

A MEANINGFUL OMISSION:
PHAEDRUS IN SENECA'S *AD POL.* 8.3-4

1. Introduction

As notorious, Seneca composes the *Consolatio ad Polybium* and addresses the freedman Polybius in order to persuade Claudius to end his *relegatio* on Corsica. Before the section which presents historical *exempla*, Seneca exalts the clemency of the *princeps*: it is thanks to his *clementia* that Seneca will return to Rome and will have the opportunity to witness the emperor's successes¹. Seneca asks that the *princeps* recall him as an act of justice or clemency². Claudius is presented in a new light, as the man who should bring a new deal to the Roman Empire: after a monstrous emperor, and the havoc caused by the madness (*furor*) of Caligula, he will bring peace and harmony and restore all things to their proper place³. The confrontation with the precedent is a main feature of the panegyric⁴. Claudius should show benevolence toward humanity, which is waiting for his reparatory deed. Thus, thanks to Claudius' generosity, Seneca will be present at the emperor's triumphs, but he will be only a *spectator*, unlike Polybius who is required to describe the *res gestae* of Claudius in a new œuvre.

Tunc Caesaris tui opera, ut per omnia saecula domestico narrentur praeconio, quantum potes compone; nam ipse tibi optime formandi condendique res gestas et materiam dabit et exemplum. (Ad Pol. 8.2)

“During that time write as well as you possibly can about the achievements of your Caesar, so that they may be passed on down through the ages by a herald from within his own household; for when it comes to shaping and writing a history, he

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¹ *Ad Pol.* 13.2: *hic Germaniam pacet, Britanniam aperiat, et paternos triumphos ducat et novos; quorum me quoque spectatorem futurum, quae ex virtutibus eius primum optinet locum, promittit clementia*; cf. *Ov. Trist.* 4.2.19: *ergo omnis populus poterit spectare triumphos*; *Pont.* 2.2.91: *felices, quibus, o, licuit spectare triumphos*; see Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1980, 133.

² *Ad Pol.* 13.3: *viderit: qualem volet esse existimet causam meam; vel iustitia eius bonam perspiciat vel clementia faciat bonam: utrumque in aequo mihi eius beneficium erit, sive innocentem me scierit esse sive voluerit*. Rudich 1997, 32 interprets this passage as a “recognition of guilt”. Cf. Grimal 1978, 470-471; Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1980, 137-143.

³ Cf. *Suet. Cal.* 50: *mentis valetudinem et ipse senserat ac subinde de secessu deque purgando cerebro cogitavit*. Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1990, 246 n. 77, stresses the similarities with *Curt.* 10.9.3-4. Cf. *Sen. Apocol.* 1.25-28.

⁴ Cf. Maguinness 1932, 45; Degl'Innocenti Pierini 1990, 247.

himself will be the best person to give you both a subject and a model.”

In this instance, the implicit literary references may be to Livy’s mammoth historical work, *Ab Urbe Condita*, and to Augustan *Res Gestae*. However, it might be that Seneca here refers to Claudius’ historical work (*exemplum*): the emperor was a competent historian, and he composed twenty volumes of Etruscan history and eight volumes of Carthaginian history in Greek and he planned to write a history of the civil wars in Latin⁵. According to Suetonius, the future Emperor, encouraged by Livy, began a history of Rome from the death of Caesar, but never finished it as both his mother Antonia and his grandmother Livia warned him against composing a risky work. He would have started from the death of Julius Caesar in 44, but after the intervention of Antonia and Livia, he broke off and resumed from the end of the civil wars, *a pace civili*⁶. In this sense, the *princeps* will provide the freedman with the *exemplum*. Nevertheless, Polybius’ assignment will be particularly arduous, although the emperor himself will supply the freedman with not only the model (*exemplum*) but also the subject (*materia*): *nam ipse tibi optime formandi condendique res gestas et materiam dabit et exemplum*. After the composition of the *Res gestae*, Seneca invites Polybius to practise a less demanding literary genre in order to relax his mind. In this paper, I want to investigate the political resonances behind the reference to *hilariora studia* and the non-reference to Phaedrus.

2. Polybius’ *hilariora studia*

In the passage which follows the exhortation to celebrate the magnificent deeds of the *princeps*, Seneca encourages Polybius, after the composition of the historical *œuvre*, to relax by dedicating himself to *hilariora studia*.

Non audeo te usque <eo> producere ut fabellas quoque et Aesopeos logos, intemptatum Romanis ingeniis opus, solita tibi venustate conectas. Difficile est quidem ut ad haec hilariora studia tam vehementer percussus animus tam cito possit accedere; hoc tamen argumentum habeto iam corroborati eius et redditi sibi, si poterit a severioribus scriptis ad haec solutiora procedere. In illis enim quamvis aegrum eum adhuc et secum reluctantem avocabit ipsa rerum quas tractabit austeritas: haec quae remissa fronte commentanda sunt non feret, nisi cum iam sibi ab omni parte constiterit. Itaque debes eum severiore materia primum exercere, deinde hilariore temperare. (Ad Pol. 8.3-4)

⁵ Cf. Suet. *Claud.* 41-42; cf. Canfora 2000, 162 n. 2. For the position of Claudius on Roman history see Judge 2019, 276-279.

⁶ Cf. Suet. *Claud.* 41.2: *initium autem sumpsit historiae post caedem Caesaris dictatoris sed et transiit ad inferiora tempora coepitque a pace civili, cum sentiret neque libere neque vere sibi de superioribus tradendi potestatem relictam, correptus saepe et a matre et ab avia*; see Guastella 1999, 214; Hurley 2001, 228-229.

“I do not venture to get you to compose, in your usual agreeable style, fables and stories from Aesop, a genre not attempted by Roman talents. It is certainly hard for your mind to find a way to embark on these lighter forms of literature so soon after it has received such a severe shock; but take it as proof that your mind has already been strengthened and restored, if it can proceed from more serious forms of writing to these more informal ones. With the first kind, the very somberness of the subject matter will distract your mind, however much it is still ailing and struggling with yourself; but your mind will not tolerate works whose composition requires a relaxed expression until it is completely at one with itself. So, you will need first of all to exercise it on sterner subject matter, and later to switch to a gentler regime with something lighter.”⁷

The philosopher explicitly recommends fable as a ‘divertissement’, and wants Polybius to rest after having immersed himself in the historical account of Claudius’ great feats (*res gestae*). This advice might appear inconsistent with Seneca’s precepts in some of his other works. Seneca encourages Polybius to indulge in a type of literature, which elsewhere he condemns. According to Seneca, literature should have an ethical value and an educative aim⁸: works which only are *fabula* and *aurium oblectamentum* are for Seneca among the most useless activities, *supervacua*⁹. Behind the suggestion to relax with Aesopean fables, there is a famous literary precedent: even Socrates, on the night of his death, distracts himself by turning the fables of Aesop into verse; as Viansino notes, it might have become a consolatory topos¹⁰. But in Polybius’ case, I argue, the reason is different: by recommending Polybius to write fables, Seneca is not providing him with relief to lighten his pain due to his brother’s death. Instead, he suggests fables as a way to recover from the demanding work of composition. Indeed, the recommendation to indulge in this literature as a way to relax the soul (*temperare* 8.4) is in line with what Seneca asserts in the last chapter of the *De tranquillitate animi*: it is not profitable to keep the mind always alert. Occasionally, it should be entertained, as Socrates, Cato and Scipio used to

⁷ Translation by Hine 2014.

⁸ Cf. *Epist.* 75.4: *non delectent verba nostra sed prosint*; 113.26: *utile ac salutare*.

⁹ As regards Seneca’s critique of *supervacuum* cf. *Epist.* 48.12; 88.42; 106.11; see Scarpat 1965, 157-176. Cf. *Benef.* 1.4.5: *istae vero ineptiae poetis reliquantur, quibus aures oblectare propositum est et dulcem fabulam nectere*. Among these *ineptiae* Seneca includes lyrics and dialectics, cf. *Epist.* 49.5: *eo magis itaque indignor aliquos ex hoc tempore quod sufficere ne ad necessaria quidem potest, etiam si custoditum diligentissime fuerit, in supervacua maiorem partem erogare. Negat Cicero, si duplicetur sibi aetas, habiturum se tempus quo legat lyricos: eodem loco <pono> dialecticos: tristius inepti sunt. Illi ex professo lasciviunt, hi agere ipsos aliquid existimant. Epist.* 117.30: *transcurramus sollertissimas nugae et ad illa quae nobis aliquam opem sunt latura properemus*. See Mazzoli 1970, 150-151; 168-170; 209-211; Leigh 2013, 175-183; Mattiacci 2019, 238-239.

¹⁰ Viansino 1990, 779; cf. Pl. *Phd.* 50c.

do¹¹. Even Seneca, addressing his mother, admits unwinding sometimes with *leviora studia* after reflecting on more serious issues. At the end of consolation, he writes:

sunt enim optimae, quoniam animus omnis occupationibus expers operibus suis vacat et modo se levioribus studiis oblectat, modo ad considerandam suam universique naturam veri avidus insurgit. (*Ad Helv.* 20.1)

“For best they are, since my mind is free of all preoccupation and with time for all its own concerns, now delighting itself with lighter studies, and now, in its eagerness for the truth, rising to the contemplation of its own nature and that of the universe.”¹²

Just as Seneca has done, Polybius should lighten his mind. It is worth noting the expression *remissa fronte* that Seneca uses to describe Polybius’ face when he has to shift from serious literature to a lighter genre¹³. *Remissa fronte* is the opposite of *rugosa fronte* that qualifies philosophical prose and, more generally, serious literature¹⁴. *Epistle* 113 starts by discouraging Lucilius from reflecting on *disputationes nihil profuturæ* which are not suitable for philosophers. *Haec disputamus attractis superciliis, fronte rugosa?*¹⁵ By using *remissa fronte*, Seneca advises Polybius that the transition from *severiora scripta* to *solutiora* (sc. *scripta*) implies not only a complete change in content but also a different mindset toward the method of composition. Therefore, the invitation to compose fables to relax his mind does not imply or conceal a contrast with what Seneca himself does.

Instead, the fact that, by mentioning the *fabulae*, Seneca refers specifically to the *fabulae* such as the *Aesopei logoi*, defined by the philosopher *intemptatum opus*, is suspicious. In contrast to Seneca’s utterance, Aesop’s *fabulae* had already been ‘shaped’ into Latin by Phaedrus, a fact that the philosopher here seems not to know, or pretends not to know.

¹¹ Cf. *Tranq.* 17.4: *nec in eadem intentione aequaliter retinenda mens est, sed ad iocos devocanda*. On this passage see Giusti 2017. Cf. *Cic. De orat.* 2.22: *saepe ex socero meo audivi, cum is diceret socerum suum Laelium semper fere cum Scipione solitum rusticari eosque incredibiliter repuerascere esse solitos, cum rus ex urbe tamquam e vinclis evolavissent*; *Hor. Sat.* 2.1.72-73: *virtus Scipiadae et mitis sapientia Laeli, / nugari cum illo et discincti ludere*.

¹² Translation by Williams 2014. Degl’Innocenti Pierini 1990, 166 suggests that the *leviora studia* could be identified with the epigrams composed during his *relegatio* on Corsica.

¹³ Martial at 4.11.11-12 uses the same *iunctura*: *nec torva lege fronte, sed remissa / lascivis madidos iocis libellos*. By exploring the difference between epigram and other genres, Martial encourages Silius Italicus to read his book, despatched as a Saturnalian gift, with a relaxed attitude. See Soldevila 2006, 177-186; Rimell 2008, 87-88. Cf. *Epigr.* 10.64.1-2: *contigeris Regina meos si Polla libellos / non tetrica nostros excipe fronte iocos*.

¹⁴ Cf. *Ov. Trist.* 2.241-242: *illa quidem fateor frontis non esse severae / scripta, nec a tanto principe digna legi*; cf. Ciccarelli 2003, *ad loc.*; Ingleheart 2010, *ad loc.*

¹⁵ *Sen. Epist.* 113.26; see Degl’Innocenti Pierini 2020. Cf. *Epist.* 23.3: *ceterae hilaritates non implent pectus; fronte remittunt, leves sunt, nisi forte tu iudicas eum gaudere qui ridet*.

3. Phaedrus 'the Roman Aesop'

Before launching into a discussion of why Seneca omits Phaedrus, I need briefly to explain one preliminary question. Who was Phaedrus? Despite the fascinating attempt led by Champlin to establish a new aristocratic identity for him, we should pay close attention to what Phaedrus writes about his *persona*. According to traditional scholarship, Phaedrus originated from Macedonia, was a slave, like Polybius, and was liberated by Augustus¹⁶. His life spanned the reign of four *principes*, from Augustus to Claudius. During Tiberius' rule, Phaedrus annoyed the emperor's *factotum* Sejanus, who was responsible even for the condemnation of Cremutius Cordus, and received an unspecified punishment¹⁷.

Phaedrus explicitly identifies Aesop as his model: in the prologue to book one, for example, the author says that he transferred Aesop's fables into verse and into Latin to entertain (*movere risum*) and to advise (*monere*)¹⁸.

*Aesopus auctor quam materiam repperit,
hanc ego polivi versibus senariis.
Duplex libelli dos est: quod risum movet
et quod prudenti vitam consilio monet*¹⁹.

"Aesop is the author of the fables that follow, which I have refined in the form of verse. This volume has a twofold attraction: it entertains and gives careful counsel for the conduct of life."²⁰

It is remarkable that the specific form of verse is *senarii* (not lyric meters or hexameters) – an original Roman verse. By using the *senarii* Phaedrus wants to insert himself in a Roman tradition. On the one hand, he admits that he starts with someone else's material (*quam materiam repperit*); on the other, he makes it clear that he transfers a Greek genre into a Roman tradition. Although Phaedrus here does not say explicitly, it seems that the author is fully aware of the role he wants to play: not merely as an *imitator* of Aesop, but, more ambitiously, as the *inventor* of Roman fables. At the epilogue of book 2, Phaedrus asserts that he has a mind untainted with envy, highly capable of emulation, for a spirit of emulation was rife in him: *non haec invidia, verum est aemulatio*²¹.

¹⁶ *Contra*, Mattiacci 2014 argues that Phaedrus came from Thrace.

¹⁷ Phaedr. 3, *prol.* 41. Cf. Henderson 2001, 60-71; Champlin 2005; Mattiacci 2014, 53-56.

¹⁸ On Phaedrus' use of Aesop as a model see Bernardi Perini 2001.

¹⁹ Phaedr. 1, *prol.* 1-4. Phaedrus mentions Aesop also at the prologue to book two, three and four. Bernardi Perini 2001, 245 notes that lines 3-4 explicitly refer to Hor. *Ars* 344: *lectore delectando pariterque monendo*. *Contra*, Bloomer 1997, 108-109 remarks on the distance that Phaedrus wants to create from Horace. Cf. Mattiacci 2014, 50-51; Geue 2019, 119-120.

²⁰ Translation (revised) is by Widdows 1992.

²¹ Phaedr. 2, *epil.* 7; cf. Mattiacci 2014, 65 remarks that "Fedro si colloca nella *lignée* poetica augustea che ha intrapreso la stessa via dell'*aemulatio* (cfr. e.g. Hor. *epist.* 1.19.23-4

4. Seneca's silence

It is not at all clear why Seneca omits to mention the Roman author. Indeed, the emphasis on *intemptatum Romanis ingeniis opus* and the technical distinction that Seneca makes between *fabellae* and *Aesopeii logoi* introduce a complication²². Scholars have proposed different explanations for this passage: some claimed that simply Seneca ignored Phaedrus, others that the philosopher intentionally omitted him. Ker reads the silence on Phaedrus as a sign of irony, or even sarcasm²³. On the contrary, Grimal, followed by Champlin, supposes that the *Consolatio* precedes Phaedrus' fables²⁴. Rudich suggests that Seneca 'may not have been familiar with Phaedrus' collection or may have regarded it as entirely insignificant'²⁵. I agree with those who argue that Seneca knew Phaedrus' work, but deliberately does not mention him²⁶.

Nevertheless, the fact that Seneca slyly neglects to mention Phaedrus, the Roman version of Aesop, and says that there is no Latin fable still deserves further investigation. After all, if Phaedrus is too lowly a poet, we might ask how Aesop would be more acceptable, or more sophisticated, than Phaedrus. I will qualify and go beyond usual readings of this omission as a kind of 'textual removal' designed to enact the philosopher's condemnation of a (sub)literature. Instead, I will suggest that this complex operation of displacement enacts the doublespeak theory in ways that suggest new methods of conveying subtle criticism and unexpected censorship.

First, we might observe that a general silence arises around the figure of Phaedrus²⁷. Seneca is not the only author to bypass him. The fact that even Quintilian does not mention him demonstrates a lack of interest in Phaedrus' work or, at least, a prejudice toward him, as the author himself reports: *fasti-*

Parios ego primus iambos / ostendi Latio".

²² *Romanis ingeniis* may recall Prop. 1.7.22: *tunc ego Romanis praeferar ingeniis*; cf. Viansino 1990, 780. Λόγος is a technical word for fables; see LSJ s.v. λόγος (5.1). Mazzoli 1968, 360 suggests that *fabellae* indicate the fables written in Latin and in verse, while *aesopoi logoi* refer to the fables written in Greek and in prose.

²³ Cf. Ker 2009, 101.

²⁴ Cf. Grimal 1980; Champlin 2005, 101.

²⁵ Cf. Rudich 1997, 267 n. 45.

²⁶ Cf. Postgate 1919 sets out similarities between Phaedrus and Seneca and asserts that Seneca knew Phaedrus; *contra* Dadone 1954. See Lana 1955, 157; De Vico 1955; Mazzoli 1968; 1970, 152-153; Atkinson 1985, 878.

²⁷ The first author to name Phaedrus seems to be Martial; cf. Mart. 3.20.5: *an aemulatur inprobi iocos Phaedri?* Nevertheless, the identification of Phaedrus with the author mentioned by Martial is not certain: see Fusi 2006, 212-216; Mattiacci 2008, 192-198.

*diose tamen in coetum recipior*²⁸. Postgate explains Quintilian's silence on Phaedrus by saying that Phaedrus himself calls his fables Aesopic, and that only a selection may have been used in Roman schools²⁹. Quintilian's omission can perhaps be explained, but Seneca's is more complicated: Seneca not only does not mention him, but he claims that fables are a genre never practised (*intemptatum*) by Romans. In reference to *intemptatum*, Kurth rightly refers to Hor. *Ars* 285-287: *nil intemptatum nostri liquere poetae, / nec minimum meruere decus vestigia Graeca / ausi deserere et celebrare domestica facta*³⁰. Horace had claimed that there was no literary genre which has not been explored by Roman poets. The participle, which Seneca uses in other four instances, has few attestations before this one, it is always attested in poetry, apart from Valerius Maximus³¹. By claiming that the fables are never accomplished by Romans, Seneca does not polemicise with Horace, but he might use the Horatian intertext to draw attention to his declaration. In what follows, I consider the possibility that Seneca intentionally seeks to delete Phaedrus from the canon of Latin authors.

I suspect there are two different reasons for the *damnatio* of Phaedrus. As I will suggest, what Seneca carries out is a rhetorical dissimulation which discloses two different levels of flattery. According to some scholars, the exclusion of Phaedrus does not imply that Seneca does not know him. Rather, the exclusion of the fabulist implies that he does not consider him a '*Romanum ingenium*' because he comes from Macedonia³². This objection, however, is unconvincing, as Polybius, for example, is Greek and his non-Roman identity does not prevent him from being counted among the *Romana ingeniia* in Seneca's text³³. Even less convincing is the observation that Seneca cannot crown Phaedrus among those *auctoritates* because he is a freedman, for Polybius too is a freedman. As Seneca is addressing a freedman there is no reason not to reference another *libertus*. Despite their divergent

²⁸ Phaedr. 3, *prol.* 23. Cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.9.2: *igitur Aesopi fabellas, quae fabulis nutricula-rum proxime succedunt, narrare sermone puro et nihil se supra modum extollente, deinde eandem gracilitatem stilo exigere condiscant.* See Phaedr. 1, *prol.* 5-7: *calumniari si quis autem voluerit, / quod arbores loquantur, non tantum ferae, / fictis iocari nos meminerit fabulis; 2.9.18-19: fatale exilium corde durato feram, / donec Fortunam criminis pudeat sui.*

²⁹ Cf. Postgate 1919, *contra* Colson 1919.

³⁰ Kurth 1994, 102-104. Martial (2.14.1) parodies Ov. *Ars* 287; cf. Fusi 2019.

³¹ Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 1.5.13; Verg. *Aen.* 10.39; Ov. *Met.* 10.585; Val. Max. 9.15.2; cf. *TLL* VII, 2112, 15-16 s.v. *intemptatus*. For *intemptatus* in Seneca see *Ad Marc.* 18.7; *Epist.* 66.52; *Benef.* 7.15.3; *Med.* 62.

³² Lana 1955, 157.

³³ Cf. *Ad Pol.* 2.6: *quam diu fuerit ullus litteris honor, quam diu steterit aut latinae linguae potentia aut graecae gratia, vigebit cum maximis viris quorum se ingeniis vel contulit vel, si hoc verecundia eius recusat, adplicuit.*

fortunes (Polybius flourished at the court of Claudius, unlike Phaedrus who ran up against imperial wrath) juridically they belong to the same class. Nevertheless, and as Lana has suggested, the exclusion of Phaedrus is beneficial to Seneca's adulation of Polybius. Seneca wants to flatter Polybius as much as he can, and he does not hesitate to claim that he would be the first '*Romanum ingenium*' to compose fables. Indeed, Seneca in the consolation recognises the literary talent of Polybius. Nevertheless, his aptitude for literature does not justify Polybius' inclusion among the Roman *ingenia*. The implication that Polybius could scale the heights of Roman literary fame is an evident sign of blatant flattery. This explanation is the most obvious but is not sufficient. Moreover, according to Mazzoli, it is reasonable to detect sarcasm in light of the notorious disregard that Seneca has for this (sub)type of literature³⁴. Deeper reflection suggests another possible motivation for the silence, however. Yet it seems to me that, by mentioning the Greek author and avoiding the Roman one, Seneca deploys a sophisticated act of displacement. In doing so, he has in mind Claudius, his main addressee. Seneca dissociates himself (and Polybius) from Phaedrus' works. As Jennings argues, there are several passages in Phaedrus which are critical of *imperium*. One could object that at fables 2.5 and 3.10, in which he deals with Roman emperors, Phaedrus speaks positively of Augustus and Tiberius³⁵. Indeed, in the former fable, Augustus restores the truth in favour of a woman unjustly accused of betrayal, while in the latter, Tiberius gets rid of an annoying flatterer³⁶. Conversely, many fables in Phaedrus are coded speeches since "[to] speak out, even briefly, could prove catastrophic"³⁷. For instance, it is difficult not to see in *Fable* 4.14 in which the lion-king requires flattery, allusions to the politics of the time, when flattery is a public recognition of power³⁸.

Yet, because Seneca hopes to convince Claudius to nullify his *relegatio* through this *consolatio*, he cannot suggest that Polybius practise a genre which encapsulates such cryptic messages. Yet, in the *Ad Polybium* there is an additional reason for his exclusion: he must condemn Phaedrus as he explains the origin of the fable as a desire to say what one does not dare to say.

*Nunc, fabularum cur sit inventum genus,
brevis docebo. Servitus obnoxia,
quia quae volebat non audebat dicere,*

³⁴ Mazzoli 1968.

³⁵ Cf. Henderson 2001, 9-55; Libby 2010, 551-557.

³⁶ Tiberius notoriously despises flattery: cf. Tac. *Ann.* 6.3.9: *hoc pretium Gallio meditatae adulationis tulit*.

³⁷ Cf. Jennings 2009, 225.

³⁸ Cf. Henderson 2001, 180-186.

*affectus proprios in fabellas transtulit,
calumniamque fictis elusit iocis.* (Phaedr. 3, prol. 33-37)

“Now, the reason why the genre of the fable was invented, will be a brisk lesson from me. The vulnerable slave, because he dared not to say what he wanted, shifted his own sentiments into fables, and jollied away incrimination with fictional fun.”³⁹

According to the Augustan freedman, fables are a weapon of the slaves to *transfer* their own feelings and to ‘denounce’ the oppressive power of the masters without running the gauntlet of imperial persecution, or rather they use coded language or a ‘hidden transcript’ to communicate under the eyes of the master. In Polybius’ case the master is the emperor.

Particularly significant is fable 4.13 in which two visitors, one *fallax* and one *verax*, arrive at a land controlled by apes⁴⁰. The Ape King asks them to define him: *quid sum ego?* The first man claims that he is the emperor, the second asserts that he is an ape. The result is that the former is awarded for having lied, the latter is punished for having told the truth⁴¹. This story may pick up on what Seneca implies in several passages especially in the second book of the *De ira*: people in the presence of the powerful must dissimulate as telling the truth and speaking out is not a feasible solution. Only on rare occasions do rulers reward their subjects for having told the truth; indeed, the reward achieved by Demaratus for telling the truth to Xerxes is an exception that proves the rule⁴². Phaedrus introduces fable 4.13 by claiming that *utilius homini nil est quam recte loqui: / probanda cunctis est quidem sententia, / sed ad perniciem solet agi sinceritas* (“more profitable for a person can nothing be, than straight-talking / yes everybody must agree with that tag. / But honesty does tend to head straight for perdition”)⁴³. Seneca extensively reflects on the impossibility of telling the truth, as being straight-forward (*simplex*) means being incautious (*incautus*) and it is not to be re-

³⁹ All translations of Phaedrus’ *Fabulae* (unless otherwise specified) are by Henderson 2001. Cf. Bradley 1987, 150-153; Fitzgerald 2000, 99-102; Mordegia 2014, 124 ff.; MacLean 2018, 95-102.

⁴⁰ This fable is supplied conjecturally by Zander 1921 together with a metrical reconstruction of the whole fable.

⁴¹ Cf. Henderson 2001, 178-180; Libby 2010.

⁴² *Benef.* 6.31; see Roller 2001, 116; Griffin 2013, 305-307; Citti 2015. The king Cambyses punished the courtier Prexaspes for having told the truth and given him good advice (*bona consilia*); cf. *Sen. Ir.* 3.14.6: *accessit itaque ad numerum eorum qui magnis cladibus ostenderunt quanti constarent regum amicis bona consilia*; *Epist.* 29.1: *nulli enim nisi audituro dicendum est*.

⁴³ Phaedr. 4.13.1-3.

commended⁴⁴.

Let us return to Phaedrus: the honest man thinks that if the liar has received a compensation, by telling fibs, he achieves an even bigger reward for having told the truth. The truthful man's expectation of being rewarded is ruined when the Ape king condemns him. In this context, it emerges that honesty does not pay, only, flattery and trickery. It is difficult to resist seeing political allusion in this fable⁴⁵.

Nevertheless, it is implied, Polybius will write fables which are different from those of Phaedrus: his *fabellae* will hide any criticism⁴⁶. Seneca wants Polybius to polish the genre of fables by getting rid of any dangerous political sub-text. After all, Seneca has already praised Polybius for his sincere and 'safe' love of literature (*sincerus et tutus amor litterarum*); *tutus* may imply devoid of political risk⁴⁷. Polybius should return to the *auctor* Aesop, by skipping Phaedrus, and by restoring the fables to their original 'pureness'. One may object that even Aesop's fables are morality tales and that also Aesopic fables display the same technologies of 'language from below' in the face of power that Phaedrus' fables display. We might counter that his 'distance' in geographical and cultural terms make them seem less subversive, but this explanation does not fully satisfy⁴⁸. The use of fables as an instrument to denounce oppressive power is already recognised by Aristotle, who identifies in Aesop clear indication of this 'subversive' use⁴⁹.

At first reading, we might suggest that the *damnatio* of Phaedrus is useful not only to the flattery of Polybius, but also and, more subtly, to the flattery of Claudius. Once more, Seneca repeats that neither his work nor that of his addressee presents any trace of dissent. By avoiding the mention of Phaedrus, Seneca implicitly compares Phaedrus with Polybius: Phaedrus and his

⁴⁴ Sen. *Ir.* 2.16.3: '*simplicissimi*' inquit '*omnium habentur iracundi.*' *Fraudulentis enim et versutis comparantur et simplices videntur quia expositi sunt. Quos quidem non simplices dixerim sed incautos: stultis luxuriosis nepotibusque hoc nomen inponimus et omnibus vitiis parum callidis.*

⁴⁵ Cf. Henderson 2001, 2.

⁴⁶ Instead of *fabula*, Seneca uses *fabella* at *Epist.* 77.10 to introduce the account of Marcellinus' suicide and at *Nat.* 1.16.1 to speak about Hostius Quadra; cf. Berno 2002; Limburg 2008. According to Limburg 2008, 435, "the term *fabella* that Seneca uses to characterize the story also points in the direction of a didactic intent".

⁴⁷ *Ad Pol.* 4.1; cf. Kurth 1994, 56-57.

⁴⁸ On the association of the Aesopic tradition with people of lower rank see Kurke 2011. Mordeglia 2014, 122 notes that in the first century A.D. Aesop is assimilated to the Cynic philosopher Diogenes.

⁴⁹ Cf. Arist. *Rh.* 2.20. See Mordeglia 2014, 120. In *Ann.* 16.19, while staging Petronius' theatrical death, Tacitus reports that Petronius listened not to philosophical discourse but *levia carmina* and *facilis versus*. The choice of a genre with connotations of political subversion might deserve further consideration in the light of Seneca's advice to Polybius.

subversive speech stands on one side; Polybius, who will compose ‘neutral’ fables, stands on the other. Thus, by removing Phaedrus from the canon of Roman authors, Seneca simultaneously flatters Polybius, whom he raises among the *Romana ingenia*, and Claudius, to whom he demonstrates his will to distance himself from works which conceal a figured speech such as those of Phaedrus. Phaedrus himself at *Fable 4.2* informs the *lector* that behind the playful colour of his stories he masks a second meaning.

*Ioculare tibi videmur: et sane levi,
dum nil habemus maius, calamo ludimus.
sed diligenter intueri has nenas;
quantam in pusillis utilitatem reperies!
non semper ea sunt quae videntur: decipit 5
frons prima multos, rara mens intellegit
quod interiore condidit cura angulo.* (Phaedr. 4.2.1-7)

“You say I don’t seem to be serious. It is true, I do have my fun fooling around when nothing momentous is maturing in my mind, but even then I’d like you to look closely and carefully at these light-weight confections: they conceal a lot of useful lessons. They are not always exactly what they seem: outward appearances are often deceptive, and few are favoured with a fine enough sense to discover what the artist has concealed in a corner.”

Phaedrus warns his *lector* that the façade may deceive, but the careful reader will be able to unearth the hidden message.

If we now look closely at how Seneca confects his works, we note that he carries out a similar strategy to that employed by the Augustan freedman, but here Seneca probably would not want to draw explicit attention to a mode of literary discourse that thematizes the strategies subalterns employ to speak safely and truthfully under the noses of those who dominate them, as that gets uncomfortably close to both Seneca’s situation relative to Polybius and also to Polybius’ situation relative to Claudius. The philosopher constructs all his work, including the *Ad Polybium*, on “the art of the veiled speech”. The Senecan reader is constantly called on to fill in gaps in the process and to disclose a plurality of subtexts.

5. Omission as censorship?

The reading offered thus far does not take into consideration another possibility, namely, Seneca’s silence on Phaedrus as an act of subtle censorship. Silencing Phaedrus also means silencing the entire class of freedmen and their right to speak, something claimed by Phaedrus in the prologue to book 3, significantly addressed to Eutyclus, an imperial freedman⁵⁰. As we have seen, according to Phaedrus, the fables represent for the freedmen an

⁵⁰ Cf. Bloomer 1997, 271 n. 60.

opportunity to express in an encoded way what they cannot say openly. By silencing Phaedrus, Seneca wants to give Polybius a voice, by including him in the *Romana ingenia*, but this strategy of censuring a freedman is especially hazardous in a work addressed to a freedman, let alone one as powerful as Polybius. That paradox aside, the passage embeds an *exemplum* of concealed censorship of freedmen's voices⁵¹. Seneca insulates Polybius but criticises an individual who belongs to the same social class. In other Senecan works, we find several negative references to freedmen. An indirect attack on the entire category of freedmen appears in the preface to book 4 of *Naturales Quaestiones*⁵². In the *De tranquillitate animi* Seneca polemically laments that Demetrius, one of Pompey's freedmen, is richer than his patron⁵³. Thus, Seneca is aligning himself with popular opinion⁵⁴. Freedmen always bore the stigma of having once been enslaved, of course, and that never changed. Furthermore, during the reign of Claudius, and on account of their proximity to the emperor, a small number of freedmen became extremely rich and powerful, and, consequently, attracted envy⁵⁵. It was rumoured, for example, that Callistus', Narcissus', and Pallas' holdings were worth millions of sesterces⁵⁶. Tacitus ironically reports that Pallas was praised for "traditional parsimony"

⁵¹ On the concept of literary censorship in Roman society see Rudich 2006.

⁵² Cf. *Nat.* 4a, *praef.* 7: *Demetrium egregium virum memini dicere cuidam libertino potenti facilem sibi esse ad divitias viam quo die paenitisset bonae mentis. 'nec inuidebo vobis' inquit 'hac arte; sed docebo eos quibus quaesito opus est, quemadmodum non dubiam fortunam maris, non emendi vendendique aleam subeant, non incertam fidem ruris incertiorum fori temptent, quemadmodum non solum facili sed etiam hilari via pecuniam faciant gaudensque despolient.'*

⁵³ *Tranq.* 8.6: *felicior tu Demetrium Pompeianum vocas, quem non pudit locupletior esse Pompeio?* Plutarch (*Pomp.* 2.4) mentions that Demetrius had an estate of four thousand talents. According to Dio Cassius (39.38.6), Demetrius built the theatre, but named it "Pompey's theatre" to get rid of criticism of his own fortune. For Seneca's general disdain for freedmen cf. *Epist.* 27.5: *Calvisius Sabinus memoria nostra fuit dives; et patrimonium habebat libertini et ingenium; numquam vidi hominem beatum indecentius;* cf. Mouritsen 2011, 113. See also *Epist.* 86.7: *quantum statuarum, quantum columnarum est nihil sustinentium sed in ornamentum positarum impensae causa!* Cf. *Nat.* 1.17.9: *iam libertinorum virgunculis in unum speculum non sufficit illa dos quam dedit pro aīo se†.* Seneca compares the daughters of freedmen with the daughters of republican generals to denounce the luxury displayed by the former; they become a symbol of contemporary vanity in contrast to the old simplicity. On this passage cf. Citroni Marchetti 1991, 154.

⁵⁴ See Citroni Marchetti 1991, 194 ff.

⁵⁵ Wallace-Hadrill 1996, 285 discusses power exercised by freedmen and women derived from proximity to the emperor.

⁵⁶ Cf. Mouritsen 2011, 96 n. 133; Morley 2011, 279-284. Even during the reign of Nero, some freedmen were as wealthy as Nero in Tacitus' account (*Ann.* 14.55) reports. Cf. D.C. (61.34.4). Concerning the wealth of Claudius' freedmen see Plin. *Nat.* 33.134; 36.60. On Pallas cf. Storchi Marino 1995; Chelotti 2008; MacLean 2018, 107-111.

(*antiqua parsimonia*) when he already had accumulated an estate of 300 million⁵⁷. The historian refers to the fact that when the Senate – on a proposal from Barea Soranus during the *Senatus consultum Claudianum* in 52 –⁵⁸ decreed the *ornamenta praetoria* and an hundred and fifty thousand sesterces to reward him for having proposed to enslave any woman who married a slave, Pallas cunningly rejected the cash⁵⁹. It does seem scandalous that these nouveaux riches are so successful. As Edwards observes, freedmen’s wealth was in the spotlight “not because they were the richest men in Rome, but because they were freedmen, whose wealth could not be justified by their ancestry or merit”⁶⁰. The point is not only the money but the power that some freedmen could command. Polybius was not included among the wealthiest freedmen, but he remained one of the most despised. Dio Cassius relates a telling anecdote about him: the episode took place in a theatre – according to Cicero “a place where popular sentiment has been most manifested” – where Polybius was attending a ‘mise en scène’ from Menander⁶¹. When an actor pronounced the line “unbearable is a prospering scoundrel” (*Epitrepontes* 116), everyone turned back to Polybius, who, despite the (indirect) attack, was not bothered. He only replied that “the same poet also said that those who once were goatherds have become kings”⁶². Dio Cassius adds that Clau-

⁵⁷ Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 12.53: *et fixum est aere publico senatus consultum quo libertinus sestertii ter milies possessor antiquae parsimoniae laudibus cumulabatur*; see Syme 1958, 539.

⁵⁸ Cf. Plin. *Nat.* 35.201: *iubente Agrippina*. On the *Senatus consultum Claudianum* see Buongiorno 2010, 311-325.

⁵⁹ Cf. Plin. *Epist.* 7.29.2: *huic senatus ob fidem pietatemque erga patronos ornamenta praetoria decrevit et sestertium centies quinquagies, cuius honore contentus fuit = Epist.* 8.6.1. See *Epist.* 8.6.4: *mitto quod Pallanti servo praetoria ornamenta offeruntur (quippe offeruntur a servis)*. Roller 2001, 271 observes that “Pliny’s objections, then, are framed almost without exception as social inversions: what is wrong with Pallas and his honors is that he conducts himself and is treated as a high-ranking aristocrat, while the senate, in conferring these honors, reduces itself to slavish status”.

⁶⁰ Edwards 1993, 154.

⁶¹ Cf. Cic. *Att.* 2.19.3: *populi sensus maxime theatro et spectaculis perspectus est*.

⁶² D.C. 60.29.3-4; cf. Bartsch 1994, 75-76. An analogous episode concerns Pompey the Great; cf. Val. Max. 6.2.9: *Diphilus tragoedus, cum Apollinaribus ludis inter actum ad eum versum venisset, in quo haec sententia continetur ‘miseria nostra magnus est’, directis in Pompeium Magnum manibus pronuntiavit, revocatusque aliquotiens a populo sine ulla cunctatione nimiae illum et intolerabilis potentiae reum gestu perseveranter egit*; Cic. *Att.* 2.19.3: *nam gladiatoribus qua dominus qua advocati sibilis conscissi; ludis Apollinaribus Diphilus tragoedus in nostrum Pompeium petulanter invectus est: ‘nóstra misería tu es magnus’ miliens coactus est dicere; ‘eándem virtutem ístam veniet témpus cum gravitér gemes’ totius theatri clamore dixit, ítemque cetera. Nam et eius modi sunt ii versus ut in tempus ab inimico Pompei scripti esse videantur; ‘si néque leges neque móres cogunt’ et cetera magno cum fremitu et clamore sunt dicta*. Even Narcissus was challenged by Galaesus, one of Camillus Scribonianus’ freedmen. Dio Cassius (60.14.4) reports us that Narcissus asked him what he would

dius imposed no punishment upon Polybius for his words. Although this story may well be fictitious, modelled on a common trope, it denounces two elements: first, the freedman's ὕβρις in comparing himself with the kings (the emperors) and the indulgence of the emperor toward him. According to Suetonius Claudius, who was generally severe toward the freedmen of others⁶³, was excessively indulgent toward his own⁶⁴. For Levick, the reasons for this are rooted in historical context: Claudius, who did not have senatorial favour, would have sooner trusted his freedmen than the élite⁶⁵. Second, it is an indication of the particular sentiment about Polybius, and, more generally, the entire class of freedmen. This is a direct consequence of the prominence of freedmen under Claudius. In Weaver's words, we may say that 'a status dissonance' comes to the fore: while freedmen rate low on some criteria such as birth and legal status, they rate high on others such as wealth, education and proximity to the emperor⁶⁶. This 'dissonance' provokes resentment, especially in the eyes of aristocrats: according to Cicero, Lucullus justifies the luxury of his villa by claiming that "what was granted to persons of lower rank ought to be conceded to him"⁶⁷. Tacitus displays his loathing for individuals who were his social inferiors but due to their

have done if Camillus had become emperor and he replied that he would have stood behind him and kept his mouth shut.

⁶³ Cf. Suet. *Claud.* 25.1: *libertinos qui se pro equitibus Romanis agerent publicavit*; Levick 1990, 122; Roller 2001, 267.

⁶⁴ Cf. Suet. *Claud.* 29.1: *his, ut dixi, uxoribusque addictus, non principem [se], sed ministrum egit*. See Kierdorf 1992, 132; Hurley 2001, 195-196; Roller 2001, 268 n. 94, and Suet. *Vit.* 2.4. By emphasising Claudius' dependence on his freedmen, Suetonius sets out to ridicule the emperor who acts like a slave. Suetonius insinuates that they are in charge for everything (including the positive deeds) and degrades the emperor to the role of the material executor; cf. *Claud.* 25.5: *sed et haec et cetera totumque adeo ex parte magna principatum non tam suo quam uxorum libertorumque arbitrio administravit, talis ubique plerumque, qualem esse eum aut expediret illis aut liberet*. Tacitus also depicts Claudius as passive and reliant on his wives: cf. *Ann.* 11.28; 12.1. Dio Cassius (60.2.4; 60.28.2) describes Claudius as "ruled by slaves and by women" who were responsible for cruel executions (60.14.1). As Rudich 1997, 36 observes, "it is now a matter of consensus that, whatever his other faults, the emperor was able to make decisions on his own, independently of his wives and freedmen". Cf. Momigliano 1932, 141; Scramuzza 1940, 46 ff.; 86 ff.; Levick 1990, 194 ff.

⁶⁵ Levick 1990, 83.

⁶⁶ Weaver 1967, 4-5. Roller 2001, 264-272 uses the terms "social inversion" to describe the new condition of these slaves and freedmen and "status anxiety" to illustrate the apprehension of the aristocrats threatened by these upwardly mobile categories.

⁶⁷ Cf. Cic. *Leg.* 3.30: *vir magnus et nobis omnibus amicus L. Lucullus ferebatur quasi commodissime respondisset, cum esset obiecta magnificentia villae Tusculanae, duo se habere vicinos, superiorem equitem Romanum, inferiorem libertinum; quorum cum essent magnificentiae villae, concedi sibi oportere quod eis qui inferioris ordinis essent liceret*. For inferior *ordo* see MacLean 2018, 94-95.

closeness to the emperor might have had more ‘influence’⁶⁸. In the *Annales*, the historian bitterly comments that under Claudius everything was under the freedman’s control; in particular, due to his impolite arrogance (*tristis adrogantia*), Pallas – ironically defined *arbitrium regni* (*Ann.* 13.14.3) – had exceeded the parameters of a freedman’s conduct⁶⁹. Even under the rule of Nero, freedmen wielded excessive power and prestige: according to Tacitus, Nero sent his freedman Polyclitus to Britain for inspection and Britons were surprised by the fact that a freedman controlled such a boundless empire⁷⁰. In general, it does seem outrageous that ex-slaves can equal or outdo the wealth of the most established Romans⁷¹.

We can, therefore, interpret Seneca’s silence on Phaedrus as an expression of the general disapprobation toward this class. By choosing to ignore Phaedrus, first of all Seneca wants to cajole and flatter Polybius in hopes of obtaining his assistance but he criticises a social class whom Polybius himself belongs. Albeit implicitly, Seneca also casts a shadow on Claudius, who gave excessive prominence to his freedmen during his reign⁷². Subversive

⁶⁸ Cf. Tac. *Germ.* 25.3: *liberti non multum supra servos sunt, raro aliquod momentum in domo, numquam in civitate, exceptis dumtaxat iis gentibus quae regnantur. Ibi enim et super ingenuos et super nobilis ascendunt; apud ceteros in pares libertini libertatis argumentum sunt.* The sarcasm of Tacitus is patent: by comparing the relevance of freedmen among the Germans and the Romans, he subtly criticises the fact that freedmen in Rome are more influential than freemen and nobles; cf. Rives 1999, 219-220.

⁶⁹ Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 11.35.2: *omnia liberto oboediebant*; cf. Malloch 2013, 449; *Ann.* 13.2.12: *sed neque Neroni infra servos ingenium, et Pallas tristi adrogantia modum liberti egressus taedium sui moverat.*

⁷⁰ Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 14.39.7: *sed hostibus inrisui fuit apud quos flagrante etiam tum libertate nondum cognita libertinorum potentia erat; mirabanturque quod dux et exercitus tanti belli confector servitiis oboedirent.* Pliny (*Epist.* 6.31.9) reports that Trajan cited the case of Polyclitus to state that the freedmen should not be allowed to have such as an unlimited power. Even Claudius in 43 C.E had sent the freedman Narcissus in Britain to persuade the soldiers to cross from Gaul to Britain. According to Dio Cassius (60.19.3), the soldiers prevented Narcissus from speaking by pronouncing ‘*Io, Saturnalia*’ and followed Aulus Plautius. Roller 2001, 269 observes that “the anger at a former slave impersonating an aristocrat, and so enacting the kind of social inversion appropriate only to the Saturnalia, comes not from an aristocrat, but from common soldiers who regard him unworthy of the deference they would normally accord a senatorial commander”.

⁷¹ Cf. Tac. *Dial.* 13.4: *nam Crispus iste et Marcellus, ad quorum exempla me vocas, quid habent in hac sua fortuna concupiscendum? quod timent, an quod timentur? Quod, cum cotidie aliquid rogentur, ii quibus praestant nihil indignantur? Quod adligati cum adulatione nec imperantibus umquam satis servi videntur nec nobis satis liberi? Quae haec summa eorum potentia est? tantum posse liberti solent*; cf. Mayer 2001, 129-130.

⁷² Alongside Pallas who received the *ornamenta praetoria* even Narcissus was awarded the *ornamenta quaestoria*: cf. Tac. *Ann.* 11.38 (Narcissus); 12.53 (Pallas); Suet. *Claud.* 28; Plin. *Epist.* 7.29; 8.6; see Lotito 1974, 328-329; MacLean 2018, 31-32. At *Apocol.* 6.2 Seneca

innuendo can coexist with explicit praise of Polybius, just as subversive readings can be detected in the entire consolation. That strategy chimes with Seneca's *modus operandi*: the philosopher conflates eulogy with criticism. By omitting to mention Phaedrus, Seneca is trying to finesse an awkward point about coded language and social status in a situation (his own address to Polybius) that is tangled up in exactly those same matters.

6. Conclusion

In sum, I suggest that the absence of any reference to Phaedrus in the *Ad Polybium* is particularly significant as it is a demonstration of a more general sentiment toward freedmen. What is remarkable is that Seneca chooses to 'critique' this category in a work addressed to a freedman, whom he hoped would act as a mediator and allow him to return to Rome. Indeed, Seneca is well aware of the risks he might incur if he should offend Polybius. Therefore, he elaborates a cunning strategy: on the surface, the omission of Phaedrus in his work functions as a homage to Polybius; on closer examination, however, it conceals an unforeseen attack on Polybius, who, as a freedman, has achieved a higher position than Seneca (at least when Seneca writes the consolation). Even more relevant is the fact that Polybius has obtained the favour of Caesar thanks to literature, as Seneca remarks *ad nauseam* throughout the consolation. By silencing Phaedrus, Seneca, implicitly, rejects the idea that literature is a means for the lower classes to express feelings and rejects literature as a medium for freedmen to gain the favour of the emperor and, consequently, to achieve a prominent position. As Bloomer points out, freedmen in general "embodied the emancipatory potential of literature"⁷³. Indeed, slaves and freedmen played a fundamental role at the beginning of Roman literature, which, conventionally, starts with Livius Andronicus, originally a Greek slave. The list of freedmen who have a place in Latin literature is substantial (Caecilius Statius, Terence, Publilius Syrus). The case of Horace, son of a *libertus*, is emblematic, as he himself often remarks⁷⁴. If for slaves, 'literature', broadly speaking, is a means to rise up from an initial position of inferiority, Seneca and other exponents of the senatorial and equestrian order want to contrast freedmen's excessive

sarcastically hints to the fact that Claudius' freedmen did not consider his orders at all: *ille autem Febrim duci iubebat illo gestu solutae manus, et ad hoc unum satis firmae, quo decollare homines solebat. iusserat illi collum praecidi: putares omnes illius esse libertos, adeo illum nemo curabat.*

⁷³ Cf. Bloomer 1997, 27.

⁷⁴ Cf. Hor. *Epist.* 1.20.20: *me libertino natum patre et in tenui re*; see Mayer 1994, *ad loc.*; Cucchiarelli 2019, 538; *Sat.* 1.6.6: *ignotos, ut me libertino patre natum*; 1.6.45-46: *nunc ad me redeo libertino patre natum, / quem rodunt omnes libertino patre natum.*

influence inside the court. The advancement of the empire, in aristocratic eyes, aggravates the situation: not only are freedmen influential writers, but they also fill strategic positions at the very heart of the Roman court. Although Seneca is in exile and has no clear means or assurance of ever returning to Rome, in the *Ad Polybium* there emerges a common dissatisfaction with the increasing number of freedmen at the imperial court. The fact that Seneca feels he can (covertly) criticise freedmen in a work addressed to one is yet another sign of his – and literate Roman society’s – dismissal of them as educated individuals.

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ABSTRACT.

In this article, I consider the omission of Phaedrus in Seneca's *Consolatio ad Polybium* 8.3-4. I suggest that Seneca's silence on Phaedrus can be read on multiple levels. On the one hand, it may be considered as an 'homage' to Polybius, included among the *Romana ingenia* for having been the first to compose fables defined as '*intemptatum Romanis ingeniis opus*'; on the other, it enacts a censorship toward the entire category of freedmen, who had great importance during the reign of Claudius. The omission of Phaedrus offers another demonstration of how patent flattery and veiled criticism can coalesce in this consolation, generally stigmatized as a work of shameful opportunism.

KEYWORDS:

Seneca, Phaedrus, flattery, censorship, freedmen.