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Peruigil ante fores, irrita uota gerens: Avianus' Fables and Roman Love Elegy

Abstract: Despite a longstanding negative assessment, many of the intertextual references in Avianus' fables turn out to be highly elaborate instances of intertextuality, which opens them up to more differentiated interpretation. A prime example of this is the intertextual connection between the first two fables of Avianus' collection and Roman love elegy, which this paper analyses. A short introduction on intertextuality in Avianus' fables is followed by an analysis of the first two fables and their references to love elegy, which prompts suggestions about possible effects on the fable's interpretation. The following comparative analysis of the two fables presents a multi-layered connection between these fables and the genre of Roman love elegy. Against the background of the paratextual *epistula*, it is then demonstrated how this connection facilitates metapoetic readings of the two fables and their messages. A summary of the findings and the outlook for future investigations conclude the paper.

Throughout modern research, the fables of Avianus, which are usually dated around 400 CE, have been rated quite negatively. In this regard, Avianus' collection can surely be considered a 'child of its time', since these negative assessments target stylistic peculiarities that we today associate strongly with literature of the Late Antique period. One of the main points of criticism is the use of intertextual references: throughout the corpus we stumble upon an abundant number of blatant and sometimes allegedly awkward references to poets of the Classical period. While this is by no means unusual in the context of Late Antique literary aesthetics, which include among their main features a deeply reverent attitude to the 'Classical giants' and (visible) references to them,[1] one can easily see how this might differ from the aesthetic ideals of other periods and so give rise to such negative assessments. Upon closer inspection, however, many of these references in Avianus' fables prove to be highly elaborate instances of intertextuality, often adding multiple layers to the text and opening it up to a more nuanced interpretation. A clear and impressive example of this can be found in the first two fables of the collection, where an

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1 On the reverent Late Antique interaction with Latin literature of the Classical period, and on intertextual references as one of its main features, see e.g. Pelttari 2014, *passim*.

intertextual connection to Roman love elegy is established through a plethora of references in motifs and lexicon.

In what follows, a short introduction will provide necessary preliminaries for the investigation (1), and I will then analyse the first two fables of Avianus' collection, examining where intertextual references to love elegy are found, how they are implemented, and to what extent they influence the fables and their (possible) interpretation (2.1–2). I will also consider the two fables side by side, to elucidate the role that these references play in the reciprocal context of the two poems (2.3). In a third section, I consider the larger context and show, against the background of the paratextual *epistula*, how the two fables' multi-layered connection to love elegy affects the interpretation of Avianus' whole collection, by facilitating meta-poetic readings of them and their messages, which can be seen as relating to the author's literary ambition (3). A conclusion offers a summary of the findings and the outlook for potential further investigations of these themes (4).

1 Introduction: models, changes, and intertextuality in the fables of Avianus

Intertextuality is — to some degree — always a question of models. In this respect, the fables of Avianus hold a unique position that sets them apart from other fable collections: there is no doubt that the *Mythiambi* of Babrius were the model on which Avianus devised his collection.[2] On the one hand, the author explicitly mentions Babrius in the *epistula*,[3] on the other hand, direct connections to Babrius' *Mythiambi* and their prose paraphrases can be established for 35 of the 42 fables of Avianus.[4] There has, however, been some discussion about whether Avianus knew the *Mythiambi* of Babrius directly, that is, in their original metrical Greek form, or only through a Latin prose paraphrase, presumably that of a certain Titianus,

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2 Cf. e.g. Küppers 1977, 163: "Es ist allgemein unumstritten, daß die avianischen Fabeln stofflich im wesentlichen auf Babrius zurückgehen." ("It is undisputed that in terms of content the fables of Avianus go back to Babrius."); also Crusius 1896, 2376: "Die von Avian behandelten Stoffe finden sich also, wie schon Lachmann und Eberhard sahen, ausschließlich bei Babrius und in den von Babrius abhängigen Überlieferungen." ("The topics treated by Avianus are thus, as already Lachmann and Eberhard recognized, found exclusively in Babrius and the traditions dependent on him.").

3 Cf. Avian. *praef.* 13–14; also, below § 3.

4 Cf. Küppers 1977, 164; Luzzato/LaPenna 1986, XIX–XXII; Adrados 2000, 253–273.

which is mentioned in one of Ausonius' letters.[5] While this is not the place to discuss this debate in detail, there are several good reasons to assume that Avianus accessed the fables of Babrius in their original form.[6] One of these is that one of the originally defining features of Latin literature, to translate Greek models into Latin, while trying to improve and ultimately surpass them in the spirit of *aemulatio* again gained special attention from the fourth century onward.[7] Avianus' adaptation of the Babrian fables clearly is to be seen in the context of this '*a Graecis in Latinas*' practice.[8] Hence, when reading and interpreting Avianus, we must always consider the fable versions of Babrius as well.

There is not a single fable of Avianus in which there are no changes from the corresponding Babrian version[9] in content and/or structure, and this often goes hand in hand with changes in the fables' motifs and messages.[10] It is especially in the context of such deviations from the Babrian versions that intertextual references can be found. As already touched on, these references focus strongly on the 'great' poets of the Classical period, most prominently Vergil, Ovid, and Horace.[11] In the early 2000s, Roberto Scanzo performed a great service for research on Avianus by identifying and collecting these references on a large scale.[12] Scanzo focused on identifying them by considering lexical and prosodic similarities, in most cases, however, there is more to the intertextual references in Avianus than what meets the recipient's eye on the surface level. This should be borne in mind as we now analyse the first two fables and their references to love elegy, which are prime examples of how intertextuality is used in Avianus' collection.

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5 Auson. *Ep.* 9b.78–81 (according to Green 1999).

6 The debate centres on the phrase *rudi latinitate compositas* (Avian. *praef.* 15–17) and what it refers to. Advocates of the assumption that Avianus knew the *Mythiambi* only through a prose paraphrase read this statement as describing the prose paraphrase, he alledgedly used (cf. e.g. Crusius 1896, 2374; Gaide 1980, 38–43). In my opinion it is far more plausible that this phrase refers to Avianus' own collection, thus presenting a prime example of a topos of modesty through self-deprecation in the context of a *captatio benevolentiae*. For this stance, see Ellis 1887, 51; Küppers 1977, 163–191; Holzberg 2012, 71–72; 2019, 41; 2022, 10–12.

7 Cf. e.g. the three extant works of Rufius Festus Avienus (4th century), all of which go back to Greek models, cf. Küppers 1977, 198–199. For an account of the discussion regarding this topic, see Küppers 1977, 193–207.

8 Cf. below § 3.

9 If there is a Babrian version extant.

10 For the narratological and structural peculiarities of Avianus' fables — also in comparison to their Babrian models —, see Küppers 1977, *passim*.

11 There is, e.g. not a single fable without any reference to one of Vergil's works, although most of them involve the *Aeneid*.

12 Cf. Scanzo 2001a; 2001b; 2002, *passim*.

2 Identifying and analysing references to love elegy in Avian. 1 and 2

2.1 Avian. 1 — *de nutrice et infante*

Rustica deflentem paruum iuraerat olim,
  ni taceat, rabido quod foret esca lupo.
credulus hanc uocem lupus audiit et manet ipsas
   peruigil ante fores, irrita uota gerens.
nam lassata puer nimiae dat membra quieti,   5
  spem quoque raptori sustulit inde fames.
hunc ubi siluarum repetentem lustra suarum
  ieiunum coniunx sensit adesse lupa:
"cur, inquit, nullam referens de more rapinam,
  languida consumptis sed trahis ora genis?"   10
"ne mireris, ait, deceptum fraude maligna
  uix miserum uacua delituisse fuga.
nam quae praeda, rogas, quae spes contingere posset,
  iurgia nutricis cum mihi uerba darent?"
haec sibi dicta putet seque hac sciat arte notari,   15
   femineam quisquis credidit esse fidem.[13]

                                             (Avian. 1)

A peasant woman had once sworn to a crying boy that if he did not keep quiet he would become food for the raging wolf. Gullibly the wolf heard this speech and stayed awake right in front of the door, nursing vain desires. For the boy surrenders his exhausted limbs to the overpowering calm; then hunger also took away the robber's hope. As soon as his wife, the she-wolf, noticed that he was hungrily returning to the lairs of his woods, she said: "Why don't you bring prey as you should, but make a long face with sunken cheeks?" "Marvel not," he said, "that, deceived by malicious fraud, I have had difficulty in vain flight. For what prey, you ask, what hope could I have, since the wicked words of the nurse deceived me?"
Everyone has to believe that this is said for them, and to know that they are designated by this art, who believes that there is female reliability.[14]

                                             (Transl. Chr.P.)

Ursula Gärtner has convincingly shown that this fable reflects on, and to some degree deconstructs, the genre of fable poetry.[15] On the one hand, the naïve and

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13 All texts follow the edition of Guaglianone 1958.
14 If not stated otherwise, all translations are my own. This translation is oriented towards that of Gärtner 2022, 46.
15 See Gärtner 2022, 41–50.

henpecked wolf does not match his typical character in fable.[16] On the other, there is also a witty play with the issue of *ueritas* and *falsitas*. This issue is central to the genre of fable poetry and is commonly raised not only in prologues to fable collections but also in definitions of the fable genre, where it comprises two aspects, of truth and falsehood, and the reality and fictionality of fables.[17] This dichotomy is also important when examining the connection to love elegy.

The model for this fable is Babr. 16.[18] When comparing Avianus' adaptation to the Babrian version, the parallel construction of their first eight verses is striking: in both fables, the first line describes the setting, where both have the rustic nurse (*rustica* – ἄγροικος) as the first word, while the second line contains her threat to the crying child.[19] In line 3 the wolf is introduced, who hears (*audiit* – ἀκούσας) this threat, believes it (*credulus* – ἀληθεύειν νομίσας, 3–4), and therefore waits (*manet*, 3 – ἔμεινεν, 4) for its fulfilment. In the fifth line the boy falls asleep (*dat membra quieti* – ἐκοιμήθη), leading to the wolf's realization that his hopes are in vain (*spem sustulit*, 6 – νωθραῖς ἐλπίσιν παρεδρεύσας, 7), while line 6 focuses on the animal's hunger (*fames* – πεινῶν), and line 7 tells us how it ultimately leaves (*repetentem lustra* – ἀπῆλθε). After the wolf returns home, the she-wolf (*lupa* – λύκαινα), its mate (*coniunx* – σύνευνος), is introduced in line 8.

Then the two versions begin to diverge: although there are similar dialogues between the wolves in both, in Babrius this 'dispute' only comprises two lines, while in Avianus it is much extended, spanning six lines. While a general statement about

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16 Cf. e.g. Phaed. 1.1 Z. [= G.].

17 Cf. e.g. Phaed. 1 *prol.* 7 Z. [= G.]; Quint. *Inst.* 5.11.19; Theon *Prog.* 4 (72, 78 Spengel); August. *Soliloq.* 2.11.19 etc. On the discussion of *falsitas* and *ueritas*, cf. also Cameron 1967; Küppers 1977, 173–174; Uden 2009, 113–115; Feddern 2018, *passim*.

18 Babr. 16: Ἄγροικος ἠπείλησε νηπίῳ τίτθη κλαίοντι· | "παῦσαι, μή σε τῷ λύκῳ ῥίψω." | λύκος δ' ἀκούσας τήν τε γραῦν ἀληθεύειν | νομίσας ἔμεινεν ὡς ἕτοιμα δειπνήσων, | ἕως ὁ παῖς μὲν ἑσπέρης ἐκοιμήθη, | αὐτὸς δὲ πεινῶν καὶ λύκος χανὼν ὄντως | ἀπῆλθε νωθραῖς ἐλπίσιν παρεδρεύσας. | λύκαινα δ' αὐτὸν ἡ σύνευνος ἠρώτα· | "πῶς οὐδὲν ἄρας ἦλθες, ὡς πρὶν εἰώθης;" | ὁ δ' εἶπε· "πῶς γάρ, ὃς γυναικὶ πιστεύω;" ("A rustic nurse threatened a small child, when it was crying: 'Stop it, lest I feed you to the wolf.' The wolf, hearing this and believing the old woman was telling the truth, stayed looking forward to a ready meal, until the child fell asleep in the evening, while he himself left, hungry and a 'wolf with gaping jaw', after he leaned on vain hopes. The she-wolf, his mate, asked him: 'Why did you come, without bringing something like usually before?' And he said: 'Why indeed, I, who believe a woman?'"). This translation is that of Holzberg 2019, 67. On the relation of Babr. 16 to Avian. 1, see also Spielhofer 2023, 281–282.

19 The fact that Avianus uses *oratio obliqua* here rather than *oratio recta* like Babrius is connected to his peculiarities in style and narrative. Avianus in general makes far less use of direct speech than his model and uses it specifically to emphasize certain (parts of) speeches. On this, see Küppers 1977, 88–95; Schmalzgruber 2020, 105–114; Poms 2022, 250–253.

female credibility is advanced by the wolf in Babrius (10), in Avianus the wolf narrates what happened to him (11–14). It is only after these four lines that we get an epimythium, in which female credibility as a whole is questioned. Gärtner has already identified this 'marital quarrel' of the wolves as a possible reference to love elegy, in which quarrels between lovers are a common topic, and she has suggested Ov. *Am.* 2.2.33–38 as a possible sub- or intertext.[20]

An even more obvious reference to love elegy can be found in line 4 of Avianus: as has been pointed out, both versions explicitly mention that, after hearing the nurse's words, the wolf stayed — *manet* in line 3 of Avianus is a literal equivalent of ἔμεινεν in Babrius line 4. However, in Avianus line 4 we are given additional information about the waiting wolf: *peruigil ante fores, irrita uota gerens* ("[he] stayed awake in front of the door, nursing vain desires"). This clearly takes up the motif of the *exclusus amator*, with whom the wolf is thereby identified. Thus, by adding the detail of the *fores*, in front of which the wolf waits, Avianus nonchalantly calls up a well-known motif, enriching the possible interpretation of the text. It is also significant that this takes place in the fourth line, where Avianus' adaptation is otherwise still very similar to the model. This draws special attention to this small but meaningful change, presenting a prime example of how intertextuality functions in Avianus.[21]

The motif of the *exclusus amator* in conjunction with the extension of the plot in lines 9–14, which particularly emphasizes the wolves' 'marital dispute', therefore seems to establish an intertextual connection between this fable and love elegy on a motivic level.[22] In light of this, the central motifs of this fable, *spes* and *fides*, can also be seen as intertextually charged hints towards love elegy, where the *spes* of the *amator* and the *fides* of the *puella* are among the main topics. Of course, we now

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20 Ov. *Am.* 2.2.33–38: *cum bene uir traxit uultum rugasque coegit, | quod uoluit fieri blanda puella, facit | sed tamen interdum tecum quoque iurgia nectat, | et simulet lacrimas carnificemque uocet. | tu contra obiciens, quae tuto diluat illa, | et ueris falso crimine deme fidem.* ("After the good husband lours and frowns, he does what the flattering girl wants to happen. But, nevertheless, she may start quarrels with you, and feign tears and call you a bastard. You, on the other hand, accuse her of things that she can safely rebut, and take away the credibility of truth through <the accusation of> a false crime."). — I find this very convincing, since there are also possible lexical parallels, e.g.: *trahis languida ora* (Avian. 1.10) and *uir traxit uultum* (Ov. *Am.* 2.2.33). Cf. Gärtner 2022, 47, esp. also n. 20.
21 Although Avianus usually uses lexical references (cf. above § 1, esp. n. 1; 11–12), I would argue that a motif this prominent does not need a lexical model to be immediately recognized.
22 Also, there seem to be quite a few references through motifs to Tib. 1.1 in particular, which I only mention, since they cannot be discussed here; they will be treated in detail in my PhD project.

need to ask how this connection to love elegy affects or interacts with the interpretation of the fable.

The central subject of Avian. 1 is undoubtedly the question of *ueritas* and *falsitas*, comprising two aspects, the first being the credibility of women, which is the topic of the Babrian version. This is interconnected with the second aspect, the question of the *ueritas* and *falsitas* of fables, which is central to the fable genre and is also posed prominently at the beginning of other fable collections.[23] Not only is this fable subject inherently connected to credibility, but the *iurgia* of the *rustica nutrix* and the wolf, which is not a typical fable wolf, pick up and reflect upon the fable genre and its central dichotomy.[24] The choice of this fable topic, as well as its positioning at the beginning of the collection, therefore, seems to pay tribute to tradition and to enter into a dialogue with it in a sophisticated way.

However, if we take love elegy into consideration, it is noteworthy that the fidelity and truthfulness (of the *puellae*) are among its central and recurring themes, which sheds new light on the *iurgia* of the *rustica nutrix*: they are heard by two males, the wolf and the *deflens puer*, who receive them very differently. The wolf, the *exclusus amator*, is *credulus* in respect to the woman's words and full of *spes*. It is only after his long wait *ante fores* that he gets disillusioned and realizes that there is no *fides feminea.* Because of his disillusionment, he repays the other female in the fable, the *lupa* — the term is of course ambiguous –, in the same way when she scolds him: he lies to her (12). The boy, on the other hand, at no point believes the *rustica,* but falls asleep from exhaustion, as the *lassata membra* (5) suggest. He is already disillusioned about female credibility, it would seem. In light of this, the boy and the wolf seem to embody two different stages of the *amator*: one where he is desperate and heavily lamenting, knowing that there is no female fidelity; and one where he is hopeful and gullible and ready to endure the challenges imposed on him by the *puella.* However, the true significance of this connection to love elegy only becomes apparent if we also consider the following fable, where it continues, as does the topic of *ueritas* and *falsitas*.

2.2 Avian. 2 — *de testudine et aquila*

Pennatis auibus quondam testudo locuta est:
  si quis eam uolucrum constituisset humi,
protinus e rubris conchas proferret arenis,
  quis pretium nitido cortice baca daret;

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23 Cf. above n. 17.

24 Cf. Gärtner 2022 as above in n. 15.

indignum sibimet, tardo quod sedula gressu   5
    nil ageret toto perficeretque die.
ast ubi promissis aquilam fallacibus implet,
    experta est similem perfida lingua fidem.
et male mercatis dum quaerit sidera pennis,
    occidit infelix alitis ungue fero.   10
tum quoque sublimis, cum iam moreretur, in auras
    ingemuit uotis haec licuisse suis.
nam dedit exosae post haec documenta quietis
    non sine supremo magna labore peti.
sic quicumque noua sublatus laude tumescit, 15
    dat merito poenas, dum meliora cupit.

(Avian. 2)[25]

To the feathered birds the turtle once spoke: If one of the winged had <after a flight through air> set it <safe> on ground, immediately it would bring forth shells from the Red Sands <= Sea>, which pearls with shining skin would give value; disgraceful <it seemed> to itself that, <though> eager, with slow step it did and completed nothing the whole day. But as it had filled the eagle with deceitful promises, the disloyal tongue experienced similar loyalty. And while it chased the stars on ill-bought wings, the unlucky one died by the fierce talon of the bird. Then also, high above, in the agony of death, to the heavens it moaned that it suffered this <punishment> for its desire. For thenceforward it gave testimony to the hated tardiness not to strive for great things without utmost toil. Thus, whoever swells, elevated by new praise, rightly gets punished while he strives for better things.

(Transl. Chr.P.)

The continuation of the topic of *ueritas* and *falsitas* in this fable is connected to a change in its motifs relative to the Babrian model, Babr. 115.[26] In Babrius' version the turtle is primarily characterized by its naivety: on the one hand, it wishes for something unrealistic (to fly), on the other hand, it blindly trusts the eagle with its

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25 For the following analysis of Avian. 2, cf. Poms 2024, 104–107.

26 Babr. 115: Νωθὴς χελώνη λιμνάσιν ποτ' αἰθυίαις | λάροις τε καὶ κήυξιν εἶπεν ἀγρώσταις· | "κἀμὲ πτερωτὴν εἴθε τις πεποιήκει." | τῇ δ' ἐκ τύχης ἔλεξεν αἰετὸς ταῦτα· | "πόσον, χέλυμνα, μισθὸν αἰετῷ δώσεις, | ὅστις σ' ἐλαφρὴν καὶ μετάρσιον θήσω;" | "τὰ τῆς Ἐρυθρῆς πάντα δῶρά σοι δώσω." | "τοιγὰρ διδάξω" φησίν. ὑπτίην δ' ἄρας | ἔκρυψε νέφεσιν, ἔνθεν εἰς ὄρος ῥίψας | ἤραξεν αὐτῆς οὖλον ὄστρακον νώτων. | ἡ δ' εἶπεν ἐκψύχουσα "σὺν δίκῃ θνήσκω· | τί γὰρ νεφῶν μοι καὶ τίς ἦν πτερῶν χρείη | τῇ καὶ χαμᾶζε δυσκόλως προβαινούσῃ;" ("The lazy turtle once said to the loons in the swamp, the seagulls and the wild sea swallows: 'If only someone made me winged!' To it the eagle said this by chance: 'What prize, turtle, will you give to me, the eagle, I who will lightly lift you in the air?' 'All gifts of the Red Sea I will give to you.' 'Hence, I will teach you', he said. Then <the eagle> lifted <the turtle> turned on its back, hid it in the clouds, from there threw it on a mountain and broke the shell of its back. It said exhaling its soul: 'Rightly I die. Why did I need clouds, why wings, who <only> slowly went forward on the ground?'"). This translation is that of Holzberg 2019, 165, the additions in angled brackets are mine.

life. Küppers argues that, besides this obvious naivety, the greed motivating the turtle's wish should also be seen as the cause of its demise, as the eagle acts on the turtle's plea to exploit it.[27]

In stark contrast, the eagle in Avianus disappears into the background, while the turtle becomes the sole actor. Even while being killed by the eagle (10), the turtle remains the grammatical subject through the sentence's passive construction. Further, the turtle's character has changed notably: despite obviously still being portrayed as naïve in Avianus for gullibly trusting the eagle, the turtle's main character trait seems to be its deceitfulness, for it does not intend to pay the prize (7–8) that it has promised for fulfilment of its wish (3). Also, compared to the Babrian version, the motif of greed seems more prominent in Avianus' adaptation, where it is also transferred to the birds, whose greed the turtle seeks to arouse with its promise. This brings about a change in the fable's message: whereas in Babrius the dying turtle laments its foolish wish for things not apt for it, in Avian. 2 we are presented with two concluding sentences (13–16), each spanning one distich, that condemn dishonest means of achieving one's goals. The core of this message is explicitly verbalized in line 14: *non sine supremo magna labore peti.*

It is notable that very literal references to love elegy can be found precisely in the verses that are crucial to this change in content, namely Avian. 2.3 and 2.7–8.[28]

Avian. 2.3	Prop. 3.13.6
Protinus **e rubris conchas** proferret **arenis**	et uenit **e Rubro concha** Erycina **salo**
	Tib. 2.4.30
	uestis et **e Rubro** lucida **concha mari**

While Babr. 115.7 features a similar promise by the turtle (τὰ τῆς Ἐρυθρῆς πάντα δῶρά σοι δώσω),[29] Avianus, in line 3, specifies these gifts as shells with pearls. In doing so, he is picking up Prop. 3.13.6 and Tib. 2.4.30. Thus, Avianus here adds to his model in a very similar way to what we saw above in Avian. 1.4 with the *fores*. Since Avianus is thus alluding to specific lines of verse here, it is crucial that we consider these lines' (original) context: both Prop. 3.13 and Tib. 2.4 thematize the greed of the *puellae* and present it as the cause of all that is bad and evil.[30] Both the intertextual model-lines are part of a 'greed catalogue',[31] a catalogue of goods that are not only

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27 For a comparative analysis of Avian. 2 and Babr. 115, cf. Küppers 1977, 111–118.

28 The relation of these verses on a lexical level was set out by Scanzo 2001a, 212–213. On traces of the elegies of Tibullus and Propertius in Avianus' fables, see also Romeo Pallas 1981; 1986.

29 Cf. above, n. 26.

30 Cf. Prop. 3.13.25–50; Tib. 2.4.31–34.

31 Cf. Prop. 3.13.5–8; Tib. 2.4.27–30.

the cause, but also the goal of the *puellae*'s greed. In this light, the turtle's promise of a price that is part of such a catalogue seems quite fitting, as it is trying to incite the greed of the birds. The fact that this price not only corresponds to the model, but is also the only item in the catalogue that the turtle could plausibly promise, adds to the ingenuity of the reference. Also, the reference to a catalogue that presents 'the root of all evil' appears as if a foreshadowing of the turtle's demise.[32] Lines 7–8 contain a similar 'prophecy'.

Avian. 2.7–8	Prop. 3.13.66
(Ast ubi promissis aquilam fallacibus implet,)	**expertast** ueros irrita **lingua** deos
experta est similem perfida **lingua** fidem.	(Tib. 2.4.51)
	(uera quidem moneo, sed prosunt quid mihi uera?)

In Prop. 3.13.66 the poetic 'I' of the elegy compares himself to Cassandra. The foreshadowing of the outcome is, therefore, intertextually charged with a reference to the perhaps best-known prophetess in ancient literature and to the fall of Troy. This also results in a colourful contrast: Cassandra tells the truth and is not believed; the turtle, on the other hand, lies and is heard. In the end, however, both die a similarly gruesome death.[33] Although there are no lexical parallels, the motif of futile truthtelling is also taken up in Tib. 2.4.[34] Therefore, the topic of *ueritas* and *falsitas* is not only thematized in Avian. 2 through a change in the motifs and the narrative focus on the lying turtle, but is emphasized through intertextual references to love elegy in particular.

It is noteworthy, however, that the references to love elegy in Avian. 2 are not central topoi of the genre, as is the case with the references in Avian. 1. While material greed is by no means a topic foreign to love elegy, as the two intertexts attest,[35] it is not treated as frequently as the *exclusus amator* or lovers' quarrels. The topic of prophecy is arguably even less prominent in love elegy than that of material greed. Avian. 2 picking up less prominent topics of love elegy can be explained easily by considering the arrangement of the two fables and comparing them side by side.

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32 This is all the more plausible as anticipations of this kind are very common in Avianus' fables. For this, cf. Küppers 1977, 85–88.

33 I think it could also be argued that this reference is continued in line 10 (*occidit infelix alitis ungue fero*), with *infelix* referring to the tragic fate of the Trojan and *ungue fero* referring to the dagger of Clytemnestra.

34 Cf. the table above; transl.: "Of course, I herald the truth, but what good is the truth to me?"

35 Cf. e.g. also Tib. 1.1, in which the renunciation of spoils and riches, acquired by various means — most prominently warfare — plays a central role.

2.3 Avian. 1 and 2: their inter-relation and their connection to love elegy

There is an undeniable inter-relation between the first two fables of Avianus, which is created not only by their shared connection to love elegy but also by parallels in topics, motifs, and structure. Firstly, they are connected through their central topic, the dichotomy of *ueritas* and *falsitas*. If we consider the plot and the characters, more parallels become apparent. Both fables begin with a false promise: just as the *rustica nutrix* does not intend to feed the child to the wolf, the *testudo* does not intend to pay the price it promises. Analogous to the gullible wolf who believes this promise in Avian. 1, in Avian. 2 there is the eagle whom the turtle was (seemingly) able to persuade of its promise. After this, the roles of the two actors giving false promises diverge. Since the turtle itself gullibly believes the eagle, it is deceived. The eagle on the other hand appears to correspond to the disillusioned wolf who, after learning that females cannot be trusted, lies to his wife himself. A similar thing is done by the eagle: he deceives the 'deceptress' — as one might say — since *testudo* is a feminine noun.

There is another striking parallel in the protagonists of the fables, the wolf and the turtle, in that both are denied their *uota* because they aimed to achieve them by illicit means. While the wolf expects to get his *praeda* just by waiting (instead of hunting for it), the turtle wants to achieve by deception something that is inappropriate to it.[36] In contrast, the *fabula docet* of Avian. 2 reminds us explicitly that there is no easy or comfortable way to achieve one's goals: if you want *magna*, you must put in *supremus labor.*

The wrongful behaviour of the protagonists is not only related to the question of *ueritas* and *falsitas* but should also be seen in the context of the fables' connection to love elegy, which is first established in Avian. 1 by adopting prominent topoi of that genre. In Avian. 2 the references to love elegy are not such common topoi, but instead are clearly lexical and, in a sophisticated way, refer to the same two poems of the same two authors twice. In light of the ostentatious thematic references to love elegy in Avian. 1, readers will most likely still have this genre in mind when reading Avian. 2. They, therefore, are probably able to identify the lexical references in Avian. 2, which they otherwise might — though not necessarily, of course — have missed. This makes perfect sense from the perspective of an erudite author playfully guiding his readers, which inevitably leads me to my last question:

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36 I would argue that being brought back to earth safely is the essential part of the turtle's *uota*, since it is the only part that is explicitly verbalized (Avian. 2.2). Evidently the turtle is denied this part (Avian. 2.10).

how does this connection to love elegy affect the interpretation or evaluation of Avianus' collection as whole?

3 Context and implications: the references to love elegy as metapoetic statements in light of the paratextual *epistula ad Theodosium*

To grasp the importance of these findings for interpreting the collection of Avianus, two factors need to be considered: the position of the two fables within the collection and the paratextual *epistula ad Theodosium*.

Regarding the first, one must at once ask whether we know, or even can know, the original order of the fables within the collection. The answer is as delightful as it is surprising: there is — in comparison to other fable collections[37] — an exceptionally high degree of certainty regarding the order of the fables within Avianus' collection. This is due to the collection's completeness[38] as well as to its broad and consistent manuscript tradition.[39] It is thus rather certain that these are the first two fables of the collection, with the implication that they are intended to present an initial show of skill, and that they probably perform some kind of programmatic function. Further, they must hence also be seen in the context of the paratext that immediately precedes them.

> Avian. praef. — epistula ad Theodosium
> Dubitanti mihi, Theodosi optime, quonam litterarum
> titulo nostri nominis memoriam mandaremus, fabularum
> textus occurrit, quod in his urbane concepta falsitas
> deceat et non incumbat necessitas ueritatis. nam quis
> tecum de oratione, quis de poemate loqueretur? cum in   5
> utroque litterarum genere Atticos Graeca eruditione
> superes, et latinitate Romanos? huius ergo materiae
> ducem nobis Aesopum noueris, qui responso Delphici
> Apollinis monitus ridicula orsus est ut legenda firmaret.
> uerum has pro exemplo fabulas et Socrates diuinis ope-   10

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37 Cf. e.g. the changes regarding the order of the fables made by Zago 2020 in his new critical edition of Phaedrus.

38 Avianus states the scope of his work (cf. *praef.* 15), and a corresponding number of fables survives.

39 There are over 130 manuscripts extant. For a catalogue of the manuscripts, cf. Guaglianone 1958, ix–lix. This catalogue is complemented by Dicke/Grubmüller 1987, lxviii–lxix.

ribus indidit et poemati suo Flaccus aptauit, quod in se,
sub iocorum communium specie, uitae argumenta conti-
neant. quas Graecis iambis Babrius repetens in duo uolu-
mina coartauit. Phaedrus etiam partem aliquam quinque
in libellos resoluit. de his ergo ad quadraginta et duas   15
in unum redactas fabulas dedi, quas rudi latinitate com-
positas elegis sum explicare conatus. habes ergo opus,
quo animum oblectes, ingenium exerceas, sollicitudinem
leues, totumque uiuendi ordinem cautus agnoscas. loqui
uero arbores, feras cum hominibus gemere, uerbis certare   20
uolucres, animalia ridere fecimus, ut pro singulorum neces-
sitatibus uel ab ipsis <in>animis sententia proferatur.[40]

<div align="right">(Avian. <i>praef.</i>)</div>

Letter to Theodosius — As I pondered, <my> dearest Theodosius, with which title of literature we should commend the memory of our name, the narrative of fables occurred <to me>, because, in these, wittily elaborated falsity is befitting, and the compulsion for truth is not incumbent. For who could argue with you about rhetoric, who about poetry? While in both genres of literature you surpass the Athenians in Greek erudition, as well as the Romans in Latinity? You know Aesop as our leader in this subject who, prompted by the response of Delphic Apollo, began amusing stories to support that, which should be chosen. But these fables Socrates added to his divine works and Flaccus (= Horace) fitted them into his poetry as examples because they contain stories of real life, under the guise of jests of general application. Taking them up again, Babrius adapted them into two volumes with Greek iambs. Phaedrus also presented another part <of them> in five books. Of these, therefore, I gave 42 fables made into one book which, written in crude Latin, I tried to devise in elegies. Thus, you have a work with which you may delight your spirit, exercise your mind, alleviate sorrows, and, when cautious, <even> understand the whole order of life. But we made trees talk, wild beasts moan with humans, birds fight with words, animals laugh, so that according to the necessity of the single <stories> even an aphorism is brought forth by inanimate things themselves.

<div align="right">(Transl. Chr.P.)</div>

The *epistula* is full of the topoi of dedication-letters as well as of prologues to fable collections, that is, those present in the prologues of Phaedrus and Babrius. A thorough analysis of these topoi would call for a paper of its own, so I can only point out some of them here, as they appear in the two sections of the *epistula* relevant to this study.

The first important section is lines 3–7, the topos of deliberating about which genre to write. Avianus' reasoning for choosing the fable is twofold. An explicit reason is given in the *quod*-clause, namely that, when writing fables, there is no *necessitas ueritatis*, and *urbane concepta falsitas* is befitting (3–4). This obviously refers

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40 Although the *epistula* is a prose text, I have retained the formatting of Guaglianone 1958, because its line count makes navigation in the text easier.

to the dichotomy of *ueritas* and *falsitas*, central to fable poetry, and so picks up the related discourse on fictionality.[41] Here the author not only displays his knowledge of the fable genre, but clearly places himself in its tradition. But there is also an implicit reason in the exaltation of the addressee (4–7, again a topos). Avianus confesses that he chose the fable genre because it lies outside the addressee's field of competence which, it seems to be implied, is representative of the literary environment of his time. That is, he chose a genre that was not completely played out, one in which or through which he can still excel. This is undoubtedly to be understood as an earnest expression of literary ambition in the context of the author's time, i.e. the late fourth or early fifth century. This is further corroborated by his approach, the emulative *a Graecis in Latinas* transmission, already mentioned above,[42] which also seems to be hinted at here through the contrast of *Graeca eruditione* (6) and *latinitas* (7).[43]

This directly leads to the second important section, the historical overview of the genre of fable poetry (7–15), and the definition of the scope and content of Avianus' own work (15–17). After the obligatory or even 'necessary' mention of Aesop as inventor of the fable genre,[44] Avianus lists four authors, divided into two pairs, who used or wrote fables: the first pair is Socrates (10) and Horace (11), who did not treat fables as an individual genre, but used single fables in their works. Surely, by naming these great figures as predecessors Avianus is aiming to elevate the fable genre and his own work. The second pair is Babrius (13) and Phaedrus (14), who wrote the only verse fable collections extant today that predate that of Avianus and are, therefore, to be seen as his immediate predecessors.[45]

Although the second pair is evidently programmatic,[46] this historical overview shows no concern for completeness or chronology. It does, however, aptly depict the evolution of fable and fable poetry: from its beginning and the initial use of fables as a rhetorical means of persuasion or as illustrative examples, portrayed through the first pair, to the independent literary genre of collections in metre,

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41 Cf. above § 2.1, esp. n. 17.

42 Cf. above § 1, esp. n. 7.

43 Cf. Küppers 1977, 205–207.

44 Cf. Phaed. 1 *prol.* 1 Z. [= G.]; Babr. 1 *prol.* 15.

45 Cf. Küppers 1977, 181–184.

46 Babrius is the model for Avianus, cf. above. The fables of Phaedrus also serve as a direct model for Avianus: they in some cases can clearly be traced behind content-related changes in Avianus' fable adaptations in relation to the Babrian versions. Küppers 1977 examined and demonstrated such connections between Avian. 37 and Phaed. 3.7 Z. [= G.], and between Avian. 34 and Phaed. 5.24 Z. [= 4.25 G.], and I myself have done so for Avian. 8 and Phaed. 3.18 Z. [= G.]. Cf. Küppers 1977, 140–156; Poms 2022, 257–260.

illustrated by the second pair. Further, in light of Avianus' *a Graecis in Latinas* approach, which appears to be reflected in the first pair, it seems plausible that he has deliberately rejected chronological order in the second pair, mentioning the Greek-writing Babrius before the Latin work of Phaedrus, further emphasizing this approach.

These two sections of the *epistula* leave the reader with a clear picture of a self-confident and ambitious author who aims to excel in his contemporary literary environment and to surpass his predecessors in fable poetry. This is further corroborated by the fact that Avianus defines his own work immediately after the historical overview (15–17), implicitly presenting it as the pinnacle of the fable genre. Avianus mentions the metrical form of his fables, the elegiac distich (*elegis*, 16), as their defining feature that sets them apart from those of his predecessors.[47] In Avianus' time, the Late Latin period, the elegiac distich was a universally used metre, no longer restricted to certain subjects or content, as it had been in the Classical period of the language. Nevertheless, even in the context of the Late Latin period, the stylistic level of the elegiac distich has to be considered higher than that of the iambs of Phaedrus and Babrius. Thus, the decision to use it is certainly an instance of Avianus' *aemulatio*. I would argue, however, that this is not the only aspect of *aemulatio* relevant to his choice of this specific metre. This is where love elegy comes into play: on the one hand, it is the genre that most prominently used the elegiac distich in the Classical period, on which Late Antique literature so clearly focuses,[48] so one could even argue that Avianus' mention of the 'elegiac form' as the distinctive feature of his fables would have led a Late Antique reader to expect some degree of interaction with love elegy in particular. On the other hand, and by no means of less importance, is the poetic ideal that shaped it: Avianus, given the literary erudition he puts on display, surely knew that Roman love elegy, like fable poetry, was greatly influenced by the ideal of the Hellenistic Alexandrines.[49] This poetic ideal enjoyed a renaissance in Avianus' lifetime,[50] and can plausibly be assumed to lie behind the statement in lines 4–7 of the *epistula*, where Avianus says that he chose fables because of their their standing as a minor genre. Further, Roman love elegy itself arguably constitutes a rather 'minor' or 'small' genre. It seems plausible that, analogous to the choice of the fable genre, its 'smallness' could have played a role

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47 The mention of the metre used is a topos found also in Phaedrus and Babrius. Cf. Phaed. 1 *prol.* 2 Z. [= G.]; Babr. 1 *prol.* 19.

48 Cf. above § 1.

49 Cf. e.g. on love elegy, Holzberg 2015, 7–15; on Babrius, Spielhofer 2022 and 2023, *passim*, esp. 51–71; on Phaedrus, Gärtner 2015, 59–61.

50 Cf. e.g. Ausonius.

in Avianus' choice of love elegy in regard to intertextuality. Since the elegiac form is mentioned in the same sentence as the self-deprecating assessment in the *epistula*,[51] one could even argue that the 'smallness' of the genre of love elegy might correspond to this as a topos. Avianus, that is, chose the genre of fable poetry also for the poetic ideals that shaped it, which, at the same time, influenced the one genre in Classical Latin literature that most prominently used the metre he himself has chosen.

If we view the analysis of Avian. 1 and 2 against this background, a deep and intricate intertextual connection between the two genres of love elegy and fable poetry seems to be established at the beginning of Avianus' collection. This connection comprises the three different levels of metre, motivation or aesthetics, and intertextual references, allowing Avianus to emphasize and simultaneously realize his intention of *aemulatio* as would not have been possible with any other genre.

If we bear this in mind, the change in message in the second fable urges a metapoetic reading, since Avian. 2.14 (*non sine supremo magna labore peti*) picks up the well-known motif of *labor* which, although quite popular in Classical Latin literature in general, is especially widespread in poetry influenced by the ideal of Hellenistic Alexandrines:[52] Avianus is striving for *magna* in trying to surpass his predecessors in verse fable poetry and to excel in his contemporary literary environment. Without doubt, the means by which he aims to achieve that, and presents here, i.e. intertextual references, the many levels of which are rightly called "*inter (se) texta*", involve the utmost *labor*.

4 Summary and outlook

The references to Roman love elegy in the first two fables of Avianus' collection were long seen as just some among many clumsy attempts by a mediocre author to 'jazz up' his small book of fables in a way typical of Late Antiquity, namely by referring to the great poets of the Classical period. On closer inspection, they turn out to be witty instances of intertextuality, skilfully interlacing the text with a subtext. If we also take into account the paratext, a multi-layered connection between the genre of the work itself — fable poetry — and the genre referenced — love elegy — opens up before the reader's eyes. Against the background of the *epistula*, these references also facilitate the development of a metapoetic statement over the

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51 Cf. above n. 6.
52 Cf. e.g. Hor. *Sat.* 1.9.59; Catull. 1.4–7.

course of these fables that, due to their position, are programmatic, expressing the author's hard work and ambition. All things considered, this — as I hope I have been able to show — could hardly have been done in a more elaborate or fitting way, or by using any other genre as a point of reference.

Since this paper has only been able to look at references to one genre in a small part of the collection, there is — and it seems trivial to point this out — a lot more that Avianus' fables have to offer in terms of metapoetic statements, intertextuality, and even intertextual references specifically to Roman love elegy. Two rather obvious examples of this are, on the one hand, the following fable, Avian. 3 ("*de cancro et matre*"), which, in my opinion, has great potential for metapoetic interpretation, and on the other hand Avian. 22 ("*de cupido et inuido*"), which apparently again picks up topoi from love elegy. Further, the interconnection between the first two fables seems to hint strongly that the collection as a whole has a well-thought-out composition that has yet to be thoroughly investigated.

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