Part IV: **Fable and Prose Genres**

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Clever Creatures: How Phaedrus Parallels Natural History in His Fables

Abstract: Although Phaedrus (2nd half of 1st century CE) generally tends to humanize animals in his fables and to use them as representatives of human characters, there are numerous fables that show an interest in the physical and mental characteristics, the lifestyle and the astonishing skills of 'real' animals. Some fables merely incorporate a few realistic details about animals, while others come closer to natural history anecdotes. In my paper, I discuss five fables from Phaedrus' collection that clearly involve 'knowledge' about animals that is shared with the ancient tradition of natural history writing. While the paper is not a source-critical study, a comparison with obvious parallels in two prominent representatives of ancient natural history in the Imperial period, Pliny the Elder (1st century CE) and Aelian (2nd/3rd century CE), will show how Phaedrus comes close to the genre of natural history in content and style, the effect of such a convergence with this other genre, and how his fables fundamentally distinguish themselves from natural history.

1 Introduction

Although Phaedrus, like other ancient fable authors, generally tends to humanize animals in a fantastical way and to use them as representatives for human characters, most of his fables are rich in details that characterize the animals as 'real' animals, referring to their physical and mental characteristics, natural environment, and lifestyle.[1] Some fables contain naturalistic details that correspond to humans' everyday experience and are not spectacular at all, while others centre on more unusual or even astonishing features of animals. These features are presented as realistic traits and behaviours and, although the modern reader may have doubts about their reality in some cases, they do not seem totally unimaginable, so the line

1 Even fables in which the animals' behaviour is strongly humanized provide a few realistic details: in Phaed. 1.26 Z. [= G.], for example, the fox keeps the stork hungry by setting a plate with thin soup before him, while the stork takes revenge by setting a narrow-mouthed jar with solid food before the fox. The punchline of such behaviour can only be understood with regard to the realistic physical traits of the animals, who cannot take in soup with a beak or extract food from a jar with a muzzle.

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between fable and natural history is blurred.[2] For we must bear in mind that ancient natural history differs considerably from what we understand by 'scientific writing' today and often incorporates material on animals that is incredible or rather fantastic from a modern point of view.[3]

In this paper, I will focus on five fables from Phaedrus' collection that stand out for their interest in 'real' animals and which all have striking parallels to two prominent works of Latin and Greek natural history writing in the Imperial period, Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis historia* and Aelian's *De natura animalium*;[4] in one case, also, there is a parallel with Aelian's *Varia historia*, a collection of edifying tales that includes a few natural history animal anecdotes in the style of *De natura animalium*.[5] The biographical data for Pliny (23/24–79 CE)[6] and Aelian (*c.* 170–235 CE)[7] are fairly well known, but the dating of Phaedrus' work is fraught with uncertainties, as there is no reliable evidence for his life as a historical person,[8] though it is plausible that he lived in the second half of the 1st century CE.[9]

The direct comparison of Phaedrus' fables with the corresponding passages in both Pliny and Aelian offers a unique opportunity to explore how Phaedrus comes close to natural history in the Imperial period in content and style, the effect of this convergence with the other genre, but also how his fables fundamentally distinguish themselves from natural history. The focus will be on Phaedrus' convergence with natural history *as a genre*, because source-critical questions are very difficult to answer in this case[10] and will therefore not be addressed here. Likewise, the

2 On the interest of the ancient fable in 'natural history' material, see also Lefkowitz 2014, 15–18.

3 On the narrow line between ancient natural history and paradoxography and the authors' particular interest in *mirabilia*, see for example French 1994; Naas 2001; Kitchell 2015; on the influence of traditional beliefs and folklore on ancient scientific writing, see Lloyd 1983.

4 Pliny's *Naturalis historia* offers "a universal index of the world as known and imagined by the educated classes of early imperial Rome" (Murphy 2008, 671), while Aelian's *De natura animalium* is, "after Aristotle, the most important extant zoological corpus in Greek" (Zucker 2008, 33).

5 To identify these parallels, Adrados 2003, the notes in Holzberg 2018, 221–245 and the apparatus listing similia in Zago 2020 are particularly helpful.

6 Cf. Murphy 2008, 671.

7 Cf. Zucker 2008, 33.

8 Cf. Gärtner 2015, 21–33.

9 Cf. Gärtner 2015, 56, and Holzberg 2018, 13.

10 The identification of Phaedrus' sources for details of natural history is fraught with difficulties because he may have used other fable collections, writings in natural history and paradoxography, or collections of proverbs and aphorisms that are no longer extant, he may have worked in his own observations of nature, and he may even have invented some of the more unusual animal traits and behaviours himself; cf. also Gärtner 2015, 41–42. Due to his uncertain dating, we cannot be sure whether he used Pliny as a direct source or whether both used similar sources.

question whether Pliny and Aelian may in their turn have been directly or indirectly inspired by Phaedrus' fables or whether the parallels are due to common or intermediate sources is beyond the scope of this paper.[11]

2 Case studies

2.1 Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.]: The dog and the crocodile

Consilia qui dant praua cautis hominibus
et perdunt operam et deridentur turpiter.
Canes currentes bibere e Nilo flumine,
a corcodillis ne rapiantur, traditum est.
Igitur cum currens bibere coepisset canis,
sic corcodillus: "Quamlibet lambe otio,
noli uereri." At ille: "Facerem mehercules,
nisi esse scirem carnis te cupidum meae."
(Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.])[12]

Those who give wrong advice to careful people waste their effort and are disgracefully ridiculed as well. It has been handed down that dogs drink from the river Nile while running, so that they are not seized by crocodiles. Accordingly, when a dog had begun to drink on the run, a crocodile spoke as follows: "Slurp in peace as you like, don't be afraid." But the dog said: "I would do it, by Hercules, if I didn't know that you are greedy for my flesh."

(Transl. H.S.)

The drinking habits of the Egyptian dogs have clear parallels in natural history:

Certum est iuxta Nilum amnem currentes lambere [canes], ne crocodilorum auiditati occasionem praebeant.[13]

(Plin. *HN* 8.149)

11 Although Pliny names a great variety of Greek and Latin poets as his sources in the indices of his books and in the text itself, the name of Phaedrus never appears: if Pliny used Phaedrus, he did so without mentioning his name. Aelian used a wide range of Greek authors and also names many of them; it is questionable whether he would have used Phaedrus as a direct source.

12 The text of Phaedrus is based on Zago 2020; the numbers in Guaglianone's edition are given in brackets. All translations are my own. For Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.], see Gärtner 2015, 232–235; Baeza Angulo 2011, 28–29; Solimano 2005, 70–71; Oberg 2000, 82–83.

13 Pliny's text is quoted according to Ianus/Mayhoff 1875–1906; all translations are my own.

> It is certain that [dogs] by the river Nile lap up water while running, so that they do not provide an opportunity for the greed of the crocodiles.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

> οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι κύνες καὶ ἐλεῖν καὶ ἀνιχνεῦσαι τὰ θηρία σοφοί, οἱ δὲ Αἰγύπτιοι φυγεῖν δεινότατοι. τὰ γοῦν ἐν τῷ Νείλῳ δεδιότας ἄγει μὲν αὐτοὺς τὸ δίψος πιεῖν, ἡσυχῇ δὲ καὶ ἐς κόρον πιεῖν τὸ δέος οὐ συγχωρεῖ. καὶ διὰ ταῦτα οὐ πίνουσιν ἐπικύψαντες, ὡς ἂν μή τι τῶν κάτωθεν ἀνερπύσαν εἶτα ἐξαρπάσῃ αὐτούς. οὐκοῦν τὴν μὲν ὄχθην παραθέουσι, λάπτουσι δὲ τῇ γλώττῃ, ἁρπάζοντες ὡς ἂν εἴποι τις ἢ καὶ νὴ Δία κλέπτοντες τὸ πόμα.[14]
>
> (Ael. *NA* 6.53)

> The other dogs are clever at catching and tracking down wild animals; the Egyptian dogs, however, are most capable of running away. Thus, while they are afraid of the animals in the Nile, their thirst forces them to drink, but their fear does not allow them to drink in peace and until they have had enough. Therefore, they do not drink while bowing down, for fear that some of the animals from below might creep up and then seize them. Accordingly, they run along the riverbank and lap with their tongue, snatching, as one might say, or even, by Zeus, stealing their drink.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

The context of Pliny's very short description is a discussion of the many astonishing qualities of dogs, ranging from loyalty to high intelligence and fighting spirit. In Aelian, the immediately preceding chapter deals with the amazing intelligence of an elephant that punishes its keeper for cheating it out of its food. He reports the drinking habits of the dogs in much more detail, focusing on the dogs' deeper motivation for this uncomfortable kind of drinking and on its practical realization. Both authors use the present tense and the plural (referring to *canes* / κύνες) to mark the generalizing character of their description.

In content, it is obvious that Phaedrus shares the most important 'realistic' details with Pliny and Aelian: like them, he explains the extraordinary drinking behaviour of the Egyptian dogs as an attempt to avoid crocodile attacks; cf. *canes currentes bibere e Nilo flumine,* | *a corcodillis ne rapiantur* (3–4) with *iuxta Nilum amnem currentes lambere* [*canes*]*, ne crocodilorum auiditati occasionem praebeant* and ὡς ἂν μή τι τῶν κάτωθεν […] ἐξαρπάσῃ αὐτούς […] τὴν μὲν ὄχθην παραθέουσι, λάπτουσι δὲ τῇ γλώττῃ […] τὸ πόμα. In particular, the unusual 'lapping up' of the water is emphasized by each of the three authors (*lambe*, 6; cf. *lambere* and λάπτουσι).[15]

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14 Aelian's text is based on García Valdés et al. 2009 (*NA*) and Dilts 1974 (*VH*); all translations are my own. A very similar description is found in Ael. *VH* 1.4.

15 The lexical parallels and synonymous correspondences between Phaedrus and Pliny are striking, cf. *e Nilo flumine* (3) vs. *iuxta Nilum amnem, currentes bibere* (3) vs. *currentes lambere, traditum*

Stylistically, Phaedrus comes close to the genre of natural history in some aspects, while at the same time retaining typical features of the fable. His fable starts with a promythium (1–2) that anticipates the 'lesson' of the following animal narrative for the human realm (*hominibus*, 1). This element is characteristic of fables, whereas in natural history the focus is not a priori on the analogy between animal world and human world but on the *mirabilia* of the animal world.[16] It is true that Aelian in his *De natura animalium* often compares and contrasts the behaviour of animals with that of humans, and concludes that animals are even superior to humans due to their technical, intellectual, and moral virtues.[17] However, these reflections never take the form of a clear 'lesson' that humans should learn from animals.

The exposition (3–4) is less typical of a fable: it does not introduce the reader into the situation of one or more individual dogs that acted sometime in the past,[18] but contains a general observation on the cautious drinking habits of dogs at the Nile that, as suggested by the present tense *rapiantur* (4), are still observable in the narrator's times. Here, Phaedrus clearly comes close to the genre of natural history, in which generalizing characterizations of animal traits and behaviours in the present tense are the default mode, as can be seen in the passages quoted above.[19] Furthermore, *traditum est* (4) seems to refer to an unspecified written tradition,[20] which in this case could be a work of natural history like Pliny's. The impersonal formula stands out from Phaedrus' usual fable style, as it occurs only here and, slightly varied, in 5.4.6 Z. [= 4.4.6 G.] *sic locutus traditur*,[21] where it does not seem to refer to a particular written tradition. Here, Phaedrus obviously employs it to underline the credibility of his report and of the following fable narrative,[22] taking up a strategy frequently used in natural history and in historical writing in general.

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est (4) vs. *certum est*, *lambe* (6) vs. *lambere*, *corcodillis* (4) vs. *crocodilorum*, *cupidum* (8) vs. *auiditati*. As Gärtner 2015, 233 n. 8 notes, it cannot be excluded that Phaedrus was inspired by Pliny here, but due to the uncertain dating of his work no definite conclusion is possible. At any rate, there seem to be no other extant texts that Phaedrus could have used as a source, neither among natural history writings nor other fables, see also Gärtner 2015, 235. For later parallels, see Solin. 15.12 and Macrob. *Sat.* 2.2.7.

16 Cf. Hübner 1984, 162.

17 Cf. Hübner 1984, 159–163; Smith 2014, in particular 101 and 111.

18 Cf. for example Phaed. 1.4.2 Z. [= G.]: ***Canis*** *per flumen carnem cum* ***ferret***; 1.19.3 Z. [= G.]: ***Canis*** *parturiens cum* ***rogasset*** *alteram*; 1.20.3 Z. [= G.]: *Corium depressum in fluuio* ***uiderunt canes***.

19 See also Lefkowitz 2014, 17–18 on Avian. 27 (the fable of the clever crow and the pitcher) in comparison with Ael. *NA* 2.48.

20 On *tradere* referring to written traditions in particular, see Georges 1913/1918, II s.v. *trado* p. 3168 under II/2/m/β.

21 "It is said that he <i.e. the rider of the horse> spoke as follows." (Transl. H.S.)

22 See also Gärtner 2015, 233–234 n. 8.

Pliny himself employs such an impersonal formula at 8.149 (*certum est*) to stress his authority, and in book 8 alone there are numerous instances of *tradere* referring to a specified or unspecified source.[23] Aelian does not refer to a specific tradition in this particular context, but in the rest of book 6 he often indicates his written or oral sources.[24]

By *igitur* (5), Phaedrus links his generalizing introduction with a supporting example of a specific dog interacting with a specific crocodile sometime in the past.[25] In accordance with the fable's general tendency to humanize animals, the two engage in a dialogue which is presented in direct speech (6–8): the crocodile tries to reassure the cautious dog and encourages it to drink in peace, but the dog refuses to do so because it knows that the crocodile wants to seize and eat it. The possessive pronoun *meae* (8) is emphasized by its position at the end not only of the verse but also of the entire text; it highlights the dog's presence of mind, as it is not distracted by the friendly words of the predator but remains focused on saving its own life. Against this backdrop, the emphatic phrase *facerem mehercules* (7) has a sarcastic overtone and seems to refer back to the promythium where humans that act like the crocodile are said to be "disgracefully ridiculed" (*deridentur turpiter*, 2).

Neither Pliny nor Aelian illustrate their general descriptions of the dogs' drinking habits with concrete examples of specific individuals in the past, but in other cases they do.[26] What clearly distinguishes fable from natural history here is the strong humanization of Phaedrus' dog and crocodile through the gift of human speech, which is particularly noticeable due to the direct speech and adds a fantastic dimension to the text. Furthermore, the crocodile is humanized through its hunting strategy, which does not consist in jumping out of the water and dragging the dog in with its jaws, but in an attempt to outwit the dog with sneaky words. Pliny

23 *Iuba tradit* and *idem* […] *tradit* (8.14); *Verrius tradit* (8.17); *Fenestella tradit* (8.19); *Aristoteles* […] *tradit* (8.44); *is ergo tradit* (8.45); *tradit Demetrius* (8.59); *Theophrastus* […] *tradit* (8.173); *Nigidius tradit* (8.205); *Aristoteles tradit* (8.229); *traditur* (8.9; 13; 51; 55; 117; 123; 155; 166); *tradunt* (8.20; 40; 58; 151; 163; 176; 186; 203; 215; 222; 227); *traduntur* (8.106; 178). *Traditum est* only occurs once in Plin. *HN* (10.23).

24 For example, he refers to Homer's testimony in 6.1: Ὅμηρος […] μαρτυρῶν δῆλός ἐστι ("it is obvious that Homer testifies"), to an oral report he has heard in 6.2: ἀκούω γοῦν τὸν λόγον ἐκεῖνον ("I hear at least the following story"), to Aristotle in 6.3: λέγει μὲν Ἀριστοτέλης ("Aristotle says"), and to a non-specified tradition in 6.5: λέγονται ("it is said that").

25 See also Gärtner 2015, 234, according to whom the action of the fable is a "Sonderfall" ("special case") of the usual behaviour of dogs on the Nile.

26 In the context of his remarks on dogs in book 8, Pliny praises their loyalty to humans in general and then lists numerous historical examples of amazingly loyal dogs (8.142–145). A few chapters earlier, Aelian (*NA* 6.48) states in the present tense that mares are good mothers and illustrates this with an example from the time of Darius III.

and, even more, Aelian often humanize animals by attributing complex mental capacities, feelings, and moral virtues to them,[27] but the animals in their anecdotes never reveal what they think or feel 'straight from the horse's mouth'. If animals 'speak' in natural history, they mimic human speech, particularly often in birds,[28] or their sudden ability to speak is reported as a *prodigium*.[29]

2.2 Phaed. 2.6 Z. [= G.]: The eagle, the crow and the tortoise

Contra potentes nemo est munitus satis;
si uero accessit consiliator maleficus,
uis et nequitia quicquid oppugnant ruit.
  Aquila in sublime sustulit testudinem.
Quae cum abdidisset cornea corpus domo
nec ullo pacto laedi posset condita,
uenit per auras cornix et propter uolans:
"Opimam sane praedam rapuisti unguibus;
sed nisi monstraro quid sit faciendum tibi,
graui nequiquam te lassabit pondere."
Promissa parte suadet ut scopulum super
altis ab astris duram illidat corticem,
qua comminuta facile uescatur cibo.
Inducta uerbis, aquila monitis paruit
⟨***⟩
simul et magistrae large diuisit dapem.
  Sic tuta quae Naturae fuerat munere,
impar duabus occidit tristi nece.
(Phaed. 2.6 Z. [= G.])[30]

No one is sufficiently protected against the powerful; but if an evil adviser joins forces with them, whatever violence and wickedness besiege collapses. An eagle carried a tortoise high up into the air. As it had hidden its body inside its horny house and could not, safe as it was, be hurt in any way, a crow came through the air and flying alongside said <to the eagle>: "You have certainly carried off a good haul in your talons; but unless I show you what to do with it, it will tire you through its heavy weight to no purpose." When a share had been promised, <the crow> advised <the eagle> to smash the hard shell on a rock from the height of the stars,

27 For Pliny, see in particular *HN* 8.1 on the elephant. In Aelian, humanization of animals is present throughout, see Hübner 1984, 159–163.

28 See Kitchell 2020 with several examples from Pliny and Aelian.

29 Cf. for example Plin. *HN* 8.153: *canem locutum in prodigiis* […] *accepimus* ("among other prodigies we have heard that a dog spoke").

30 For Phaed. 2.6 Z. [= G.], see Gärtner 2021, 56–62; Baeza Angulo 2011, 44–45; Solimano 2005, 188–191; Oberg 2000, 104–106.

> so that, after crushing it, it might easily eat the meal. Persuaded by the words, the eagle obeyed the instructions <***> and at the same time generously shared the feast with its teacher. Thus, <the tortoise> that had been protected by a gift of Nature was no match for the two and died a bitter death.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

This fable, too, has obvious parallels in natural history:

> huius ingenium est et testudines raptas frangere e sublimi iaciendo, quae fors interemit poetam Aeschylum, praedictam fatis, ut ferunt, eius diei ruinam secura caeli fide cauentem.
>
> (Plin. *HN* 10.7)

> It <i.e. a kind of eagle called *morphnos*> has the clever trick to break up even tortoises that it has carried off by dropping them from a height. This accident killed the poet Aeschylus, who, as they say, was on his guard against the catastrophe of this day which had been foretold by oracles by confidently trusting in the <open> sky.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

> τὰς χερσαίας χελώνας οἱ ἀετοὶ συλλαβόντες εἶτα ἄνωθεν προσήραξαν ταῖς πέτραις, καὶ τὸ χελώνιον συντρίψαντες οὕτως ἐξαιροῦσι τὴν σάρκα καὶ ἐσθίουσι. ταύτῃ τοι καὶ Αἰσχύλον τὸν Ἐλευσίνιον τὸν τῆς τραγῳδίας ποιητὴν τὸν βίον ἀκούω καταστρέψαι. ὁ μὲν Αἰσχύλος ἐπί τινος πέτρας καθῆστο, τὰ εἰθισμένα δήπου φιλοσοφῶν καὶ γράφων· ἄθριξ δὲ ἦν τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ ψιλός. οἰηθεὶς οὖν ἀετὸς πέτραν εἶναι τὴν κεφαλὴν εἶτα μέντοι κατ᾽ αὐτῆς ἀφῆκεν ἣν κατεῖχε χελώνην, καὶ ἔτυχε τοῦ προειρημένου τὸ βέλος, καὶ ἀπέκτεινε τὸν ἄνδρα.
>
> (Ael. *NA* 7.16)

> Eagles seize land tortoises and then dash them on rocks from above, and having crushed the tortoise's shell they extract the flesh in this way and eat it. It was in this way, I hear, that also Aeschylus of Eleusis, the tragic poet, ended his life. Aeschylus was sitting on a rock, meditating, I suppose, and writing in his usual way. He had no hair on his head and was bald. Now an eagle, supposing that his head was a rock, then, however, dropped on it the tortoise that it was holding, and the missile struck the aforementioned man and killed him.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

In Pliny, the immediate context is the description of different kinds of eagles; in the above passage, he is discussing the third kind called *morphnos*. He provides a short general description of the eagle's behaviour in the present tense (*huius ingenium est*), using the collective singular *huius* for all eagles of this kind and the generalizing plural *testudines*, and links it with a statement on the bird's intelligence (*ingenium*)[31] and a historical example of a prominent person's death caused by the animal's behaviour (*interemit poetam Aeschylum*). In Aelian, the chapter on eagles is

31 *Ingenium*, however, might also be interpreted in the sense of 'innate quality' or 'instinct', see the translation by König/Winkler 2007, 21: "den angeborenen Instinkt" ("the innate instinct").

not directly connected to the preceding one but opens a short sequence on various birds (7.16–18). Like Pliny, he uses the present tense[32] and the plural (τὰς χερσαίας χελώνας οἱ ἀετοί) to emphasize the general nature of the bird's behaviour, but his description is more detailed: he also mentions the purpose of the eagle's strategy, that is extracting the flesh from the smashed tortoise's shell and eating it (ἐξαιροῦσι τὴν σάρκα καὶ ἐσθίουσι), and he reports the decisive fact that eagles deliberately drop their prey onto rocks (ταῖς πέτραις). He, too, adds the example of Aeschylus' death, but whereas Pliny only speaks of the accident (*fors*) that killed the poet, Aelian expands this into a story in the past tense in which a specific eagle (ἀετός) drops a tortoise on Aeschylus' bald head, mistaking it for a rock.

In regard to content, Phaedrus parallels natural history throughout this fable by his strong focus on realistic details of the animals' physiognomy and behaviour. The most important elements of the story, i.e. the fact that the eagle has lifted the tortoise into the air (*in sublime sustulit*, 4), breaks its shell by dropping it on a rock (*scopulum super | altis ab astris* […] *illidat corticem*, 11–12), and eats its flesh (*uescatur cibo*, 13), have parallels in Pliny and Aelian, cf. *testudines raptas frangere e sublimi iaciendo* and τὰς χερσαίας χελώνας […] συλλαβόντες […] ἄνωθεν προσήραξαν ταῖς πέτραις, καὶ τὸ χελώνιον συντρίψαντες οὕτως ἐξαιροῦσι τὴν σάρκα καὶ ἐσθίουσι. Phaedrus even goes beyond these two reports as he highlights the hardness and stability of the tortoise's shell on the phonetic and lexical level (cf. ***c**ornea **c**orpus*,[33] 5; *nec ullo pacto laedi*, 6; *duram* […] *corticem*, 12) and emphasizes its highly protective effect through its metaphorical description as a 'house' (*domo*, 5) in which the tortoise is safely hidden (*abdidisset*, 5; *condita*, 6). He also gives some attention to the eagle's physiognomy by mentioning its talons (*unguibus*, 8), which are the basic prerequisite for lifting the tortoise and smashing its shell from on high. Pliny and Aelian do not focus on the bird's feet in this context, but Pliny pays special attention to talons in *HN* 10.29, suggesting that birds should be classified according to their feet, which are either hooked talons or claws or webbed feet.

Stylistically, Phaedrus clearly sticks to the conventions of fable. Again, his fable starts with a promythium (1–3) that anticipates what we can learn about human life from the following narrative, setting his genre apart from natural history. Furthermore, the 'lesson' of the fable is very different from what readers can learn from the passages in Pliny and Aelian. In Pliny, the destruction of the tortoise's shell by the eagle provides evidence of the intelligence of this bird (*ingenium*), and the implicit intention of Aelian's passage seems to be the deepening of his readers' insight into the astonishing qualities that the ἄλογα, the non-human animals "without

32 The aorist προσήραξαν is gnomic and equivalent to the present tense.

33 On the effect of the *c*-alliteration, see also Gärtner 2021, 57.

reason", share with humans[34] — even if this accidently resulted in the death of a famous poet. Phaedrus, however, tells his fable to highlight that the combination of power, represented by the eagle, and wickedness, represented by the crow in the role of an adviser, is fatal for the victim (*uis et nequitia quicquid oppugnant ruit*, 3). Therefore, his focus is not on Aeschylus' accident, which he does not mention at all, but on the fate of the tortoise that is deliberately victimized by the two birds.

In contrast to Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.], the exposition (4–6) does not contain a generalizing description of the behaviour of eagles and tortoises in the present tense as would be typical of natural history, but introduces the reader directly into the concrete situation of a specific eagle some day in the past, which lifted a tortoise up into the air (*sustulit*, 4) and was — at least at that moment — not able to destroy its shell (cf. *nec* […] *laedi posset*, 6).

The exposition of Phaedrus' fable is followed by the *actio* of the crow (7–13), which suddenly turns up and flies alongside the eagle (*propter uolans*, 7). In a skilful speech, it makes the eagle promise it a share of the tortoise's flesh and in turn gives it the essential advice to smash the shell on a rock from a great height. In its *reactio* (14–15), the eagle follows the advice and gives its 'teacher' a generous share of the prey. In contrast to the tradition of natural history, Phaedrus thus introduces a third animal into the story, which acts as a teacher to the eagle in order to profit from the prey itself. The idea that different species of birds compete for the same prey, which seems to be the 'realistic' background of the interaction between the crow and the eagle,[35] or that one animal learns a new useful behaviour by imitating another, would not be fundamentally alien to natural history. Phaedrus' narrative, however, clearly enters the fantastic realms of the fable because the crow gives verbal advice to which the eagle reacts (cf. *inducta uerbis* and *monitis paruit*, 14). As in Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.], the humanization of the two birds through the gift of human speech is the key difference between fable and natural history.

Only in the conclusion (16–17) might one identify a convergence with the style of natural history, as Phaedrus calls the protective shell a "gift of nature" (*Naturae* […] *munere*, 16), employing concepts and terms that are also frequent in natural history.[36]

34 Cf. in particular the *praefatio* of Ael. *NA*.

35 Crows and birds of prey such as eagles may compete for the same kind of food, which may result in crows attacking other birds, as can be seen in a great variety of media reports on the internet.

36 Cf. for example Plin. *HN* 7.167 (*munus naturae*) and 25.18 (*naturae munere*); Ael. *NA praef.* (δῶρα φύσεως); 1.21 (δῶρον ἐκ φύσεως εἰλήχασι); 1.36 (δῶρον […] ἡ φύσις […] ἔδωκεν).

2.3 Phaed. *app.* 20 Z. [= *app.* 22 G.]: The hungry bear

Si quando in siluis urso desunt copiae,
scopulosum ad litus currit et prendens petram
pilosa crura sensim demittit uado;
quorum inter uillos simul haeserunt cammari,
in[37] terram abripiens excutit praedam maris
escaque fruitur passim collecta uafer.
Ergo etiam stultis acuit ingenium fames.
(Phaed. *app.* 20 Z. [= app. 22 G.])[38]

Whenever the bear lacks food supplies in the woods, it runs to the rocky shore and, clinging to a rock, gradually lowers its hairy legs into the water; as soon as crabs have got caught amidst their fur, it drags them away onto the land and shakes out the haul from the sea and, having collected the food from all sides, enjoys it, clever creature. Thus, hunger sharpens the mind even of the stupid.

(Transl. H.S.)

This description of the bear's fishing strategy seems to be unparalleled, but passages from Pliny and Aelian can be compared in some respects:

ingrediuntur et bipedes [scil. ursi]; arborem auersi derepunt. tauros ex ore cornibusque eorum omnibus pedibus suspensi pondere fatigant. nec alteri animalium in maleficio **stultitia sollertior**.

(Plin. *HN* 8.130–131)

<Bears> even walk on two feet; they crawl down a tree backward. They exhaust bulls with their weight by hanging by all four feet from their mouth and horns. And no other animal's stupidity is more skilful in its misdeeds.

(Transl. H.S.)

ursi et fruge, fronde, uindemia, pomis uiuunt et apibus, **cancris** etiam ac formicis; [...].

(Plin. *HN* 10.199)

Bears also live on crops, leaves, grapes, fruits, and bees, even on crabs and ants.

(Transl. H.S.)

δολερὸν χρῆμα ἡ ἀλώπηξ. [...] τὰ σμικρὰ δὲ ἰχθύδια θηρῶσι πάνυ σοφῶς. παρὰ τὴν ὄχθην τὴν τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἔρχονται καὶ τὴν οὐρὰν καθιᾶσιν ἐς τὸ ὕδωρ· τὰ δὲ προσνέοντα ἐνίσχεταί τε καὶ ἐμπαλάσσεται τῷ δάσει τῷ τῶν τριχῶν. αἳ δὲ αἰσθόμεναι τοῦ μὲν ὕδατος ἀναχωροῦσιν,

37 in terram codd., <se> in terram Zago.

38 On Phaed. *app.* 20 Z. [= *app.* 22 G.], see Baeza Angulo 2011, 169–170; Solimano 2005, 326–327; Oberg 2000, 257.

> ἐλθοῦσαι δὲ ἐς τὰ ξηρὰ χωρία διασείουσι τὰς οὐράς, καὶ ἐκπίπτει τὰ ἰχθύδια, καὶ ἐκεῖναι δεῖπνον ἀβρότατον ἔχουσιν.
>
> (Ael. *NA* 6.24)

> The fox is a crafty thing. […] They catch tiny fish in a very clever way. They walk along the riverbank and lower their tail into the water. And <the fish> swim up to them and are enmeshed and entangled in the shaggy hairs. When <the foxes> notice this, they withdraw from the water, go onto the dry land and shake their tails violently, and the tiny fish fall out, and the former have a most delicious meal.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

> **σοφία** δὲ ἄρκτου ἦν ἄρα ἐκεῖνα.
>
> (Ael. *NA* 6.9)

> The following shows the cleverness of the <female> bear.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

The first passage from Pliny is found within his descriptions of the bear's physical qualities and deals with the animal's ways of moving and with its strategy for hunting down bulls; in the second passage, the bear's diet is discussed. In Aelian *NA* 6.24, the clever fishing strategy of the fox follows directly after a passage on the scorpion's ingenuity, whereas the female bear's cleverness (*NA* 6.9) in protecting its young is loosely connected to the following chapter on the docility of animals.

In content, Phaedrus' epimythium that "hunger sharpens the mind even of the stupid" (*stultis acuit ingenium fames*, 7) can be compared to Pliny's statement in 8.131 that bears are skilful in doing harm while at the same time being stupid (*nec alteri animalium in maleficio stultitia sollertior*).[39] In addition, the fact reported in the same passage that bears crawl down trees backwards (*arborem auersi derepunt*) might be compared to the movement of the bear in lines 2–3, which clings to a rock while letting its legs down backward into the water (*prendens petram* | […] *crura* […] *demittit uado*), and the crabs mentioned in Phaedrus (*cammari*, 4) are also listed as part of the bears' diet in Plin. 10.199 (*cancris*).

Aelian, too, attests the intelligence of the bear in certain behaviours (σοφία δὲ ἄρκτου, 6.9), but does not mention its general stupidity. More interesting, however, are the striking parallels between his description of the fox's clever hunting strategy and that of the bear in Phaedrus: both animals lower a part of their body into the water, the fox its tail (τὴν οὐρὰν καθιᾶσιν ἐς τὸ ὕδωρ) and the bear its legs (*crura*

39 Ovid, too, ascribes stupidity to the bear in *Hal.* 59, asking *quid nisi pondus iners* ***stolidae****que ferocia mentis?* ("what else <is it> than sluggish weight and ferocity of a stupid mind?"). The apparent clumsiness of the heavy and shaggy animal seems to be the reason why it is sometimes considered unintelligent.

[...] *demittit uado*, 3), the little fishes or crabs get entangled in the fur (τὰ δὲ [scil. σμικρὰ ἰχθύδια] προσνέοντα ἐνίσχεταί τε καὶ ἐμπαλάσσεται τῷ δάσει τῷ τῶν τριχῶν — *inter uillos simul haeserunt cammari*, 4), the fox or bear gets back on land, shakes its fur to make the prey fall out, and eats it (ἐλθοῦσαι δὲ ἐς τὰ ξηρὰ χωρία διασείουσι τὰς οὐράς, καὶ ἐκπίπτει τὰ ἰχθύδια, καὶ ἐκεῖναι δεῖπνον ἀβρότατον ἔχουσιν — *in terram abripiens excutit praedam maris | escaque fruitur passim collecta uafer*, 5–6). Thus, even though there are no exact parallels in content between Phaedrus' fable and natural history writings, the content of his fable clearly comes close to the tradition of natural history.

In style, Phaedrus' text is much closer to a natural history anecdote in the style of Pliny or Aelian than to a typical fable. It starts with *si quando* ("whenever", 1) and is written in the present tense throughout, with the only perfect *haeserunt* (4) marking the completion of an action before a new action in the present (*excutit*, 5). This is clearly a general description of a particular behaviour of bears that happens under particular circumstances (whenever the bear has no more food supplies) and can be repeated at any time, like the behaviour of the bears or foxes in Pliny and Aelian. The singular (*urso*, 1) does not refer to a specific individual but must be interpreted as a collective singular, as is the case in the two passages from Aelian (ἡ ἀλώπηξ, 6.24; ἄρκτου, 6.9). Further, the focus is on a realistic step-by-step description of the bear's behaviour with many illustrative details, e.g. the rocky shore (*scopulosum ad litus*, 2), the hairy legs that are lowered gradually into the water (*pilosa crura sensim demittit*, 3), and the fact that the bear collects the crabs from all directions (*passim collecta*, 6) after shaking them out of its fur. This very detailed representation is quite similar to that in Ael. *NA* 6.24. The bear is not humanized through verbal speech or thoughts, it shares only the mental quality of cleverness (*uafer*, 6) with humans. The idea that non-human animals have many mental (and also moral) virtues that are claimed to be restricted to humans is present throughout Aelian's work and can also be found in the above passages (δολερὸν χρῆμα ἡ ἀλώπηξ, 6.24; σοφία δὲ ἄρκτου [...] ἐκεῖνα, 6.9). Finally, the 'typical' structure of the narrative part of fables, which often comprises an exposition, an exchange of *actio* and *reactio*, and a result, is hardly noticeable here,[40] as the bear's actions appear as a continuous process, very similar to the generalizing descriptions of animal behaviour in natural history. Interestingly, the epimythium, which is a standard element of fables, does not explicitly refer to humans, as does the promythium in 1.25 Z. [= G.] (*cautis hominibus*, 1), but *stultis* (7) seems to include humans *and* non-human animals. There is no longer a clear analogy between the animal world and human

40 One might distinguish an exposition in 1, the *actio* of the bear in 2–3, the *reactio* of the crabs in 4, and the result in 5–6, but this does not seem very convincing to me.

world, as would be typical of fable, and the last sentence could also be read as the concluding remark of a natural history anecdote.

2.4 Phaed. *app.* 23 Z. [= *app*. 25 G.]: The snake and the lizard

Serpens lacertam forte auersam prenderat,
quam deuorare patula cum uellet gula,
arripuit illa prope iacentem surculum
et pertinaci morsu transuersum tenens
auidum sollerti rictum frenauit mora.
Praedam dimisit ore serpens irritam.
(Phaed. *app*. 23 Z. [= *app*. 25 G.])[41]

A snake had by chance caught a lizard from behind. When it wanted to devour it with its gaping throat, <the lizard> seized a twig lying nearby and holding it transversely with firm bite restrained the greedy jaws with the ingenious obstacle. The snake released from its mouth the prey that had been caught in vain.

(Transl. H.S.)

Snakes feed on other reptiles like lizards and Pliny mentions battles between lizards and snakes (*HN* 8.97), but there seem to be no exact parallels to this description of a lizard's behaviour either in natural history or in other sources. However, Pliny and Aelian provide accounts that are in some way comparable:

sed aduersum ire soli hi [scil. Tentyritae] audent [scil. crocodilis], quin et flumini innatant dorsoque equitantium modo inpositi hiantibus resupino capite ad morsum addita in os claua, a dextra ac laeua tenentes extrema eius utrimque, ut frenis in terram agunt captiuos […].

(Plin. *HN* 8.93)

But these men alone <i.e. the Tentyritae> dare to go against them <i.e. the crocodiles>; they even swim in the river and, sitting on their back like riders, when they open their jaws with the head thrown backward to bite, insert a wooden club into their mouth, and holding its ends on both sides on the right and on the left, drive them to the land as their prisoners as if with bridles […].

(Transl. H.S.)

Σοφόν τι ἄρα χρῆμα ἦν γένος βατράχων Αἰγυπτίων, καὶ οὖν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὑπερφέρουσι κατὰ πολύ. ἐὰν γὰρ ὕδρῳ περιπέσῃ Νείλου θρέμματι βάτραχος, καλάμου τρύφος ἐνδακὼν πλάγιον φέρει καὶ ἀπρὶξ ἔχεται καὶ οὐκ ἀνίησι κατὰ τὸ καρτερόν. ὃ δὲ ἁμηχανεῖ καταπιεῖν αὐτὸν αὐτῷ

41 On Phaed. *app*. 23 Z. [= *app*. 25 G.], see Baeza Angulo 2011, 172; Solimano 2005, 328–331; Oberg 2000, 259–260.

καλάμῳ· οὐ γάρ οἱ χωρεῖ περιβαλεῖν τοσοῦτον τὸ στόμα, ὅσον ὁ κάλαμος διείργει. καὶ ἐκ τούτου περιγίνονται τῆς ῥώμης τῶν ὕδρων οἱ βάτραχοι τῇ σοφίᾳ.

(Ael. *VH* 1.3)

A clever thing is a species of Egyptian frogs, and therefore they are much superior to the others. For if a frog encounters a water snake, a creature of the Nile, it bites off a piece of reed, carries it transversely, holds it tightly and does not let it go with all its strength. <The water snake>, however, cannot swallow it together with the reed, because it does not manage to encompass it with its mouth as much as the reed is wide. And, as a result, the frogs overcome the strength of the water snakes through their cleverness.

(Transl. H.S.)

In the context of the above passage, Pliny describes the Nile crocodile and its natural enemies, including the inhabitants of the island of Tentyris, who are the only humans to face the horrible animals bravely. They defeat them by sitting on their backs and inserting a club transversely into their gaping mouths which they use like reins. Aelian here and in the following chapter also deals with Egyptian animals, but in contrast to the human-animal interaction in Pliny he describes the interaction between two animals, one of which outwits the stronger one through its cleverness (cf. σοφόν τι […] χρῆμα and τῇ σοφίᾳ): by holding a piece of reed transversely in its mouth, the Nile frog becomes too wide to fit into the mouth of the water snake. While in Pliny the humans bridle the crocodiles' mouths with a club held transversely, Aelian's frog holds the reed in its own mouth.

In terms of content, the fable is much closer to Aelian than to Pliny:[42] the lizard and the Nile frog both keep a kind of stick transversely in their mouth to avoid being swallowed by a snake (*surculum* […] | […] *transuersum tenens*, 3–4; cf. καλάμου τρύφος […] πλάγιον φέρει) with the slight difference that the lizard is stuck in the snake's throat with the lower half of its body (cf. *auersam prenderat*, 1) whereas the frog has not yet been caught by the water snake. The behaviour of the lizard and the snake is rendered with many realistic details that are also present in Aelian and Pliny, in particular the gaping mouth of the snake (*patula* […] *gula*, 2; *auidum* […] *rictum*, 5; cf. *hiantibus* referring to the crocodiles) and the lizard's tight grip on the twig lying transversely in its mouth (*pertinaci morsu transuersum tenens*, 4; cf. πλάγιον φέρει καὶ ἀπρὶξ ἔχεται καὶ οὐκ ἀνίησι κατὰ τὸ καρτερόν). Like in Aelian, the lizard's natural behaviour shows its cleverness (*sollerti* […] *mora*, 5; cf. σοφόν τι […] χρῆμα and τῇ σοφίᾳ).

42 The question who used whom as a source would be very difficult to answer and cannot be discussed here. Phaedrus may have been inspired by Pliny (cf. in particular *frenauit*, 5; cf. *ut frenis*), and may have modified the story himself, which was taken up by Aelian later. But it is also plausible that Phaedrus and Aelian used a single source that is no longer extant.

Stylistically, this fable parallels natural history in a similar way to the previous one, as it entirely lacks any humanization of animals through speech or thought. But whereas Pliny and Aelian provide generalizing descriptions of human and animal behaviour in the present tense, Phaedrus is not describing in general the trick lizards use to escape from a snake's mouth, but telling the story of a specific lizard and a specific snake, which happened "by chance" (*forte*, 1) some time in the past.

Phaedrus' fable is preceded by a later prose introduction with the message that "when strength is lacking, guile must be used",[43] but we cannot be sure if the original fable contained a promythium at all.[44] Hence, we should be cautious about claiming that this fable parallels natural history stylistically through a deliberate lack of a promythium. However, it can at least be noted that, as in Phaed. *app*. 20 Z. [= *app*. 22 G.], the typical fable structure recedes into the background behind a more continuous narrative.[45]

2.5 Phaed. *app*. 28 Z. [= *app*. 30 G.]: The beaver

Canes effugere cum iam non possit fiber
(Graeci loquaces quem dixerunt castorem
et indiderunt bestiae nomen dei,
illi qui iactant se uerborum copia),
abripere morsu fertur testiculos sibi,
quia propter illos sentiat ⟨se⟩se peti.
Diuina quod ratione fieri non negem;
uenator namque simul inuenit remedium,
omittit ipsum persequi et ⟨re⟩uocat canes.
Hoc si praestare possent homines, ut suo
uellent carere, tuti posthac uiuerent;
haud quisquam insidias nudo faceret corpori.
(Phaed. *app*. 28 Z. [= *app*. 30 G.])[46]

When the beaver is no longer able to escape from dogs (the loquacious Greeks have called it 'castor' and have given the animal the name of a god, they who brag about the abundance of

43 *Ubi leonis pellis deficit uulpinam insuendam esse: hoc est ubi deficiunt uires astu utendum* ("If a lion's skin is not available, a fox's skin must be sewn on; that is, if strength is missing, guile must be used.").

44 Cf. Zago 2020, 181.

45 It would be less convincing to distinguish an exposition (1–2), the actio of the lizard (3–4), the reactio of the snake (5), and a conclusion (6).

46 On Phaed. *app.* 28 Z. [= *app*. 30 G.], see Baeza Angulo 2011, 176–177; Solimano 2005, 334–337; Oberg 2000, 266–268; and Silvia Mattiacci's contribution in this volume.

> their words) it is said to bite off its testicles because it understands that it is hunted for them. That this happens according to a divine plan I cannot deny; for as soon as the hunter has found the medicine, he ceases to pursue the beaver itself and calls back the dogs. If men could manage to be willing to do without their property, they would live safely in the future; no one would set a trap for a naked body.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

The beaver's behaviour described here was quite frequently treated in ancient literature.[47] With regards to natural history, the following passages can be quoted as parallels:

> Easdem partes sibi ipsi Pontici amputant fibri periculo urgente, ob hoc se peti gnari; castoreum id uocant medici.
>
> (Plin. *HN* 8.109)

> The beavers living at the Black Sea cut off the same parts of their bodies when threatened by danger, as they know that they are hunted for this reason; the doctors call it 'castoreum' <'beaver-oil'>.
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

> [...] spectabili naturae potentia, in iis quoque, quibus et in terris uictus est, sicut fibris, quos castoras uocant et castorea testes eorum. amputari hos ab ipsis, cum capiantur, negat Sextius diligentissimus medicinae, quin immo paruos esse substrictosque et adhaerentes spinae, nec adimi sine uita animalis posse; [...].
>
> (Plin. *HN* 32.26)

> [...] Equally remarkable is the might of Nature also in those animals that live <in the water and> also on land, such as the beavers, which they call "castors" and their testicles "castorea". Sextius, who is most scrupulous in the field of medicine, denies that these are bitten off by <the beavers> themselves when they are being caught; on the contrary they are small, as he says, drawn inwards, and attached to the spine, and cannot be taken away without the animal's life; [...].
>
> (Transl. H.S.)

> οὐκοῦν ἐπίσταται τὴν αἰτίαν δι᾽ ἣν ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν οἱ θηραταὶ σὺν προθυμίᾳ τε καὶ ὁρμῇ τῇ πάσῃ χωροῦσι, καὶ ἐπικύψας καὶ δακὼν ἀπέκοψε τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ ὄρχεις, καὶ προσέρριψεν αὐτοῖς, ὡς ἀνὴρ φρόνιμος λησταῖς μὲν περιπεσών, καταθεὶς δὲ ὅσα ἐπήγετο ὑπὲρ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ σωτηρίας, λύτρα δήπου ταῦτα ἀλλαττόμενος. ἐὰν δὲ ᾖ πρότερον ἐκτεμὼν καὶ σωθεὶς εἶτα πάλιν διώκηται, ὃ δὲ ἀναστήσας ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐπιδείξας ὅτι τῆς αὐτῶν σπουδῆς οὐκ ἔχει τὴν ὑπόθεσιν, τοῦ περαιτέρου καμάτου παρέλυσε τοὺς θηρατάς· ἧττον γάρ ἔτι τῶν κρεῶν ἐκείνοις φροντίς ἐστι. πολλάκις δὲ καὶ ἔνορχοι ὄντες, ὡς ὅτι πορρωτάτω ἑαυτοὺς ἀποσπάσαντες τῷ δρόμῳ, εἶτα

47 Cf. Cic. *Scaur*. 2.14 Olechowska; *Nux* 165–166 (allusion); Juv. 12.34–36; Apul. *Met.* 1.9; in the ancient fable it only occurs after Phaedrus (Aesop. 118 P. [= 120 Hsr.; 154 Ch.]).

ὑποστείλαντες τὸ σπουδαζόμενον μέρος, πάνυ σοφῶς καὶ πανούργως ἐξηπάτησαν, ὡς οὐκ ἔχοντες ἃ κρύψαντες ἔσχον.

(Ael. *NA* 6.34)

Thus, <the beaver> understands the reason why hunters come after it with all their eagerness and effort, and it bows down and bites off its testicles and throws them before them, like a prudent man who, after he has fallen into the hands of robbers, puts down all he is carrying to save his own life, doubtless giving it in exchange as ransom. If, however, it has castrated itself earlier and after saving its life is then again pursued, it stands up and demonstrates that it offers no ground for their eagerness and releases the hunters from further effort; for they care less about its meat. Often, however, also beavers with <intact> testicles, after escaping as far away as possible by running, have then drawn in the coveted part and tricked <the hunters> in a very clever and crafty way, as if they no longer possessed what they indeed possessed, concealing it.

(Transl. H.S.)

In Pliny, the self-castration of the beaver in danger (8.109) is immediately preceded by a chapter on the castration of new-born male wild asses by their fathers. In the context of 32.26, Pliny is speaking of remedies produced from animals that live in water; here, he discusses the so-called 'beaver-oil' (*castoreum*), a viscous fluid for territorial scent-marking produced in organs that were thought to be the male animal's testicles in Antiquity but are in fact the so-called castor sacs, "a pair of pouch-like structures located between the kidneys and bladder" possessed by both male and female beavers.[48] Based on the pharmacological writer Sextius, Pliny denies that the beaver cuts off its 'testicles' itself because this would cause its death. In Aelian, the chapter on the self-castration of the beaver is loosely linked to the three preceding chapters on animals hunted by humans. In contrast to Pliny, he discusses not only the act itself but also the tricks with which already castrated or still intact beavers escape hunters, either displaying their belly deprived of the coveted 'testicles', or pretending to have lost them already by drawing them inwards.

It is obvious that Phaedrus' knowledge about the beaver is shared with ancient natural history. The idea that beavers cut off their testicles when they are hunted (*canes effugere cum iam non possit*, 1; *uenator*, 8) is expressed in a more general way in Pliny (*periculo urgente* and *peti*, 8.109; *cum capiantur*, 32.26), who does not explicitly mention humans as hunters, in contrast to Aelian (οἱ θηραταί). Phaedrus then, in a kind of parenthesis (2–4), adds a mini-excursus on the animal's Greek name *castor*, which has a parallel in Pliny 32.26 (*quos castoras uocant*). According to 5–6, the beaver bites off its testicles (*abripere morsu* […] *testiculos sibi*) because it is aware that it is pursued for them (*quia propter illos sentiat <se>se peti*). The beaver's

48 Cf. Rosell/Campbell-Palmer 2022, 85–86, here: 85.

teeth as the instrument of castration are explicitly mentioned by Aelian (δακὼν ἀπέκοψε) whereas this detail is obscured somewhat by Pliny, who uses the more technical term *amputare*; if Phaedrus used Pliny as a source, he obviously ignored Pliny's critical remarks on the beaver's self-castration in *HN* 32.26 (*negat Sextius diligentissimus medicinae*). Like Phaedrus, both writers highlight the animal's awareness that the hunters are interested in its testicles (Plin. *HN* 32.26: *ob hoc se peti gnari*; Ael. *NA* 6.34: ἐπίσταται τὴν αἰτίαν δι᾽ ἣν ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν οἱ θηραταὶ [...] χωροῦσι); the use of the testicles as a remedy (*remedium*, 8) is discussed in detail by Pliny at 32.27–31. Finally, the result that the hunter stops pursuing the beaver after finding the testicles (8–9) has a parallel in Aelian, according to whom the animal throws its amputated testicles in the hunters' path (καὶ προσέρριψεν αὐτοῖς).

Phaedrus' convergence with natural history is also evident in style. He describes the repetitive behaviour of beavers, using the present tense throughout the fable and in one case the perfect (*inuēnit*, 8) to mark the completion of an action before another one starts (*omittit*, 9).[49] The collective singulars *fiber* (1) and *uenator* (8) stand for beavers' persecution by hunters in general and not for specific individuals that interacted with each other on a particular day in the past. The description is naturalistic throughout and does not contain any signs of humanization such as human speech or thoughts. Remarks on the non-Roman names (cf. *Graeci* [...] *dixerunt castorem*, 2) of humans, animals, and things are frequent in natural history, as can be seen in the passages from Pliny (*castoreum id uocant medici*, 8.109; *quos castoras uocant et castorea testes eorum*, 32.26),[50] and thus Phaedrus is matching the 'didactic' style of natural history. However, he goes beyond mere *didaxis* by attacking the Greeks for their loquaciousness (*loquaces*, 2; *qui iactant se uerborum copia*, 4): here, the poet Phaedrus and his poetical programme of *breuitas* come to the fore.[51] The impersonal formula *fertur* (5) is rare in Phaedrus and only here does it seem to refer to a non-specified tradition of knowledge.[52] As in the case of *traditum est* (1.25.4), the formula evidently serves to underline the credibility of what is told, and in this way, too, Phaedrus comes close to the style of natural history.[53]

49 Pliny uses the present tense throughout, Aelian mixes the gnomic aorist and present tense.

50 There are many more examples in books 8 and 32, e.g. *nabun Aethiopes uocant*, 8.69 ("the Ethiopians call it nabu") and *quas Graeci* φρύνους *uocant*, 32.50 ("which the Greeks call phrynoi <i.e. toads>").

51 Cf. also Baeza Angulo 2011, 176 n. 65.

52 The other instances of *fertur* do not refer to traditions of knowledge (1.10.8 Z. [= G.], 1.27.9 Z. [= G.], 3.3.2 Z. [= G.]).

53 There are several instances of *fertur* referring to a certain tradition in Pliny, e.g. 12.108; 19.128; 21.12; 31.55; 32.3; 35.66; 36.17; 36.127.

Whereas the use of the first person (*non negem*, 7) is frequent in the pro- and epilogues and in the pro- and epimythia of Phaedrus' fables,[54] the 'author'[55] Phaedrus does not speak up elsewhere in the narrative parts of his fables. Thus, *non negem* (7) is indeed unusual and might be interpreted as a coming close to natural history, where authors often speak in the first person to present their personal opinion, observations, or knowledge: there are many examples in Pliny and Aelian.[56] Also, the idea that the gods or divine Nature have organized the world in a most reasonable way and care for its creatures (*diuina quod ratione fieri non negem*, 7) can be interpreted as a parallel to natural history thinking and is found in Pliny's and Aelian's works too.[57]

Like the previous two texts, this fable does not seem to correspond to the 'typical' structure of fable with actio and reactio; instead, it contains a continuous narrative with an inserted mini-excursus (2–4) and a commentary by the 'author' (7), coming quite close to a natural history anecdote. Only the epimythium (10–12) is clearly recognizable and explicitly transfers the beaver's behaviour to human life: by using a counterfactual conditional clause (*hoc si praestare possent homines* […] | *tuti posthac uiuerent*, 10–11), Phaedrus makes clear that humans are — usually — unable to act like the beaver but would benefit from doing so, and so the animal serves as an exemplary model for them. It should be mentioned that Aelian, too, in

54 Cf. Oberg 2000, 14.

55 That is, the author-persona, not the empirical author.

56 For example, there are 55 instances of *arbitror* ("I believe") in Pliny's *Natural history* outside the *praefatio*, in five cases in combination with *equidem* ("as far as I am concerned"). Aelian, too, often speaks in the first person singular outside his prologue, cf. the following examples from book 1: 1.6: ἀκούω ("I hear"); 1.49: καὶ ἔπεισί μοι θαυμάζειν ("and I am astonished"); 1.51: ὡς κρίνειν ἐμέ ("as I estimate"); 1.53: καὶ τὴν μὲν αἰτίαν εἰπεῖν οὐκ οἶδα, ὃ δὲ οἶδα τοῦτο εἶπον ("and the reason for this I am unable to tell, but I have told what I know").

57 Pliny emphasizes throughout his work that divine Nature has created everything for the sake of mankind, cf. for example *HN* 27.2 where he underlines that our knowledge about plants and the remedies derived from them is not a human invention but comes from the gods or Nature (*nunc uero **deorum** fuisse eam apparet aut certe **diuinam**,* […] *eandemque omnium parentem et genuisse haec et ostendisse*, "But now it is clear that <the rich knowledge about plants> has been the gift of the gods or at least inspired by them, […] and that the same mother of all things both produced and showed this <to us>"). Even in the most marvellous natural phenomena there is a "plan" (*et in his quidem, tametsi mirabilis, est tamen aliqua **ratio***, "and in these things there is indeed, however marvellous, nevertheless a kind of plan", *HN* 9.178). In contrast to Pliny, Aelian underlines the idea that the gods do not disdain the non-human animals, but take care of them and love them, cf. *NA* 11.31: πρόνοιαν αὐτῶν [scil. τῶν ζῴων] **οἱ θεοὶ** ποιοῦνται, καὶ οὔτε αὐτῶν καταφρονοῦσιν οὔτε μὴν ὀλιγώρως ἔχουσιν […]. ὅπως οὖν καὶ αὐτὰ φιλεῖται **θεοῖς** ἐρῶ […] ("The gods care for them and neither look down upon them nor indeed disdain them […]. I will now explain how they, too, are loved by the gods […]").

the above passage links the beaver's behaviour to that of a prudent man who, falling into the hands of robbers, saves his life by giving away all he is carrying as a ransom (ὡς ἀνὴρ φρόνιμος λῃσταῖς μὲν περιπεσών, καταθεὶς δὲ ὅσα ἐπήγετο ὑπὲρ τῆς ἑαυτοῦ σωτηρίας, λύτρα δήπου ταῦτα ἀλλαττόμενος). But the fundamental difference between Aelian and Phaedrus' epimythium is that Aelian compares the animal's behaviour to that of an intelligent human in order to highlight that non-human animals, too, have astonishing mental skills, whereas Phaedrus turns the story about the beaver into a kind of lesson for humans. Further, it must be noted that Aelian often contrasts a description of positive animal behaviour with negative human behaviour at the end of his anecdotes. This structure can in some ways be compared to the epimythium of a fable,[58] but the crucial difference is that Aelian's focus is on the contrast between 'good animals' and 'evil humans', whereas Phaedrus' epimythium suggests that humans should imitate the animal's behaviour.

3 Conclusion

The study of the five fables from Phaedrus' collection demonstrates that the poet is not only interested in 'real' animals, but also in unusual and spectacular animal behaviours with more or less obvious parallels in Pliny and Aelian, two prominent representatives of natural history in the Imperial period. Regardless of source-critical questions, of whether Phaedrus invented the astonishing strategies of the lizard and the bear himself or whether all three authors rely on some common animal lore, it can be concluded that Phaedrus comes close to the genre of natural history in content by the fact that he shares detailed 'knowledge' of animals with Pliny and Aelian.

The style of natural history is matched to varying degrees. Generally, if we imagine the genre of fable as one pole and that of natural history as the other, we might say that the first two texts (Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.] and 2.6 Z. [= G.]) are obviously closer to fable, because despite their naturalistic details they have a promythium that clearly anticipates a kind of 'lesson', they report the behaviour of specific animals in the past, and humanize these animals in a fantastical way through the gift of speech. The last three fables stand out for their lack of animal speech, so they come closer to natural history anecdotes. Two of them, Phaed. *app*. 20 Z. [= *app.* 22 G.] on

58 Cf. Hübner 1984, 162; cf. for example Ael. *NA* 7.17 (certain birds take care of elderly fellow birds whereas humans despise old age) and 17.40 (elephants worship the gods whereas humans have doubts about their existence).

the bear and *app*. 28 Z. [= *app*. 30 G.] on the beaver, also provide generalizing descriptions of animals' behaviour in the present tense that could be repeated at any time, and Phaed. *app*. 20 Z. [= *app*. 22 G.] even has an epimythium that does not draw explicit parallels between the bear and the human world. Here, the metrical form of the verse fable seems to be the only clear criterion that distinguishes it from a natural history anecdote.

This convergence between fables and natural history has several effects. First, the poet seems to imply that he does not exclusively regard the animals in his fables as fantastic representatives of human characters, but is also bearing their original 'animal' nature in mind. Interestingly, all five fables deal with animals' mental capacities, in particular with their cleverness in saving their own lives (the dog, the lizard, and the beaver) or in hunting down prey (the eagle and the bear). This in turn seems to encourage the application to Phaedrus' fables of Human-Animal Studies, which emphasize the interest in 'real' animals and in their intrinsic value.[59] Second, the display of more unusual and spectacular 'knowledge' of animals shows Phaedrus as a *poeta doctus* who not only alludes to prominent predecessors in the field of poetry but is also familiar with the natural history lore of his time. Third, fables like that of the hungry bear (*app*. 20 Z. [= *app*. 22 G.]) that deliberately confound readers' expectations of the genre by breaking some of its most important conventions show Phaedrus' particular mastery of the genre and suggest that he was addressing a learned audience, capable of appreciating his play upon genre conventions.

In the history of the Graeco-Latin fable, Phaedrus was, of course, not the only one to 'experiment' with the blurring of boundaries between fable and natural history: Fables of this kind can be found in the Greek prose fable collections in particular, but occasionally also in the verse fable collections by Babrius and Avianus.[60] With regard to the five fables by Phaedrus studied in this paper, it is remarkable, however, that only the fable on the eagle, the crow and the tortoise (Phaed. 2.6 Z. [= G.]) is paralleled by several versions in later fable collections, which partly differ

59 For an introduction into this growing interdisciplinary field, see for example Kompatscher/Gufler et al. 2021 and De Mello 2012.

60 Cf. for example Aesop. 25 P. [= Hsr.; 28 Ch.] on the kingfisher, 65 P. [= 66 Hsr.; 255 Ch.] on the bear, 195 P. [= 210 Hsr.; 149 Ch.] on the camel, 203 P. [= 219 Hsr.; 305 Ch.] on the monkey, 214 P. [= 234 Hsr.; 327 Ch.] on the mole, 218 P. [= 243 Hsr.; 308 Ch.] on the mother ape (parallel versions: Babr. 35 and Avian. 35), Aesop. 242 P. [= 241 Hsr.; 341 Ch.] and 243 P. [= 240 Hsr.; 340 Ch.] on the hyena, Avian. 27 (parallel version: Rom. 4.13 [= 87 Thiele]) on the crow and the pitcher. For the influence of natural history on the ancient fable, see Adrados 1999, 40–41 and 234–235.

considerably from Phaedrus' version.[61] By contrast, Phaed. 1.25 Z. [= G.] on the dog and the crocodile is only paralleled by a late Latin prose paraphrase (Ademar 37), *app*. 28 Z. [= *app*. 30 G.] on the beaver is only paralleled by Aesop. 118 P. [= 120 Hsr.; 154 Ch.], and there seem to be no parallel versions at all of *app*. 20 Z. [= *app*. 22 G.] on the hungry bear and of *app*. 23 Z. [= *app*. 25 G.] on the snake and the lizard. In respect of the reception history of Phaedrus, it might therefore be concluded that his fables which show marked interest in natural history and 'realistic' animal behaviour were not his most successful ones.

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61 Cf. Babr. 115, Avian. 2, Aesop. 230 P. [= 259 Hsr.; 352 Ch.] and Rom. 1.4 [= 17 Thiele]. For a comparison, see Gärtner 2021, 59–62.

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