirp like a cicada, but dwells on his topics like the braying ass. Is he not making fun of his Roman colleagues, who all took over the motive of the small path, so that this motive became a wide road or a highway itself?

7. The Ass and the Cicada

There are two fables by Phaedrus, which have been difficult to understand until now. In an earlier paper, I focused on them in detail⁴¹. It was my aim to show that there is one particular kind of Phaedrus' fables, which he invented, where an animal finds an object it has no use for, and that these fables are to be interpreted poetologically⁴². In app. 14 an ass finds a lyre; the motive itself is old; from classical antiquity up to the middle ages the proverb ὄνος λύρας ἀκούων, the ass hearing a lyre, referred to the lacking understanding of art⁴³.

It seems that Phaedrus was the first to convert the motive into a fable:

*Asinus iacentem uidit in prato lyram.
accessit et temptauit chordas ungula;
sonuere tactae. «Bella res sed mebercules
male cessit» inquit «artis quia sum nescius.
si repperisset aliquis hanc prudentior,* 5

39. The *uarietas* itself is a further reference to the Callimachean ποικιλία.

40. Cf. HENDERSON 2001, 82.

41. Cf. GÄRTNER 2007, 442-443; 2011, 222-228; GLAUTHIER 2009, 248-278.

42. Cf. I 7: A fox finding a tragic actor's mask; III 12: A cockerel finding a pearl; IV 8: A serpent finding a file; cf. GÄRTNER, in this volume, 37-57.

43. For the background, cf. VOGEL 1973. – For the proverb, cf. e. g. Paroem. I, p. 193; I, p. 291; II, p. 125; II, p. 563; Cratin. *Fr.*, 247 (PCG = 229 FCG): ὄνοι δ' ἀπωτέρω κάθηνται τῆς λύρας; Men. *Mis.* 295: ὄνος λύρας; Luc. *Ind.* 4: καὶ σὺ τοίνυν βιβλίον μὲν ἔχεις ἐν τῇ χειρὶ καὶ ἀναγιγνώσκεις αἰεὶ, τῶν δὲ ἀναγιγνωσκομένων οἶσθα οὐδέν, ἀλλ' ὄνος λύρας ἀκούεις κινῶν τὰ ὄτα; Hier. *epist.* XXVII 1: *asino quippe lyra superflue canit*; LXI 4: *uerum est illud apud Graecos prouerbium: ὄνοφ λύρα*; Mart. Cap. VIII 807: *saltem Prieneiae ausculta nihilum grauate sententiae et ni ὄνος λύρας, καιρὸν γινῶθι*; cf. also Ael. *NA* X 28; Plu. *Moralia* (*sept. sap. con.*) 150 d 8-f 10; Boeth. *cons.* I 4, 1. cf. ADOLF 1950; OBERG 2000, 243-244; RUEF & MUMPRECHT 1996. – The ass with the lyre even became a topic in fine arts; cf. e. g. the figure of the ass with the lyre on the south side of the tower of the cathedral of Chartres from the 12th century AD; cf. VOGEL 1973, 351-364; MÜLLER 2003, 278.

diuinis aures oblectasset cantibus.»
sic saepe ingenia calamitate intercidunt.

Phaedrus turned the motive upside down: Here the animal is reasonable; the ass even tries to use the lyre, and the lyre sounds. But the ass knows the limits of his efforts, as he is unacquainted with art (*artis* is exactly in the middle of the poem). So the poem ends quite appropriately with the recognition that true art often cannot come into being because of unfavorable circumstances⁴⁴. But how can we explain that it is only Phaedrus who gives the motive a new meaning?

The full sense of the fable is revealed only when we compare it with another fable⁴⁵: In III 16 a cicada is getting on an owl's nerves due to her constant singing. When she does not stop her high-pitched chirping, even though the owl begs her repeatedly, the owl tempts the cicada by offering fine nectar to drink. As a reason the owl states: *dormire quia me non sinunt cantus tui, | sonare citharam quos putes Apollinis* (11-12). The cicada falls for the alleged praise at once and, being thirsty because of all the singing, she flies to the owl and is killed at once — and rightly as the moral shows, because in her arrogance she did not show any *humanitas*.

At first sight the fable is understandable without further literary education. Educated readers might have thought of the myth of the cicadas told by Plato⁴⁶. While in this myth people stop eating to be able to sing, here the cicada stops singing immediately because of her greed and desire to drink⁴⁷. But even then the wit of the fables remains hidden; it is revealed only when we compare it with the fable of the ass⁴⁸. If we keep in mind how important Apollo's admonition to Callimachus — to chirp like a cicada, not to roar like an ass — was for the Roman poets, both fables together give a witty, humorous and ironic reinterpretation of the high aspirations of poetry: An understanding ass regretfully recognizes his inability to please the ears with «divine» songs (*diuinis* [...] *cantibus* 6), but the annoying cicada believes she is inspired by Apollo (*citharam* [...] *Apollinis* 12), — are these not the poems of an ass-as-poet amusedly writing poems about poetry?⁴⁹ Of course, this is no allegory that could be interpreted systematically. In the fable the ass seems to abandon his attempts (*temptauit* 2), while Phaedrus goes on with his poetry. It is rather the ability to judge one's own competence, which creates the parallel⁵⁰.

44. The last sentence was taken as the title for this paper as it rather fits considering the fate of Phaedrus' fables.

45. Cf. MANDRUZZATO 1979, 341; SOLIMANO 2005, 224-225.

46. Cf. SCHÖNBERGER 1987, 181; SOLIMANO 2005, 224-225.

47. Pl. *Phdr.* 259 b 5-c 6. However, here the cicadas stop eating right after their birth to sing at once until they die; Hes. *Sc.* 393-401.

48. We cannot say where the fable was originally placed.

49. Cf. NØJGAARD 1967, 92-96, however considered Phaedrus' fable «foncièrement sérieuse» (92), explicitly referring to III 12 and app. 14 (93).

50. MANDRUZZATO 1979, 341, referred III 16 to Hor. *epist.* II 2, 92-108 and opined that the cicada symbolizes Horace's overzealous poets. It becomes more ironic if one considers that in

8. Phaedrus and his Patrons

I hope I have shown so far that here we find a poet, who at first sight might seem naive, but whose «self-statements» reveal themselves as a witty play with the aspirations of his predecessors. Whoever it is who is writing these poems, it is obvious that he is very well-read, as one can conclude from all the subtle references to passages from other authors where one always has to keep the context and literary tradition in mind. Sharpening them, exaggerating them and even turning them upside down, Phaedrus shows himself to be a master of the poetological game.

Of course, I have to admit that the figure of the «real author» is becoming more and more elusive. And of course, we are all tempted to look for this real author⁵¹. And it is very controversial whether readers in antiquity really differentiated between the real author and the *persona*, as is obvious in modern literary studies; but remarks from Catullus or Ovid and Phaedrus himself show that poets reflected upon this phenomenon⁵². Therefore, we could also argue that Phaedrus uses exactly this non-reflected way of reading so that he can disguise himself completely behind a mask. This is why we should set the poet free from all too narrow determinations. We have to locate him in Rome, and he is mostly likely to have lived in the second half of the first century AD; but we can hardly say more. His home is — literature, in fact Greek and Latin literature. Therefore, when I talked about «Phaedrus», I meant the *persona* of the poet. And this poet shows himself to be an author who thinks of himself as more of an «ass-as-poet» while at the same time using a despised genre — the fable — he works his way wittily and allusively through all the things his predecessors liked to boast about. The same can be said about his patrons. Patrons who have first to be converted to literature or who can be offended by blatant claims for money are caricatures of ideals such as Maecenas or Asinius Pollio. Their names are, I think, also pure fantasy. Eutyclus (patron of book III) is the «lucky strike», Particulo (patron of book IV) perhaps a lover of little

the fable the cicada only thinks that she is inspired by Apollo (III 16, 12), whereas the owl obviously received presents from the gods (13-14). Finally, one could refer to Varro who also made fun of allegedly gifted poets: *non omnes, qui habent citharam, sunt citharoedi* (*rust.* II 1, 3).

51. CHAMPLIN 2005 rightly questioned the biographic interpretation, but he himself seems to succumb to the wish to fixate and localise. He thinks that Phaedrus is not the freedman, but a Roman aristocrat from the second half of the first century AD. This aristocrat would not only be literate, but his legal knowledge prompts one to think of a legal scholar. This is possible, but methodologically we have the same problem as with the biographic interpretation. Therefore, CHAMPLIN's assumption (2005, 105) is less convincing that *Musarum limen* (III prol. 16) should in reality be the *aedes Herculis Musarum* on the *campus Martius*, the residence of the *collegium poetarum* and therefore the birthplace of Phaedrus should be Rome. – CHAMPLIN's hypothesis was not generally accepted; cf. accepted by e. g. SCIARRINO 2010; MORDEGLIA 2014; POLT 2014; rejected by PIEPER 2010, 36; MATTIACCI 2010, 169; WIEGAND 2013; EDWARDS 2015. For a survey cf. GÄRTNER 2017.
52. Cf. Catull. 16; Ov. *am.* III 15, 4; *trist.* I 9, 59-60; II 353-358; III 2, 5-6; IV 10, 67-68; *Pont.* II 7, 47-50; IV 8, 19-20; Mart. I 4, 7-8; I 35, 10-11; Plin. *epist.* IV 14, 5; cf. CLAY 1998; MAYER 2003.

things and Philetas (patron of book V) nothing else but a beloved friend. Ciphers or keys — all the funnier is the assurance of the poet that those names will live on and even funnier that nowadays scholars have tried to identify them⁵³. We could make similar suggestions about the name of the poet himself — is it a real name, is it a descriptive name or is it an allusion to Plato?⁵⁴

9. *breuitas*

Phaedrus also frequently refers to the topos of *breuitas*, in a Callimachean, or especially Horatian way⁵⁵. Scholars often accused him of forgetting this pivotal demand, because exactly those fables where he mentions *breuitas* are especially long. However, this is also nothing other than a witty game Phaedrus plays with a widespread topos. And before I, like Phaedrus, am accused of lacking brevity I will end my paper right here.

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53. For a survey, cf. GÄRTNER 2015, 33-35.

54. For a survey, cf. GÄRTNER 2015, 20-30.

55. Cf. Hor. *sat.* I 10, 7-15. – Phaedrus plays with the topos of *breuitas*; for example, III 10, the longest fable, ends like this: *haec exsecutus sum propterea pluribus | breuitate nimia quoniam quosdam offendimus* (59-60), though he made us expect something else: *periculosum est credere et non credere. | utriusque exemplum breuiter exponam rei* (1-2). The fables III 7 and IV 5, where the poet also emphasizes brevity, are very long, too. We also have to consider that the character of *breuitas* is never explained; it can refer to expression, length of a poem or a book etc.; cf. NØJGAARD 1967, 22-27; GÄRTNER 2015, 46-47.

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