

# Real and Metaphorical Mimicking Birds in the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius<sup>1</sup>

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In this contribution I propose yet another way of negotiating Apuleius' allusiveness in his richly textured narrative. As the title suggests my conceptual journey has as its starting point the actual appearance in the novel of articulate birds but ends up in a strangely configured metaphorical place. In the fable of Cupid and Psyche the sea mew and the eagle parody rhetorical techniques but their very existence in the novel also highlights the loss of speech suffered by the hero who is listening in on this enchanting tale told by the old robber housekeeper. Both these versatile birds do things that Psyche, the heroine of the story in which they star, cannot; they also gain access where she fails.

I shall pursue the exchange between human and bird-like functions and argue that Psyche and Lucius are themselves reference points for and representational of the most well known imitative bird, the parrot. The ancient perception of the parrot and of its skills in human speech was aptly summarised by Apuleius in *Florida* 12. Whatever dating we espouse for the Apuleian novel it is possible to discover in the derivative discourse of the *Metamorphoses* covert references to anecdotal prosaic parrots and metaphorical poetic ones. The portrayal of Lucius and Psyche conjures up the occasional bird image, demonstrating that Apuleius intended the ornithological mimicry to cut both ways. Apuleius achieves this additional layer of identification by assuming familiarity with popular stories and beliefs about talking

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birds in general.<sup>2</sup> On a more sophisticated literary level the author treats the reader to two specific evocations, by reprising the content of a poem attributed to Petronius and consciously echoing a phrase from Statius' lament on Melior's parrot in the *Silvae*.<sup>3</sup>

### The Bird as the Word

In *Florida* 12 Apuleius celebrates the parrot in what is a performative if not actually performed piece.<sup>4</sup> Hunink argues (2000, 71–79) that while apparently praising the parrot Apuleius is demonstrating the superiority of the philosophical orator over those who merely mimic, proving the point that mere imitation equals limitation. Apuleius claims in *Florida* 13 that the philosopher sings every sort of 'literary' tune. The subject matter of 12 seems to flow neatly into the content of 13 as the latter extols the 'proper human speech' with all its rich registers which the philosopher has at his command. Taking the interpretation of Harrison (2000, 112) in a different direction Hunink (78–79) concludes that the parrot is being praised but its limitations should be recognised. It is an accident of nature that endows it with the ability to speak like a human – the implication is surely that the parrot surpasses other birds in the way that the philosopher stands out as an intellectual ornament to the human species:

*sed illud omnibus proprium, quod eis lingua latior quam ceteris avibus; eo facilius verba hominis articulant patientiore plectro et palato. Id vero quod dicit ita similiter nobis canit vel potius eloquitur, ut, vocem si*

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<sup>2</sup> Hunink 2000, especially 72–3, succinctly summarises the sources. The most authoritative account of parrot references in Classical literature can be found in Thompson 1936, 335–338. More generally see now Boehrer 2004.

<sup>3</sup> The potential of the parrot to represent facets of literary imitation and intertextuality throughout the ages forms the focus of a forthcoming collection of essays, *Parrot Play: The Trickster in the Text* (Julia Courtney, Paula James edd.)

<sup>4</sup> Hunink (2000, 74–75) discusses the nature of the performance and suggests that the parrot piece was part of a *prolalia* or taster for a more serious speech. In his edition of *Florida* (Hunink 2001) 127–132 he introduces his commentary on 12 with the observation that 'The description is so elaborate that it merits the term *ecphrasis*, even if we do not possess the context in which it first stood out.'

*audias, hominem putes: nam quidem si corvum audias †idem conate non loqui†.*

*Florida 12*

But they all share that characteristic, namely the tongue being broader than that of other birds, so that they can more easily articulate human words with their expanded plectrum and palate. That which it utters it sings or rather speaks in just the same way as us so that, if you heard its voice, you would think it a human being. †for indeed, if you hear a raven, it seems to be trying not speaking†.<sup>5</sup>

Apuleius suggests that parrots are to be admired for their talents but recognised as learning at the lowest level of intelligence. Their suggestibility puts them a long way down the cognitive scale and for this reason parrots also come in useful as a metaphoric means of insulting literary rivals; the satirist Persius introduced the mimicking bird as an appropriate guise for slavishly imitative poets. They, like parrots, can only learn by rote and reproduce what they have been taught and it is just a short step to accuse them of stealing the words of others and of being pathetically stale repeaters of standard phrases:<sup>6</sup>

*quis expediunt psittaco suum 'chaere'  
picamque docuit nostra verba conari?  
magister artis ingenique largitor  
venter, negatas artifex sequi voces.  
quod si dolosi spes refulserit nummi,*

<sup>5</sup> If Apuleius were suggesting that once you see such a talented bird it does not look as if it were visibly articulating then this would set up a nice contrast with the true human orator who accompanies fine words with showy gesticulation. But I think that it is more likely that the raucous sound of the raven is being contrasted with the fluency of the parrot in reproducing words.

<sup>6</sup> The Greeks and Romans were most intimately acquainted with the exotically coloured oriental bird not the West African Grey, the most skilled speaker and a species that in current biological and behavioural experiment is judged capable of categorising and cognising at a level comparable to kindergarten age children. (See the work of Irene Pepperberg on the parrot and psycholinguistics.) Parrots over the ages have been recognised as capable of cavalierly subverting language and linguistic registers and fictional parrots frequently function as commentators upon a text as well as characters within it. For the parrot as parole (amongst other subtle signifiers) see the forthcoming volume by Courtney and James (n.3 above).

*corvos poetas et poetridas picas  
cantare credas Pegaseium nectar.*

Persius *Prologue*

Who made his 'Hello' possible for Parrot  
And who taught Magpie to attempt our speech?  
Belly, master of art and talent-briber,  
Artist to copy utterance denied him.  
And should there gleam a hope of tricky cash,  
You'd think that poet crows and magpie  
Poetesses were chanting Pegasean nectar.

(Lee 1987)

#### Psyche's Feathered 'Friends'.

My first examples of significant birds have to be differentiated from the parrot model outlined above. They are talented and possess reason; they are fully-fledged characters within their brief appearances and engagement with the goddess Venus and her unfortunate imitator, Psyche. In the Cupid and Psyche fable these two articulate creatures do not belong to a traditionally speaking species but rather to a whole other (arguably Golden) age in which all animals shared a facility for conversation. The fantastic story liberates them from conforming to rules of (biological) reality and they seem to be lifted from the mythical traditions familiar to us through Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>7</sup> The talking birds have free play in such an environment.

The *gavia* is the bird who alerts Venus to the crisis her son Cupid and the love goddess herself have precipitated by pursuing private pleasures and abandoning the world to a loveless state. The gossipy creature tells the tale of Cupid and Psyche without any frills reducing their lyrical love affair to a sordid piece of sexual adventuring and revealing to an incensed Venus that her disobedient son has taken her mortal rival to his bed. The bird functions as the mouthpiece of the internal narrator, the old robber housekeeper, who is also, outside of her text, so ready with opinions and advice.<sup>8</sup> The *gavia*

<sup>7</sup> I am indebted to Wytse Keulen's excellent article on the *gavia* (Keulen 1998)

<sup>8</sup> The fact that the old woman can produce such a *bella fabella* (the verdict is Lucius' the non speaking ass at 6,25 and perhaps we should note the syllabic repetition!) under the

really relishes the ‘doom and gloom’ scenario she poses for a world without love and union. She literally pecks Cupid’s reputation to shreds, a strong visual image to match the kind of damning account she has given of his irresponsible behaviour:

*Haec illa verbosa et satis curiosa avis in auribus Veneris fili lacerans existimationem ganniebat. (Met. 5.28)*

‘Thus did that talkative and altogether interfering bird cackle into Venus’ ear, tearing her son’s reputation to shreds.’<sup>9</sup>

Her eloquent critique of the abnormal situation is framed in *oratio obliqua* although within the crescendo of condemnation she directly addresses Venus; the reader is caught up in her words. We tend to suppress the fact that all these sentiments are attributed to the bird by the narrator and that the *gavia* in turn is quoting *per cunctorum ora populorum rumoribus conviciisque variis*, ‘the various rumours and reproaches circulating by word of mouth throughout the whole world.’ The goddess hears but does the *gavia* speak? The vociferous presence of the sea bird and the eagle adds to the other worldly atmosphere of the Cupid and Psyche story where other members of the animal and even the plant kingdom are gifted with human speech and all the cognitive power that implies. There is even a talking tower which advises Psyche on the best method of going alive to the Underworld on her final and most likely fatal mission if Venus has her way. Psyche has already been assisted in apparently impossible tasks by ants, a talking reed, and the eagle, a bird who bears closer scrutiny.

The eagle, royal bird of Jupiter, is both rhetorically skilled and manipulative. He performs Psyche’s task for her collecting the icy water from the precipitous waterfall. He is not merely agile with his wings; he has to persuade the dangerous denizens of the rapids to fill his urn and he does so with word skill. He has already assessed the situation and sternly told Psyche she has no chance of fulfilling the labour herself:

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influence of drink is a reminder that humans as well as parrots are capable of unexpected utterances given the right kind of external stimulation.

<sup>9</sup> All translations are from the J.Arthur Hanson *Loeb* edition of the *Metamorphoses*..

*Et protinus arreptam completum aquae festinat, libratisque pinnarum nutantium molibus genas saeventium dentium et trisulca vibramina draconum remigium dextra laevaue porrigens, nolentes aquas et ut abiret innocuus praeminantes excipit, commentus ob iussum Veneris petere eique se praeministrare, quare paulo facilior adeundi fuit copia.*

*Met.6.15.*

‘He snatched it out of her hands and hurried off to fill it with the water. Balancing his massive waving pinions he flew between the serpent’s jaws, with their savage teeth and three-furrowed flickering tongues, plying his oars both left and right. The water resisted and threatened to harm him if he did not depart but he took some, alleging that he was making his petition at Venus’ orders and acting as her agent, on which account he was granted somewhat easier access.’

Neither the *gavia* nor the eagle is simply a mimicking bird. Or at least we could say that their mimicry of humans goes much further than mere words. The *gavia* is for instance *satis curiosa* which links her to Psyche at 5.23 (*Quae dum insatiabili animo Psyche, satis et curiosa, rimatur atque pertrecat et mariti sui miratur arma* – this when Psyche is handling the weaponry of Cupid) *Curiosa* connects the meddlesome and interfering bird to Lucius who listens in on the story. He plays the part of the proverbially curious ass on more than one occasion, also making and acting upon his moral judgement of others. For the ass entranced by the story and unable to articulate at all, even though he is essentially human, the appearance of eloquent animals must be fantasy indeed and ironic fantasy at that. I shall shortly return to Lucius’ unspoken and yet recorded frustrations in the main narrative.

Psyche suffers from the limitations imposed by her predicament. Unlike the sea bird she has no wings with which she might pursue her lover who has taken flight.<sup>10</sup> She cannot gain an audience with Venus or appease her in any way. Psyche is not the winged soul; rather she is a flawed imitation just as she is not the real Venus, only a mortal copy. Psyche’s sad situation at the beginning of her story has been caused by her unintentional mimicry of a

<sup>10</sup> For negative bird imagery the actions of the wicked sisters should be noted: they are described at 5.17 as flying (*pervolant*) to the cliffs and swooping down (*devolant*) towards Psyche, their prey. However the razor takes flight (*evolasset*) from Psyche’s hands so that she cannot do herself any injury at 5.22.

goddess. This is not the only imitation imposed upon Psyche. In spite of her apparent acclimatisation to the supernatural situation (residing in the palace of Cupid with unseen servants, voices only, and visited by an invisible husband at night) the heroine of the old woman's story feels bereft of human company in Cupid's magnificent abode. She persuades her mysterious husband to facilitate a visit from her sisters and after tasting human company again she rails against her idyllic imprisonment in a divine palace. This reprises a similar phrasing from Statius' lament for the death of Melior's parrot:

*sed eo simul cum nocte dilapso diem totum lacrimis ac plangoribus  
misella consumit, se nunc maxime prorsus perisse iterans, quae beati  
carceris saepta et humanae conversationis colloquio viduata...*

*Met.* 5.5.

But when he [Cupid] and the night had both slipped away, she spent the whole day miserably weeping and lamenting, saying repeatedly that now she really was utterly dead: fenced in by the confinement of her luxurious prison, and bereft of human company and conversation.'

*At tibi quanta domus rutila testudine fulgens  
conexus ebori virgarum argenteus ordo,  
argutumque tuo stridentia limina cornu,  
et, querulae iam sponte, fores – vacat ille beatus  
carcer et augusti nusquam convicia tecta.*

Statius, *Silvae*. 2.4.11–15.

But how spacious a house you had, its red roof agleam, the row of silver bars joined with ivory, the gates your beak rattled with a shrill sound and the doors now complaining of their own accord. That blissful prison is unoccupied and the clamour of the majestic cage is no more.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The Ancients noted that speaking birds achieved a sound and mimicry miraculous in their effect – you would think you were hearing a human voice. A great deal has been written on Corinna's parrot and Ovid's metaphorical games with the parrot as poetic *parole* – see e.g. Booth's list 1991, 45, Myers 1990 and the debate between Boyd and Cahoon (1987 and 1991, the programmatic poet versus the hermeneutic one.)

Statius' lament for his friend's parrot has attracted far less attention but there are signs that he too has more than one agenda other than the obvious one of impressing with an

This bird too had a *carcer beatus*, a heavenly prison, which is now empty of voices, referring in Statius to the sweet sounds the parrot could make for itself. Could this lonely cage connect the parrot and the princess? Psyche lives with many voices that possess no human form to make them real companions. She also keeps repeating the same lament parrot fashion – *se nunc maxime prorsus perisse iterans, quae beati carceris custodia saepta et humanae conversationis colloquio viduata*. It seems as if our fictional Psyche has taken up residence in the poetic prison of Melior's parrot.<sup>12</sup> The parrot's cage in Statius also suggests the wider context of the *Silvae* with its detailed descriptions of the villa. The visualisation of Cupid's palace could then be viewed with hindsight as an Apuleian parroting of a predecessor in the service of generic idyllicism.<sup>13</sup>

#### A Parrot in the prologue? Lucius in mimicking mode

The unfortunate metamorphosis of the hero into an ass occurred because Lucius had attempted to transform himself into a winged creature, to be a lover in the mould of Cupid. At various stages of the novel a paradoxical

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ornamental and mannered lament. Dietrich 2002, 95–110 and Van Dam 1984, 336–67 are the closest reading of this particular poem to date. One connection to be pursued in the Courtney and James volume (see n.3 above) is the relationship between parrot and owner in these Classical texts and the extent to which loyalty and politically framed *pietas* are being evoked by the poet / friend / lover through the personality of the cherished pet. Catullus' lament for Lesbia's sparrow is re-examined with a similar critique in mind.

<sup>12</sup> Melior's parrot is referred to as his master's *voluptas*. *Voluptas* is the name of Cupid's and Psyche's child. This could be coincidental or a deliberate choice of endearment on Apuleius' part if he really is interacting with the Statius text. The feminine gender of the Latin word for pleasure may not reflect the gender of the baby (witness the male Love God as *Cupido!*) and the divinity of the offspring is also in question given that Psyche has disobeyed Cupid's taboo. Parrots are not only notoriously difficult to sex, they also represent other kinds of liminality, including boundary crossing between the living and the dead, the vulgar (earthbound) and the ethereal

<sup>13</sup> I am very grateful for Catherine Connors' observation that both Melior's parrot and Psyche (a metaphorical bird in a golden cage) operate in the broader context of the villa epiphany. Apuleius has set the scene of a divinely constructed country estate within the Psyche story. Statius' choice of title for his corpus of poems, *Silvae*, suggests the juxtaposition of art and nature amongst a rich register of connotations (anything from rough drafts to elaborate order – see Van Dam, 1984, 17.) It is worth recalling that the diversionary tale told as an *anilis fabula* is presented as spontaneous but far from artless. For Cupid's palace as a Roman villa see Brodersen 1998, 114–125.

comparison is made between the ass and winged Pegasus – a comically ‘winged’ ass participates in the procession of Isis in Book 11, a comment on Lucius’ foolish aspirations which gives an appropriate sense of closure prior to his retransformation.<sup>14</sup> If the intended transformation of the hero into a bird had taken place Lucius could hardly have guaranteed the retention of his human voice. But the luckless Lucius, once changed into the orally challenged ass, might be forgiven for continuing to envy the attributes of several species of talking birds.

Lucius’ inability to speak out for himself or for others is a regular source of frustration for him. As an ass he is unable to call upon the emperor when he is desperate to report the injustice of his situation. Anecdotes from Roman writers inform us that this simple apostrophe could be taught to the most uncooperative birds as long as they possessed the physical capacity to articulate.<sup>15</sup> In fact, for a bird that could make articulate sounds the discourse of ironic flattery suggested that they could hail the emperor spontaneously and needed no master to celebrate the ruler of the empire. Lucius’ predicament is given added poignancy if the stories about what parrots, pies, crows and ravens could do are called to mind:

*psittacus a vobis aliorum nomina discam  
hoc didici per me dicere: ‘Caesar have.’*

Martial 14.73

As a parrot I shall learn the names of others from you.  
I have learned to say ‘Hail Caesar’ for myself!

[text and translation from Leary 1996, 36 & 132]

<sup>14</sup> Lucius’ aspirations towards wings and lightness are explored by James 1998 (esp. 46–7).

<sup>15</sup> Statius reprises this popular perception about the teachability of the bird in lines 29–32. Melior’s parrot can of course salute kings and speak the name of Caesar but he can be taught to mimic the moods of his owner as well as repeat mere words. It is just possible that Juvenal is ‘parroting’ Statius with his depiction of the versatile Greek, ready to match the mood of his master, *Satire* 3, 100–103. The ready tongue and ease with which the caricatured Greek puts on a persona not his own is mocked in lines 73 to 78 culminating in the line *Graeculus esuriens: in caelum iusseris ibit*. ‘Hungry (to please!?) – Say the word and he is airborne!’

*Inter ipsas turbelas Graecorum genuino sermone nomen augustum Caesaris invocare temptavi. Et "O" quidem tantum disertum ac validum clamitavi, reliquum autem Caesaris nomen enuntiare non potui.*

*Met. 3.29*

I tried amidst those crowds of Greeks to invoke the august name of Caesar in my native tongue. And indeed I shouted "O" by itself eloquently and vigorously, but I could not pronounce the rest of Caesar's name.

The *ille* in the prologue to the novel claims to have acquired a speaking facility in Latin with considerable labour but uses similar imagery (hard campaigning) to describe his acquisition of Greek, his alleged native tongue. His roughness as a speaker of Latin concerns him and he apologises in advance for any slip he might make in this exotic and foreign tongue. His hesitancy and modesty over his Latin seems to evaporate with his boast of a story the attentive reader will rejoice to read:

*Mox in urbe Latia advena studiorum Quiritium indigenam sermonem aeternabili labore, nullo magistro praeunte, aggressus excolui. En ecce praefamur veniam, siquid exotici ac forensis sermonis rudis locutor offendero. Iam haec equidem ipsa vocis immutatio desultoriae scientiae stilo quem accessimus respondet.*

*Met. 1.1*

Soon afterwards, in the city of the Latins, as a newcomer to Roman studies I attacked and cultivated their native speech with laborious difficulty and no teacher to guide me. So, please, I beg your pardon in advance if as a raw speaker of this foreign tongue of the Forum I commit any blunders. Now in fact this very changing of language corresponds to the type of writing we have undertaken, which is like the skill of a rider jumping from one horse to another.

The prologue narrator is confident about our enjoyment of the written text but nervous of our judgement upon his voice as *rudis locutor*, so is this why he relinquishes his speaking part in the novel? Ahuvia Kahane (2001, 231–241) argues that the prologue text presents itself sometimes as written record, sometimes as vocalized speech. For a narrator who makes such a big issue of learning a language and speaking it without too much tongue tripping, the removal of the narrator's voice in Book 3 is ridiculously paradoxical.

cal if – and this is the big if! – the narrator is supposed to be Lucius who is silenced as soon as he has become an ass.

The exchange of one voice for another and the process of learning a new language figures in a poem attributed to Petronius, the other famous Latin novelist who must be part of any dialogue Apuleius conducts with a literary past. Catherine Connors gives us a fascinating insight into the Petronian verse as a shameless justification for and exegesis of the epic discourse re-shaped to the purposes of Petronius' prose fiction. The parrot functions as a highly appropriate metaphor for the process:

'In the Petronian poem, the *Satyricon*'s fashioning of fiction out of quotation and imitation of epic is embodied in the parrot's imitative utterance and its ambitions to displace the loftier and more poetic swan. A metapoetic parrot would confirm yet again the novel's self-conscious representations of the processes of its composition. Parrots imitate what they hear, and indeed, Petronius' parrotting' imitations of epic add up to a pre-history of his novelistic discourse, incorporating his recollection of earlier ways of fracturing epic's structures to accommodate fictionalising inventions.' (Connors 1998, 47–8).

Let us look at the words of the Petronian parrot (fr. 41 Bücheler):

*Indica purpureo genuit me litore tellus  
candidus accenso qua redit orbe dies.  
Hic ego divinos inter generatus honores  
Mutavi Latio barbara verba sono.  
Iam dimitte tuos, Paeon o Delphice, cycnos:  
Dignior haec vox est quae tua templa colat.*  
[Text : Courtney 1991, 67]

The land of India bore me on its purple shore,  
where bright day returns with its fiery orb.  
Born into divine honours here I exchanged  
barbarian words for the sound of Latin.  
Now, O Delphic Paeon, send away your swans:  
My voice is worthier to inhabit your temple.  
[Translation : Connors 1998, 48]

‘Born into divine honours here I exchanged barbarian words for the sound of Latin.’ This seems a rather nice fit with both the end and the beginning of Apuleius’ foray into prose fiction.<sup>16</sup> At the end of the ass’s story Lucius, described as the poor Madauran, is reborn into the divine honours of Isis and Osiris after the revelation and divine encounter on the shore. Lucius is required to repeat rituals before he can be successfully initiated into the sacred state. By the end of the novel he has earned a voice worthy of the gods’ temples, and not simply by the restoration of his human voice replacing the barbaric braying of the ass. His voice becomes his trademark in the law courts; it is his speaking skill that earns him money and success:

*Quae nunc incunctanter gloriosa in foro redderem patrocina, nec extimescerem malevolorum disseminationes, quas studiorum meorum laboriosa doctrina ibidem exciebat.*

*Met.* 11.30.

Bidding me unhesitatingly to continue as now to win fame in the law courts as an advocate and not fear the slanders of detractors which my industrious pursuit of legal studies had aroused in Rome.

### Watch the Birdie!

The first but by no means last challenge of Apuleius’ prologue is just who the ‘ego’ is or who the ‘ego’ thinks he is.<sup>17</sup> The question *quis ille?* (*Qui est la?*<sup>18</sup>) is answered enigmatically, periphrastically, epically even in the sense

<sup>16</sup> Of course it must be sheer linguistic coincidence that the *dies* that returns is *candidus* in the Petronian poem! See the significance of the reappearance of the horse Candidus in Apuleius’ novel at 11.20.

<sup>17</sup> A comical but pertinent point was made in an article on the parrot in *The Independent Magazine* (31/8/2002) entitled ‘A Wing and a Prayer’. Tony Juniper wrote ‘The next time a parrot says ‘hello’ and you return the greeting just remind yourself who said it first.’ With some lateral thinking we could assume that the *ego* of the Apuleian prologue is also the reader mimicking the writer.

<sup>18</sup> I borrow the first half of a mantra uttered by Coco, the parrot in Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) ‘Who is there?’ characterises on several levels Rhys’ narrative style with its instability and unreliability in the identity of the reporter and in the accuracy of what is reported. The parrot replies to itself in patois ‘Ché Coco, Ché Coco.’ (‘Dear Coco’) Rhys’ parrot switches from the ‘cultivated, colonising’ language to the local and

that provenance is identified but then this generic register is splintered because the name is never spoken. And in any case the 'ego' cannot be necessarily conflated with the 'ille'.<sup>19</sup> The elusive speaker of the prologue alerts the reader to his *immutatio vocis* (rendered by Hanson as 'changing of language' but with a small change we would have *imitatio vocis*, imitation of voice!). The persona of the prologue has learnt Latin without a master (like Martial's parrot when it comes to Caesar's name) but his alter ego hero has ended up as a skilled speaker of Latin, albeit with one or more asinine stumble along the way. Lucius had to lose his voice before he could complete his linguistic training.

In terms of the written book the prologue narrator successfully does what he set out to do, bringing together any number of overheard tales that he apparently repeats from memory and verbatim. Lucius takes on the voices of others when technically he no longer has a voice himself.<sup>20</sup> The narrator of the prologue has taken pains to acquire human speaking skills but Lucius the narrator is to be confined to the loud bellow of a dumb beast. The reader is relying on the author's writing skills being regained at the end of a novel, but the emphasis in Book 11 seamlessly embroils us back into the speaking talents of the hero as he finds his voice in the Roman law courts courtesy of Isis and Osiris.

Ultimately Diophanes' prediction of Book 2, that the hero will be immortalised in prose, has come true, except that it is only true outside the fiction of the text. During the novel the ass narrator suggests that we cannot be reading anything at all – what price deconstruction now? The ass with glued on wings in the Isis procession is perhaps then Apuleius' homage to Petronius' programmatic statement. Who knows what metaprosaic parrot lurks within the text of Apuleius' novel doing symbolic service to authors

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indigenous. For the symbolic presence of Coco on a narrative level throughout the novel see Courtney and James (n.3).

<sup>19</sup> Parrots have a tendency to talk about themselves in the third person, taking some delight in the name they have been given. When they do use 'I' it is likely to refer to the person they are quoting directly rather than to themselves. The narrator in the Apuleian prologue is as elusive as the parrot in the first person in that no-one can state categorically what such an interlocutor may mean when he refers to himself.

<sup>20</sup> Mal-Maeder and Zimmerman 1998, 102 recognise just such an emphasis in the story of Cupid and Psyche where 'the multiple voices relaying one another illustrate in exemplary fashion the power of words, their capacity to persuade every listener willing to lend an ear, to manipulate, mislead or simply to divert.'

who have gone before and effecting yet another transformation of this literary device to celebrate the metaphorical parrot's art of *imitatio*.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In defence of the parrot's and the classical author's imitating art it is worth quoting the Catalan philosopher and apostle of the Baroque, Eugenio D'Ors: 'What does not grow out of tradition is plagiarism.'

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