



The Fables of Phaedrus

Phaedrus

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Animal fables are said to have originated with Aesop, a semilegendary Samian slave, but the earliest surviving record of the fables comes from the Latin poet Phaedrus, who introduced the new genre to Latin literature. This verse translation of *The Fables* is the first in English in more than two hundred years.

In addition to the familiar animal fables, about a quarter of the book includes such diverse material as prologues and epilogues, historical anecdotes, short stories, enlarged proverbs and sayings, comic episodes and folk wisdom, and many incidental glimpses of Greek and Roman life in the classical period.

The Fables also sheds light on the personal history of Phaedrus, who seems to have been an educated slave, eventually granted his freedom by the emperor Augustus. Phaedrus' style is lively, clean, and sparse, though not at the cost of all detail and elaboration. It serves well as a vehicle for his two avowed purposes—to entertain and to give wise counsel for the conduct of life. Like all fabulists, Phaedrus was a moralist, albeit on a modest and popular level.

An excellent introduction by P. F. Widdows provides information about Phaedrus, the history of *The Fables*, the metric style of the original and of this translation, and something of the place of these fables in Western folklore. The translation is done in a free version of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, a form used by W. H. Auden and chosen here to match the popular tone of Phaedrus' Latin verse.

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