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Daughters of a Freed Language: The Rhetoric of Fables in Horace's *Epistles*

According to Phaedrus's account in the prologue of book 3 of his *Fables*, slaves devised the genre of fable as a coded language in order to circulate subversive messages among themselves without the risk of retaliation from their owners. The implications of Phaedrus's aetiology of the genre have been well studied, and potential traces of slaves' protest statements have been detected in the plots of a few fables. What has not been explored are the implications of Horace's redeployment of the charged language of fable in his hexameter works and the evolution of his treatment of the form from the *Satires* to the *Epistles*.

In the *Satires*, the zoomorphic language associated with fable preserves discomfiting traces of its association with its servile past and thus confirms Phaedrus's account of its origins. In the *Epistles* the rhetorical mechanisms, systematic distancing, and terminological shifts by which the poet of the satires had negotiated a delicate insinuation of the language of fable into his text are replaced by a wholesale incorporation of fabulistic material into the narrative. In their use of fable, the two works engage in a complementary movement. In the *Satires*, Horace's servile past is introduced directly through the figure of his freedman father (1.6.6, 45-6); only then does fable begin to surface (1.6.22; cf. *Aes.* 358), and then only in mediated form, through the voices of the dialoguing protagonists (2.3.186 and 314-320; 2.5.55-7). In the *Epistles*, the reality of Horace's association with slavery recedes into the background of metaphor (1.1.1-4, 1.10.10, 1.14.1-5, 1.16.45-52) and the voice of the poet takes direct responsibility for an extended use of fable. With the internal citation of *Satire* 1.6 at *Epistle* 1.20.20 the cycle of allusions to fable is rounded off and is once again rejoined, this time retrospectively, with Horace's social status.

Traditional treatments of Horace's use of fables have concentrated on the narratives embedded in Horace's *Epistles* (especially 1.1.73-75, 1.3.18-20, 1.7.29-33, 1.10.34-41, and 1.20.14-16). This paper broadens the discussion by examining previously undetected allusions to the genre in the zoomorphic language of passages such as 1.1.12 and 1.18.109 (cf. *Aes.* 373) and 1.13.6-9 (cf. *Aes.* 180) and in setting Horace's use of fabulistic language in the *Epistles* against the background of his earlier treatment of the form in his *Satires*. In conclusion, an over-interpretation in Porphyrio's commentary on 1.19.15 (relating, mistakenly, Horace's use of a rhetorical topos to the moralistic context of *Aes.* 376; cf., e.g., Quint. *Inst. Orat.* 11.3.42) will be taken to suggest how fable was perceived in antiquity as an integral part of Horace's epistolary rhetoric.