

## A Rare Parrot-Teacher: The Parrot as Latin Poet in a Greek Epigram

Ovid's elegy on the death of his mistress' pet parrot (*Amores* 2.6) has deservedly received much scholarly attention for its metapoetic resonances: many interesting and influential readings (e.g. Boyd 1987, Myers 1990, Kronenberg 2016) have found in the exotic, entertainingly fluent parrot a figure for the Roman elegist or neoteric poet, or for a specific individual, whether Ovid himself or a deceased friend. Somewhat less attention, however, has been paid to the potential resonance that such readings of Ovid's poem (and of other literary parrots that follow it, notably Statius *Silvae* 2.4) might have with the "parrot" epigram attributed to Crinagoras, a Greek poet writing at Rome under Augustus (*Anth. Pal.* 9.562; for a different take on poetic patronage in this epigram, see Whitmarsh 2013: 152-3).

This paper aims to offer a new perspective on the latter poem: it explores the possibility that the epigram, like Ovid's poem, is playing on the idea of the parrot as Roman poet, and more specifically on the idea of the parrot as *Latin* poet. The parrot in the Crinagoras epigram, like that of the *Amores*, is described in a way that invites metapoetic reading and is tellingly cast in the role of Orpheus toward the end of the poem. Where Ovid's poem emphasizes the exceptional rarity of the bird's abilities and appeal, however, the Crinagoras epigram emphasizes the studied nature of its speech, the limited scope of its vocabulary and material (directed solely toward the emperor), and the number of would-be imitators that it inspires. Its descriptions of the birds' utterances, moreover, contain strikingly dissonant onomatopoeic vocabulary (e.g. ἀνακρέκεται, 8) that might be seen as not merely imitative of bird-speech, but potentially Latinate. My argument, then, is that the epigrammatist is engaging with a tradition of metapoetic avian imagery to comment on imperial Latin poetry in particular; the parrot epigram can fruitfully be read side by side with *Amores* 2.6 to present very different views of the work and preoccupations

of the Latin poet in Augustan Rome—views, I finally suggest, that might well be in dialogue with one another.

#### Bibliography

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