

## CAESAR TELLING TALES: PHAEDRUS AND TIBERIUS

The Emperor Tiberius was notorious for using figured speech, including fables, to express his thoughts, leaving them open for (mis)interpretation.<sup>1</sup> Champlin has studied remarks which use figurative speech made about or by Tiberius within the larger tradition of folklore in historiography, especially the image of the “wise king.” He observes that while Greek rulers had previously been known to express themselves through fables, “Why the princeps Tiberius should relate an Aesopean fable is a question worth considering.”<sup>2</sup> In his provocative article, ‘Phaedrus the Fabulous’, Champlin proposed that the fabulist Phaedrus was not a Greek freedman, but rather a member of the Roman elite; nevertheless, he dated the work of Phaedrus to the Claudian and Neronian eras.<sup>3</sup> Champlin has raised some interesting points, but has failed to connect the importance of Phaedrus as the first Latin author to consider fables worthy of their own separate poetic genre with Tiberius’ employment of fables. Jennings touched on Phaedrus’ and Tiberius’ shared affinity for fables briefly in her article on Phaedrus as a literary artist, noting, “It is hardly fortuitous that fable re-emerges in the Principate when methods for communicat-

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1) Ahl laid the foundation for discussion of figured speech in antiquity. By ancient standards, “in figured speech the speaker wishes us to understand something beyond, or something different from, what the superficial meaning of his words suggests,” F. Ahl, *The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome*, *AJP* 105, 1984, 174–208 at 192. Cf. F. Ahl, *The Rider and the Horse: Politics and Power in Roman Poetry from Horace to Statius*, *ANRW* II,32,1, 1984, 40–124.

2) E. Champlin, *Tiberius the Wise*, *Historia* 57, 2008, 408–425 at 416.

3) E. Champlin, *Phaedrus the Fabulous*, *JRS* 95, 2005, 97–123. For the reluctance of later scholars to entertain Champlin’s theory, see C. Renda, *Illitteratum plausum nec desiderio: Fedro, la favola e la poesia*, Napoli 2012, esp. 8 n. 3. C. Pieper, *Phaedrus’ Ironie. Anmerkungen zum Prolog des dritten Fabelbuches*, *Gymnasium* 117, 2010, 33–48, although open to Champlin’s proposal, remarks, “Champlin verfällt m. E. zum Teil in denselben methodischen Fehler, den er der früheren Forschung vorwirft” (36).

ing difference require re-negotiation.”<sup>4</sup> But why fables in particular? I believe both Phaedrus and Tiberius utilize fables to navigate their own feelings of *servitus* in the new principate.

In order to further trace this connection, first I examine the opposing hypotheses surrounding the ‘biography’ of Phaedrus as a sign of a complicated authorial persona, while also making arguments that at least the first three books were composed and published during the reign of Tiberius. Secondly, I discuss Phaedrus’ assertion that fables originated as an outlet for those enslaved to speak without fear of reprisal, and the way in which his literary manifesto fits within the environment of Tiberian Rome. Finally, I explore Tiberius’ view of himself as a slave to the empire in relation to his use of fables and similar types of figured speech.

### *Who (and when) was Phaedrus?*

Based upon the title in the manuscript family P and speculation from internal references, scholars have believed for years that Phaedrus was a Greek freedman of Augustus.<sup>5</sup> As Champlin points out, “Nowhere in the surviving corpus does Phaedrus actually *say*, or even hint, that he had once been a slave.”<sup>6</sup> Champlin claims that Phaedrus was a Roman lawyer, taking on the pose of one who was disenfranchised. He concludes, “He was not a Greek freedman inscribing himself into the élite of Rome. He was a member of the Roman élite masquerading as a man of the people, ‘transferring his true feelings into fables and eluding censure under the guise of jesting with made up stories’ (3 pr. 35–36). What a pity we shall never know who he was.”<sup>7</sup>

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4) V. Jennings, *Borrowed Plumes: Phaedrus’ Fables, Phaedrus’ Failures*, in: W. J. Dominik / J. Garthwaite / P. A. Roche (eds.), *Writing Politics in Imperial Rome*, Leiden 2009, 225–248 at 242. Unfortunately, although within the same volume S. Rutledge engages with Champlin’s 2005 article (*Writing Imperial Politics: The Social and Political Background*, 22–61 at 47), Jennings does not.

5) de Lorenzi built such references into an entire biography: F. de Lorenzi, *Fedro*, Firenze 1955. B. E. Perry accepts too much of de Lorenzi’s conjecture; see especially his review in *CP* 52, 1957, 267–269, and the introduction to his Loeb translation of Babrius and Phaedrus, Cambridge, MA 1965.

6) Champlin (n. 3) 99 (his italics). Cf. E. Oberg, *Phaedrus-Kommentar*, Stuttgart 2000, 37.

7) Champlin (n. 3) 117.

However, Champlin has fallen into the same trap from which he has attempted to extricate the tradition regarding Phaedrus' status, reading the poems autobiographically, and focusing specifically on the prevalence of legal language and an inventive interpretation of Phaedrus' claim that he was born on the mountain sacred to the Muses: *ego, quem Pierio mater enixa est iugo* ... (3 pr. 17). The initiation into the circle of the Muses is a poetic convention dating back to Hesiod, and is not likely an indication of where Phaedrus was actually born. As Pieper observes, Phaedrus is constructing a poetic persona, laden with irony.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Wiegand comments regarding the claims made by Phaedrus about his origins at the beginning of Book 3, "dass das ganze dritte Buch von Belegen der falschen Rede gerahmt ist," starting with the allusion to Sinon from Book 2 of the *Aeneid* at 3 pr. 27.<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this study, we are concerned more with what Phaedrus says within the text, not with constructing a biography of the poet. But the fact that such debate has arisen concerning the status and origins of Phaedrus indicates the complexity of his poetic persona.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to questioning the claim that Phaedrus was a Greek freedman, Champlin also asserts that the fables of Phaedrus were not published until the Claudian or Neronian era.<sup>11</sup> The primary basis for Claudian and/or Neronian publication stems from a passage of Seneca the Younger, who, in his *Consolatio ad Polybium*, states that the fables of Aesop are *intemptatum Romanis ingeniis opus* (8,3). Bloomer responds, "This statement reflects either ignorance or abuse of our author [Phaedrus] (and possibly

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8) "Ob Phaedrus wirklich Römer oder Grieche war, diese Frage wird in den Texten nicht verhandelt. Zentral ist, dass er teilnimmt an dem literarischen Diskurs der römischen Literaturszene der frühen Kaiserzeit" (n.3) 47. See also U. Gärtner, *Palam mittire plebeio piaculum est*. Die Fabeln des Phaedrus als literarische Kommunikationsform in der frühen Kaiserzeit, in: A. Haltenhoff / A. Heil / F.-H. Mutschler (eds.), *Römische Werte und römische Literatur im frühen Prinzipat*, Berlin 2011, 253–277.

9) I. Wiegand, *Neque libere neque vere*. Die Literatur unter Tiberius und der Diskurs der *res publica continua*, Tübingen 2013, 208.

10) For a debate regarding ancient interpretations of the idea of a literary persona, see D. Clay, *The Theory of the Literary Persona in Antiquity*, MD 40, 1998, 9–40; with response by R. Mayer, *The Literary Persona in Antiquity Revisited*, MD 50, 2003, 55–80.

11) "In brief: the fables of Phaedrus were not yet available around A.D. 41, and they (or at least their first book) were in circulation by about A.D. 70" (n.3) 102.

of others too – the elder Seneca at Suas. 7,12 commemorates a fabulist: ‘Surdinus, ingeniosus adulescens, a quo Graecae fabulae eleganter in sermonem Latinum conversae sunt’.<sup>12</sup> Our first evidence for awareness of Phaedrus’ work comes from Martial, who asks Canius, *utrumne chartis tradit ille victuris legenda temporum acta Claudianorum? ... an aemulatur improbi iocos Phaedri?* (3,20,2–3.5). Perhaps not coincidentally, Seneca suggests to Polybius that before writing fables he should write a history of Claudius. The similarity of the two passages indicates that Martial is correcting Seneca’s slight.<sup>13</sup>

The later dating for the fables was first proposed by Vollmer, and then refuted by Prinz, maintaining, among other reasons, that Phaedrus’ claim to have been attacked by Sejanus would have meant little to an audience twenty years removed from the death of the Praetorian Prefect.<sup>14</sup> Wiegand argues convincingly for an earlier date, including Phaedrus in her treatment of Tiberian literature. As she demonstrates, aside from the fact that the prologue to Book 3 indicates the death of Sejanus was a recent event, the sympathetic portrait painted of Tiberius in 2,5 does not seem likely under his successors.<sup>15</sup> In 3,10, Phaedrus narrates a case supposedly heard by Augustus as though it were from his own memory – *narrabo tibi memoria quod factum est mea* (3,10,8). Gärtner questions these internal references which support a Tiberian dating, al-

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12) M. Bloomer, *Latinity and Literary Society at Rome*, Philadelphia 1997, 263 n. 11. Surdinus is mentioned in connection with the Augustan orator Cestius Pius.

13) “Insomma il testo di Marziale sembra ‘dialogare’ con il passo della *Consolatio* ...”, S. Mattiacci, Fedro, Marziale, e il nuovo impegno del *lusus* poetico, in: P. Arduini et al. (eds.), *Studi Offerti ad Alessandro Perutelli*, v. II, Lucca 2008, 191–203 at 197.

14) F. Vollmer, *Beiträge zur Chronologie und Deutung der Fabeln des Phädrus*, Sitzungsbericht der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1919, 44–122 (n. v.); K. Prinz, *Zur Chronologie und Deutung der Fabeln des Phaedrus*, WS, 43, 1922/23, 62–70. For an attempt to date Book 3 of Phaedrus to the reign of Claudius or Nero based on speculative interpretation of an inscription supposedly associated with Phaedrus’ dedicatee, Eutyclus, see P. Grimal, *Du nouveau sur les Fables de Phèdre?*, in: *Mélanges de littérature et d’épigraphie latines, d’histoire ancienne et d’archéologie. Hommage à la mémoire de Pierre Wuilleumier*, Paris 1980, 143–149.

15) “Angesichts des schlechten Bildes, das die Nachwelt von Tiberius zeichnet, zeugt 2,5 m. E. für eine Abfassung zu Tiberius’ Lebzeiten, evt. für die Zwanzigerjahre” (n. 9) 191.

luding, among other things, to the devices of Juvenal to satirize his own time by using names from the past.<sup>16</sup> However, Juvenal does mention historical figures from recent memory and his own time (e. g. 15,27 – *nuper consule Iunco*; the consulship of L. Aemilius Iuncus is dated to 127).<sup>17</sup> Phaedrus mentions no one who can be identified with certainty after the reign of Tiberius. Although none of these arguments individually are conclusive, the sum of the evidence tips the balance towards a Tiberian date for at least the first three books.

*The origins and use of fables according to Phaedrus*

While the first two books of Phaedrus' fables begin with the name Aesop, first in the nominative – *Aesopus auctor quam materiam repperit* (1 pr. 1), then in the genitive case – *exemplis continentur Aesopi genus* (2 pr. 1), Book 3 begins with the name Phaedrus.<sup>18</sup> As Phaedrus begins to assert his own authorial identity as a creator of fables, what does he have to say for himself? The prologue to Book 3 is addressed specifically to one Eutyclus, a name common to slaves and imperial freedmen, but which is likely a pseudonym.<sup>19</sup> After proclaiming his literary heritage, Phaedrus tells Eutyclus why fables were invented.

*Nunc, fabularum cur sit inventum genus,  
breui docebo. Servitus obnoxia,  
quia quae volebat non audebat dicere,  
affectus proprios in fabellas transtulit,  
calumniam fictis elusit iocis.*

(3 pr. 33–37)

16) “Der als Schreckensfigur bekannte Seian kann lediglich als Beispiel genannt sein. Man denke etwa an den Tigillinus bei Juvenal,” U. Gärtner, *levi calamo ludimus*. Zum poetologischen Spiel bei Phaedrus, *Hermes* 135, 2007, 429–459 at 444.

17) E. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal*, Berkeley 2013 (repr. 1980), 528.

18) Pieper (n. 3) 41.

19) M. Kaplan, *Greeks and the Imperial Court, from Tiberius to Nero*, New York 1990, 145, persuasively argues, “none of Phaedrus' patrons was a real person.” Renda (n. 3) 188 sees Eutyclus as an “interlocutore satirico.”

Aside from the fact that fables were said to have originated with the legendary slave Aesop, there is no overt statement outside of Phaedrus' prologue that fables are connected to the language of slavery. As Henderson notes, "the only classical company for Phaedrus' analysis as 'Sklavenmoral' (slave counsel) comes from the fourth-century pagan Roman emperor Julian, writing in Greek."<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, Phaedrus claims that fables arose from *servitus obnoxia*.<sup>21</sup> This has been translated by Henderson as "The vulnerable slave" and by Perry as "The slave, being liable to punishment for any offence."<sup>22</sup> But *servitus obnoxia* does not mean the vulnerable slave. Nowhere in his poetry does Phaedrus indicate that he is a slave or that he is the spokesman of slaves. Gärtner observes, "Als 'Sprachrohr des Sklaven oder des kleinen Mannes aus der *plebs*' wird Phaedrus sich kaum verstanden haben."<sup>23</sup> Phaedrus has deliberately chosen to use the abstract noun for slavery. In the late Republic and early Empire, *servitus* became a political term often used to describe the loss of *libertas* by the ruling class.<sup>24</sup> "The master-slave relationship, made present through the vocabulary and symbols of social status, serves as a paradigm for aspects of the political experience of elites."<sup>25</sup> Phaedrus is writing within this tradition.

As a literary artist, Phaedrus was inspired by both Greek and Roman predecessors. In particular, two genres using fables seem to have had the most influence on Phaedrus – persuasive rhetoric and satire. Aristotle advocates fables as a type of *παράδειγμα* in rhetoric

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20) J. Henderson, *Telling Tales on Caesar. Roman Stories from Phaedrus*, Oxford 2001, 81.

21) For the pairing of *obnoxia* with *servitus* in a political sense in Sallust's version of Catiline's speech to rouse his supporters (Cat. 20,6–7), see J. Connolly, *The State of Speech. Rhetoric and Political Thought in Ancient Rome*, Princeton 2007, 188.

22) Henderson (n. 20) 59 and Perry (n. 5) 255.

23) U. Gärtner, *Maske, Perle, Feile, Lyra – Phaedrus, die literarische Gattung und die klassische Bildung*, *Hermes* 139, 2011, 216–248 at 242.

24) On the transformation and use of *libertas* in the late Republic, see V. Arena, *Libertas and the Practice of Politics in the Late Roman Republic*, Oxford 2012. On the multiple connotations of *libertas* in the Republic and early principate, especially in comparison to Greek ideas about freedom, see P. A. Brunt, *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays*, Oxford 1988, 281–350.

25) M. Roller, *Constructing Autocracy. Aristocrats and Emperors in Julio-Claudian Rome*, Princeton 2001, 217.

because they can be invented, as opposed to historical examples, which require research (Rhet. 2,20,7–8 = 1394a2–9). His two examples put fables in the mouths of the literary figures Stesichorus and Aesop. In the first example, Stesichorus tries to persuade the people of Himera, who have already made Phalaris tyrant, not to grant him a bodyguard. He narrates the fable, later retold by Horace and Phaedrus, of the horse and the stag (or boar). Stesichorus warns the people that if they allow Phalaris a bodyguard, “You will already be enslaved to Phalaris.”<sup>26</sup> In the second example, Aesop is defending the life of a demagogue at Samos. He tells the fable (to be discussed further below) of the fox and hedgehog. He argues that while the old demagogue may be bad, a new one would be worse. Holzberg believes, “When, for example, a fable is employed in the way recommended by Aristotle . . . as a rhetorical argument, then it can just as easily serve, within the context of a political discussion, to clarify the standpoint of someone in a position of power.”<sup>27</sup> And yet, while both examples given by Aristotle are used in a political setting, neither Stesichorus nor Aesop is in a position of real power.

Attitudes towards the use of fables in Roman rhetoric seem rather different. Quintilian (Inst. or. 5,11,19–21) believes fables are more suitable for simple and uneducated minds – *ducere animos solent praecipue rusticorum et imperitorum*. Livy’s Menenius Agrippa uses the fable of the body, a rare example of fable in Latin historiography, to defuse the secession of the plebs, tailoring his arguments to his audience (2,32).<sup>28</sup> As Holzberg notes, following Schmidt, “Livy, writing in the classical period of Roman literature, is indicating here his disapproval of a rhetorical convention that allows political arguments to be illustrated not by way of *exempla maiorum*, but with a facile fable.”<sup>29</sup> Although writing in Greek, the

26) δουλεύετε ἤδη Φαλάραδι.

27) N. Holzberg, *The Ancient Fable*, Bloomington, IN 2002, 17. For more on this passage, “the oldest extant theoretical discussion of fable,” see G.-J. van Dijk, *ΑΙΝΟΙ, ΛΟΓΟΙ, ΜΥΘΟΙ*. Fables in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greek Literature, Leiden 1997, 40–42.

28) F. G. M. van Dijk, *Fables in Ancient Historiography*, *Bestia* 5, 1993–94, 27–42, lists only two examples of fables, including this one from Livy, used in Latin historiography prior to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

29) Holzberg (n.27) 32, citing P.L. Schmidt, *Politisches Argument und moralischer Appell: Zur Historizität der antiken Fabel im frühkaiserzeitlichen Rom*, *Der Deutschunterricht* 31, 1979, 74–88.

later imperial fabulist Babrius dedicates his collection to the young son of a king named Alexander.<sup>30</sup>

Phaedrus, however, seems to be addressing his fables to an educated audience familiar with the conventions of poetry. Indeed, the majority of fables found in Latin literature (aside from Phaedrus and later collections) come from satire, a genre known for its employment of figured speech.<sup>31</sup> Horace, the first great satirist of the imperial period, incorporated fables into his poetry; he too was concerned with the meaning of *libertas* and *servitus* in the new principate, focusing on the idea that no man is free unless he has control over himself.<sup>32</sup> In Satire 2,7, Davus the slave reprimands his master for being a slave to his weaknesses. He concludes, “Who then is free? The wise man, who is master over himself . . .” (*Quisnam igitur liber? sapiens, sibi qui imperiosus . . .*) (Sat. 2,7,83). In his meditations on true freedom, Horace includes the fable, first found in Aristotle (see above), of the horse and the stag (Ep. 1,10,34–41). The horse, vying with the stag for dominion over a field, eliminates the stag with the help of a human, but then finds himself enslaved to a human master. Horace uses the fable in a financial sense, warning his friend Aristius Fuscus that the quest for wealth can often lead to enslavement.<sup>33</sup> Phaedrus tells the same fable, substituting a boar for a stag. But Phaedrus makes the moral of the story political – “it is better to suffer an injury with impunity than to put one’s self in the power of another” (*impune potius laedi quam dedi alteri*; 4,4,13 Loeb trans. Perry).

Other fables narrated by Horace in his analysis of personal *libertas* include, most famously, the country mouse and city mouse in Satire 2,6, and the fox in the grain bin in Epistle 1,7. Johnson remarks with respect to Horace’s fox: “Horace resembles, so far, or hints he does, the wiser fox. It is the crowds and their puppet king who always crave – and cannot get – freedom (the freedom to do as they please, to be without anxiety for a future they need to control and cannot); and it is always they who end in servitude to

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30) For more on the possible identifications of this figure, see T. Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire*, Cambridge 2007, 326–330.

31) Holzberg (n. 27) 32–33.

32) As Seneca the Younger makes clear in Ep. 47. See P. Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*, Cambridge 1996, 128–152.

33) For a subversive reading of this fable in Horace, see Ahl, *The Rider and the Horse* (n. 1) 54: “In Horace, Rome is Octavian’s horse.”



one another and to their fantasies of omnipotence . . .”<sup>34</sup> Those who are comfortable with a modest situation enjoy more freedom than their superiors. Tiberius, who was included in Horace’s poetry (Odes 4,4 and 4,14), would have been sympathetic to Horace’s message.

Unlike Horace, who safely navigated the world of the new principate, Phaedrus claims to have exceeded the boundaries of what is acceptable to those in power. But his antagonist is not the emperor himself. In Phaedrus’ depiction of his persecution by Sejanus, Tiberius is absent:

*ego illius [Aesopi] pro semita feci viam,  
et cogitavi plura quam reliquerat,  
in calamitatem deligens quaedam meam.  
quodsi accusator alius Seiano foret,  
si testis alius, iudex alius denique,  
dignum faterer esse me tantis malis  
nec his dolorem delenirem remediis.*

(3 pr. 38–44)

Interpretations of Phaedrus’ allegation that he was persecuted by Sejanus vary from those who read this passage as autobiographical, to those who believe Sejanus is merely a symbol for the abuse of imperial power. Adrados, for example, believes that in interpreting the fables, “we must indicate a critical moment, the persecution of the poet by Sejanus, mentioned in the prologue to book III . . .”<sup>35</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, Champlin proposes that Sejanus is not meant to be taken as the Sejanus, but rather a Sejanus.<sup>36</sup> Regardless, we must consider Phaedrus’ allegation as having certain connotations which would have been recognizable to the reader. Henderson points out, “victimization by Sejanus could be a badge of courage to display from late October 31 onward, earned or not . . .”; “Dropping Sejanus’ name may be just his one lunge for reflected ‘glory’.”<sup>37</sup> As Levick observes, “There is a whining tone of

34) W.R. Johnson, *Horace and the Dialectic of Freedom*, Ithaca, NY 1993, 46.

35) F.R. Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Roman Fable*, v. II, Leiden 2000, 170–171.

36) Champlin (n.3) 101.

37) Henderson (n.20) 66 and 70.

self-pity, a demand for sympathy” in Tiberius’ public pronouncements on the downfall of Sejanus.<sup>38</sup> This would certainly have resonated with literary artists like Phaedrus.

Phaedrus supports Tiberius in condemning Sejanus’ behavior (without acknowledging Tiberius’ complicity). He then includes in Book 3 a fable praising Tiberius’ adoptive father. Indeed, 3,10, in which Augustus solves a court case with Solomonesque wisdom, is the least fable-like of all Phaedrus’ fables, and the longest. In this context, the story itself is not important, but rather the role played by Divus Augustus, and for that matter, his appearance at all. Thiele demonstrates that the family drama reads like something from a declamation exercise. But that exercise should have ended with the suicide of the father and the defense of the mother. There is no real reason why Augustus should have gotten involved.<sup>39</sup> Henderson concludes, “Phaedrus is doing a spot of Empire State building here, in telling this tale out of court; his fiction is itself part of the business of consecrating Augustus; and learning to love a dead Caesar, or finding a use for one, is no sideshow in the reign of Tiberius.”<sup>40</sup>

Phaedrus had already inserted Tiberius himself into one of his fables, declaring that this story was a true one, *vera fabella* (2,5,6).<sup>41</sup> To prove his veracity, in setting up the story, Phaedrus gives a surprisingly elaborate description of Tiberius’ villa at Misenum, as well as the dress of the *ardalio*. As the busybody works up a sweat trying to stay ahead of Tiberius, sprinkling water in his path, he expects to earn a proper reward. Instead, he is greeted with Tiberian wit:

*Non multum egisti et opera nequiquam perit;  
multo maioris alapae mecum veneunt.*

(2,5,24–25)

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38) B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician*, London 1999, 201, citing Suet. Tib. 65,2 and ILS 6044 = EJ<sup>2</sup> 53.

39) G. Thiele, *Phädrus-Studien*, *Hermes* 63, 1908, 337–372 at 369: “Die Einführung des Augustus ist weiter nichts als eine Schmeichelei für seinen kaiserlichen Patron.”

40) Henderson (n. 20) 38.

41) “Die Einleitung (1–6) weicht von sonstigen Vorworten / Promythien ab: es ist die längste und liefert nicht nur ein Thema oder Stichwort, sondern schildert einen Übelstand und kündigt zu dessen Beseitigung eine *vera fabella* an, also eine Anekdote mit dem Anspruch der Authentizität,” Oberg (n. 6) 102.

The double meaning of *alapa*, as either a punishment (a slap in the face) or a reward (part of the manumission ceremony), resembles the figured speech for which Tiberius was known. Moreover, as Libby has observed, Phaedrus uses this fable to invite comparison between himself and the emperor. “The Emperor and the fabulist share their impatience with, and ability to see through, the false attentions of overzealous flatterers.”<sup>42</sup>

Finally, in his last book of fables, Phaedrus includes the odd tale (5,7) where a piper named Princeps believes himself to be the real deal. As Henderson states, this is the ultimate tale about the use of showmanship in the principate.<sup>43</sup> The fable takes place in the heyday of Bathyllus, who was known to be a favorite of Maecenas. While there were other performers who used this stage name, Phaedrus conjures up the reign of Augustus and the ways in which the first princeps created his own trappings of power. In Phaedrus’ tale, Princeps loses himself in applause, not realizing that the audience is not applauding for him, but for the *divina domus* (5,7,38). Henderson sees a similarity to the cries in the wake of the falsely reported recovery of Germanicus – *salva Roma, salva patria, salvus est Germanicus* (Suet. Gai. 6).<sup>44</sup> However, he fails to note Tiberius’ own attitude towards such statements – *principes mortales, rem publicam aeternam esse* (Tac. Ann. 3,6,3). Phaedrus’ moral about Princeps the piper would apply equally to the imperial family. “In this sense, then, Phaedrus is telling another tale on the emperors’ Rome. In a word, this is what the Caesars made of Rome: a pantomime.”<sup>45</sup> Tiberius would have agreed with him.

In addition to name-dropping, there are other indications that Phaedrus’ fables reflect Tiberian Rome. In his analysis of Phaedrus’ treatment of the fable of the wolf and the lamb (1,1), Nøjgaard notes that Phaedrus’ version has a slightly darker ending than those of other ancient fabulists. The wolf does not give the lamb a chance to refute his last charge. He pounces *atque ita correptum lacerat iniusta nece* (1,1,13). The epimythium reads:

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42) B. Libby, Poetic and Imperial Authority in Phaedrus’ Fables, CQ 60, 2010, 545–558 at 557.

43) Cf. F. DuPont, L’Acteur-roi, ou Le Théâtre dans la Rome antique, Paris 1985.

44) Henderson (n.20) 114–115.

45) Henderson (n.20) 103.

*Haec propter illos scripta est homines fabula  
qui fictis causis innocentes opprimunt.*

(1,1,14–15)

Nøjgaard concludes: “Dans cette interprétation, la vraie moralité sera celle de Phèdre: rien ne vaut contre *vis* et *nequitia* (cf. Phaedr. II 6,1–3).”<sup>46</sup> Fable 2,6 tells the story of an eagle who has caught a tortoise but cannot figure out how to crack the shell. A crow suggests that the eagle fly up and then drop the tortoise. They share the feast of the hapless *testudo*. Perhaps not coincidentally, the promythium of 2,6, which immediately follows the anecdote about Tiberius, warns against those who fall in with a ruler who has a *consiliator maleficus*:

*Contra potentes nemo est munitus satis;  
si vero accessit consiliator maleficus,  
vis et nequitia quicquid oppugnant ruit.*

(2,6,1–3)

At the end of the fable of the dog and the wolf, epitomized by the phrase *quam dulcis sit libertas* (3,7,1), the wolf refuses to give up his freedom in order to enjoy the security which the dog has. But Phaedrus pushes the point even further in the wolf’s parting words: *Fruere quae laudas, canis; / regnare nolo, liber ut non sim mihi* (3,7,26–27). The choice of the verb *regnare* indicates that even kings have to give up their liberty, and that the price of doing so is too high.

### *Tiberius’ use of fables*

Phaedrus’ choice of fables as a literary outlet for political speech, his description of fables as a genre for expressing the sentiments of those who felt oppressed by *servitus obnoxia*, and his need to censure Sejanus, praise Augustus, and admire Tiberius, all suggest a Tiberian date. More importantly, they may explain why Tiberius sometimes used fables. Tiberius, like his fellow members

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46) M. Nøjgaard, La moralisation de la fable: d’Ésope à Romulus, in: F. R. Adrados / O. Reverdin (eds.), La Fable (Fondation Hardt. Entretiens sur l’Antiquité Classique XXX), Genève 1984, 225–251 at 232.

of the senate, felt the loss of *libertas* as he took over the imperial position created by Augustus. Hillard observes, “When Tacitus (Ann. 1.4) complains that there was, by AD 14, nothing left of the old spirit (*nihil usquam prisci et integri moris*), we might look to challenge that assertion in the person of Tiberius himself.”<sup>47</sup> Even though Tiberius was eventually seen as a tyrant, he seems to have viewed himself, along with his fellow senators, as a slave to the principate.<sup>48</sup>

The idea of an absolute ruler as a slave to his position was not new. Aelian relates an anecdote about the Hellenistic king Antigonos II (VH 2,20), who rebuked his son for abusing their subjects, telling him, “Do you not know, my son, that our monarchy is an honorable slavery?”<sup>49</sup> Martin observes, “In many different rhetorical contexts, the topos of the enslaved leader was used in ideological debates about proper forms of leadership.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, it was part of Republican rhetoric that all citizens were slaves to the law. Cicero remarks at Pro Cluentio 146, “We are all slaves to the laws, so that we might be able to be free” – *Legum . . . idcirco omnes servi sumus ut liberi esse possimus*. As Wirszubski has demonstrated, this carries over into the principate. In the Augustan system, the emperor was not (in name anyway) an authoritarian ruler, but rather the first citizen (*princeps*). Thus, “Augustus considered himself a soldier at a post; Tiberius asserted that the Princeps ought to be the servant of the State; and both of them eschewed the appellation ‘dominus’.”<sup>51</sup>

Although, according to Tacitus, Tiberius proclaimed that the senators were men prepared for slavery (Tac. Ann. 3,65,3), he himself as *princeps senatus* was also bound up in this enslavement to the new regime. In a speech quoted by Suetonius, Tiberius calls the *patres conscripti* his *domini* – *bonos et aequos et favescentes vos habui*

47) T. Hillard, Velleius 2.124.2 and the reluctant *princeps*: the evolution of Roman perceptions of leadership, in: E. Cowan (ed.), Velleius Paterculus: Making History, Oxford 2011, 219–251 at 235.

48) On the absence of *libertas* in Tiberian literature and iconography, see I. Cogitore, Le Doux Nom de Liberté: Histoire d’une idée politique dans la Rome antique, Paris 2011, 136.

49) οὐκ οἶσθα, εἶπεν, ὃ παῖ, τὴν βασιλείαν ἡμῶν ἔνδοξον εἶναι δουλείαν;

50) D. Martin, Slavery as Salvation: the Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity, New Haven, CT 1990, 114.

51) C. Wirszubski, *Libertas* as a Political Idea at Rome During the Late Republic and Early Principate, Cambridge 1960, 130.

*dominos et adhuc habeo* (Tib. 29), a term he refused himself (Tib. 27). He also states that he as *princeps* ought to serve the senate and his fellow citizens – *senatui servire debere et universis civibus saepe et plerumque etiam singulis*. Velleius Paterculus, Tiberius' one time comrade-in-arms, concludes his universal history with a prayer to the gods that Tiberius will be able to continue at his post (*statio*), and that his successors will be able to bear the burden of empire with the same fortitude (Vell. 2,131). Hillard summarizes, "The emperor as public servant ... It may well be the case that the Roman populace – at least those who were in a position to make an expression of 'collective opinion' – wanted to see the burden of determining the collective destiny shouldered by others."<sup>52</sup> As Roller has shown, Tiberius was engaged in the ongoing debate among the elite about expressions of power.<sup>53</sup> But unlike other emperors who sought to define the limits of their role as *dominus* (whether they allowed themselves to be called that or not), Tiberius inverted the paradigm by not only refusing the title *dominus*, but further insisting that he was a *servus*.<sup>54</sup>

Like his contemporary Phaedrus, Tiberius had trouble expressing himself directly. He relied on figured speech, including fables, to overcome his feeling of *servitus* to the state. In doing so, he was also drawing on his educational background and his natural rhetorical style. According to Suetonius, Tiberius' literary tastes tended towards the Hellenistic and esoteric (Tib. 70).<sup>55</sup> He was an admirer of Euphorion, Parthenius, Rhianus, and the *Silloi* of Timon.<sup>56</sup> Along the same lines, Tiberius was said to have rewarded

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52) Hillard (n. 47) 237–238. A. J. Woodman, *Velleius Paterculus. The Tiberian Narrative* (2.94–131), Cambridge 1977, 281 comments on the military overtones of Velleius' vow.

53) Roller (n. 25) 259–260. Along the same lines, although tangential to this discussion, Tiberius also rejected the other dialectical relationship discussed by Roller, that of father / son, by refusing to accept the title *pater patriae*.

54) Roller (n. 25) 260 comments regarding Tiberius' successor, "Caligula is said to have insisted on being called *dominus*."

55) On Tiberius' Greek proclivities, see S. Rutledge, *Tiberius' Philhellenism*, *CW* 101, 2008, 453–467. Our first known (and now lost) collection of fables was compiled by Demetrius of Phalerum during the Hellenistic period. See B. Perry, *Demetrius of Phalerum and the Aesopic Fables*, *TAPhA* 93, 1962, 287–346.

56) For a recent reconstruction and discussion of the *Silloi*, satirical attacks on dead philosophers, see D. Clayman, *Timon of Phlius: Pyrrhonism into Poetry*, Berlin 2009.

Asellius Sabinus for a dialogue involving a mushroom, a fig-pecker, an oyster, and a thrush (Tib. 42,2). While we have no idea how Asellius Sabinus shaped his dialogue, the characters resemble those of fable.

As a speaker, Tiberius imitated Messala Corvinus, *sed adfectione et morositate nimia obscurabat stilum* (Tib. 70,1).<sup>57</sup> Suetonius does not elaborate on what he means when he says that Tiberius obscured his style. Dio, however, begins his account of Tiberius' reign by stating, "he never let what he desired appear in his conversation, and what he said he wanted he usually did not desire at all. On the contrary, his words indicated the exact opposite of his real purpose; he denied all interest in what he longed for, and urged the claims of what he hated" (57,1 Loeb trans. Cary).<sup>58</sup> Dio's description closely resembles ancient definitions of figured speech (see n. 1). Yet while Dio portrays Tiberius as a tyrant, Tiberius viewed himself as the oppressed.

Upon the death of Augustus, Tiberius, the heir-apparent, tried to re-enact the *recusatio imperii* which Augustus had successfully orchestrated in 27 BC.<sup>59</sup> Suetonius states that Tiberius felt compelled to take up the empire and complained that he was being yoked to a wretched and burdensome servitude – *tandem quasi coactus et querens miseram et onerosam iniungi sibi servitutem, recepit imperium* (Tib. 24,2). Tiberius represented himself as the dominated and not the dominant, using the language of fable to do so.<sup>60</sup> As he made his refusals, he rebuked his friends, *increpans ut ignaros quanta belua esset imperium* (Tib. 24,1). After an awkward debate in the senate confirmed his rule, Tiberius agreed to accept the responsibilities of the princeps, but remarked that in doing so

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57) By comparison, although Augustus did use proverbs from time to time, according to Suetonius (Aug. 86,1), *genus eloquendi secutus est elegans et temperatum vitatis sententiarum ineptiis atque concinnitate et 'reconditorum verborum,' ut ipse dicit, 'fectoribus.'* He criticized Tiberius for his obscure expressions (Aug. 86,2): *Sed nec Tiberio parcit et exoletas interdum et reconditas voces aucupanti.*

58) οὔτε γὰρ ὧν ἐπειθύμει προσηποιεῖτό τι, καὶ ὧν ἔλεγεν οὐδὲν ὡς εἰπεῖν ἐβούλετο, ἀλλ' ἐναντιωτάτους τῇ προαιρέσει τοὺς λόγους ποιοῦμενος πᾶν τε ὃ ἐπόθει ἠρνείτο καὶ πᾶν ὃ ἐμίσει προετείνετο.

59) On the presentation of this process in Velleius, see Hillard (n. 47).

60) "Der Staat verschlingt nicht nur die Untertanen, sondern auch die Herrscher, wenn sie nicht aufpassen," A. Demandt, *Politik in den Fabeln Aesops*, *Gymnasium* 98, 1991, 397–419 at 408.

he was taking a wolf by the ears – *ut saepe lupum se auribus tenere diceret* (Tib. 25,1).<sup>61</sup>

As princeps, Tiberius used a fable to explain his prorogation of provincial governors. As mentioned above, Aristotle relates a story told by Aesop defending a demagogue on trial at Samos. A fox was driven into a ravine while crossing a river. Unable to get out, she was infested with fleas. A hedgehog passing by offered to swat away the fleas. The fox refused, saying, “They are already full of me and draw little blood; but if you take them away, others will come and drain what remains of me” (Rhet. 2,20,6 = 1393b Loeb trans. Freese). Tiberius, according to Josephus (AJ 18,173–176), changed the characters from animals to men. But, like Aesop, Tiberius applied the fable to politicians who extort money from their provinces. In the same vein, Tiberius was said to have responded to greedy provincial governors that he wanted his flock shorn not flayed (Suet. Tib. 32; Dio 57,10,5; cf. Aes. 212; Babr. 51). Both fables indicate resignation to abuses of power which could not be changed.<sup>62</sup>

Tiberius also used the language of fable to describe the impending reign of Caligula. He rebuked his Praetorian Prefect Macro for paying homage to the rising sun – *namque Macroni non abdita ambage occidentem ab eo deseri, orientem spectari exprobravit* (Tac. Ann. 6,46,4; cf. Dio 58,28,4). According to Suetonius, he was accustomed to say that by fostering Caligula he was nursing a viper for the Roman people (Gai. 11). This suggests the fable of the farmer who saved a viper, nursing him back to health, only to be bitten (Phaedr. 4,20; Babr. 143). Tacitus (Ann. 6,46) states that Tiberius felt his hands were tied in his decision by his respect for Augustus’ intentions.

Despite his power, Tiberius still felt like a slave to the Augustan system. As Syme recognized:

The dissimulation of Tiberius is an integral part of the tradition. It is also confirmed by the facts. Slow, cautious, and secretive, he had learned to cloak his thoughts and repress his feelings. Private affections

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61) For similar statements in Roman comedy, see G. Pisi, Fedro. Traduttore di Esopo, Firenze 1977, 26–27 n.2. The same expression was used by Thomas Jefferson regarding slavery in his Letter to John Holmes on the Missouri Statehood Question – April 20, 1820.

62) For a similar sense of resignation in his reluctance to enforce sumptuary laws, see Tac. Ann. 3,52–55.



had been overruled for reasons of high politics, and the ‘dignitas’ of a proud aristocrat suffered outrage more than once from Caesar Augustus; and yet, after multiple humiliations, he must behave as though nothing had occurred, resuming on command from his taskmaster the servitude of office and the mask of cheerful subordination.<sup>63</sup>

The emperor, like Phaedrus, believed that he had to disguise his true opinions, even though he was theoretically the most powerful man in Rome.<sup>64</sup>

### Conclusions

Phaedrus claims that he was alive in the reign of Augustus and writing before the fall of Sejanus. We have no evidence to dispute this. The complexity of his literary persona makes it difficult to discern anything about the man himself. However, Phaedrus explicitly connects his use of fables to *servitus obnoxia*. The political and social realities exposed in his poems make it clear that Phaedrus is a member of educated Roman society, engaging in a discussion about the nature of true freedom in a system where only a few have power. The credibility of his claim to have been attacked by Sejanus indicates that he convinced his readers (at least some of them) that his fables could be dangerous.

The last fable in the extant Book 5 (10) of Phaedrus, the tale of the old dog and the hunter, has often been read autobiographically. Phaedrus, thought to be at the end of his career, is associated with the dog who, despite his *animus*, has lost his strength. Historical sources depict Tiberius at the end of his life as a vigorous man who has lost his *animus*.<sup>65</sup> Phaedrus and Tiberius were both apparently worn out by trying to navigate the complexities of the Augustan system. While we can never know with any certainty if Tiberius and Phaedrus were contemporaries, they both express

63) R. Syme, *Tacitus*, v. I, Oxford 1958, 423.

64) According to Suet. Tib. 29, despite being princeps, Tiberius begged the pardon of Haterius for speaking too freely in a senatorial debate: ‘ignoscas,’ inquit, ‘rogo, si quid adversus te liberius sicut senator dixero.’

65) Suet. Tib. 68,4 asserts that Tiberius was in excellent health (*valitudine prosperrima usus est*) until the end of his life. Cf. Suet. Tib. 24,2, where Tiberius agrees to accept his role as princeps: *Ipsius verba sunt: ‘Dum veniam ad id tempus, quo vobis aequum possit videri dare vos aliquam senectuti meae requiem.’*

anxieties about the new principate. Both men feel a sense of enslavement, one fearing literary censorship, the other performing acts of self-sacrifice for the common good. Both men use fables and similar types of figured speech to cope.

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