Phaedrus, Callimachus and the recusatio to Success

The following article investigates how Phaedrus’ Latin verse fables engage standard Callimachean topoi. When Phaedrus imitates the *Hymn to Apollo* he fails to banish Envy and when he adopts Callimachus’ own polemical allusions to Aesop he turns them upside down. Such texts are essentially Callimachean in spirit and technique and constitute a *recusatio*: by “mis-handling” or “abusing” and thus “rejecting” various Callimachean *topoi* and the role of the “successful” Callimachean poet, the fabulist demonstrates his skill and versatility within the Callimachean tradition. This sort of *recusatio* satirizes those poets who unimaginatively rehash Callimachean staples and represents a strategy that gains momentum in the first century AD. It thereby provides a literary context for understanding Phaedrus’ engagement with the evolving traditions of Roman Callimacheanism.

From Ennius to Juvenal, Callimachus exerted a pervasive influence on Roman literature. It is well known, however, that what it means to write in the Callimachean tradition can change dramatically from genre to genre and in different historical contexts. By the middle of the first century AD it had become possible for Roman poets to present Callimachean literary programmatics as hopelessly clichéd and to declare that the unreflective imitation of both Hellenistic and Latin “classics” was the rule rather than the exception. To counter this trend and

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to voice successfully one’s own version of Callimachus it became necessary to be a little un- or even anti-Callimachean. A writer like Persius and texts like the *Culex* and *Moretum* amply demonstrate the ironic ways in which imperial authors can both attack and endorse Callimachus. Such works represent a very particular strand of the Callimachean tradition at Rome.

The following article will argue that Phaedrus’ five books of Aesopic fables participate in this tradition and that we need to read Phaedrus’ engagement with Callimachus and Callimachean literature from the perspective of satire or parody. In particular, it will connect a series of fables in which Phaedrus encounters Envy and the envious criticism of his literary critics, a *topos* made popular at Rome by Callimachus’ *Hymn to Apollo*. Phaedrus, however, creates a strange version of familiar material. When the Roman Aesop adapts Callimachus to the generic perspective of fable, he finds himself unable to banish Envy and so ends up playing the role of the Callimachean “loser.” Something similar also happens when the fabulist rewrites those fables to which Callimachus himself alludes in polemical circumstances. Whereas Callimachus plays the role of the Aesopic Cicada who outwits his opponents, Phaedrus’ Cicada meets an untimely and unexpected end. It is my contention that by simultaneously “attempting” and ultimately “botching” or “rejecting” standard Callimachean moments, Phaedrus writes a kind of *recusatio* and subtly mocks those authors whose mindless application of Callimachean material seems thoroughly uninspired. Since the irony and wit that pervade the fabulist’s Callimachean reminiscences have received scant attention, the basic nature of Phaedrus’ engagement with some of the standard themes of Roman Callimacheanism has tended to go unnoticed. This article attempts to correct that imbalance in a very limited way. I will begin with a brief look at the end of the *Hymn to Apollo*.4

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2. See, e.g., Thomas 1993: 202–204 on Persius, and Ross 1975b on the *Culex* and *Moretum*.


4. Note that Champlin 2005 discusses the evidence for Phaedrus’ date and (at p. 102) reaches the sensible conclusion that “the fables … were not yet available around AD 43, and they (or at least their first book) were in circulation by about AD 70.” It should also be noted that the MSS claim, and most modern critics assume, that Phaedrus was a freedman; the temptation to treat certain fables and programmatic pieces as the autobiography or manifesto of an ex-slave is correspondingly high. Champlin 2005 again provides a thorough review of the evidence and shows that the standard account of the poet’s life is based entirely on biographical interpretations of the poems themselves. Phaedrus nowhere claims to have been a *libertus* and his supposed identity as such derives from questionable readings of individual poems. When I discuss elements of Phaedrus’ biography, it
Callimachus and the Roman Callimacheans engage the images of Phthonos, Mômos, Invidia and Livor against the background of proverbial wisdom and fable. According to tradition, Envy accompanies glory and attacks that which is highest, and Criticism assails everything good. Those who meet with envy are implicitly worthy of praise, and the criticism leveled by their opponents is implicitly unjust. From this point of view, when a poet encounters the envious criticism of proverb or fable, he provides his audience with a touchstone by which to gauge the aesthetic value of his production, as well as a foil against which to posit future fame and success. But when a poet actually overcomes or banishes Envy and envious Criticism, he turns proverbial wisdom upside down, claiming for himself and his work a quality that outstrips all ordinary criteria of aesthetic evaluation and a status that will forever silence dissent. Callimachus and the Roman Callimacheans frequently act out such scenarios—only the adherents of the slender Muse and her Alexandrian technē can successfully counteract the evil eye of Phthonos.

At the end of the Hymn to Apollo Callimachus performs both of these maneuvers. Here Callimachus and Apollo encounter two personified figures, Envy (Phthonos) and Criticism (Mômos). Although most analyses of the text focus on the implications of the speeches delivered by Phthonos and Apollo, the speeches themselves will prove to be of little use for understanding Phaedrus. Consequently the following discussion will look at the dramatic nature of the confrontation from three generic perspectives: that of *epos*, that of *iambos* and that of fable. This will set the stage for a preliminary reading of Phaedrus.

should be understood that I refer to the biography of the Phaedrian persona—we know nothing at all about the identity of the historical poet.


6. Cf. Cameron 1995: 404 and Nagy 1999: 225–27. According to Aristotle, *phthonos* is resentment directed at one’s peer, not because he is unworthy, but simply because he is one’s equal (*Rhet.* 1386b18–20); criticism marked by *phthonos* is implicitly unfounded.

7. For the aesthetic or literary-critical positions that the speeches of Phthonos and Apollo imply, see Bundy 1972, Williams 1978, Köhnken 1981, Bassi 1989 and Cameron 1995: 403–409. Köhnken 1981 and Bassi 1989 also stress the dramatic nature of the scene; the latter highlights particularly well the confrontational nature of the poem as a whole and of Callimachean aesthetics in general.
Envy said secretly to the ear of Apollo: “I do not admire the singer who does not sing as much as the sea.” Apollo struck Envy with his foot and spoke as follows: “Great is the stream of the Assyrian river, but it drags on its waters much filth from the land and much debris. The bees do not bring Deo water from every [source], but [only] that which emerges clean and undefiled from the holy spring, a small stream, the highest peak [of waters].” Hail, master: but let Criticism go where Envy is.

(1) At one level Callimachus presents a cosmic battle in which the god of poetry contends with a “demonic” Phthonos in a larger-than-life theomachia; this has all the trappings of an epic confrontation. But despite the prominent role of Apollo, Callimachus actually demonstrates the ultimate efficacy of his own technē. One of the goals of the traditional hymn is to secure the assistance of the god by means of song. Since the coming of the god promised at the poem’s opening (3–7) is fulfilled by his startling epiphany at the poem’s close, Callimachus’ prowess as a hymnist is surely not to be surpassed. In fact this guarantees the quality of poet, poem and reader alike, for we have already been told that “Apollo does not appear to everyone, but only to the good (ἐσθλός): whoever sees him, this man is great (µέγας), but he who does not see him, that man is small (λιτός)” (9–10). In addition, while poets as hymnists occasionally ask that the god or goddess in question be their fellow-fighter (summachos), we rarely see it happen. This is the world of the Iliad—albeit a miniaturized or personalized Iliad—where gods fight for heroes and heroes regularly engage in verbal neikos before combat.

(2) Envy and criticism regularly appear together in archaic Greek blame poetry and their presence here specifically marks the end of the Hymn as iambic. Moreover, in an appropriately demarcated iambic context, physical violence can constitute an appropriate response to inappropriate speech acts—we need only think of Odysseus, who wallops Thersites with the speaker’s sképtron to save...
the Achaean expedition at Troy (II. 2.265–69). It is also common for such iambic violence to manifest itself through the feet, quite literally the lowest part of the body. This explains why Melanthius abuses Odysseus and deals him a dastardly kick (Od. 17.233–38), and why Hipponax uses his feet to silence a hostile opponent (Hipp. 104.13–14 West). From the iambic perspective, Apollo’s kick righteously banishes Envy from the world of Callimachean hymn.

(3) By personifying and then banishing Phthonos and Momos, the Hymn also stages an Aesopic fable (100 Perry = 102 Haurath). Once upon a time, Zeus, Athena and Prometheus selected Momos to be the judge (κριτήν) of their respective inventions (bull, man and house). Momos was overcome with envy (φθονήσας) and so faulted the products of all three gods. Zeus grew angry at Momos’ jealousy (τα θεότητα θανατωτά) and physically ejected the faultfinder from Olympus. From the human perspective, the fable explains why perverted criticism, motivated solely by phthonos and baskania, inexorably plagues the race of men. Callimachus, however, engages the fable from the divine perspective: since envious criticism has no place among the gods, Callimachus will banish it from his own personal Olympus. This means that Callimachus plays the role of Zeus, the poetic creator and poetic expeller who escapes the relentless attack of his envious critics when others falter. But by writing a fable into his hymn and by including himself in that fable, Callimachus also flirts with the role of Aesop. According to tradition, Aesop is the lowly ex-slave who points out the folly of others through the medium of fable and who comes to an unfortunate end at the hands of his unjust critics. The Hellenistic poet comes close to acting out this narrative in its entirety, but chooses instead to win a poetic triumph.

Whatever the point of Phthonos’ criticism and Apollo’s refutation, the combination of “high” (Homeric battle, Homeric Hymn, poetic triumph) and “low” (physical violence, iambos, fable, self-criticism) dramatizes a stylistic mainstay

13. Note how Hipponax’s former friend violated his oaths with his feet (115.15 West), and compare the emphasis placed on Hipponax’s own feet (34.3–4 West). Thersites too is bandy-legged and lame in one foot (II. 2.217), not unlike Odysseus and Hephaestus, who both function as the subjects of iambic abuse (Od. 17–18 and II. 1, respectively).

14. Callimachus also adopts the role of the archaic praise poet, a figure who regularly opposes the poetry of blame and combats iambic phthonos and/or mòmos. For example, Pindar notes the need “to flee” (φεύγει νύ) the bite of ill-speech, and then recounts how he “saw from afar . . . blame-filled Archilochus, growing fat with his word-heavy hatreds” (Pyth. 2.52–56). Callimachus one-ups Pindar: instead of simply fleeing, he aggressively exiles iambic criticism from his poetic universe. See again Nagy 1999: 222–42.

15. Wimmel 1960: 61–64 discusses the connection. Williams 1978: 97 and van Dijk 1997: 647, however, disallow the allusion. For another version of the fable, see Babrius 59.

16. As the epimythium explains, nothing is so virtuous that it does not become the subject of blame. Cf. the second epimythium, reported in Chambry’s edition (= 125 Chambry), that explains, “if someone does something good, he does not escape envy: for there is nothing virtuous in criticism.”

17. Aesop’s fatal visit to Delphi is told at length at Vitae Aesopi G/W 124–42. The story is intimately connected with the figures of the blame poet and scapegoat; see Wiechers 1961, Nagy 1999: 279–90, 302–303, 307–308 and Compton 2006, who discusses Aesop in particular at pp. 19–40.
of Callimachean poetics and lends the poet’s battle with Envy a uniquely programmatic significance. To be sure, there is a certain irony in the fact that this poem inscribes within itself its own aesthetic critique, but such irony clearly maps onto the persona of the poet and constitutes an important part of his self-presentation. In particular, the *Hymn*’s representation of *phthonos*, *mômos* and (via Aesop) *baskania* connects this battle with two other texts in which Callimachus again encounters and again triumphs over the envious criticism of his detractors, *Ep.* 21Pf. and the *Aitia* Prologue.  

The envious rivalry of poets is a commonplace that appears already in Hesiod (*WD* 26), but Callimachus appropriates the ancient commonplace, stages it in the form of an actual confrontation and then transforms it into a sort of aesthetic *sphragis*.

To banish Envy and to overcome the perpetrators of envious criticism thus become synonymous with literary *apologia* and aesthetic self-definition, allowing the Roman tradition to configure Callimachus as the poetic banisher of Envy *par excellence*.

The first (extant) text in the Phaedrian corpus to feature a personified Envy (*Livor*) is the epilogue to Book 2. Here, as elsewhere, the Roman Aesop adapts his Callimachean model to the generic perspective of fable. The latent ironies and incongruities that animate the *Hymn*—the playful tension between high and low, criticism and rebuttal, triumph and defeat—suddenly dominate their new context as Phaedrus proves unable to banish Livor. The change in context creates an image of the poet that “fails” on all accounts to perform “successfully” the maneuvers of the Callimachean original.

The poem begins with the suggestion that fame can be obtained through literary *ingenium*. Phaedrus cites Aesop as proof:

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Aesopi ingenio statuam posuere Attici,
servumque collocarunt aeterna in basi,
patere honoris scirent ut cuncti viam
nec generi tribui sed virtuti gloriam.
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2 ep. 1–4

18. Pfeiffer 1928: 330–31 already sees the connection between *Aitia* fr. 1.17Pf. and *Ep.* 21.4Pf. Giangrande 1968 amplifies the discussion, outlines Callimachus’ triumphant overturning of envy and highlights the literary nature of the conflict, although not from the perspective of proverbial wisdom and fable. Both texts have been repeatedly linked with the end of the *Hymn to Apollo*; see, e.g., Wimmel 1960: 100–101.


21. For the text, I follow Perry 1965 and have consulted Guaglione 1969. In general I note textual variants only where they might alter the particular interpretation put forward. It should be noted, however, that the corpus is fragmentary and that certain fables exist only in an “appendix”
The Athenians set up a statue to the talent of Aesop and placed a slave on an eternal pedestal so that all might know that the path to honor lies open and that glory is granted not on the basis of birth but on the basis of excellence.

Phaedrus here conflates literary success with social or political success. “The path to honor” (honoris via) fuses the Roman cursus honorum with the Pindaric/Callimachean path of song. By privileging virtus over genus, the image also marks Aesop, and implicitly Phaedrus, as a sort of novus homo. From this perspective, the fabulist adopts the role of a newcomer to the Callimachean Senate—he is a poet who has no social (i.e. literary) dignitas of which to speak but finds himself poised to make impressive gains. This position is fundamentally ambiguous. An ex-slave like Aesop could potentially wield unprecedented power under the Empire. But despite the rhetoric of the occasional new man, the cursus honorum was open to a very limited number of individuals and few outsiders ever actually made it to the top. If the path of song resembles the traditional cursus at all, Phaedrus will not get very far.

The poet next admits that he has not pursued his chosen path out of any deep-rooted aesthetic conviction, much less at the prompting of Lycian Apollo:

> quoniam occuparat alter ut primus foret, ne solus esset, studui, quod superfuit. 
> nec haec invidia, verum est aemulatio. 
> quodsi labori faverit Latium meo, 
> plures habebit quos opponat Graeciae. 

2 ep. 5–9

Since another had anticipated [me] so as to be the first, I worked hard that he might not be alone—this was all that was left. However, this is not envy, rather it is emulation. But if Latium favors my toil, she will have more [authors] to set against Greece.

The fabulist has worked hard (studui) and such vocabulary momentarily situates him in the “highest” traditions of learned Latin poetry. But Phaedrus then reveals that he has not exerted himself so as to find an untrodden path or to sing what others have not: he has worked hard at the only road that was open to him (quod superfuit). This narrative recalls Horace’s explanation in Sermones 1.10 for why he chose to write satire. Horace surveys a number of literary genres and their most distinguished representatives; although satira is the only arena in which he feels

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(Ap.) compiled by Niccolo Perotti or in prose paraphrases; see Henderson 1999, Holzberg 2002: 3–4, 39–40 and 95–104. Note also Zander 1921, who attempts to restore several of the paraphrases to verse form.

22. Koster 1991: 65 makes the connection with the cursus honorum and novus homo, and links the combination of virtus and gloria to the language and values of Cicero and Sallust’s Marius. Bernardi Perini 1992: 47 makes a similar comparison in connection with 1 pr.
he can make improvements, he knows that he will remain inferior to Lucilius. Like Phaedrus, Horace is aware of his predecessors and contemporaries. Both poets present themselves as feeling a certain amount of apprehension but also as choosing to work in fields where they think they can excel. Horace then proceeds to critique Lucilius and to demonstrate his own superiority. Phaedrus will do just the opposite.

In what follows the fabulist continues to set up high expectations through the recognizable poetic language of hard work, study and artistic refinement. But Phaedrus doubts that he will ever obtain the praise he deserves. Once Envy gets his foot in the door, the fabulist lets him in:

si Livor obtrectare curam voluerit, 
non tamen eripiet laudis conscientiam. 

si nostrum studium ad aures cultas pervenit, 
et arte fictas animus sentit fabulas, 

omnem querelam submovet felicitas. 

si autem rabulis doctus labor, 

sin autem rabulis doctus 
occurrit labor, 

sinistra quos in lucem natura extulit, 

nec quidquam possunt nisi meliores carpere, 
fatale exilium corde durato feram, 
donec Fortunam criminis pudeat sui. 

2 ep. 10–19

If Envy wants to disparage my diligence, nevertheless he will not take away my awareness of my praiseworthiness. If our study reaches cultured ears and the mind perceives that our fables have been made with art, then good luck will drive away all cause for complaint. But if, on the other hand, our learned toil runs into ranting critics whom a perverted nature has brought forth into the light and who can do nothing except pull their betters to pieces, then I will endure my fated exile with hardened heart until Fortune repents of her crime.

Phaedrus here expresses the paranoid self-doubt of the debutant litterateur in typically Roman fashion—with an ascending tricolon. Envy might criticize (obtrectare) Phaedrus’ careful diligence (curam); his study (studium) might reach an educated audience (aures cultas) who will appreciate his skill; or the critics might tear his learned work to shreds (doctus labor) and so send him into a sort of

23. Serm. 1.10.36–49; note lines 46–48: “this was . . . what I could write better, though remaining inferior to the inventor [of the genre]” (hoc erat . . . melius quod scribere possem / inventore minor).


25. rabulis doctus is Baehrens’ reading and is adopted by Perry; the MSS read ab illis doctus, which does not make sense; Rigault, followed by Guaglianone, reads doctus illis.

26. exilium is Gruner’s emendation for exitium, accepted by Perry but not by Guaglianone. It is tempting to see here an allusion to Ovid’s poetic exile.
poetic exile. The poem ends on a decidedly pessimistic note. If it begins with the *novus homo* contemplating his political future (*via honoris*), it ends with him imagining his political failure (*exilium*). It remains to be seen whether Phaedrus, the socio-poetic new man, will ever actually get anywhere on the path of song. He himself suggests, programmatically, that he may not. 27

Three points need to be made regarding the appearance of Livor. (1) While most Roman poets engage Callimachus’ *Hymn* from the perspective of victory, Phaedrus does not. 28 As Iliadic hero or Aesopic Zeus, Callimachus is able to expel Envy and Criticism from his poetry. Phaedrus stays much closer to the role of an actual Aesop, adopting the position of a would-be Callimachus who has no Apollo to invoke when the unjust dispensers of blame attack. The Roman Aesop thus manages his Greek text through a rhetoric of defeat appropriate to his own generic context. If Callimachus masterfully manipulates fable, then Phaedrus “simply” lives it. 28

(2) Whatever literary ideals the speeches of Phthonos and Apollo may entail, the fabulist grossly oversimplifies. Elsewhere Phaedrus does formulate aesthetic principles and these principles are closely connected with practical moral goals, 29 but that process has nothing to do with Envy. 30 Livor’s presence is motivated not by aesthetic scruples, but by social resentment. Phaedrus contrasts the critics who will despise his work (*rabulis*) with two other groups, the cultured audience that will appreciate his fables (*aures cultas*) and the better sort of people whom the critics unjustly censure (*nec quidquam possunt nisi meliores carpere*). These two groups are actually the same. By becoming the subject of envious criticism, Phaedrus attempts to place himself among the learned elite. Unfortunately his attempt to climb the social ladder by living the life of a sophisticated Hellenistic poet seems to meet with resentment and to end in political/literary failure (*exilium*). Elitist contempt for the uneducated—a typical feature of Roman Callimacheanism—can only be expressed effectively by those who have already found their niche at the top. 31

(3) Upon closer inspection, it seems that Phaedrus does not actually encounter Envy at all. Instead, the anxious fabulist allows his imagination to run wild:

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\text{si Livor . . . voluerit . . .}
\]

\[
\text{si nostrum studium . . . pervenit . . .}
\]

27. Koster 1991: 66 completely misses the point when he marks the entire scene as “unfreiwillig komisch.” Dams 1970: 101–102 finds Phaedrus’ use of the *topos* peculiar, but usefully compares it to 1 pr.

28. So, for instance, Koster 1991: 66–67 connects the diction (*cura, labor*, etc.) with Callimachean aesthetics and notes the grand implications of Livor, although Phaedrus’ position seems “überraschend schwach.”

29. E.g., 1 pr. 2–3, 2 pr. 1–4. For the moralizing aims of fable in general, see van Dijk 1997: 74–75.


31. Reading *doctus illis* with Rigault and Guaglianone instead of *rabulis doctus* with Baehrens and Perry does not alter the contrast sketched in this paragraph.
Phaedrus, Callimachus and the recusatio to Success

2 ep. 10, 12, 15

If Envy wants . . . If our study reaches . . . But if, on the other hand, our learned toil runs into ranting critics . . .

The criticism directed at Phaedrus stems from the poet’s own insecurity. While Callimachus uses Envy to represent the criticism of other people, the Roman Aesop refuses to create a narrative wherein other poets or other critics voice their disapproval and his work meets with independent criticism. We can see Phaedrus performing a similar maneuver in fable 4.22. There Envy keeps quiet, but Phaedrus busily imagines his plans for giving judgment (4.22.1–2): “What verdict are you now thinking about giving, Envy? Although he conceals it, nevertheless I understand full well” (Quid iudicare cogitas, Livor, modo? / licet dissimulet, pulchre tamen intellego). Callimachean poets have battles with Envy or stoutheartedly endure its criticism—Phaedrus, by contrast, has paranoid daydreams.

On the one hand, the differences between Callimachus and Phaedrus make sense when read generically. Callimachus writes “high” poetry capable of engaging in complicated literary-critical debate and enlisting the support of the gods. Phaedrus writes “low” fables that fail to attract the gaze of Fortuna and succeed only in agitating the mob. Both poets indulge in their generic counterparts—Callimachus engages iambos and fable, Phaedrus looks towards Callimachus and Augustan literature. And yet, both do so to drastically different ends—Callimachus dramatizes a set of aesthetic principles and proves his literary superiority, Phaedrus reveals his own sense of self-doubt and raises serious questions about the reception of his work. Even though the presence of Envy implies the aesthetic quality of the fable collection, Phaedrus’ inability to fight back gives the lie to any such implication. On the other hand, we should not underestimate the programmatic significance of this Phaedrian Livor narrative. The Aitia Prologue and the Hymn to Apollo made such confrontations particularly suitable for poetic openings and closings. Hence, Horace meets Envy in Sermones 2.1 (opening), but also in Sermones 1.10 and Odes 2.20 (closings). The epilogue to Phaedrus’ second book of fables suggestively parallels these texts, but whereas Callimachus and Horace actively banish Envy, here Envy itself finds a way to banish Phaedrus (exilium). This kind of reversal or inversion smacks of Callimachus. The
fabulist lives the pessimistic life of proverbial wisdom, but seems to do so from an appropriately Callimachean perspective.

The ways in which Callimachus uses fable have recently begun to receive the detailed literary analysis that they deserve. In particular, critics have noted that Callimachean literary polemic makes programmatic and highly effective use of Aesop.\(^34\) The *Aitia* Prologue provides a striking example. When Callimachus famously likens the voice of his detractors to the braying of donkeys and his own voice to the song of the Cicada (*Aitia* fr. 1.29–36Pf.) he infuses his Prologue with fable.\(^35\) According to the Aesopic tradition (184 Perry = 195 Hausrath), the Ass used to marvel at the voice of the Cicadas. When the Ass grew envious (ζηλώσας), he asked the insects what they ate that allowed them to sing so sweetly. Following their reply he adopted a diet of dew, but was unable to live on dew alone and eventually died of starvation. The moral is that those who strive for what is contrary to their own nature, in addition to not getting what they desire, actually suffer the greatest misfortunes. The Prologue thus combines allusions to authors of high rank and great prestige with reminiscences of the lowly, everyday quasi-literature of Aesop. The combination is arresting, and the implications for Callimachus’ critics are clear.\(^36\)

This kind of maneuver has two sides. On the one hand, Benjamin Acosta-Hughes has noted that Callimachus “raises the stature of the animal fable by the association with the tone and imagery of elevated poetry and through deploying fable as a medium for literary criticism.”\(^37\) Callimachus may have found a model for this strategy in Hesiod, whose fable of the Hawk and the Nightingale, plagued by Envy, imagines his own death and takes comfort in the fact that Envy feeds only on the living (*Am*. 1.15.39–42). The vivid contrast between his violent (literary) “death” (= *Pont*. 4.16) and his optimistic (literary) “youth” (= *Am*. 1.15) reminds the reader of his successful and voluminous output. By dying, Ovid manages, in a way, to banish Envy and secure an immediate increase in fame. If we read exitium at Phaedrus 2 ep. 18, the fabulist imagines himself to be playing this sort of game. But again, Phaedrus only worries about his own death. He does not banish Envy (= Callimachus), he does not feel confident that his death will bring fame (= *Am*. 1.15) and he does not succumb to Envy’s bite (= *Pont*. 4.16).

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34. See Acosta-Hughes 2002: 152–204, Acosta-Hughes and Scodeo 2004, and Lelli 2004: 23–82. Van Dijk 1997: 646–48 discusses a number of passages—including the *Aitia* Prologue and the end of the *Hymn to Apollo*—that have been claimed as allusions to fable but that he explains differently; although I agree with most of his analyses, clearly I do not agree with them all.


36. For the allusions, see Massimilla 1996 ad loc., Acosta-Hughes and Stephens 2002 and Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004: 66–76. Lelli 2006: 183–85 discusses a number of proverbs that may possibly be lurking behind the *Aitia* Prologue as well.

gale (WD 202–12) stands at the head of a long tradition of literary critique that stages its concerns through the conflicts of birds and other flying creatures.\(^{38}\) Whatever the precise model, such a combination of the “highs” of Greek literature with the “lows” of fable clearly represents a stylistic ideal. On the other hand, when Callimachus adopts fable as a means of literary polemic, he also adopts the beleaguered persona of the Aesopic fabulist or iambographer. This is certainly the case in the Aitia Prologue and the Hymn to Apollo, where Callimachus presents himself as the victim of literary-critical attack. It is also true in the Iambi, where Callimachus narrates fables at great length and where Aesop and Hipponax play prominent roles.\(^{39}\) But Callimachus’ narrative differs in one essential respect from Aesop’s: whereas Aesop loses his life in a confrontation with his faultfinding critics, Callimachus always triumphs.\(^{40}\) The Hymn to Apollo, the Aitia Prologue and the Iambi as a whole make this plain. Such a reversal in the Aesopic storyline helps define the successful Callimachean persona as one who confounds generic expectations and overcomes seemingly insurmountable odds.

From a Roman perspective, the Aitia Prologue and the Hymn to Apollo were key texts and the inescapable prominence of Aesop at two Callimachean moments of the utmost importance encourages the Roman Aesop to handle the familiar material in a unique way. When it comes to re-working Callimachean fables, Phaedrus makes a move similar to that of his model, but in the opposite direction: by re-writing Callimachean allusions as freestanding fables, he lowers the “high” of Greek literature back to the generic level of fable. This can be seen with particular clarity in two Phaedrian fables that employ the Callimachean Cicada and the Callimachean Ass. Instead of simply rehashing the allusions of the Aitia, the Roman Aesop presents separate stories that draw on and reconfigure the implications of Callimachus’ own use of Aesop.\(^{41}\) In the end, Phaedrus reverses Callimachus’ narrative: instead of claiming a poetic triumph, the fabulist maintains his “lowly” Aesopic persona and fails as a “true” Callimachean. Such fables

38. Van Dijk 1997: 127–34 discusses the fable itself and Acosta-Hughes 2002: 170–71 contrasts it with Callimachus’ use of fable. Most recently, Steiner 2007 traces the history of “avian poetics” from Hesiod through Pindar down to Callimachus. Note that even in antiquity (Σ ad WD 202) the Hesiodic fable was interpreted with reference to the poet and his adversaries—Callimachus will easily have adapted the trope.

39. The fables in Iambi 2 and 4 also engage in literary polemic. For the fables themselves, see van Dijk 1997: 230–50. For Callimachus’ appropriation of the personae of Aesop and Hipponax, see Acosta-Hughes and Scodel 2004. Note that Adrados 1999: 240–86 treats the many intimate points of contact between iambos and fable, a connection on which Callimachus draws.

40. The actual manner of Aesop’s death varies: the Delphians throw him from a cliff (Vita W 142, Σ ad Call. Iambus 1.27), or he is surrounded by the Delphians and so throws himself off a cliff (Vita G 142), or the Delphians stone him (Σ ad Call. Iambus 1.27), or the Delphians stone him and then throw him off a cliff (P.Oxy. 1800 fr. 2.48–51).

41. Gärtner 2007b: 442 n.70 briefly acknowledges the presence of the Ass and the Cicada in Phaedrus, although not from the perspective of Callimachean fable, and rightly calls his use of the images “eine absichtliche Verdrehung der kallimacheischen Bilder.”
constitute one recognizable way in which Phaedrus negotiates his Callimachean texts in a distinctly Callimachean manner.⁴²

Consider the story of the Owl and the Cicada (3.16). The Owl cannot sleep due to the Cicada’s incessant racket and the Cicada refuses to keep quiet despite the Owl’s request. The text places great weight on Cicada’s musical qualities. Focalized through the critical eye of the Owl, its song is convicium (3), its activity clamare (7), and its defining attribute garrula (10). To solve the problem once and for all, the Owl addresses the Cicada: she describes the insect’s song as cantus (11), likens it to the music of Apollo’s cithara (12), and then invites her target back to her tree to have a drink of nectar (13). Fooled by such fulsome praise and being parched with thirst, the Cicada accepts the treacherous invitation. The Owl traps her frightened guest and promptly kills it. Not even the most Callimachean of insects stands a chance in Rome.

The story of the Owl and the Cicada represents a common type of fable, the contest (agôn) between animals.⁴³ But Phaedrus’ text also invokes a traditional literary topos, the contest (agôn) between birds. We have seen in passing that poets such as Hesiod and Callimachus stage their own conflicts with literary opponents and promote their own literary agendas through the conflicts of flying animals.⁴⁴ In the Aitia Prologue Callimachus establishes a contrast between poetic styles by characterizing his adversaries as noisy cranes (14) or braying donkeys (31) and presenting himself as the slender nightingale (16) or the sweet-voiced cicada (30). So, too, Phaedrus’ fable contrasts the powerful crafty Owl with the helpless credulous Cicada and allows the former to pass judgment on the latter’s song. Thus Phaedrus returns Callimachean fable back to the world of Aesop, where Callimachean lightness suddenly becomes a liability and the Callimachean protagonist dies a violent death.⁴⁵ Through this fable the Roman

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⁴². Two potential connections between Phaedrus and Callimachus deserve to be noted. (1) At 1 pr. 5–7 Phaedrus defends the fact that his fables include both talking animals and talking trees. Bernardi Perini 1992: 46 and Cavarzere 2001: 210–11 point out that the emphasis on trees places Phaedrus in a tradition whose most conspicuous exemplar is Callimachus Iambus 4. Is Phaedrus alluding to Callimachus? If the Phaedrian collection contained a version of the agôn of the Olive and the Laurel we might be justified in reading 1 pr. as a nod towards Callimachus. However, it is difficult to know whether Iambus 4 would have stood out as the paradigm of the plant fable to a first century audience. Not only was the form relatively common (see Oberg 2000: 39–40), as one of the readers for this article points out to me, we know of only one Phaedrian fable that deals with talking plants (Zander 1921: 32–35 no.16 and Perry 1965: 481 no.302) and it has nothing to do with Callimachus. (2) The basic facts underlying Iambus 4.69–78 appear in Phaedrus 3.17. Again, is Phaedrus alluding to Callimachus? The information in question concerns what trees the various gods honor and whether or not their fruit is of any value. However, the techniques and emphases of the two texts are entirely different and I see no close verbal, stylistic or thematic parallels to suggest that Phaedrus is re-shaping the Hellenistic poet.

⁴³. For the type, see Adrados 1999: 152.

⁴⁴. See again Steiner 2007, who treats the topos in Hesiod, Pindar and Callimachus.

⁴⁵. Callimachus’ cicada is proverbially weak as well as proverbially light, like the old men in the teichoscopia of Iliad 3. Callimachus, however, is able to transform this physical weakness into poetic strength. For the connections, see Wimmel 1960: 111–12, Acosta-Hughes and Stephens 2002:
Aesop also re-enacts the conclusion of the *Hymn to Apollo*. The fabulist stages his conflict in a lower register far more appropriate to the generic context and endows it with an ending more suitable to that world: Apollo does not come to the rescue, the Cicada dies like Aesop before him. Nevertheless, the reader (or would-be poet) is left with a serious lesson: all praise is suspect and potentially tainted with envy. The Callimachean Cicada would do well to stop singing immediately.

As for the ass, its ignorance is a proverbial failing that is often alluded to by its inability to play the lyre and that is frequently punished with physical violence. In the *Aitia* Prologue Callimachus alludes to this ignorance by emphasizing his own melodious *techne* and casting his opponents as harsh-voiced donkeys. Phaedrus, by contrast, tells the story of the Ass and the Lyre (App. 14). Once upon a time an Ass (*asinus*) found a lyre in a meadow. After trying it out with his hoof, the animal exclaimed:

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"bella res mehercules
male cessit" inquit "artis quia sum nescius.
si reperisset aliquis hanc prudentior,
divinis aures oblectasset cantibus."
sic saepe ingenia calamitate intercidunt.
App. 14.3–7
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“A fine thing, by Hercules, has turned out badly,” he says, “since I am ignorant of art. If someone with more practical knowledge had found this, he would have delighted [his audience’s] ears with divine songs.” Thus talent often perishes due to disaster.

App. 14 fits well with Callimachean literary polemic. The Ass blames this misfortune on his lack of training and the reader well understands that technical proficiency is an essential quality for the poet-musician. In fact Phaedrus underscores the animal’s ignorance by rejecting its more polite name (*asellus* =...
“donkey”) in favor of its more “lowly” or “servile” name (asinus = “ass”). But Phaedrus’ Ass is also a sympathetic character. He seems to regret his technical ignorance and to lament his inability to please his audience—his ingenium is the unfortunate victim of unfair circumstances that lie beyond his control (calamitate intercidunt). How do we explain this discrepancy?

In Phaedrus’ “awkward” or “anticlimactic” handling of Callimachean material we should see the fabulist playing two complementary roles: he is the Callimachean Cicada who fails to win an aesthetic triumph and the ignorant Ass who butchers Callimachean topoi. This combination of roles develops in surprising ways at key junctures in the collection. For instance, Phaedrus seems to showcase his ass-like treatment of Callimachean principles in the opening poem of Book 1. The fabulist begins by contrasting his own artistic refinement with the simplicity of his model:

Aesopus auctor quam materiam repperit,  
hanc ego polivi versibus senariis.  
1 pr. 1–2

This material that Aesop the author first discovered, I have polished in senarian verses.

As soon as Phaedrus proudly declares that he has “polished” his material in the manner of Catullus, we find out, much to our erudite dismay, that he has done so versibus senariis. 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.

In the prologue to Book 3 Phaedrus makes a similar display, describing how he took Aesop’s “path” (semita) of fable and built it up into a “highway” (via). This maneuver ultimately ends in disaster:

ego illius [sc. Aesopi] pro semita feci viam,  
et cogitavi plura quam reliquerat,  
in calamitatem deligens quaedam meam.  
3 pr. 38–40

49. Housman 1930 shows that asellus is by far the more decorous Latin term for the animal. Even Horace, when he succumbs to the pressure of the bore, only becomes a “donkey” (Serm. 1.9.20, ut iniquae mentis asellus).

50. For the senarius, see Cicero Orator 189 and cf. Aristotle Rhetoric 3.8. For the ancient evidence on the senarius and a partially similar reading of ego polivi versibus senariis, see Cavarzere 2001: 208–10, who calls Phaedrus’ usage “an oxymoron.”
I made a highway in place of that man’s [sc. Aesop’s] path and I thought up more things than he had left behind, although I made certain selections that led to disaster for me.

These lines show the fabulist’s fundamental “misunderstanding” of the basic opposition between the Callimachean semita and the very un-Callimachean via.51 From the perspective of Latin poetry, his ignorant preference for the latter over the former is appalling. A convoluted series of conditionals follows in which Phaedrus imagines himself to fall victim in some sort of legal dispute to a veritable Sejanus, Tiberius’ proverbially nasty Praetorian Prefect (41–44).52 Both episodes figure the fabulist as the ignorant ass who ruins poetic commonplaces and as the defenseless cicada whose Callimachean ideals lead to physical harm.

Phaedrus systematically develops the connection between sophisticated aesthetic principles and potential danger at the middle and end of Book 3.53 Fable 3.10 is one of the longest in the collection. At 3.10.60 we find out that the fabulist has gone on at length “because we have offended certain people with our excessive brevity” (brevitate nimia quoniam quosdam offendimus). When Phaedrus’ Callimachean brevisitas gets him into trouble, he reacts by writing longer works that are implicitly less Callimachean. But just like the cicada in 3.16, Phaedrus does not know when to stop singing. The final poem of the book further emphasizes the fabulist’s verbosity and the danger that he feels is imminent:

excedit animus quem proposui terminum,
sed difficulter continetur spiritus,
integritatis qui sinceræ conscius
a noxiorum premitur insolentiis.
qui sint, requiris? apparebunt tempore.

3 ep. 28–32

My mind has passed beyond the limit that I set up, but one’s spirit is checked with difficulty when he is oppressed by the insolent actions of harmful people although aware of his genuine uprightness. Who are they, you ask? They will be seen in due time.

Phaedrus is anxious and consequently loses control of his work, a significant failure for any poet working in the Callimachean tradition. Unlike his Hellenistic


52. The passage about Sejanus has long been misunderstood; see Champlin 2005: 100–101. Note that Bloomer 1997: 105, Bajoni 1997: 289 and Gärtnert 2007b: 444 also see a parallel with Ovid’s obscure crimen and exile. Most recently, Compton 2006: 302–304 uses 3 pr. and the Sejanus episode in particular to characterize Phaedrus as a “victim of the Muses” in the tradition of Aesop, Archilochus and other scapegoats. Although Compton is undoubtedly right to put Phaedrus in this category, his brief analysis is inadequate and historically unsound.

predecessor, Phaedrus cannot retaliate through the medium of fable and so claim poetic victory. 54 Although the fabulist does not die an Aesopic death, by the end of the collection (5.10) he figures himself as the old hunting dog whose rotten teeth cause him to lose his prey. This is a devastating and ironically anticlimactic, but programmatically consistent, failing for Phaedrus the satirist no less than for Phaedrus the target of iambic (i.e., biting) Envy. The collection, as we have it, ends with failure and abuse. 55

Phaedrus’ shortcomings and mistakes form a coherent picture. By remaining unable to win an aesthetic victory or to play the Callimachean lyre, Phaedrus continues to fall short of the Callimachean ideal. And yet, what could be closer to Callimachus in spirit? As recent scholarship has emphasized, Hellenistic poets and their Roman imitators self-consciously attempt to recuperate, renew and redeploy key elements of a vast amount of literary history; they are interested as much in literary continuity as in literary innovation. 56 This holds especially true for Callimachus and the Roman Callimacheans. From this perspective, the Roman Aesop digs up the work of an archaic prose author who is to be situated at the low end of the generic spectrum but whose own work and persona provide a model for Callimachus himself. 57 The fabulist then produces a small allusive series of libelli (e.g., 1 pr. 3, 3 pr. 1, 4 pr. 14) in an antiquated, but technically refined, meter that had never been used for Alexandrian-style literature at Rome. The end result is an entirely new creation—the Latin verse fable—that is steeped in the traditions of earlier Roman Callimacheanism and that turns Callimachean fable, not to mention literary programmatic, upside down.

Consider again the semita of Aesop. When the fabulist inverts the Callimachean opposition between path and highway (3 pr. 38), he sides with proverbial wisdom: “if a highway is available, do not seek out the shortcut” (ὁδὸν παρούσης τὴν ἀτραπὸν µὴ ζήτει). 58 The desire to take the highway betrays a very un-Callimachean fondness for convenience and conformity: Phaedrus’ (ostensible) rejection of Callimachean principles turns out to be a sign of ignorance that hinges

54. Critics like Koster 1991 and Bloomer 1997: 102 compare these kinds of passages with Terence’s prologues. Such comparisons are valid to a point, but make much of the supposed “fact” that Terence and Phaedrus were both ex-slaves. However, by emphasizing the fact that fable was the invention of slaves (3 pr. 33–37), Phaedrus may invite comparison with the figure of the slave-poet familiar from Plautus.

55. The hunter reproaches his dog and the dog asks that he praise what he once was even if he now condemns what he has become. Phaedrus again abuses his literary memoria: these lines travesty similar expressions deployed amidst great adversity and/or anxiety, but with firm poetic resolve, by Propertius (1.12.11) and Horace (Odes 4.1.3–4). Gärtner 2007b: 439 n.57 sees the fable as a “spielerische Verwendung” of a theme found first in Latin at Ennius 522 Sk., where Ennius is the old race horse that used to triumph at the Olympian games; cf. Babrius 29.

56. See Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, and Hunter 2006, both with further bibliography.

57. For Callimachus’ Aesopic persona, see again Acosta-Hughes and Scodel 2004. Callimachus also proudly advertises his own use of prose sources (e.g., Xenomedes at Aitia fr.75.54Pf.).

58. CPG I App. Prov. 4.12; cf. Otto 1890: no.1888. The Callimachean image, however, operates on many levels and engages a number of traditions; see Massimilla 1996: 219–22.
on Callimachus’ own (ostensible) rejection of the wisdom of the démos. This maneuver defines the fabulist as generically “low” from two points of view, that of learned Roman literature and that of everyday life. Phaedrus has his Callimachean cake and eats it too.

By re-orienting an essential moment of Callimachean literary polemic to the world of fable, Phaedrus cultivates the persona of the helpless Cicada or ignorant Ass. This is the framework within which we should read Phaedrus’ Envy narrative as a whole, as well as his “feeble” or “ignorant” persona more generally. Weakness and ignorance, however, are two character traits that sit ill at ease with more straightforwardly emulative approaches to Callimachean literary programatics. Like Callimachus, most poets of the late Republic and early Empire continually transform helplessness into strength and make constant displays of erudition; a Catullus or a Propertius may suffer serious setbacks along the way, but the path of song is ultimately paved with (aesthetic) gold.59 This leads to a series of puzzling questions. Why does Phaedrus continually develop the role of the loser? To whom does this kind of maneuver appeal? What is the larger strategy at work here and how does this strategy situate Phaedrus in Roman literary culture of the first century? By this time fable could boast of having reached the generic summits of Greco-Latin literature. Callimachus wrote fables that carried full programmatic weight, featured Aesop in a speaking role and clearly alluded to the Greek fabulist’s life story (Iambi 2 and 4). He also wrote highly refined elegiac and hexameter poetry that redeployed Aesopic material alongside the work of literary classics like Homer and Hesiod (Aitia Prologue and Hymn to Apollo). At Rome fable was associated with Ennius and Horace—even Catullus had adopted fable for his own polemical literary critique.60 Ever since the third-century BC fable was a place to show off.61 When Phaedrus acts “low,” he does so on purpose and with Callimachean flair. Why?

59. Although a certain amount of helplessness forms a part of the elegiac lover’s condition, this helplessness is closely related to Hellenistic literary sensibilities (e.g., erotic epigram and Parthenius’ Erotica pathemata; cf. the Posidippus epigram discussed above) and thus serves as a sign of (intellectual) strength. Examples of ignorance are harder to come by and less easily accounted for. Absolute ignorance, however, can very well imply cunning intelligence (e.g., Trimalchio’s masterfully orchestrated display of hopelessly confused and inaccurate mythology at Satyricon 59). Cf. Thomas 2007: 52 on the “high-register incompetence” of Horace Odes 1.6.5–12. It is, however, Horace who takes the greatest pride in being able to craft his lowness and then convert it into highness (e.g., Odes 3.30.12–13, ex humili potens / princeps . . .).

60. For Ennius and fable, see Cozzoli 1986, Cozzoli 1995: 196–204 and Holzberg 2002: 32–35. Catullus 22.21 alludes to the fable of the two knapsacks (266 Perry = 229 Hausrath), again combining fable with invective and literary criticism. The fable reappears at Horace Serm. 2.3.299, Persius 4.24 and Phaedrus 4.10, although Phaedrus’ fable does not appear to draw on any of these earlier texts.

61. This is true in Greek and Latin literature. For instance, it is specifically during a fable that Nicander uses an acrostic to include his name in the Theriaca (345–53); see van Dijk 1997: 136. It is also through the fable of the country mouse and the city mouse that Horace writes a Hellenistic epyllion (Serm. 2.6.77–117); see Thomas 2007: 61–62. For Phaedrus’ lost version of the mouse fable, see Holzberg 1991 and Zander 1921: 8–11 no.4.
Phaedrus’ treatment of Callimachean material constitutes a kind of recusatio. This recusatio works on two levels. (1) The “low brow” composer of fables continually “misunderstands,” and hence “rejects,” a wide array of poetic commonplaces (e.g., Envy, the Cicada, the Ass), but displays his knowledge and skill thereby. Fable thus continually defines itself as everything that “successful” or “classical” poetry is not, while it subtly performs all the poetic maneuvers to which it claims to be inferior. (2) By refusing to play the role of the “straight-faced” or “self-confident” doctus poeta, the fabulist satirizes those poets who continue to rehash Callimachean material in mundane and superficial ways. The prologue to Persius’ Satuæ provides an instructive point of comparison. Here Persius mocks Callimachean poets as mere parrots and magpies who mechanically repeat a small number of human phrases and who sing for food or money (pr. 8–14). Phaedrus does not attack Callimachean poets outright. Instead, he himself plays the role of the Callimachean parrot who is driven to compose poetry out of hunger and the prospect of remuneration. By failing to act for the appropriate reasons, he highlights the “true” nature of poetic success and situates it squarely in financial transactions. These pieces, then, paint a humorously depressing picture of literary society and the often idealized relationship of poetic amicitia. This bit of social critique fits well with the overall outlook of the fables and allows the reader to form a more coherent picture of the collection.  

The following discussion will focus on several poems from Books 3–4 that show Phaedrus moving from patron to patron, trying to banish Envy and secure his promised fee. As we will see, the struggling fabulist may not measure success by the Persian chain, but he certainly does not measure it by the standards of Callimachean technē. We will begin with the prologue to Book 3, a meandering apologia that repeatedly and programmatically draws attention to its relationship with earlier Roman poetry. At first the reader who remembers the epilogue to Book 2 finds the fabulist’s lot to have changed significantly. Phaedrus proudly advertises the identity of his new patron, Good Fortune (Eutychus), and presents

62. For the negative outlook of the fables, see Champlin 2005: 115 (“he [sc. Phaedrus] preaches to the people a doctrine of resignation and acceptance, of not rocking the boat, of hoping to be ignored by the mighty or avenged by the gods”). Champlin 2005: 123 also provides a useful list of citations that demonstrate Phaedrus’ obsession with the “oppression of the weak by the strong,” his doctrine of “resignation and acceptance,” and the fact that the humble rarely win by virtue of their own actions. Chrestes 1979: 208–20, Currie 1984: 500–504 and 508–11, and Bloomer 1997: 73–109 are also useful, although they remain hampered by certain historical presuppositions.

63. Much more of relevance could be said about 3 pr. than I will say here. By far the best treatment of the poem as a whole is Henderson 2001: 57–92, who duly notes, apropos of 3 pr. 33–50, that Phaedrus presents himself as one who “means to flood the market with formula-Aesopica” (p. 82). Also useful are Gartner 2007b: 432–49, who emphasizes the parody in 3 pr. and 3 ep., Champlin 2005: 102–106 and Koster 1991: 67–75. Cf. the discussion above on the semita-via opposition and Sejanus at 3 pr. 38–44.
himself as the author of refined *libelli* and learned *carmina* that require *otium* to be appreciated properly (3 pr. 1–3). By acquiring a patron, Phaedrus seems to enter into the mainstream world of Roman literary society—he even manages to write a “proem in the middle.”

But Eutychus immediately interrupts:

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verum “ inquis “tanti non est ingenium tuum,
momentum ut horae pereat officiis meis.”
3 pr. 4–5
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“But,” you say, “your talent is not so valuable that a moment of time should be lost from my duties.”

Eutychus functions as both patron and satiric interlocutor. Phaedrus backtracks, making excuses and imagining everything that Eutychus would rather do than read his work. Finally the fabulist declares that whether or not his patron reads the book makes little difference to him (3 pr. 31–32). The entire episode dramatizes Phaedrus’ insecurity and characterizes Eutychus as the typical Roman *negotiator* who lacks the free time necessary for the enjoyment of life’s finer literary pleasures. Poet and patron will not be spending the day scribbling *versiculi* on their neoteric *tabellae*.

From this perspective, the poem consistently highlights Phaedrus’ inability to play the role of the “successful” or “classical” poet. This becomes clear at the end of the piece, when Phaedrus turns his attention back to Callimachean *topoi*. First the fabulist hints at the difficulty of his task, declaring that some may think he has undertaken “a weighty affair” (3 pr. 51, *rem me professum dicet fors aliquid gravem*). Then he associates himself with Linus and Orpheus, whose song could check the mighty *impetus* of the Hebrus river. This image triggers multiple literary reminiscences (Gallus, Vergil, Propertius, Ovid) and sets the scene for a re-enactment of the end of the *Hymn to Apollo*, complete with Phthonos and Assyrian river:

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ergo hinc abesto, Livor, ne frustra gemas,
quom iam mihi sollemnis dabitur gloria.
3 pr. 60–61
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Therefore, Envy, be gone from here so that you may not lament in vain when eternal glory is soon given to me.

64. The phrase refers to such programmatic pieces as *Eclogues* 6, the beginning of *Georgics* 3 and Propertius 3.1. For the phrase and discussion, see Conte 1992, who does not mention Phaedrus.
65. As in 2 ep., the bulk of this criticism comes from Phaedrus’ overactive imagination: 3 pr. 8, “perhaps you will say . . .” (fortasse dices . . .) and 10, “will you read, I ask . . .?” (legesne, quaeso . . .?).
Phaedrus appears to end his work with an optimistic flourish, deftly constructing a dense web of literary intertexts. But he immediately “spoils” the aesthetic victory:

induxi te ad legendum? sincerum mihi
candore noto reddas iudicium peto.
3 pr. 62–63

Have I enticed you to read? I ask that you give me your genuine verdict with your well known candor.

Phaedrus admits that he has written his poem to secure Eutychus’ interest and financial backing. The fabulist knows well how highly the Roman market values poetry that looks Callimachean (Assyrian river, battle with Phthonos, etc.) and, as a result, he eagerly adopts the role of the “successful” poet by deploying the topoi that the customers expect. But instead of triumphantly addressing the god of poetry and banishing envious criticism, Phaedrus turns to his would-be patron and asks for his support. The fabulist plays the role of the Callimachean parrot, the kind of hack writer who wants his handout and sings a Callimachean song to get it.

By the end of the book (3 ep.) we find that the relationship between Phaedrus and Eutychus has deteriorated (note that the fable of the Cicada and the Owl occurs between the two at 3.16). Here the fabulist hounds his patron for his promised remuneration:

brevitatis nostrae praemium ut reddas peto
quod es pollicitus; exhibe vocis fidem.
3 ep. 8–9

I ask that you give the reward for our brevity that you promised: display the fidelity of your word.

Phaedrus no longer asks for Eutychus’ appraisal of his poetry (3 pr. 63, reddas iudicium peto); instead he asks for his patron’s financial support outright (3 ep. 8, praemium ut reddas peto). The “tactless” demand for monetary compensation immediately debases the stylistic ideal of brevitas and violates the unwritten rule that poetic clientes and patroni maintain a ruse of amicitia between equals. Given the fabulist’s position, it is not surprising that he has had other patrons. The reader senses that Eutychus will not be the last:

tuae sunt partes; fuerunt aliorum prius;
dein simili gyro venient aliorum vices.
decerne quod religio, quod patitur fides,
ut gratuler me stare iudicio tuo.
3 ep. 24–27

The task is yours; before it belonged to others; later, by a similar revolution, others will have their turn. Make the decision that duty and fidelity allow so that I may rejoice that I am supported by your verdict.
The epilogue’s repeated appeals to Eutychus’ *fides* (3 ep. 9 and 26) suggest that the fabulist will not get what was promised him, and his verbal wrangling reveals that he has not acquired any of his patron’s “good luck.” Neither this small-time *negotiator* poet nor his small-time *negotiator* patron belongs to the highly regulated world of Latin literary culture.

Book 4 shows a similar mixture of artistic confidence and satiric self-sabotage. In 4 pr. we find that the fabulist has indeed acquired a new patron, Particuló, but Phaedrus feels sure that when time permits Particuló will actually read his work (4 pr. 14, *quartum libellum cum vacaris perleges*). Phaedrus then returns to the problem of envious criticism:

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hunc [sc. libellum] obtrectare si volet Malignitas,  
imitari dum non possit, obtrectet licet.  
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4 pr. 15–16

If Spite wants to disparage this [sc. little book], provided he cannot imitate it, let him disparage it!

The Roman Aesop downplays the potential criticism of Malignitas by relying on proverbial wisdom: envy is easier than imitation. So long as no one can copy him, the critics can bray to their hearts’ content. The scene is small and well-contained. To solidify his new image and guarantee long-lasting fame, Phaedrus boasts of the praise that he has recently received:

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mihi parta laus est quod tu, quod similes tui  
vestras in chartas verba transfertis mea,  
dignumque longa iudicatis memoria.  
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4 pr. 17–20

Praise has been produced for me because you, because those like you, transfer my words onto your pages and you judge me worthy of being remembered for a long time. Nor do I desire the applause of the uneducated.

No longer the subject of scorn, the fabulist pronounces his disdain for the uneducated rabble and activates his own claim to literary *memoria*: “I detest everything common,” Phaedrus seems to say (Callim. *Ep.* 28.4Pf., *σοχχίζω πάντα τὰ δηµόσια*). Phaedrus’ Callimachean discrimination has numerous predecessors in the satiric tradition. But the fabulist compromises his position by ignorantly equating success with circulation: his claim rests on the simple

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68. For Phaedrus’ negative portrayal of the common crowd, see Champlin 2005: 116–17.

(economic) fact that Particulo and those like him take the time to have his books copied. Phaedrus’ laus has nothing to do with skill, polish or erudition: he paints a sober picture of everyday life, wherein poetic success is measured by the social (i.e., financial) status of those attending one’s recitations and circulating one’s work. This flies in the face of Callimachean, neoteric and Augustan literary sensibilities.

For Phaedrus, banishing envy and becoming a true poetic cliens means learning to play a certain social game and knowing how to reap the financial benefits. As Phaedrus’ first person narrative demonstrates, the fabulist does not play this game particularly well. When the seemingly optimistic proclamations of 4 pr. lead into the downtrodden resignation of 4.1, the reader understands Phaedrus’ predicament:

Qui natus est infelix, non vitam modo
tristem decurrit, verum post obitum quoque
persequitur illum dura fati miseria.

4.1.1–3

He who was born unfortunate not only lives out a sad life, but after death the harsh misery of his fate pursues him as well.

In the epilogue to Book 2 it is precisely his own lack of felicitas that Phaedrus laments. One doubts whether his lot will ever improve. As the book continues, the poet’s confident dismissal of Malignitas appears more and more unfounded. Envy and envious criticism surface at 4.7, 4.8 and 4.22. These are oddly un-programmatic places for confrontations with Callimachean phthonos and baskania. Even if Phaedrus seems to triumph over envy, envy’s reappearance notably disrupts the flow of the book and undermines Phaedrus’ carefully cultivated appearance of artistic mastery. The Roman Aesop simply cannot win.

Throughout these poems Phaedrus literalizes or hyperbolizes certain traditional aesthetic values, especially those of smallness and paupertas. Following Callimachus, earlier Roman poetry sets “smallness,” as a stylistic ideal, against the general “largeness” of traditional Roman values (poverty vs. wealth, intimacy vs. empire, personal amicitia vs. public amicitia, militia amoris vs. actual militia). Phaedrus extends the trope to its most literal level, whereupon it immediately ceases to look stylistically or aesthetically attractive: the helplessness of the feeble Cicada and the stupidity of the ignorant Ass are a far cry from the noble, if feigned, simplicity of a Horace or a Tibullus. Of course Greek and Roman poets had patrons and received various kinds of financial backing. Literary representations of the patron-client dichotomy, however, tend towards one

70. The most intriguing of these is 4.7, where Phaedrus attempts to placate a nasty critic by writing Aesopic tragedy. The main body of the fable presents Phaedrus’ learned parody of a Medea prologue, clearly based on Ennius and Euripides, and constitutes a sort of recusatio to tragedy. See Gärtner 2000.
of two respective extremes: an idealization of the expenditure (e.g., Theocritus 17)\textsuperscript{71} or an idealization of the relationship (e.g., Horace and Maecenas). Phaedrus emphatically avoids both courses: he caters to the lowest common denominator by drawing attention to his failures and self-serving motivations, and does not hesitate to use the language of the Forum to talk about his work.\textsuperscript{72} This should be read as satire and parody. In fact, Phaedrus’ deployment of economic motifs parallels his treatment of Callimachean topoi and Callimachean fable. Catullus, for example, reinvests the language of the Forum with the values of friendship, love and poetry.\textsuperscript{73} Phaedrus, by contrast, “lowers” his poetry into the world of financial transactions, exposing the patron-client relationship for what it was, or for what he thought that it could be. If Catullus contemplates to whom he ought to give his book as a present (1.1, \emph{cui dono} . . .), Phaedrus wonders who will pay the highest price. Such a move fits into a larger pattern whereby the Roman Aesop continually baffles his readers’ expectations of what certain poetic topoi should look like, how traditional programmatic language should sound, and who the “successful” Roman poet should be. The fabulist defines himself in opposition to, or even as the exact opposite of, the triumphant Callimachean, repeatedly satirizing the inefficacy of the would-be poet and the foolishness of his audience and/or patron. The \emph{Callimachus Romanus}, then, is a helpless Cicada or ignorant Ass; his patron is too busy in the Forum to read his work and probably will not pay up when the time comes. This is a dangerous game in which everybody loses sooner or later and the average poet lives a life of precarious dependency.

Phaedrus may parody the world of first century Roman poetry and its illustrious traditions, but this is also the world that will have read Phaedrus’ work. The fabulist’s abuse of traditional material will only have made sense to a readership equipped with the cultural background to recognize the topoi and to apprehend clearly Phaedrus’ subtle, though hilarious, variations and rejections. Those who sympathized with Phaedrus’ portrayal will also have been those who sympathized with the devastating sketches of his satiric predecessors and contemporaries. Writers like Persius, Petronius, and Juvenal and texts like the \emph{Culex} and \emph{Moretum}, continually “abuse” the topoi and values of “classical” Latin literature through a strategy akin to Phaedrus’ \emph{recusatio}. Like Horace in the \emph{Sermones}, they heap scorn

\textsuperscript{71} When Greek poets sing of financial remuneration for their songs, they do so to the credit of their patron. So Theocritus, for example, hymns Ptolemy Philadelphus’ financial support of poetry as part of a larger strategy of praise that extols the ruler’s generosity and piety (Theocritus 17.95–120).

\textsuperscript{72} In addition to literature’s \emph{pretium}, Phaedrus considers his book to have a “dowry” (1 pr. 3, \emph{dos}), thinks his \emph{brevitas} capable of “paying back” an indulgence (2 pr. 12, \emph{rependet}), and describes a particular fable as “pay” (4.2.8, \emph{merce}). Bloomer 1997: 108–109 contrasts \emph{dos} with the language of Horace.

\textsuperscript{73} See, e.g., Ross 1969: 80–95.
upon the growing crowd of would-be poets who glut the rural villas, urban atria and well-stocked libraries of the educated Roman elite. Phaedrus’ deliberate “mishandling” of various Callimachean moments and veiled mockery of pathetic versifiers and their incompetent patrons situate him squarely within such a tradition.

Persius again provides an instructive point of comparison. In the preface to his Saturae, before complaining about parrots and magpies, Persius mocks the Callimachean tradition openly and professes, in no uncertain terms, not to be one of the Callimachi Romani:

\[
\text{Nec fonte labra prolui caballino} \\
\text{nec in bicipiti somniassae Parnaso} \\
\text{memini, ut repente sic poeta prodirem.} \\
\text{Heliconidasque pallidamque Pirenen} \\
\text{illis remitto quorum imagines lambunt} \\
\text{hederae sequaces. . . .} \\
\text{pr. 1–6}
\]

I neither washed my lips in the nag’s spring nor do I remember dreaming on double-peaked Parnassus so that all of a sudden I might thus emerge a poet. I leave Helicon-girls and pale Pirene to those whose busts are licked by clinging ivy . . .

Despite its anti-Callimachean protestations, Persius’ prologue fulfills certain very real Callimachean needs.\(^{74}\) The poet finds a new font, unsullied by muddy debris, rings allusive changes on time-honored themes and language, and proudly sets out on what had become at Rome the “un-trodden path,” that which rejects any and all Callimachean aspirations. Of course, the joke is that Persius has done so with all the confidence and all the topoi of a more traditional Callimachus Romanus. This sort of “Callimachean anti-Callimacheanism” develops in tandem with less ironic attitudes towards Callimachus and Callimachean emulation. Traces of such an attitude appear as early as Ennius’ Annales.\(^{75}\) It flourishes in Horace,\(^{76}\) finds various forms of expression in Ovid\(^{77}\) and then spreads throughout the first


\(^{75}\) Clausen 1964: 186 writes of the dream that began Ennius’ Annales, “Ennus’ purpose . . . was polemical and anti-Callimachean: he designed to confute Callimachus . . . in something like Callimachus’ own oblique style.”

\(^{76}\) See in particular, Scodel 1987 and Zetzel 2002, who discuss Callimachean and anti-Callimachean elements in Sermones 1.

\(^{77}\) See Zetzel 1996 and Kenney 1976: 51–52. In a discussion of the proem to the Metamorphoses, Kenney casually suggests that Ovid plays the role of the “Super-Callimachus” to Propertius’ “Roman Callimachus.” Appropriately enough, Kenney’s term has an ancestor in an epigram by Philippus that mockingly refers to the grandiose “Super-Callimachuses” (τοὺς Περικαλλιµάχους) who hunt after obscure and trivial information (AP 11.347). Philippus’ abuse, however, is notably harsher and more anti-Callimachean than Ovid’s stance. Note the other anti-Callimachean epigrams
The texts in question are by no means uniform and the stances their authors adopt range from simple paradox or light-hearted parody (e.g., Ovid) to full-fledged invective and abuse (e.g., Persius). Despite their differences, however, these are writers who make a mockery of essential Callimachean themes or promote an agenda that runs counter to basic Callimachean positions, but simultaneously situate themselves as the “true” heirs of Callimachus. Even when such writers viciously scorn contemporary literature by satirizing its unimaginative use of traditional Callimachean material, their works are invariably rooted in the underlying aesthetic ideals of other Callimachean poets—they themselves continually write *recusationes*.

This is a world to which Phaedrus belongs. We have already seen the fabulist travesty numerous Callimachean staples and satirize the poet-patron relationship from an essentially Callimachean perspective. This parody puts Phaedrus in direct contact with the satiric lampoons of Persius and highlights the underlying affinities between the worlds of Roman fable and Roman satire. It is not by accident that the first collection of Latin verse *fabulae* represents the perspective of Callimachean anti-Callimacheanism. Phaedrus’ parody, however, reaches a climax in the collection’s fifth and final prologue, where the fabulist finally turns the prejudices of Roman literary culture to his own advantage. As the book begins, Particulo is conspicuously absent:

Aesopi nomen sicubi interposuero,  
cui reddidi iam pridem quicquid debui,  
auctoritatis esse scito gratia. . . .

5 pr. 1–3

If I have interspersed Aesop’s name anywhere—a man to whom I have already rendered whatever I owed—know that it was for the sake of his authority. . . .

Phaedrus has not lost sight of his financial concerns and immediately announces that he has repaid his debt to Aesop. If he still invokes his Greek predecessor, he does so only for the sake of cultural *auctoritas*. The fabulist explains his point with an extended simile:

ut quidam artifices nostro faciunt saeculo,  
qui pretium operibus maius inveniunt novis  
si marmori adscripserunt Praxitelem suo,  
detrito Myn argento, tabulae Zeuxidem.

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78. In particular, see Ross 1975b on the *Culex* and *Moretum* as “post-Augustan literary parodies.”
80. See Bernardi Perini 1992 for a discussion of how Phaedrus presents his own debt to Aesop.
adeo fucatae plus vetustati favet
Invidia mordax quam bonis praesentibus.
sed iam ad fabellam talis exempli fero.
5 pr. 4–10

... just as certain artists do in our age, who find a greater price for their new works if they write “Praxiteles” on their own marble, “Mys” on their polished silver, “Zeuxis” on their painting. So much more does biting Envy favor counterfeit antiquity than contemporary works of good quality. But now I am carried on to a fable that contains an example of this.

The literary simile is a marked form through which poets regularly produce complicated literary intertexts, reflect on the nature of literary history and proudly display their artistic skill. Similes and metaphors that create metapoetic associations with other crafts are also common (e.g., Pindar Ol. 6.1–4 or Horace Odes 3.30.1–5). But Phaedrus does not compare his work to temples or pyramids. The allusive declaration of poetic allegiance and bookish inspiration of the Roman Callimachus gives way to something much more literal, and much more cynical, as the fabulist reveals himself to be a sort of Aesopic plagiarist. Phaedrus fails spectacularly to live up to the expectations that the occasion arouses. Like other opportunistic hacks, he simply wants to sell his goods for the highest possible price.

On the one hand, this is a devastating failure for the Callimachean poet who values hard work and originality within a tradition. Horace represents the standard view. In Sermones 2.3 the failed-businessman-turned-Stoic-philosopher Damasippus confronts the poet about his writer’s block and tells him that he cannot hope to conquer invidia if he abandons his moral principles or shirks hard work:

invidiam placare paras virtute relict?
contemnere miser; vitanda est improba Siren
desidia....

Serm. 2.3.13–15

Are you preparing to appease envy even though you have abandoned virtue? You will be despised and wretched; the wicked Siren of sloth must be avoided....

Damasippus prescribes a diet of labor and virtue; Horace is shocked that Damasippus knows him so well. Phaedrus, however, falls victim to that desidia against

81. Thus, when Vergil likens Turnus to a horse that has broken free of its chains and left its stall (Aen. 11.492–97), he recalls similes from Ennius (Ann. 535–39 Sk.), Apollonius (Arg. 3.1259–62) and Homer (Il. 6.506–11), and invites comparison with these authors on multiple levels. For the use of such similes in Roman literature, see Hunter 2006: 81–114.
which Damasippus warns Horace to be on guard and implicitly loses that *virtus* which allows a Horace, or any Callimachean, to emerge victorious in the fight against Envy.\(^{82}\)

On the other hand, Phaedrus’ fifth book begins with yet another allusion to Callimachean Envy.\(^{83}\) From the point of view of satire or parody, *fucata vetustas* is a stinging rebuke aimed at those artists, and poets, whose engagement with or reception of the “classics” operates on a purely superficial level and finds its inspiration solely in financial gain. Phaedrus’ simile may differ markedly from the type the reader had expected, but it draws attention to the artistic standards and critical faculties of both artists and patrons, and situates them all within the “real world” where economic forces govern literary production and consumption. But Phaedrus does not simply capitulate—he playfully exploits the everyday stupidity of the masses. Horace again helps illustrate the point. In *Epistles* 2.1 Horace complains that the foolish rabble heaps uneducated and meaningless praise on the poets of old only to scorn the new (i.e. Horace) simply on account of their novelty (2.1.76–78 and 88–89).\(^{84}\) Phaedrus recognizes this fact and takes advantage of it by scribbling “Aesop” all over his books and by stuffing his fables with Callimachean clichés, neoteric tags and Augustan *topoi*. This is Phaedrus’ own “low brow” way of dealing with envious criticism and ensuring that his work will continue to find readers.\(^{85}\) Of course, we have already seen that the collection ends with Phaedrus as the old dog whose rotten teeth can no longer hold their prey. The fabulist does not want to win.

Phaedrus’ anti-Callimachean stance belongs to a specific vein of the Callimachean tradition, one in which the desire for continuity and the constant pull of innovation have collided in a remarkable way. As Phaedrus’ Callimachean fables suggest, all of these poems can, and perhaps should, be read as fables. When Phaedrus dwells on the criticism of his opponents, when he is unable to execute successfully the most common and familiar Callimachean themes, when he takes great pains over the course of five whole books to trace the outlines of a poetic career that is dogged by danger, uncertainty and financial woe at every turn, he encourages his readers to construe this series of vignettes and the narrative that they construct as one or even a group of fables about poetry and being a poet. For Phaedrus, the Callimachean drive cannot help but end in failure. And yet, this is the only drive at Rome, the only critical vocabulary available for talking about or actually writing “serious” poetry. The fabulist’s biting reaction to this dismal reality shows the extent to which his work is well attuned to the literary concerns of the times. Phaedrus’ epimythium is pessimistic, but humorous. All praise is

\(^{82}\) For Phaedrus’ insistence on the “hard work” involved in reading and interpreting the fables, see Blänsdorf 2000.

\(^{83}\) *Invidia mordax* also looks to Ovid’s *Livor edax* (*Am*. 1.15.1).

\(^{84}\) This is not an uncommon complaint. Cf. Prop. 3.1.21–24.

\(^{85}\) Koster 1991: 82 rightly characterizes the move as a “sarkastische Kapitulation.” Van Dijk 1997: 98–99 also admits that there may be a touch of irony here.
suspect, the critics are unkind, occasionally you survive, but you probably will not get paid. Rome is no place for Callimachus.

Columbia University
pog2101@columbia.edu

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