

Due to the institutional connection between *parrhesia* and citizenship in Classical Athens, the privilege of frank speech is often tied both legally and practically to free status (Scarpato 1964; id. 2001; Wallace 1996; Carter 2004; Raaflaub 2004a; id. 2004b; Saxonhouse 2006). There is, however, another dimension to *parrhesia* that becomes more prominent over time: its use as a practice, not simply dependent on status but also determinative of one's place in relation to others. In the *Life of Aesop*, the eponymous slave manipulates these two senses of *parrhesia* to secure his freedom and reveal the different forms slavery takes, with implications for the imperial world in which the fullest recension of the *Life* was produced.

*Vita Aesopi* 81-95 contains an anecdote in which Aesop agrees to interpret a portent for the Samians. But before he begins, Aesop, with characteristic slyness, uses *parrhesia* to ask for his freedom so that he might have the ability to speak with frankness (*Vita G*, 88-89). This almost paradoxical use of frank speech to ask for the privilege of candor underlines the uncertain relationship between *parrhesia* as privilege and as practice. Winkler (1985:286-291) claims that Aesop is taking part in a long tradition of grotesque license, but I argue that Aesop's use of *parrhesia* toward the Samians is exceptional in a way that has less to do with his physical deformity and its low-culture associations, and more to do with playfully destabilizing the free-slave dichotomy. In the act of speaking frankly to ask for his freedom, Aesop subtly undermines the monopoly on frankness that the free claim. At the same time, Aesop's request to be freed specifically so that he might speak frankly (no matter how opportunistic a ruse this may be) simultaneously reinforces the connection between slavery and restrictions on speech.

The omen that Aesop interprets also centers around issues of slavery and freedom: an eagle has snatched up the city seal from its place next to the registry of laws and dropped it into the lap of a public slave (*Vita G*, 81-82). As Aesop reveals, this sign indicates that a king will try to subjugate the city (*Vita G*, 91). The language of Aesop's explanation contains many references to slavery and the desirability of freedom, which are particularly striking from a man who has just received free status himself. The implications of this portent help explain Aesop's request for his freedom: speaking as a slave, his emphasis on the value of freedom might have been too dangerous.

When Aesop's prophesy comes true and Croesus demands tribute from the Samians, they ask for Aesop's help in deciding whether to comply, and his response again puts a high value on freedom. He answers with a fable modeled on the choice of Heracles (a popular imperial trope), which depicts freedom as a rough path to a pleasant place and enslavement as an easy path to a terrible one (*Vita G*, 94).

Both Aesop's advice and the manner in which he asks for and gains his freedom raise questions about what truly determines freedom: whether it is granted by those in power or is something one claims for oneself (as imperial-era philosophers often maintain). He also draws parallels between the position of the individual slave and the civilization 'enslaved' by an outside power. The treatment of both of these issues helps give a sense of how Roman rule was mentally accommodated in the Greek-speaking world.