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Comedy in Phaedrus' Fables:
seruus, meretrix, anus, iuuenis, miles in fabula

Abstract: That fable and comedy can be brought into contact is certainly not surprising. Already in early Greek comedy there are clearly marked references to fable. Here we will ask what references to comedy can be found in Latin fables and what functions they assume. An investigation of all fables under this aspect would be a large undertaking more suited to a book project, so the investigation here is limited to Phaedrus and to a rather cursory overview of the following aspects: 1. the use of metre, 2. general references to theatre, 3. the characters (*seruus, meretrix, anus, iuuenis, miles*) and scenery and, finally, 4. questions will be asked about laughter, the Saturnalian aspect of the genres, and the metapoetic statement made by the references.

1 Introduction

That fable and comedy can be brought into contact is certainly not surprising. References to fable are already clearly marked in early Greek comedy.[1] Here we will consider the opposite perspective and ask not only what references to comedy can be found in Latin fables, but what functions they assume. The genres are connected from the outset through their shared relationship with satire and iambus. Horace famously puts satire in the same line of descent as ancient comedy, whose representatives *Eupolis atque Cratinus Aristophanesque poetae* ("the poets Eupolis, Cratinus and Aristophanes",[2] Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.1) used great frankness to brand those who deserved it because they were bad. According to Horace, the satirist Lucilius followed them closely, changing only the metre and rhythm (*Sat.* 1.4.6–8). Of course, Horace also emphasizes that *ridentem dicere uerum* ("to tell the truth with a laugh", *Sat.* 1.1.24) must avoid exposing names (*Epist.* 1.19.23–31), unlike in iambus. The proximity of Phaedrus' fables to the satires of Horace has been emphasized all too often, especially due to Phaedrus' similar statement of his aims in the first prologue: *risum mouere* and *consilio monere* ("to raise laughter" and "admonish with advice",

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1 Cf. Adrados 1999, 240–286; Hall 2013, 277–297; Pütz in this volume.

2 All translations of ancient or modern authors are mine.

1 *prol.* 3–4 Z. [= G.]).[3] But, besides this resemblance between comedy and fable via satire, other clear references to comedy can be identified in fables. To investigate all fables under this aspect would be a large undertaking more suited to a book project, so the investigation here will be limited to Phaedrus, the *Palliata*[4] and to a rather cursory overview of the following aspects: we will take a look 1. at the use of metre; 2. at general references to theatre; 3. at characters and scenery; and, finally, 4. questions will be asked about laughter, the Saturnalian aspect of the genres, and the metapoetic statement made by the references.

2 *hanc ego poliui uersibus senariis*: the metre

As Phaedrus himself points out, he has chosen the iambic senarius as his metre;[5] he has polished Aesop's material with it: *hanc ego poliui uersibus senariis* ("This [= the Aesopic material] I have polished up with senarian verses", 1 *prol.* 2 Z. [= G.]).[6] But the choice of metre fits into the poetological programme of playful confrontation with Roman-Callimachean ideals.[7] For, at first, the choice of the iamb appears to be a reference to Archilochus and, especially, to Callimachus and his Μουσέων πεζὸς νομός ("the pedestrian pasture of the muses", *Aet. fr.* 129.9 A. [= 112.9 Pf.]), which influenced the satire of Lucilius and Horace (cf. Hor. *Sat.* 1.4.40–62; 2.6.17: *Musa pedestris* ["the pedestrian Muse"]).[8] Yet the choice of the senarius in place of the iambic trimeter seems to add irony to this reference (as is admittedly fitting), because, just as the fable was disdained, so the senarius is at the bottom of the hierarchy of

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3 Cf. e.g. Renda 2012, 13–72; Champlin 2005, 117–120; Hawkins 2014, 132–133; Park 2017, 146–231. In the following Phaedrus' fables are quoted from Zago 2020 [= Z.]; any alternative numbering refers to the edition of Guaglianone 1969 [= G.].
4 The fact that we limit ourselves here primarily to the Roman comedies is not only due to the limited scope of the paper. It is less about source research than about intertextual references. These Latin texts are much more likely to be subtexts that the Roman audience knew and recognized than parallels to Greek middle comedy, for example. This would be material for a separate study.
5 The findings here are quite obvious and as such have already been treated; cf. e.g. Havet 1895, 147–224; Axelson 1949; Pighi 1954; Guaglianone 1965; Korzeniewski 1970; Barabino 1981; Currie 1984, 506–507; Baeza Angulo 2011, LIII–LXII.
6 Cf. Gärtner 2015, 60–62.
7 For my thoughts on Phaedrus' *lusus poeticus*, cf. Gärtner 2007, summarized in Gärtner 2015, 41–47; in English: Gärtner 2017a.
8 Cavarzere 2001, 210, called the choice of the senarius an "oxymoron".

important metres.[9] Finally, one may wonder why the poet explicitly names the metre (1 *prol.* 1–2 Z. [= G.]):

> Aesopus auctor quam materiam repperit,
> hanc ego poliui uersibus **senariis**.
> (Phaed. 1 *prol.* 1–2 Z. [= G.])

> The material that Aesop, the author, found, this I have polished up in **senarian** verse.
> (Transl. U.G.)

The reason is revealed to the recipient while reading. The emphatic *senariis* at the end of the line is probably meant to stress its typically Roman character. Further, the poet most likely chose this metre in the tradition of the spoken verse of Plautus and Terence, since its flexibility brought it particularly close to the spoken language and so also to colloquial conversation.[10] At the same time, the opening word of the poem, *Aesopus*, belongs to the Greek sphere, so with the closing word of the first sentence we have arrived in Rome; this is certainly a reference to the juxtaposition of Greece and Rome that will be found in the prologue to Book 2. The background to the two introductory lines is, of course, the principle of *imitatio* and *aemulatio*, which guides how Roman authors understood themselves in relation to their Greek models. It is not easy to assess this here: at first glance, the successor seems to be bowing to his model; but, viewed more critically, it could be thought that he is claiming to present 'Callimachean' verse in Roman dress, in contrast to a collection of prose material; yet the choice of the iambic senarius instead of the iambic trimeter, as mentioned above, adds irony to this claim at the same time.[11]

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9 Cf. Glauthier 2009, 262: "Due to its iambic nature, the senarius seems to have been the least noble of verses, laden with the connotations of comedy, mime, prose and conversation. To polish Aesopic prose in senarian verse is almost not to polish it at all. We should read the ironic combination of elevated stylistic vocabulary with less than elevated metrical practice as a programmatic sign of Phaedrus' fundamental 'ignorance' or 'misinterpretation' of Roman Callimachean ideals".

10 The first two verses of the poem itself are an example of how word and verse accent coincide; cf. Fritsch 1990, 221: "So ergibt sich gleich zu Beginn der Eindruck einer vollkommenen Einheit von prosaisch überliefertem Erzählstoff und der poetischen Kunst des Phaedrus" ("Thus the impression of a perfect unity of prosaically transmitted narrative material and the poetic art of Phaedrus arises right at the beginning"); cf. also Cavarzere 2001; Gärtner 2015, 54–55.

11 Cf. Bernardi Perini 1992, 45: "Il livello del proprio intervento viene affermato da Fedro secondo i canoni della poesia augustea, che pregiano l'*ars* non meno dell'*ingenium*: se è vero che a Esopo spetta il merito che è di ogni *inventor*, però la sua *materia* sarebbe rimasta incondita e rude, affogata nell'inerzia della prosa, se l'artista latino non le avesse conferito la dignità del verso, la superiore vita della poesia." ("The level of his own intervention is affirmed by Phaedrus according to the canons of Augustan poetry, which value *ars* no less than *ingenium*: while it is true that Aesop

The use of the senarius itself is less free than in early Roman poetry, however. In contrast to the early poets, Phaedrus no longer uses iambic shortening and is much less likely to use resolutions, though he does allow a longum or double short-ening in the second and fourth anceps. Horace had criticized the latter, especially in Ennius.[12] Nonetheless, Phaedrus plays with the metre in a masterly way. Not only does he lapse into iambic trimeter for his Medea prologue,[13] for example, but he also deliberately uses caesurae and the distribution of longa and resolutions to sup-port the statements.[14] In this respect, the inherently 'lower' form of the iambic senar-ius is again 'polished up' in a Hellenistic way compared to the Callimachean iambus.

When we recall that the iambic senarius is a verse form that is particularly typical of Roman comedy, the choice and execution of it become even more im-portant, as these spoken verses have a special function in comedy, especially in the role of the clever slave — and also of the wise old man.[15] A reference to comedy is hence certainly one of the functions of the choice of metre.

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deserves the merit that is every *inventor*'s, however, yet his *materia* would have remained un-founded and rude, drowned in the inertia of prose, if the Latin artist had not given it the dignity of verse, the superior life of poetry.") — Cf. Cavarzere 2001; Glauthier 2009, 262. It has already been said above that this refers to the Callimachean Μουσέων πεζὸς νομός ("the pedestrian willow of the muses", *Aet. fr.* 129.9 A. [= 112.9 Pf.]). Note that in Callimachus we read this in the epilogue of his *Aitia*, but here in the work's prologue, so Phaedrus is playing with beginnings and endings. Cf. Zetzel 1983, 261: "it seems to be a convention of Alexandrian and neoteric poetry to reverse beginnings and ends"; thus, the reference to the Callimachean verse metre almost becomes Alexandrian twice over.

12 Cf. *Ars P.* 251–262, esp. 259–262: *et Enni | in scaenam missos cum magno pondere uersus | aut operae celeris nimium curaque carentis | aut ignoratae premit artis crimine turpi* ("He pursues verses of Ennius thrown on the stage with great force with scolding accusation either of too hasty and careless work or of ignorance of the art.").

13 5.7.6–16 Z. [= 4.7.6–16 G.]; the 'incorrect' lengths there can be explained as deliberate 'emphases'; cf. Gärtner 2017b, 47–48. — It is this poem, in which Aesop appears on high cothurns, that provided the quotation for the conference theme: *et in coturnis prodit Aesopus nouis* (5.7.5 Z. [= 4.7.5. G.]), see introduction, 9–11.

14 Cf. Korzeniewski 1970.

15 Cf. Moore 2012, 174–177; Mann 2021, 205–206 n. 13: "Since Phaedrus later connects fables with slavery in his third prologue, it is possible that this allusion to senarii is a reference not just to Roman comedy, but to comic slaves in particular."

3 *et in coturnis prodit Aesopus nouis*: general references to the theatre

Some of Phaedrus' fables make direct references to the theatre, just some of which I pick out here. Already in 1.7 Z. [= G.] a fox finds a theatre mask, though it is expressly a tragic mask. In my view, this short poem is highlighting its cheerful distinction from that genre, which appears pompous and distant from life while failing to deliver a message.[16] In 5.7 Z. [= 4.7 G.], the irritated fable author has Aesop, wearing *coturni*, appear to a know-it-all critic and recite the beginning of a Medea tragedy — a comic image in itself. The poem, among other things, wittily belittles tragedy,[17] a motif already popular in ancient literature.[18] Finally, in 4.2 Z. [= 5.1 G.], one of the main representatives of New Comedy, Menander, appears *in propria persona*. This too is a rather critical examination of another genre, in my view. Menander may seem to be an independent and bold poet who demonstrates his disdain for the ruler, yet it becomes clear that his appearance, which is to be understood as that of a homosexual, does not match the image usually derived from his works, which were valued highly not only from an aesthetic but also from an ethical and moral point of view.[19] Moreover, the performative participation of the poets is reminiscent of Aristophanes, who had the tragic poets Aeschylus and Euripides appear in *The Frogs*, for example. Finally, in 4.6 Z. [= 5.5 G.] and 5.27 Z. [= 5.7 G.], scenes from the Roman theatre of the first century CE are described, which — with their pig imitators and self-indulgent flute players — make clear that the traditional forms of tragedy and comedy had long since outlived their usefulness in Rome and that an audience whose attention was hard to retain even in Terence's time was probably receptive only to the shorter form by the time Phaedrus composed his fables. The latter genre seems an obvious solution here; but, of course, this too is playful, since Phaedrus' fable was clearly conceived as literature to be read and could only develop its performativity in the act of reading, not on stage.[20]

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16 Cf. Gärtner 2015, 130–132.

17 Cf. in detail Gärtner 2017b with an extensive review of the secondary literature; for the quotation, see introduction, 9–11.

18 Cf. Gärtner 2017b, 38–39.

19 Cf. Ov. *Am.* 1.15.17–18; Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.18; 10.1.69; cf. Gärtner 2011, 239–241; 2015, 31–32; 2022, 214–216.

20 On how to situate the reception of Phaedrus' fables, see Gärtner 2015, 35–36.

4 *personae loquantur, non ferae*: the characters

It should perhaps be no surprise that we will deal with fables set in the human world. The extent to which allusions to comedy might be found in animal fables is beyond our scope here.[21] We will consider characters that could be compared to *personae* in comedies: what happens when characters from one genre appear in another?

4.1 *seruus*

The most striking character in our context is certainly the clever slave. Slaves appear several times in Phaedrus' fables.[22] We will not pursue the vexed question of whether Phaedrus himself was a freedman, as claimed in the manuscripts and in much of the secondary literature.[23] It is important that, in Phaedrus' fables, it is Aesop whose intradiegetic role as a *seruus* — often combined with the role of a *senex* — is emphasized.[24] And it is interesting that obvious references to comedy can be found in this.[25]

This is most clearly marked in fable 3.19 Z. [= G.]:

[Aesopus respondet garrulo]
Aesopus domino solus cum esset familia,
parare cenam iussus est maturius.
Ignem ergo quaerens aliquot lustrauit domus
tandemque inuenit ubi lucernam accenderet;
tum circumeunti fuerat quod iter longius   5
effecit breuius, namque recta per forum
coepit redire. Et quidam e turba garrulus:
"Aesope, medio sole quid cum lumine?"
"Hominem" inquit "quaero," et abiit festinans domum.
Hoc si molestus ille ad animum rettulit,   10

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21 This would be a topic for a separate treatise and would also have to be based on the findings presented here.
22 Cf. e.g. 2.5 Z. [= G.]; 3.19 Z. [= G.]; *app.* 15 Z. [= *app.* 17 G.]; *app.* 18 Z. [= *app.* 20 G.]; *app.* 25 Z. [= *app.* 27 G.].
23 On the discussion, see Gärtner 2015, 21–36, with an extensive review of the secondary literature.
24 On the significance of this presentation of Aesop for the authorial image that the reader may form of Phaedrus, see Gärtner 2022.
25 On interfigurality in Phaedrus and the special role of Aesop in it, see Park 2017.

sensit profecto se hominem non uisum seni,
intempestiue qui occupato alluserit.

(*Phaed.* 3.19 Z. [= G.])

When Aesop was the sole servant in his master's house, he was ordered to prepare the meal earlier. So he looked for fire and wandered through some houses and finally found one where he lit his lantern. Because the way had been too long for him walking around, he then took a shortcut, for he started walking back directly across the forum. And a chatterer from the crowd said, "Aesop, in the middle of the day, what do you want with the light?" "A human being," said he, "I seek." And he went home in haste. If the annoying man took this to heart, he must indeed have realized that he had not appeared as a human being to the old man, for he was mocking the busy man at an inopportune moment.

(Transl. U.G.)

Only a few points can be addressed here.[26] In the fable, Aesop appears as a character in the action, not as a fable teller.[27] From its form, it can be classed as an anecdote.[28] It is striking that Phaedrus has evidently transferred to Aesop an anecdote that otherwise concerns Diogenes.[29] The fable itself works through a contrast: only when the story seems to be over (1–7a) does the short exchange of words (7b–9) provide the 'main plot' of the fable and thus the punchline.[30]

The exposition mentions Aesop in the first word as the protagonist.[31] For the first time Aesop is introduced as a slave.[32] The contrast between him and his master is illustrated by the word order.[33] We learn no more about his master, nor is he

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26 These reflections were first published in Gärtner 2021, 244–248; for further interpretations, cf. Thiele 1906, 583–584; Hausrath 1936, 87; Guaglianone 2000, 220; Oberg 2000, 155; Solimano 2005, 228–230; Baeza Angulo 2011, 82–83; Renda 2012, 50–51; Park 2017, 57–66.
27 Apart from the poetological statements, Aesop acts as narrator in the following fables: 1.2 Z. [= G.]; 1.3 Z. [= G.]; 1.6 Z. [= G.]; 5.17 Z. [= 4.18 G.]; *app.* 10 Z. [= *app.* 12 G.]; in the following he appears as a character in the action: 3.5 Z. [= G.]; 3.14 Z. [= G.]; 3.19 Z. [= G.]; 5.5 Z. [= 4.5 G.]; *app.* 7 Z. [= *app.* 9 G.]; *app.* 11 Z. [= *app.* 13 G.]; *app.* 15 Z. [= *app.* 17 G.]; *app.* 18 Z. [= *app.* 20 G.]; sometimes the functions mix, since Aesop always acts in an instructive way; cf. 2.3 Z. [= G.]; 3.3 Z. [= G.]. On Aesop as a character in the fables, cf. Park 2017, passim. — After 3.3 Z. [= G.], 3.5 Z. [= G.] and 3.14 Z. [= G.] this is already the fourth fable of this kind in the third book in the transmitted order.
28 For the definition, cf. Gärtner 2015, 48 n. 195.
29 See below.
30 As an anecdote, the poem does not have to conform to the usual structure of a fable. However, it could be divided up as follows: exposition (1–2), introduction (3–7a), actio (7b–8), reactio (9), epimythium (10–12).
31 Phaedrus is clearly playing with the positioning of this name; cf. Gärtner 2021, 99 n. 73, on 3 *prol.* Z. [= G.]
32 In 2 *epil.* 1–4 Z. [= G.] and 3 *prol.* 34–37 Z. [= G.] his position as a slave was mentioned in a poetological context. He is only mentioned again as a slave in *app.* 15 Z. [= *app.* 17 G.].
33 On *dominus*, cf. Gärtner 2021, 51 n. 28.

important for the plot. The fact that Aesop is the only servant[34] marks the master as not rich, though this reference is needed more for reasons of narrative logic: since Aesop is responsible for everything, he is also given the task of preparing the meal (2)[35] and is therefore extremely busy. The fact that this must be done earlier (*maturius*, 2) gives the plot the necessary haste.

The next 4½ lines tell, in a condensed way, how Aesop roams through some houses in search of fire (3), finally lights his lamp (4), and takes a shortened route back (5–7a). The lines are not without wit. The recipient must infer that Aesop's own fire had evidently gone out. Key to the punchline is, of course, that Aesop 1. *hurries*, 2. *through the city*, 3. *in daylight*, 4. *with a lamp*.

In our context, it is important that the motif of getting fire from a neighbour's house in such a case is already a reference to comedy.[36] This is shown by passages such as Plaut. *Aul.* 90–92, where the miserly Euclio instructs his slave not to let anyone seeking fire into the house, so that no one will find the gold treasure, of which only he knows:

> caue quemquam alienum in aedis intro miseris.   90
> quod quispiam ignem quaerat, extingui uolo,
> ne causae quid sit quod te quisquam quaeritet.
> <div align="right">(Plaut. *Aul.* 90–92)</div>

> Beware of letting any stranger into your house. So that no one can seek fire from you, I want you to extinguish it, so that there is no reason for anyone to seek you.
> <div align="right">(Transl. U.G.)</div>

Or Plaut. *Rud.* 766, where the pimp Labrax threatens to burn the two girls at the altar, but can get no fire in Daemones' house:

> ibo hercle aliquo quaeritatum ignem;
> <div align="right">(Plaut. *Rud.* 766)</div>

> I'll goddamn go somewhere else to get fire.
> <div align="right">(Transl. U.G.)</div>

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34 *familia* is used here in the usual sense of household/slaves; cf. 2.8.26 Z. [= G.]; 3.7.22 Z. [= G.]; 3.10.24 Z. [= G.]; 5.22.23 Z. [= 4.23.23 G.].

35 The *cena* was the main meal of the day, usually taken at the 9th hour, i.e. in the early afternoon from 3 to 4 pm. This indirect time-indication is important for the development of the punchline.

36 Cf. also: Cic. *Off.* 1.52: *pati ab igne ignem capere, si qui uelit* ("to let fire be drawn from the fire, if one wants it"); Enn. *fr. trag. inc.* CLXV.314 J. [= 399 V.2; 145.2 FRL]: *quasi lumen de suo lumine accendat facit* ("He acts as if he lights his light with his own light").

Beyond that, Aesop's behaviour when seeking fire could refer to the characteristic haste of the *seruus currens* of Roman comedy.[37] There are models for this already in Menander, but there the figures' task, aim, and above all haste are well-founded.[38] The figure of the slave who brings good or bad news for his master or mistress, rushes through the city, cuts through crowds, threatens people who hinder him,[39] fails to see his master at home, and, in the end, breathlessly but very lengthily reports something finds its special form in Plautus, where exaggeration almost brings the action to a standstill, all with a comic effect. In antiquity, the *seruus currens* could stand for the slave in comedy altogether.[40] Here Phaedrus seems to be deliberately picking up on this.

Admittedly, the motif is altered in the fable. The search for fire is a lengthy, roundabout affair (*aliquot*, 3; *tandem*, 4; *circumeunti*, 5; *iter longius*, 5). These facts are actually superfluous for the punchline, but they are presented in an illustrative manner.[41] In contrast to comedy, the facts are narrated directly and they are not part of the report of the *seruus currens*. With *effecit breuius* (6), the path is then shortened intradiegetically, but extradiegetically the narrative itself is cut short too. This shortening is thus actually a reversal of the motif. With Aesop, we now walk straight across the forum (6–7) — yet the city is still part of the *seruus currens* motif. The description also comes alive through the fact that the reader will think of Rome rather than Athens at latest when the forum is mentioned;[42] this mixture of Greek setting and partly Roman atmosphere is also reminiscent of Roman comedy.

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37 This has been pointed out above all by Park 2017, 58–60. — On the *seruus currens*, see e.g. Duckworth 1936; Anderson 1970; Csapo 1987. — The figure of Aesop in the *Life of Aesop* also shows traces of the *seruus callidus* and thus of the New Comedy; see Holzberg 1992, 43–51. However, the parallels presented here are more striking.

38 Think of Pyrrhias in *Dyscolus* and Daus in *Aspis*; cf. Anderson 1970.

39 E.g. Plaut. *Merc.* 115–119; *Stich.* 284–287; cf. the *parasitus currens* in *Capt.* 790–822; *Curc.* 280–298.

40 This is also clear from the fact that Plautus already has other characters take on this 'role', such as Mercurius in *Amphitryo* (984–988): *concedite atque abscedite omnes, de uia decedite, | nec quisquam tam audax fuat homo, qui obuiam obsistat mihi. | nam mihi quidem hercle qui minus liceat deo minitarier | populo, ni decedat mihi,* **quam seruolo in comoediis?** *| ille nauem saluam nuntiat aut irati aduentum senis.* ("Go away, all of you, make way and get out of my way! Let no man be so bold as to step into my way! How would it be less right for me, by Hercules, as a god, to threaten the people, if they do not make way for me, than for **the little slave in comedies**. This one reports that a ship has been saved, or the arrival of an angry father.").

41 Line 5 is striking, for example, in which the *quod*, placed far behind, and the resolution of the length into two short syllables emphasize the awkward route.

42 On the action in Athens, cf. 3.14 Z. [= G.]; cf. also 1.2 Z. [= G.], where Aesop explains their situation to the Athenians through a fable.

At this point, the anecdote begins and, after the long introduction, has an even stronger effect through its conciseness. As in other anecdotes, Aesop's 'adversary' is without a name; here he is introduced in a pejorative manner as *garrulus* (7).[43] The situation of being at the mercy of a chatterer on the way reminds us, on the one hand, of Horace's famous satire 1.9[44] and, on the other hand, of the people who obstruct the *seruus currens*.[45] For these include people with whom one gets into a dispute (*et currendum et pugnandum et autem iurgiandum est in uia* ["One must run and fight, but also quarrel on the way"], Plaut. *Merc.* 99), or who pretend to be philosophers (Plaut. *Curc.* 288–291):

> tum isti Graeci palliati, capite operto qui ambulant,
> qui incedunt suffarcinati cum libris, cum sportulis,
> constant, conferunt sermones inter se\<se\> drapetae,   290
> obstant, obsistunt, **incedunt cum suis sententiis**.
>   (Plaut. *Curc.* 288–291)

> Then there are the Greeks in their cloaks, walking with their heads covered, strolling along, packed with books, with food baskets, standing around, talking to each other like runaway slaves, standing in the way, obstructing you, **harassing you with their words of wisdom**.
>   (Transl. U.G.)

It is this last passage that the fable recalls, in a highly comical reversal. For the *garrulus* asks what Aesop wants with a light in the middle of the day, with the astonishment expressed through the verse structure.[46] It need not actually be taken as mockery, even if it is seen as such in the end (*alluserit*, 12); but that the question will be perceived as superfluous is anticipated by *garrulus*. Yet Aesop's behaviour might well seem absurd to an observer, as a common saying attests.[47] Only the reader knows that Aesop is not acting absurdly; given the haste with which he is travelling, an observer might merely suspect that this is not an idle endeavour. The actual

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43 Cf. 3.5.2 Z. [= G.]: *quidam petulans* ("some forward man").

44 The situation is also reminiscent of 3.9 Z. [= G.], where someone makes fun of Socrates' house. On the situation of talk in the street, cf. further 2.3 Z. [= G.]; 3.3 Z. [= G.]; 3.5 Z. [= G.]; 3.14 Z. [= G.]; 5.1 Z. [= 4.1 G.]; *app.* 11 Z. [= *app.* 13 G.]; *app.* 18 Z. [= *app.* 20 G.]; *app.* 25 Z. [= *app.* 27 G.]; cf. Oberg 2000, 32.

45 See above n. 37.

46 The salutation is followed by the time of day *medio sole*, separated by trit- and hephthemimeres; this is also emphasized by resolution of the length into two short syllables. Only then is the interrogative pronoun placed after it. Finally, the question is shortened; *tibi uis*, for example, should be added.

47 Cf. Cic. *Fin.* 4.29: *ut in sole* [...] *lucernam adhibere nihil interest* ("as it makes no difference [...] to use a lantern in the sun"); cf. e.g. Quint. *Inst.* 5.12.8; Sen. *Ep.* 92.5, 17; Diogenian. 6.27: λύχνον ἐν μεσημβρίᾳ ἅπτειν ("light a lamp at noon").

punchline is limited to a half-line: instead of explaining his actions, for example by saying "Our fire had gone out …", Aesop responds glibly: he is looking for a human being (9a). *hominem* is placed emphatically at the beginning of the line.[48] The narrative ends just as hastily as Aesop leaves for home (9b). *abiit* is accentuated by the resolution in the length. He exits the stage as if after a performance.

The epimythium (10–12) is written in a distinctive way that does justice to Aesop's special role. It is not formulated in general terms, as would be usual, but is related to the 'historical' situation described in the anecdote; it is then merely transferable.[49] There is a certain irony in the fact that the brilliance of the quick-witted reply in two words (9) now has to be explained at length in three lines. The *garrulus* is called a nuisance (*molestus*, 10). If he had taken this remark to heart, he would have realized that to the old man he did not seem to be a human being, since he had mocked him at an inopportune moment while he was busy. This limits the "search for a human being" (9) in a significant way. At the same time, an issue of importance for Phaedrus is raised, namely the question of appropriate wit (*intempestiue* […] *alluserit*, 12),[50] which Phaedrus claims for his fables. Two things should be emphasized: 1. a change of view is added in our fable, for here we experience live, so to speak, what otherwise happened to the slave in comedy backstage; we thus get a behind-the-scenes glimpse of reality. 2. Aesop in the fable is a *seruus currens*, but cuts the diversions short and answers the chatterer succinctly; the epimythium, on the other hand, is awkwardly long and must also deliver a message — namely to us readers — but this is again conspicuously long-winded. Thus, the fable teller himself becomes a kind of metapoetic *seruus currens*.

But things get even more complex, because the fable's interpretation is not as straightforward as it may at first seem. This becomes clear by comparing the more famous version of the anecdote.[51] In Diogenes Laertius, writing about his namesake Diogenes of Sinope, we learn that the latter, in order to provoke people, deliberately wandered around in public with a lamp and said that he was looking for a human being (λύχνον μεθ' ἡμέραν ἅψας, "ἄνθρωπον," φησί, "ζητῶ." ["He lit a lamp in the middle of the day and said, 'A human being I seek'."], Diog. Laert. 6.41).[52] It was thus

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48 The contrast of *garrulus* and *homo* refers back to 3.16 Z. [= G.]; see Gärtner 2021, 223–224.

49 One could also see a reference to comedy in this, since there is no abstract instruction in comedy either.

50 Cf. 1 *prol.* 3, 7 Z. [= G.]; cf. e.g. 1.29 Z. [= G.], as an example of inappropriate joking; see Gärtner 2015, 256–261.

51 Cf. Thiele 1906, 583–584, who attempted to trace the origin of the figure of Aesop.

52 The formulation is conspicuously identical, so it probably goes back to a common source. The statement is very often found in proverbs; see n. 47; cf. Tosi 2014, 45–46. — There is also an anecdote in the *Vita Aesopi* (65–66 G) in which Aesop finds only one human being: all the people bump into

a fundamental philosophical question, since Diogenes evidently cannot find a real human being even with a lamp in daytime, but the same statement in Phaedrus' fable has become a quick-witted answer in an annoying situation. It is hence also funny that the question, which Diogenes wants to *provoke* in others ("Why do you carry a light in daytime?"), in Phaedrus' version only challenges Aesop himself to *answer*. We may also wonder if there is a joke here about Diogenes' behaviour. Firstly, it is an amusing reversal of the *seruus currens* in Plautus, who, as seen above, is delayed by Greek philosophers — a Diogenes with a lamp would have annoyed a Plautine *seruus currens* no end! Secondly, Aesop wittily quotes Diogenes just incidentally, if one leaves the chronological order aside, or Diogenes is even downgraded because the older Aesop is introduced as the actual coiner of the bon mot,[53] and, finally, Aesop has a real reason for this apparently strange behaviour. And precisely this 'important' occupation — a cook fetching fire — places the fundamental question of what it means to be human in an everyday situation, trivializing the noble claim of Diogenes in an amusing, ironic way.[54] This is reminiscent,

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a stone when entering a bath, but only one man moves it out of the way. — Already in 1.10 Z. [= G.] Phaedrus had picked up a statement otherwise attributed to Diogenes in a fable and slightly reinterpreted it; cf. Gärtner 2015, 147. Similarly, we read in 3.3 Z. [= G.] a comparable motif that was circulating about Thales (cf. Gärtner 2021, 130) and in 3.14 Z. [= G.] the motif of playing that was widespread (cf. Gärtner 2021, 205–208). It is disputed whether Phaedrus made this transfer himself or adopted an appropriate tradition; cf. Nøjgaard 1967, 130; it has repeatedly been suspected that Phaedrus drew on a collection of Chrie of Cynic origin; cf. e.g. Adrados 2000, 150; Renda 2012, 50–51; Hausrath 1936, 87, attributed the transfer to Phaedrus, but considered it unsuccessful, since the *garrulus* could draw "aus dem bittern Wort des Diogenes nur die triviale Lehre [...], daß ein richtiger Mensch einen vielbeschäftigten nicht mit unnötigen Fragen aufhält" ("from the bitter word of Diogenes only the trivial lesson [...] that a real man does not detain a busy one with unnecessary questions"). Rieks 1967, 86, thought it possible that there was an earlier attribution to Aesop, which was later "mit der künstlich aufgebauten und emporstilisierten Figur des Diogenes verbunden" ("connected with the artificially constructed and highly stylized character of Diogenes"). However, the elaboration as well as the resulting image of Aesop can certainly ascribed to Phaedrus.
53 Cf. Lévy 2011, 70–71.
54 This joking concretization of Cynic statements is obviously used on purpose by Phaedrus, for something comparable could also be found in 3.5 Z. [= G.] and 3.14 Z. [= G.]. In 3.5 Z. [= G.] Aesop is pelted with stones, which recalls a statement of Antisthenes, see Gärtner 2021, 139; in 3.14 Z. [= G.] he solves a symbolic riddle, with an actual bow, see Gärtner 2021, 207–208. Cf. Park 2017, 60: "in beiden Fabeln nimmt Aesop eine Scharnierfunktion zwischen Sprichwörtlichkeit und konkreter, manifester Form ein: Wie er in 3,14 den entspannten Bogen als Symbol für einen entspannten menschlichen Geist mitten auf der Straße ablegt und sein verwirrtes Gegenüber damit konfrontiert, [...] so tritt er hier mit einer Tätigkeit auf, die für sein Gegenüber den Inbegriff der Sinnlosigkeit darstellt, in Wahrheit aber einem einfachen und klaren Zweck dient" ("in both fables Aesop assumes a hinge function between proverbiality and concrete, manifest form: Just as in 3.14 he puts down the loosened bow as a symbol of a relaxed human mind in the middle of the road and

among other things, of Terence's *Adelphoi*, where the slave Syrus apes the strict father Demea and explains his alleged educational measures towards his fellow slaves:

> postremo, tamquam in speculum, in patinas, Demea,
> inspicere iubeo et moneo quid facto usu' sit.
>
> (Ter. *Ad.* 428–429)

> Finally, I command them to look into the pots, as into a mirror, Demea, and warn what is necessary to be done.
>
> (Transl. U.G.)

Thus the fable not only makes clear allusions to Roman comedy, above all to the motif of the *seruus currens*; but, whereas Aesop intradiegetically takes leave with philosophical brevity, the narrator extradiegetically delivers his message — in a way typical for the topos — long-windedly. And so, metapoetically, the fable could again be read as ironically commenting on itself, as a demonstration of its failure to match Callimachean *breuitas*.

Another fable in which Aesop appears as a slave should at least be mentioned. It corresponds to comedy less in its subject matter than its constellation of characters. In *app.* 15 Z. [= 17 G.], Aesop is a slave in the service of an ugly woman who spends her money on cosmetics, clothes, and jewellery; when the slave remarks that her bed will also remain empty if she saves the money, she has the *garrulus* (10) beaten. When her jewellery is stolen and she threatens to beat the slaves if they do not tell the truth, Aesop, who had just been beaten *for* telling the truth, does not feel threatened.

No such scene is documented in Roman comedies,[55] but the type of *seruus callidus,* who knows how to defend himself against his master and his fellow slaves with wit and insight, can also be seen here. Typical of comedy is the indifference, even insolence, that allows the slave to assume, at least briefly, a superior position. However, other fables, such as *app.* 18 Z. [= *app.* 20 G.], where Aesop advises a fugitive slave not to burden himself with guilt since he will also experience bad things without having done anything wrong, show that these are merely Saturnalia-like

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confronts his bewildered counterpart with it, [...] so here he appears with an activity that represents the epitome of meaninglessness for his counterpart, but in reality serves a simple and clear purpose").

55 Here one could see parallels to the *Life of Aesop*, e.g. in Aesop's relationship to his mistress, the wife of Xanthus, or already in Aristophanes' *Plutus*, e.g. in Cario's and the young man's treatment of his older mistress.

moments, as in Roman comedy, which turn the social world upside down for a moment, but fall back into the original order *post festum*.

4.2 *meretrix*

One of the central figures of the Palliata, especially in Plautus, is the *meretrix*,[56] in the versions of the *mala meretrix*, the *bona meretrix*, and the pseudo-*meretrix*. In the context of the fable, we are interested in the *mala meretrix*, who knows how to manipulate men who are socially above her and is portrayed as greedy, arrogant and opportunistic, although not entirely unsympathetic. She is, as Auhagen rightly points out, "kein Abbild der Lebenswirklichkeit in Rom, sondern ein Zerrbild: Die raffinierte und überlegene meretrix mala ist eine literarische Figur, die ebenso wie die plautinischen Sklaven, die über ihre Herren gebieten, nur vor dem Hintergrund der saturnalischen Welt vorstellbar ist: Diese Umkehrung der realen Verhältnisse im zeitlich und örtlich begrenzten Bereich des Theaters bietet unerschöpfliches Witzpotential."[57]

The role of the *meretrices* in society had certainly changed since the 3rd and 2nd century BCE. It is striking, however, how the old *literary figure* reappears in Phaedrus' fables. These are the fables *app.* 4 Z. [= G.] and *app.* 27 Z. [= 29 G.].[58]

Let us start with *app.* 27 Z. [= *app.* 29 G.]:

> Cum blandiretur iuueni meretrix perfida,
> et ille laesus multis saepe iniuriis
> tamen praeberet sese facilem mulieri,
> sic insidiatrix: "Omnes muneribus licet
> contendant, ego te plurimi facio tamen".   5
> Iuuenis recordans quotiens deceptus foret:
> "Libenter" inquit "mea lux, hanc uocem audio,
> non quod fidelis, sed quod iucunda est[59] mihi."
>   (Phaed. *app.* 27 Z. [= *app.* 29 G.])

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56 In 14 of Plautus' 20 comedies, a *meretrix* plays a central role. For a fundamental discussion of the topic, see Auhagen 2009.

57 Auhagen 2009, 282 ("not a reflection of the reality of life in Rome, but a distorted image: the refined and superior *meretrix mala* is a literary figure who, like the Plautine slaves who command their masters, can only be imagined against the backdrop of the Saturnalian world: this inversion of the real conditions in the temporally and locally limited realm of the theatre offers inexhaustible comic potential.").

58 Georgacopoulou 2014 has dealt with them in detail.

59 Here I follow the transmitted *est*; Zago reads *es*[*t*] following Ianelli.

When an unfaithful harlot flattered a young man, and he, often hurt by many wrong deeds, nevertheless showed himself friendly towards the woman, the insidious woman said: "Even if everyone competes with gifts, I still hold you in the highest esteem." The young man remembered how often he had been deceived and said, "Gladly, my light, do I hear this voice, not because it is faithful, but because it is pleasing."

(Transl. U.G.)

That there is a reference to comedy here is clear. Scholars have often seen a direct allusion to Terence's *Eunuchus* (46–206), where the beautiful Thais makes poor Phaedria do whatever she wants; although the latter is full of suspicion and fear, he gives in.[60] A significant difference seems to be that the young man here is aware of his situation; hence his answer also has a punchline; it does not sound like a tortured Catullian *odi et amo*. Moreover, in my opinion, *uox* is here not to be understood as "words"; for he knows that what the *meretrix* says is not to be taken for truth; but her "voice" sounds pleasing. The young man here has seen enough *meretrices* in comedies and remembers (*recordans*, 6):[61] he only likes to listen to such things, he no longer takes them seriously.[62]

In *app.* 4 Z. [= G.], on the other hand, there is no scene for which direct parallels can be found in Plautus or Terence:

> Mercurium hospitio contubernales duae
> illiberali et sordido receperant:
> quarum una in cunis paruum habebat filium,
> quaestus placebat alteri meretricius.
> Ergo ut referret gratiam officiis parem,   5
> abiturus et iam limen excedens ait:
> "Deum uidetis; tribuam uobis protinus
> quod quaeque optarit." Mater suppliciter rogat
> barbatum ut uideat natum quam primum suum;
> moecha ut sequatur sese quicquid tetigerit.   10
> Volat Mercurius, intro redeunt mulieres.
> Barbatus infans, ecce, uagitus ciet.
> Id forte dum meretrix ridet ualidius,
> nares repleuit umor, ut fieri solet.
> Emungere igitur se uolens prendit manu   15
> traxitque ad terram nasi longitudinem,

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60 Cf. Men. *Thais fr.* 163–164 PCG 6.2; cf. de Maria 1987, 152; Georgacopoulou 2014, 35–37; Zago 2020, 186.

61 *recordans* therefore becomes ambiguous: the *iuuenis* remembers the actual deceptions of his *meretrix*, but at the same time — metapoetically — he remembers the role of the *meretrix* in comedy.

62 Cf. Georgacopoulou 2014, 35.

et alium ridens ipsa ridenda exstitit.
Ambae gemuerunt quod sibi exoptauerant.

<div align="right">(Phaed. app. 4 Z. [= G.])</div>

Two women who lived together had once given the god Mercurius vulgar and filthy quarters. One of them had a little son in the cradle, the other liked the meretricious earnings. So, to give proper thanks for the service, he said, as he was about to set out and was already leaving the threshold: "A god you see; I will assign to you at once what each one desires." The mother implores that she may see her son with a beard as soon as possible; the harlot that whatever she touches may follow her. Mercurius flies away, in go the women. A bearded infant, behold, lets out his cry. When the harlot accidentally laughs too hard at this, mucus fills her nose, as will happen. As she wants to blow her nose, she reaches out with her hand and pulls the length of her nose to the ground. And she, who had laughed at another, now stands there ridiculous herself. Both lamented what they had wished for.

<div align="right">(Transl. U.G.)</div>

In our context, the disgraceful behaviour of the women towards a stranger (here the shabby guest room) is important, as is the greed (especially illustrated by the desire of the *meretrix*),[63] which is a topos in the behaviour of the *meretrix*. Again, however, a kind of reversal can be discerned in the treatment of a comedy character. While the beauty of the *meretrix* usually plays a role in comedy, we know nothing about the appearance in this case, but after the punishment she is grotesquely disfigured. Whereas in comedy we are dealing with cultivated and refined women, the picture drawn here in a few strokes is rather off-putting: a dirty house, a woman who blows her nose into the palm of her hand, etc. And unlike in comedy, the *meretrix* is punished for her vulgar behaviour; it is funny that the phrase "to pull something out of someone's nose" is known in Latin for "to take money from someone";[64] the punishment now makes this obvious. Moreover, there is a subtle hint in the vulgar gesture, because the *meretrix* only wants to blow her nose, but cannot finish it; Aesop, on the other hand, gives a witty answer in 3.3 Z. [= G.], also in a coarse context,[65] and is called *naris emunctae senex* ("an old man with a blown nose", 3.3.14 Z. [= G.]), which means "of keen wit". Whereas in comedy the *meretrix* is usually triumphant and laughs at others, here she laughs at another first (13), but then becomes the object of laughter herself, both intradiegetically and extradiegetically (17).

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63 But the mother also has this thought, because she will have to provide financially for her son until he has a beard, i.e. is an adult.

64 Hor. *Ars P.* 237–238: *audax | Pythias emuncto lucrata Simone talentum* ("a cheeky Pythias, who gets hold of a talent from the snuffed-out Simo").

65 He advises a man whose sheep have given birth to lambs with human heads to give his shepherds wives; for an interpretation, see Gärtner 2021, 126–131.

So, what happens when the *meretrix* steps out of comedy and into the world of fable? In *app.* 27 Z. [= *app.* 29 G.], she is unmasked as a literary figure that one no longer takes seriously but still likes to hear. In *app.* 4 Z. [= G.], she is transformed from the cultivated and shrewd character of comedy to the coarse, foolish character of everyday Roman life.[66] She becomes an object of laughter but in a completely different sense than before in comedy. One can interpret this metapoetically as a critical reading of comedies. The refined and superior *meretrix mala* as a literary character is taken out of her Saturnalian world into the brutal reality of the fable.

As an example of how subtle the references to comedy sometimes are, let us look at 3.17 Z. [= G.]. Here the gods choose trees to place under their protection. Minerva is surprised that the trees chosen by the other gods are trees without fruit; Iuppiter responds that the gods do not want to give the impression of selling honour for fruit. Minerva replies (3.17.8–9 Z. [= G.]):

> "At mehercules narrabit quod quis uoluerit,
> oliua nobis propter fructum est gratior."
> 							(Phaed. 3.17.8–9 Z. [= G.])

> "But goddamn it, everyone can say what they want, the olive tree is dearer to us because of the fruit."
>
> 							(Transl. U.G.)

While this fable sometimes has linguistic echoes of epic — matching the council of the gods[67] — Minerva calls out *mehercules* (8). Women who swear by Hercules are found very rarely in Latin literature, let alone goddesses; in Plautus, only slaves and *meretrices* swear by Hercules, albeit rarely.[68] In the world of fables, however, where everything is pointed, even goddesses who, like Minerva, are very much concerned with profit can swear like the *meretrices* of comedy.

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66 On *app.* 4 Z. [= G.], Georgacopoulou 2014, 34, already suggested that she "manque de bon sens et de discernement juste. Elle ne devient pas finalement *emuncta*; au contraire, comme si elle s'assujettissait aux normes de la fable, elle reçoit une leçon" ("she lacks common sense and fair judgment. She does not finally become *emuncta*, on the contrary, as if she submits to the norms of the fable, she is taught a lesson").

67 For an interpretation of the fable, see Gärtner 2021, 227–234.

68 Cf. a whole chapter in Gell. *NA* 11.6: *quod mulieres Romae per Herculem non iurauerint neque uiri per Castorem* ("that in Rome women did not swear by Hercules and men not by Castor"), Plaut. *Cist.* 52; cf. Stockert 2004. — The interaction among the gods here is similarly 'human' to that in 5.12 Z. [= 4.12 G.].

4.3 *anus*

The next comic character I want to examine is the old woman (*anus*). Fable 3.1 Z. [= G.], about the old woman who sees an empty amphora lying around and can still smell the remains of Falernian wine from the distinguished shard, says at the end: "*O suauis anima, quale te dicam bonum | antehac fuisse, tales cum sint reliquiae!*" ("O sweet breath of soul! How good you once were, I could say, since your remains are like this!", 5–6). This is followed by the tricky epimythium: *Hoc quo pertineat dicet qui me nouerit* ("To what this refers, he who knows me will say", 7). Elsewhere I have shown how the reader is seduced into referring the interpretation to the 'I' who speaks in the poem and the completely different interpretations that have been presented.[69] While at that time I tended to see this fable as referring to itself in a self-reflexive way, if at all, it is worth considering in our context whether there is an allusion to comedy as well, if one adds passages such as this, from the Middle Comedy of Euboulos (*fr.* 43 Kock):

> ὦ γαῖα κεραμί, τίς σε Θηρικλῆς ποτε
> ἔτευξε κοίλης λαγόνος εὐρύνας βάθος;
> ἦ που κατειδὼς τὴν γυναικείαν φύσιν,
> ὡς οὐχὶ μικροῖς ἥδεται ποτηρίοις
> (Eub. *fr.* 43 Kock)

> Oh, potter's earth, what kind of Thericles once formed you and widened the depth of your hollow side? Yes, of course one that knew the female nature, that she does not rejoice in small cups.
> (Transl. U.G.)

Or from Roman comedy Plaut. *Curc.* 76–81, where the young Phaedromus and his slave Palinurus talk about an old female drunkard who is then lured out by the smell of wine (96–98):[70]

> anus hic solet cubitare custos ianitrix,
> nomen Leaenae est, multibiba atque merobiba.
> Pal. Quasi tu lagoenam dicas, ubi uinum Chium
> solet esse. Phaed. quid opust uerbis? uinosissima est;

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69 Gärtner 2018, 268–271; 2021, 115–120; 2022, 61–65.

70 Cf. also *Cist.* 149: *utrumque haec, et multiloqua et multibiba, est anus* ("She is both, a frequent speaker and frequent drinker, this old woman"); Ter. *An.* 228–232; cf. the proverb: Lucil. 766 K. [= 767 M.]: *anus rursum ad armillum* ("the old lady back at the wine jug"); cf. Apul. *Met.* 6.22.1; 9.29.1. It is interesting to compare the funerary epigrams on female drunkards by Antipater of Sidon and Leonides, which may have been known to Phaedrus (*Anth. Pal.* 7.353 and 455); the point of each is that the dead woman sighs that the cup on her tomb is empty.

eaque extemplo ubi <ego> uino has conspersi fores,   80
de odore adesse me scit, aperit ilico;
...

<div align="center">(Plaut. Curc. 76–81)</div>

An old woman, a guard, a gatekeeper, usually sleeps here. Her name is Leaena, a frequent drinker and wine drinker. *Pal.* Like when you name a bottle with Chian wine inside. *Phaed.* What need for words? She is a very heavy wine drinker. As soon as I sprinkle these doors with wine, she will know I am there by the smell, she opens immediately; ...

<div align="right">(Transl. U.G.)</div>

Leaena flos ueteris uini meis naribus obiectust,
eius amor cupidam me huc prolicit per tenebras.
ubi ubi est, prope me est. euax, habeo;
...

<div align="center">(Plaut. Curc. 96–98)</div>

Leaena. The blossom of old wine reached my nose, love for it eagerly lured me out here through the darkness. Where, where is it? It is near me. Yay, I have it; ...

<div align="right">(Trans. U.G.)</div>

The drunken old woman may reflect reality, but she was also a subject of the visual arts. The statue-figure of a drunken old woman from Hellenistic times is well known;[71] here the strong realism is striking, which must have been much more noticeable in the Hellenistic original than in the Roman copies.[72] Zanker rightly emphasized that the Hellenistic figure must also be set within the cultural discourse:[73] "es scheint, als habe der Künstler bei seiner Charakterisierung eher die Komödiengestalt und die Topoi der kunstvollen Epigramme ins Bild zu setzen versucht als zu einer akuten gesellschaftlichen Problematik Stellung zu nehmen, so pointiert und kunstvoll sind die einzelnen 'Zitate' herausgestellt"; he was referring here above all to the topos of the once wealthy hetaera.

In this way, the fable could also be read metapoetically: the beautiful, clever *meretrix* of Latin comedy has now descended even further and can be seen in the fable at her lowest level. A tang of her former literary presence can still be grasped, however — and in the same way that a tang of comedy still hangs around the fable of Phaedrus: a presence still felt by a connoisseur, yet irretrievably gone.

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71 Two Roman marble copies have survived (Capitoline Museum, 1st century CE; Munich Glyptothek, 2nd century CE).

72 Cf. Zanker 1989, 12–14.

73 Zanker 1989, 32–42, here 33 ("it seems as if the artist in his characterization tried to portray the comic figure and the topoi of the artistic epigrams rather than to comment on an acute social problem, so pointedly and artistically are the individual 'quotations' displayed").

4.4 *iuuenis*

The *iuuenis* of comedy is also found in Phaedrus' fables. In *app.* 27 Z. [= *app.* 29 G.]
we observed that he had seen enough comedies to react with serenity towards a
meretrix. We should also mention *app.* 10 Z. [= *app.* 12 G.]. Here we are first told that
the son of the house, barely out of sight of his father, is acting out his youth by
beating up slaves. Then Aesop appears and tells the *senex* a fable: someone teams
an old ox with a young bull under the same yoke in order to tame the young bull.
The fable ends with a lengthy conclusion by Aesop and an additional epimythium
(12–15):

> Et tu nisi istum tecum assidue detines
> feroxque ingenium comprimis clementia,
> uide ne querela maior accrescat domus."
> Atrocitati mansuetudo est remedium.   15
>   (Phaed. *app.* 10 Z. [= *app.* 12 G.])

> If you do not always keep this one with you and appease his wild mind with clemency, then
> take care that your house does not suffer even greater lamentation." For wildness, gentleness
> is a remedy.
>
> (Transl. U.G.)

Again, there is no exact equivalent to this fable in a comedy. However, I think the
relationship to Terence's *Adelphoe* is worth considering. For this comedy is explic-
itly about education, whereby a mild upbringing is contrasted with a strict one. Due
to the unexpected twist at the end of the play, it is disputed whether one, and if so
which, form of education should be understood as correct. Aeschinus, a *iuuenis*,
kidnaps a girl from a pimp whom he has beaten up; his adoptive father Micio had
advocated a mild upbringing based on understanding. This education seems to
have failed. We learn, however, that Aeschinus had kidnapped this girl only for his
brother Ctesipho. The latter was brought up very strictly by their common biologi-
cal father Demea. But then it is revealed that Aeschinus has got another girl preg-
nant; Micio, his foster father, is deeply disappointed that he did not turn to him with
his problem but forgives him because the boy has shown himself to be decent to the
girl's family. So far, one thinks that Micio's parenting style, though flawed, ulti-
mately stands the test of time. But then Demea claims to have changed so that the
sons will love him too. In the end Micio has to accept all sorts of things, even his
own marriage to the bride's mother, while the sons gladly agree to be advised by
Demea (992–995):

> sed si [id] uolti' potiu', quae uos propter adulescentiam
> minu' uideti', magis inpense cupiti', consulitis parum,

haec reprehendere et corrigere me et [ob]secundare in loco,
ecce me qui id faciam uobis. Ae. tibi, pater, permittimus: 995
(Ter. *Ad.* 992–995)

But if you would rather that I rebuke and correct, and even at times help, what you because of your youth see less, desire more fiercely, consider too little, see me here who will do this for you. *Ae.* We entrust ourselves to you, Father.

(Transl. U.G.)

In the fable, the image of the yoke as an example of how to educate someone through *clementia* may seem surprising. Against the background of the *Adelphoe*, however, I think it becomes clear that in the end the dispute that filled an entire comedy is simply decided here in a short fable: neither Demea nor Micio really emerge as winners; meaningful education is only possible in a combination of the yoke, i.e. severity, with clemency. And what genre could unite this better than the fable?[74]

4.5 *miles gloriosus*

One last character should be allowed to enter our fable stage: the *miles gloriosus*. He appears in 4.3 Z. [= 5.2 G.]. There are no direct parallels to this fable; it seems to originate in Phaedrus.

Two soldiers encounter a robber; while one flees, the other bravely defends himself. Then we read:

Latrone occiso timidus accurrit comes
stringitque gladium, dein[de] reiecta paenula   5
"Cedo" inquit "illum; iam curabo sentiat
quos attemptarit".
(Phaed. 4.3.4–7 Z. [= 5.2.4–7 G.])

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74 Specifically on educational issues, cf. 3.8 Z. [= G.]; on the subject, cf. Sen. *Dial.* 4.18–21 on *iracundia*. Here the effect of a pedagogue is described (4.21.9): *pertinebit ad rem praeceptores paedagogosque pueris placidos dari: proximis adplicatur omne quod tenerum est et in eorum similitudinem crescit; nutricum et paedagogorum rettulere mox adulescentium mores* ("It will contribute something to the cause to give the boys mild teachers and pedagogues. Everything that is still tender closely follows the next ones and develops similarly to them as it grows up. The character of the adolescents soon mirrors the character of the nurses and pedagogues."). In my view, however, the old ox is not necessarily to be equated with an educator.

> After the robber had been slain, the timid companion hurried over and drew his sword, then he threw back his cloak and said: "Bring that one over here! I will make him feel whom he has attacked."
>
> (Transl. U.G.)

Before the real action begins, *latrone occiso* (4) summarizes the consequence of the brave soldier's act. The appearance of the cowardly soldier after the penthemimeres immediately seems ridiculous due to the contrast between *timidus* (4) and *occiso*. It remains unsaid, but can be assumed that the coward was watching the fight from a distance and is only now returning. The haste (*accurrit*, 4) is metrically underlined by the resolution of the longum at *timidus* and marks the feigned readiness for action. As in a theatrical performance, he performs heroic gestures — he draws his sword and throws back his cloak[75] — i.e. he poses in order to deliver a speech, which seems all the more brazen when the robber's corpse is still 'on stage', but is deliberately overlooked by the coward. In its comic distortion, it is reminiscent of the *miles gloriosus* of Plautine comedy. This is also indicated by his first word: *cedo* (6), an old imperative, which here means something like "bring it here" or "hither with it", and is found in this function above all very often in Plautus and Terence. He presumes to make sure that the robber will feel who it is that he has attacked (6–7).[76] Once again, a figure of comedy is transposed into brutal reality: for in comedy the *miles gloriosus* fights in vain for prestige or a girl, but the soldier here was in mortal danger; his behaviour thus seems all the more despicable.

The investigation of the characters could be continued, partly with the 'lower figures' such as cobblers, butchers, and the like in the Palliata, or historical figures such as poets,[77] Socrates,[78] or personifications such as Plutus[79] in Old Comedy. It would also be interesting to see to what extent transfers to animal fables can be established.

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75 The expression *reiecta paenula* is also found in Cic. *Mil.* 29; cf. Zago 2020, 98. The fight scene there may serve as a background in general.

76 *sentiat | quos attemptarit* reminds of Ter. *Eun.* 66: *sentiet qui uir siem* ("he will notice what a man I am").

77 Cf. Ar. *Ran.*

78 3.9 Z. [= G.]; cf. Ar. *Nub.*

79 5.12 Z. [= 4.12 G.]; cf. Ar. *Plut.*

5 Conclusion: *derisor potius quam deridendus senex*. Saturnalian laughter

It would require extensive research to examine the role of laughter in both genres. Therefore, only a few thoughts may be added here at the end.

Laughter is inherent to comedy, though not necessarily to fable, but Phaedrus himself repeatedly emphasizes *ridentem dicere uerum* as one task of his fables.[80] It is important to separate what is laughed at intradiegetically, on the one hand, from what the recipient is supposed to laugh at, on the other. At least one claim can be advanced here: Roman theatre audiences may have laughed at many things but one thing seems certain: they were able to laugh boisterously because the reality on stage was fictitious and took place in Saturnalian freedom. The independent *meretrix* and the *seruus callidus* could arouse liberating or frightened laughter, depending on the status of the audience, but it was certain that they had no equivalents in the real world outside the theatre. But what about fables? Intradiegetically, there is a lot of laughter, but it is usually not liberating, cheerful laughter, but ridicule, a mocking of the allegedly nonsensical behaviour of others; not infrequently, the mockers themselves end up the object of ridicule.[81] What the recipients are supposed to laugh at or do actually laugh at, is difficult to ascertain (and not only here). I would like to pick out just one aspect: what functions does the reference to comedy fulfil? Just as the figures of comedy in the fable end up in brutal reality, laughter is also released from the Saturnalian freedom of the theatre into the entirely different communicative space of fable reading. A corresponding Saturnalian laughter would therefore probably not have been heard from a Roman reader; the world presented in the fables is simply too brutal, too realistic for that.

What is offered, however, is poetological laughter. What can and perhaps should be laughed at are the references to comedy themselves presented here. Comedy is mocked as a genre no longer in keeping with the time, and its personnel and topics are transferred to the realistic world of fables, which adds a new impulse and can prompt smiles. Since many of the fables can also be interpreted poetologically, there is always a self-ironizing wink hidden in this critical engagement with the other genre. This is perhaps most evident in the reinterpretation of the *seruus*

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80 Mann 2021 has recently done some initial research on laughter in Phaedrus and emphasizes that the fables should be read as jokes with aggressive laughter. Cf. Beard 2014 on laughter in ancient Rome.

81 See, above, the *meretrix* in *app.* 4 Z. [= G.]; or a man from *Attica* in confrontation with Aesop in 3.14 Z. [= G.].

currens, which intradiegetically becomes a witty counter-conception of its theatrical model, while the fable teller once again takes way too long to get his point across to his readers. The only thing missing is for him to say: *spectatores, plaudite.*[82]

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82 Plaut. *Curc.* 929b.

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