

Crippling Nostalgia: *Nostos*, Poetics, and the Structure of the *Ibis*

The structure of the infamous curse-catalogue that makes up the final two thirds of Ovid's *Ibis* (251-644) has long been viewed as chaotic and without significance. While recent work (Williams 1992, Williams 1996, Battistella 2010, Krasne 2012) has suggested that the *Ibis* is as carefully wrought as Ovid's other poetry, sharing many of the same thematic and metapoetic concerns, the complexities of the catalogue demand further investigation. In this paper, I advance our understanding of the *Ibis* by demonstrating that Ovid uses various repeating markers to structure the curse-catalogue on a macro-level and intratextually illuminate the important exilic themes of exile, *nostos*, and poetry.

At the beginning of the catalogue, Ovid presents us with an epic opening which is quickly undercut by an encoded *pes-pun* (Krasne 2012, ¶¶32-40). I argue that Ovid repeats a similar combination twice more in the first half of the catalogue, at 339-46 and 413-24, punctuating the flow of the catalogue with successive permutations of the opening themes and thereby emphasizing their importance. Scholars have generally taken the catalogue's initial prayer, for Ibis to suffer *Troianis non leviora malis* (252), as a reference to the *Iliad* (Williams 1996, 91), but it could equally well refer to the surviving Trojans' post-Iliadic ventures in the *Aeneid* (Krasne 2012, n.67); the next couplet curses him with a lamed foot. At 339-46, Ovid reprises this curse by praying that Ibis will suffer the Greeks' failed *nostoi* and have his foot cut off; finally, at 413-24, he prays that Ibis will suffer the destitution of Ulysses' Vergilian companion Achaemenides and his foot lose its grounding, a curse packed with elegiac terminology. Ovid underscores these thematic repetitions by bringing the normally *carmen perpetuum*-style catalogue to a full stop on both occasions, thematically and syntactically, aligning asyndetic

breaks between couplets with the end of a mini-catalogue chain (a rare juxtaposition that occurs nowhere else in the intervening lines).

Three carefully demarcated curses of exile (for the Trojans as exiles, cf. Livy 1.1, *Aen.* 1.2, etc.) and failed *nostos*, each followed by a curse rife with elegiac significance, would be notable enough, but Ovid ensures that we do not miss the parallel: in addition to the hiatus caused by the juxtaposed thematic and syntactic breaks, he also repeats the half-pentameter from the catalogue's opening, *non leviora malis*, at 414. I argue that this previously unremarked repetition, which occurs approximately halfway through the catalogue, creates a ring-composition that, by bringing Ovid's initial curse back into the text, reiterates and thus reinforces key themes of the catalogue's opening. In addition, the repeated phrase comes shortly before a pair of couplets (421-4) that Williams (1996, 97-8) has taken as an interlude in the catalogic structure due to the unique occurrence of two couplets devoted to a single curse. I therefore propose that in fact this entire passage, 413-24, serves as a medial interlude to close the first section and open the second, initially marked by the ring-composition of *non leviora malis*.

I also identify language in the second section of the catalogue that can be interpreted as poetic terminology—both elegiac and iambic, appropriately for poem's genre-crisis (*Ib.* 45-58; cf. Schiesaro 2001, Krasne 2012, ¶¶35-7)—and show how it aggregates around a preponderance of poetic/literary figures. I demonstrate that here, too, Ovid continues to use the juxtaposition of syntactic and thematic breaks to draw attention to particularly poetic passages and to reinforce the association between poetry, exile, and *nostos*. Ultimately, I argue that by repeatedly cursing Ibis—his alter ego and undoubtedly either Augustus (Schiesaro 2011) or his poetry/Muse (Krasne 2012)—with exile, failed *nostoi*, and lamed feet, Ovid is actively highlighting the

presence within the catalogue of some of his favorite exilic themes in order to definitively curse Ibis with his own fate and that of his poetry.

Works Cited

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