Part II: **Fable and Elegy**

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The Fables of Avianus: Intersection of Genres and Textual Criticism

Abstract: As a poet and fable author, Avianus may frequently appear clumsy and imprecise; therefore, in many passages it is difficult for the textual critic to determine whether 'errors' in syntax, prosody, or narrative construction should be attributed to the author himself or to the copyists. However, Avianus was unquestionably a learned man and an avid reader of the great Latin poetry of the Golden and Silver Ages. Hence, for the purposes of textual criticism and interpretation, intertextual analysis is an extraordinarily effective tool, since in some passages it reveals that the transmitted text, apparently corrupt, is actually sound, while in others it is the key to healing a paradosis that is indeed corrupt. In Avianus' case, intertextual analysis must be intergeneric, because Avianus tended to mix different poetic genres (fable, epic, tragedy, elegy, comedy, lyric) to create his own poetic *parole*. Four passages from Avianus are treated in this paper: in two of them (Avian. 6.7–8; 35.1–4) intertextual analysis shows that the transmitted text should not be altered; in the third and fourth (Avian. 34.5–12; 3.5–6) it inspires emendations. This paper also demonstrates that Avianus was familiar with the poems of Catullus.

1 Introduction

Even though distinguished scholars (including giants such as Lachmann and Baehrens) have spent much time and labour on Avianus' fables in elegiac couplets, many philological problems remain unsolved, and no satisfactory critical edition has appeared to date. As Shackleton Bailey wrote, all editions of Avianus' fables "are alike in presenting many readings which no critical reader can swallow, whether produced by the carelessness of copyists or the wayward fancies of the editors".[1] The editions of Lachmann, Froehner, and Baehrens, who edited Avianus in the fifth volume of his glorious *Poetae Latini Minores*,[2] offer good conjectures but go too far in their attempt to normalize the prosody, language, and narrative style of Avianus. By contrast, the editions of Guaglianone and Gaide,[3] who had a broader knowledge

1 Shackleton Bailey 1978, 295.

2 Lachmann 1845; Froehner 1862; Baehrens 1883.

3 Guaglianone 1958; Gaide 1980.

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of the manuscript transmission than their predecessors, are marred by overly conservative textual choices. More cautious than Lachmann, Froehner, and Baehrens, but less conservative than Gaide and Guaglianone, were J. W. Duff and A. M. Duff, who edited Avianus in their Loeb of the *Minor Latin Poets*.[4] The text printed by Duff/Duff is overall the best available text of Avianus but is far from satisfactory. A new critical edition is therefore desirable. To fill this philological gap, I am preparing the new *editio Teubneriana* of the fables of Avianus, which will provide several new textual suggestions and will rely on a fresh examination of the manuscript transmission and on a careful evaluation of the philological studies that have appeared so far.

Editing Avianus is a difficult task; to quote Hermann Fränkel, the working hypothesis of textual critics sounds like this: "the author [...] always knows best what to say and how to say it".[5] Judgments about Avianus' poetry vary. In the opinion of Browning, "Avianus can scarcely be called a poet. His tasteless, strained, imprecise Latin, with its constant inappropriate Vergilian reminiscences, might have been written by a nineteenth-century public schoolboy".[6] Other scholars, *inter quos* Küppers, have observed that Avianus was unable to adequately combine content and artistic form.[7] Some have been more generous; for example, La Penna, in the Latin *Praefatio* to the Teubner edition of Babrius, wrote that Avianus "poeticam orationem elaborauit nouam et sibi propriam, dignitate et ornamentis auctam", and that his style is mostly elegant ("plerumque expeditus cum elegantia incedit"), although sometimes clumsy and convoluted ("aliquando uiam salebrosam temptat").[8] It is clear, at any rate, that Avianus can hardly be regarded as the kind of poet who always knows what needs to be said and how it can be said best, so his text is often uncertain from the point of view of both textual criticism and interpretation. Often, in fact, we are unable to determine whether 'errors' in syntax, prosody, or narrative construction are to be attributed to the author or to the copyists. In many cases, however, we can use an extraordinarily effective tool to establish and interpret the text. This tool is intertextual analysis. As a poet and fabulist Avianus may frequently appear clumsy, but he was unquestionably a learned man and an avid reader of the great Latin poetry of the Golden and Silver Ages, a reader particularly fond of Vergil, whom he knew by heart. It can be said that the prevailing tone of the language

4 Duff/Duff 1934.

5 Fränkel 1964, 139: "Der Autor (so lautet unsere Arbeitshypothese) weiß immer am besten was zu sagen ist und wie es zu sagen ist".

6 Browning 1960, 42.

7 Küppers 1977, 100 n. 2.

8 La Penna *apud* Luzzatto/La Penna 1986, XIX.

of Avianus is not only elaborately poetic, but specifically Vergilian.[9] Every fable (if not every elegiac couplet) has echoes or actual imitations of the *Aeneid*; but even when not distinctly modelled on Vergil, the style of Avianus is artificial, not least because Avianus tended to mix different poetic genres (fable, epic, tragedy, elegy, comedy, lyric) to create his own poetic *parole*. For the purposes of the *constitutio textus* it is therefore extremely important to identify the poetic models of Avianus couplet by couplet. Much work has been done in this field, especially by Cannegieter, whose annotated edition was a milestone in the study of Avianus,[10] and by Ellis, whose commentary, notable for its ample and unborrowed learning,[11] is still worth perusing.[12] However, much remains to be discovered. For instance, no one has ever noticed that Avianus was familiar with the poems of Catullus. In my opinion, in fact, Avian. 9.21 *magna quidem monuit, tamen haec quoque maxima iussit* echoes Catull. 115.7 *omnia magna haec sunt, tamen ipsest maximus ultro*, for *maximus* in Catullus and *maxima* in Avianus occur in the same metrical position, as does *tamen*, and in both passages the first hemistich contains the word *magna*; this cannot be accidental. How should we interpret this intertextual connection? In my opinion, it is either an unconscious reminiscence or a 'nonreferential' imitation (that is, a conscious imitation that does not aim to evoke its source), because it seems very unlikely to me that Avianus intended here to remind his reader of the obscene context in which Catullus' line occurs. This reminiscence (or 'nonreferential' imitation) is nonetheless significant, since, on the one hand, it offers a small contribution to the yet-to-be-written history of Catullus' Late Antique *Fortleben*, and, on the other, it shows that Avianus had read at least one poem by Catullus — something that, as I have said, has hitherto not been noticed.[13]

9 See Ellis 1887, XXXIV–XXXV.

10 Cannegieter 1731.

11 Ellis 1887.

12 On the poetic models of Avianus, see also Mayor 1887. There is nothing original, as far as I have seen, in Scanzo 2001.

13 On Avianus and Catullus, see Zago 2021a, 14. In Zago 2023, 191–194 I detected in a passage of Avianus a probable borrowing from Lucretius, an author who had never been regarded as a possible hypotext for him. On reminiscences and 'nonreferential' imitations in Late Antique poetry, see the interesting disquisition by Pelttari 2014, 114–137.

2 Examples

2.1 Intergeneric intertextuality as proof of the soundness of the transmitted text

I will now dwell on two passages from Avianus in which intergeneric intertextuality proves that the transmitted text, apparently corrupt, is actually sound. Both passages baffled a towering figure in the Latin textual criticism of the last century, Shackleton Bailey, who forty-five years ago published a set of brilliant critical notes on Avianus' fables.[14]

The first passage is:

> nec se Paeonio iactat cessisse magistro,
> quamuis perpetuos curet in orbe deos.
> (Avian. 6.7–8)

> Her boast is that she has never been surpassed by the Paeonian master,[15] though he attends the everlasting gods in turn.
> (Transl. Duff/Duff)

The subject is a frog posing as a healer. I have quoted the transmitted text. Shackleton Bailey, like Ellis 1887, Duff/Duff 1934, and the ThlL (s.v. *orbis*, 912.26–28), believes that in this context *in orbe* cannot mean anything but "in rotation", "in turn". A parallel could be cited in support of this interpretation, namely a passage from the pseudo-Vergilian *Aetna*:

> [...] uer, prima iuuenta,
> cur aestate perit, cur aestas ipsa senescit
> autumnoque obrepit hiems et in orbe recurrit. 240
> (*Aetna* 238–240)

> Why spring, the youthful prime of the year, dies in summer, why summer herself grows old, and winter creeps up on autumn and completes the cycle.
> (Transl. Hine)

Shackleton Bailey, however, rightly remarks that if *in orbe* is interpreted as "in rotation" the sense is scarcely satisfactory. Why should the gods fall ill one after the other, in rotation? Withof proposed *is arte* for the transmitted *in orbe*. The sense

14 Shackleton Bailey 1978.

15 *Scil.* Apollo.

would be "her boast is that she has never been surpassed by the Paeonian master, though he skilfully cures the everlasting gods".[16] For his part, Shackleton Bailey corrected *in orbe* to *in arce*, suggesting this alteration on the basis of the source of Avianus' fable, i.e. Babr. 120, in which the frog says:

> Ἰατρός εἰμι φαρμάκων ἐπιστήμων,
> οἵων ταχ' οὐδεὶς οἶδεν, οὐδ' ὁ Παιήων, 5
> ὃς Ὄλυμπον οἰκεῖ καὶ θεοὺς ἰατρεύει.
> (Babr. 120.4–6)
>
> I'm a physician, skilled in the use of drugs such as no one, doubtless, knows, not even Paeon who lives on Olympus, physician to the gods.
>
> (Transl. Perry)

The meaning of the phrase *in arce deos* should therefore be "the gods in heaven". In Latin, *arx*, when used in this sense, is almost invariably accompanied by *caeli* or the genitive of a word of similar meaning (in Avian. 22.2 we find *ab arce poli*), but, as Shackleton Bailey pointed out, in Dracontius, *De laudibus dei*, 2.557 (*dexter in arce sedens*), *in arce* alone, without any genitive, means *in arce caeli*.

With all due respect to Shackleton Bailey, I believe that the transmitted clausula *in orbe deos* is sound. The intertextual analysis warrants it. Avianus clearly had in mind a famous pericope, *primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, which constitutes the first four feet of two hexameters, one by Petronius (*fr*. 28.1 Müller), the other by Statius (*Theb*. 3.661).[17] In both Petronius' and Statius' passages *primus in orbe deos fecit timor* means "fear first made gods in the universe".[18] This hypotext, as far as I know, has escaped all commentators of the fables by Avianus.

What, then, does *in orbe* mean in our line of Avianus? Gaide, who in her aforementioned edition of the fabulist retains *in orbe* (without citing Petronius and Statius), translates it as "in the sky".[19] But, as Withof remarked, there is virtually no passage in which *orbis* alone unambiguously means "sky".[20] *orbis* can unambiguously mean "sky" only when linked to a genitive (*orbis caeli*) or an adjective such as *purus*, as in Ov. *Am*. 1.8.10 *puro fulget in orbe dies* ("day shines in the clear sky"), or *sidereus*, as in Manil. 1.279–282 *axis* […] | […], | *sidereus circa medium quem uoluitur orbis* |

16 Withof 1741, 241.

17 On the relative chronology of these two hexameters and on the priority of the Petronian one, see Zago 2021b, 289–293.

18 That is, "fear first made men believe that there are gods in the universe" — a Democritean and Epicurean motif; see Zago 2021b, 293 n. 3.

19 Gaide 1980, 84.

20 Withof 1741, 241.

aetheriosque rotat cursus ("the axis [...] forms the middle about which the starry sphere revolves and wheels its heavenly flight").[21] Therefore, in Avianus' line I suggest translating *in orbe* as "in the universe". The couplet *nec se Paeonio iactat cessisse magistro*, | *quamuis perpetuos curet in orbe deos* means, according to my interpretation, "her boast is that she has never been surpassed by the Paeonian master, though he heals the gods, who are eternal in the universe".[22] This translation, of course, is strongly supported by Avianus' hypotext, which is, as we have just seen, the pericope *primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, found in both Petronius and Statius. With regard to the technique of imitation, here we have a typical case of *oppositio in imitando*, that is, an 'emulative' allusion that involves an alteration or inversion of the sense of the hypotext and appeals to the readers' literary memory (only if the readers realize that *in orbe deos* is borrowed from the pericope *primus in orbe deos fecit timor* are they able to appreciate Avianus' intertextual play: the pericope used by Petronius and Statius states that gods do not exist in the universe, whereas Avianus represents them as "eternal in the universe").[23]

The second passage I want to discuss is Avian. 35.1–4:

> Fama est quod geminum profundens simia partum
> diuidat in uarias pignora nata uices.
> Namque unum caro genetrix educit amore,
> alterius **odiis exsaturata** tumet.
> (Avian. 35.1–4)

> The story goes that a monkey gave birth to twin offspring and assigned her children each to a different destiny. One the mother reared in fond affection, and she rankled with superabundant hatred for the other.
>
> (Transl. Duff/Duff)

21 Transl. Goold 1977.

22 From a syntactical point of view, it would also be possible to link *in orbe* to *curet*, not to *perpetuos*, and therefore translate *quamuis* [...] *deos* as "though he heals throughout the universe the everlasting gods". But according to the literary tradition, Paeon heals the gods on Olympus, not throughout the universe. In fact, in Hom. *Il.* 5.395–402; 868; 899–904 Hades and Ares, wounded respectively by Heracles at Pylos and by Diomedes at Troy, rush to Olympus to be cured by Paeon (Babr. 120.5–6 clearly alludes, in my opinion, to these passages in the *Iliad*). For the same reason I do not think that *quamuis perpetuos curet in orbe deos* can here mean something like καὶ εἰ ἀϊδίους θεοὺς ἐν τῇ οἰκουμένῃ ἰατρεύει ("though he heals on the land surface of the world the eternal gods"; for *orbis* in the sense of *oikoumene*, see ThlL s.v. *orbis*, 915.23–33; OLD s. eadem v., 12). It is true that the two gods healed by Paeon are injured by men, according to Homer, in two different places in the *oikoumene*, but, as already noted, in order to be cured they must go up to Olympus, where Paeon lives and practises his craft.

23 On *oppositio in imitando* in Late Antique poetry, cf. Pelttari 2014, 154–160.

Shackleton Bailey observes: "*exsaturata* […] is clearly wrong; the original is perhaps more likely to have been *exstimulata*; cf. Livy 42.29.2 *Eumenen cum uetus odium stimulabat tum recens ira*".[24]

I do not believe that Shackleton Bailey was right in deeming the text corrupt. Let us consider Juno's speech in book 7 of the *Aeneid*:

> Num Sigeis occumbere campis,
> num capti potuere capi? Num incensa cremauit
> Troia uiros? Medias acies mediosque per ignis
> inuenere uiam. At, credo, mea numina tandem
> fessa iacent, **odiis** aut **exsaturata** quieui.
> Quin etiam patria excussos infesta per undas
> ausa sequi et profugis toto me opponere ponto.
> (Verg. *Aen.* 7.294–300)

> Could they not have died on the plains of Sigeum? Nor, when taken, have truly been taken? When Troy was fired, could she not have consumed those men? Through the midst of the Greek lines, through the midst of the flames, they have found a way. It is hardly, I suppose, that at last my power lies exhausted, or that sated on hate I have rested. Yes, I even flung them out of their homeland and ventured to pursue them with enmity over the waves; in the refugees' path I stood, right across the sea.
>
> (Transl. Horsfall)

Line 298 in the passage of Vergil (*odiis aut exsaturata quieui*) reveals that *exsaturata* is what Avianus wrote. Avianus clearly had this line of Vergil in mind. Shackleton Bailey, who did not take Vergil's line into account, altered the transmitted *exsaturata* to *exstimulata* ("stimulated"), because he evidently believed that a *simia* who is *odiis exsaturata* ("sated on hate") can no longer hate. This is also the sense of Vergil's phrase *odiis* […] *exsaturata quieui*. But here we have another case of *oppositio in imitando*, because Avianus seems to have altered the original meaning of the phrase in the *Aeneid* and followed a different line of reasoning from Vergil's: if the *simia* is sated on hate (*odiis exsaturata*), then she is full of hate and is therefore swollen with hate (*odiis tumet*). In this line by Avianus we find a pleonastic use of the past participle (*exsaturata tumet* in this context is equal to *tumet*) that is not unknown in Latin poetry: see Prop. 2.24b.47 *dura est quae multis simulatum fingit amorem* ("she is unfeeling who feigns a pretend love to many", that is, "she is unfeeling who feigns love to many"); Sil. *Pun.* 9.586 *ferens* […] *portat* ("brings […] by carrying"). In the passage of Avianus, as in those of Propertius and Silius, the finite verb (in Avianus *tumet*, in Propertius *fingit*, in Silius *portat*) is, as it were, explained

24 Shackleton Bailey 1978, 300.

by a predicative participle of similar meaning (in Avianus *exsaturata*, in Propertius *simulatum*, in Silius *ferens*).[25]

In these two passages, intertextual analysis has induced me to defend the transmitted text. In other passages, however, it can lead in a different direction.

2.2 Intertextuality as a tool for emending corrupt readings

In several passages intertextuality is the key to healing corrupt readings transmitted by manuscripts. In some cases, the hypotexts that inspire emendations are the Aesopic fables from which the poems of Avianus (*qua* fables) are derived. See, for instance, Avian. 34.5–12:

> Solibus ereptos hiemi formica labores
> distulit et breuibus condidit ante cauis;
> uerum ubi candentes suscepit terra pruinas
> aruaque sub rigido delituere gelu,
> pigra nimis tanto non aequans corpore nimbos,[26]
> in propriis laribus umida grana legit.
> decolor hanc precibus supplex alimenta rogabat,
> quae quondam querulo ruperat arua sono.
> (Avian. 34.5–12)

> An ant reserved for the winter the fruits of toil snatched during sunny hours and stored them betimes in her tiny hole. But when earth assumed its white robe of hoar frost and fields lay hid beneath unyielding ice, then, quite idle and unfit bodily to face the winter weather, she picked out the moistened grain in her own abode. Pale, a cicada who before had cleft the fields with plaintive note, amid prayers and supplications begged the ant for food.
> (Transl. Duff/Duff)

I have quoted the transmitted text, which is hardly acceptable, since it seems to imply that the ants' only activity during the cold season is to pick out the moistened grain stored in their nest, without ever going outside, but performing this task

25 To quote the *ipsissima uerba* of Hofmann and Szantyr, who cite Propertius and Silius but not Avianus, passages such as these contain "eine pleonastische Erläuterung des *Verbum finitum* durch ein synonymes prädikatives Partizip" ("a pleonastic explanation of the finite verb by means of a synonymous predicative participle"): see Hofmann/Szantyr 1972, 797, § 39 c β.

26 In this line *nimis* means, as often in late Latin, *ualde*; as for *tanto* […] *corpore*, it would mean, according to many scholars, "such a small body" (cf. the notes *ad locum* of Ellis 1887 and Gaide 1980); *nimbos* is metonymically used in the sense of "cold and stormy weather", that is, "winter weather" (cf. Gaide 1980, *ad loc.*).

entirely within it.[27] According to Ellis,[28] the ant would pick out the moistened grain in order to consume it *in propriis laribus*. However, the main source of Avian. 34, namely a fable by Babrius, explicitly states that ants do not eat moistened grain but drag it out of their hole to air and dry it. Let us consider, in fact, Babrius:

> Χειμῶνος ὥρῃ σῖτον ἐκ μυχοῦ σύρων
> ἔψυχε μύρμηξ, ὃν θέρους σεσωρεύκει.
> (Babr. 140.1–2)

> An ant in the winter-time was dragging out of his hole some grain which he had stored up in the summer, in order to air it.
>
> (Transl. Perry)

See also the following anonymous version of the same story in Byzantine dodecasyllabic verse:

> Ὥρας δέ ποτε χειμῶνος τυγχανούσης,
> μύρμηκες σῖτον ἡλίαζον βραχέντα.
> Τέττιξ δὲ τούτους οὕτως ἰδὼν ποιοῦντας,
> αὐτὸς λιμώττων καὶ μέλλων τεθνηκέναι,
> δραμὼν παρ᾽ αὐτοὺς ἐδωδὴν ἐπεζήτει. 5
> (Aesop. 336.1–5 Ch.)

> Winter had arrived, and the ants were drying the moistened grain in the sun. A cicada saw them doing this, and being hungry and destined to die, approached them and sought food.
>
> (Transl. G.Z.)

See also a passage from Pliny the Elder:

> Semina adrosa condunt, ne rursus in frugem exeant e terra, maiora ad introitum diuidunt, madefacta imbre proferunt atque siccant.
>
> (Plin. *HN* 11.109)

27 Of course, picking out *humida grana* that are inside a nest does not *per se* imply that these *grana* are subsequently carried outside it. In Sen. *Ben*. 5.24.3 *ad Mundam in acie oculus mihi effossus est et in capite lecta ossa* ("in the battle of Munda I lost an eye and some bone splinters from my skull") and Quint. *Inst*. 8.5.21 *cum lecta in capite cuiusdam ossa* […] *matri dedisset* ("after giving bone splinters from someone's skull to that person's mother") the phrase *in capite legere ossa* does not mean "to take bone splinters *from* the (wounded) skull", but literally "to take bone splinters that are inside the (wounded) skull".

28 Ellis 1887, *ad loc*.

> (the ants) nibble their seeds before they store them away, so that they may not sprout up again out of the earth and germinate; they divide the larger seeds so as to get them in; when the seeds have been wetted by rain they bring them out and dry them.
>
> (Transl. Rackham)

In the light of these passages, I suggest

> pigra nimis tantum,[29] non aequans corpore nimbos,[30]
> e[31] propriis laribus umida grana legit.
>
> Quite idle and unfit bodily to face the winter weather, she merely [*tantum*] pulls the moistened grain out of her hole.
>
> (Transl. G.Z.)

If my conjecture (proposed here for the first time)[32] hits the mark, Avianus would be saying that during the winter the ant's only effort is to lazily drag the moistened grain out of its nest (a statement which would be perfectly in line with what Babrius, the anonymous Byzantine fabulist, and Pliny say), and the dialogue between the ant and the cicada in Avianus' version of the fable would have the same setting as in the versions by Babrius and the anonymous Byzantine fabulist, namely the space outside the ant's nest.

In other passages, the hypotexts that prompt emendations of Avianus' *paradosis* are not fables but texts in different genres. In the manuscripts, Avian. 3.5–6 reads as follows:

> Ne tibi transuerso placeant haec deuia, nate,
> rursus in obliquos neu uelis ire pedes.
> (Avian. 3.5–6)

This text cannot be retained, because *in obliquos* […] *ire pedes* is not tolerable Latin. In a recent article[33] I proposed

29 *tantum* ego : *tanto* **ω**.

30 The punctuation is mine.

31 *e* ego : *in* **ω** (possis etiam *a*). I assume that *legit*, which is warranted by Verg. *G*. 1.373 *umida uela legit* ("furls the soaking sails"), is here used in the sense of "pulls out" (or "gathers by pulling out"): cf. *Epic. Drusi* 223–224 *crinem* […] *legit ab ore* ("he pulled his hair out of his face"); Stat. *Theb*. 11.311–312 (*serpens*) *e corpore toto* | *uirus in ora legit* ("a snake from its whole body gathers the venom into its mouth"); see OLD s.v. *lego*, 1–3.

32 I have proposed many other conjectures in a set of *aduersaria* that has recently appeared (Zago 2025); see also Zago 2023.

33 Zago 2023.

Ne tibi transuerso placeant haec deuia, nate,
rursus **in obliquum** neu uelis ire **pedes**.

Don't go sideways and choose these crooked ways, my child,[34] and don't seek to walk backwards and slantwise.

(Transl. G.Z.)

I take *pedes* as the nominative singular of *pedes*, *peditis*, used predicatively (*eo pedes* = "I go on foot", that is, "I walk" — a Vergilian idiom: cf. *Aen*. 6.880, 7.624, 10.453; see ThlL s.v. *pedes*, 968.44-49); *in obliquum* is an adverbial phrase and means "slantwise".[35]

I regard my proposal (*in obliquum* […] *pedes*) as superior to that of Baehrens (*in obliquo* […] *pedes*) and to that of Schenkl (*in obliquum* […] *pede*),[36] as it is supported by Augustan parallels, namely Verg. *G*. 1.97–99 *et qui, proscisso quae suscitat aequore terga,* | ***rursus in obliquum*** *uerso perrumpit aratro* | *exercetque frequens tellurem atque imperat aruis* ("he […] who, having raised flat land into ridges by ploughing one way, ploughs it crosswise for a second time, and regularly works his lands and keeps a tight rein on his holding")[37] and Prop. 2.12.22–24 *quis erit qui* […] *canat ut soleant molliter* ***ire pedes?*** ("who will there […] be to sing how softly her feet are accustomed to move?").[38]

Note that in Vergil *rursus* means *iterum*,[39] whereas in Avianus it means *retro* (cf. Avian. 3.1 *curua retrocedens dum fert uestigia cancer* ["while a crab was walking backwards and tracing its crooked way"], which is picked up here), and that in Propertius *pedes* is the accusative plural of *pes*, *pedis*, while in Avianus' line, as we have seen, it is the nominative singular of *pedes*. In 3.5–6, as in 6.7–8, 35.1–4 (see *supra*) and other passages, Avianus borrows phrases and words from his hypotexts, but uses them with meanings that are different from those they have in their original contexts. Being aware of this typical feature of Avianus' style can often help us to better understand what he actually wrote and what he meant.

34 The mother crab is speaking to her baby.

35 In the light of Avian. 23.10, *siue decus busti seu uelis esse deum* ("whether you wish me to adorn a tomb or to be a god"), one could also interpret *pedes* as the accusative plural of *pes*, *pedis* (in this case, *in obliquum* […] *pedes* would mean "do not let your feet go slantwise"), but if we take it with *ire* as the nominative singular of *pedes*, *peditis*, we obtain a text that is more idiomatic and, so to speak, more Vergilian. Therefore, my preference is clear.

36 Baehrens 1883, *ad loc.*; Schenkl 1865, 401.

37 Transl. Fallon.

38 Transl. G.Z.

39 See Thomas 1988, *ad loc*.

3 Conclusion

Avianus' fables, *qua* fables, derive from Aesopic sources (*in primis* Babrius' mythiambi), but his poetic *parole* is modelled on the great Latin poetry of the Golden and Silver Ages, Vergil being by far Avianus' favourite poet. Therefore, detecting the countless 'emulative' and 'nonreferential' allusions to non-Aesopic passages in Avianus' lines is an indispensable tool for correctly interpreting his text and, if necessary, improving it by emendation.

Interestingly enough, Avianus, who writes fables in elegiac couplets and begins his Aesopic book with a fable that plays with elegiac motifs (the *paraclausithyron*; the quarrels between lovers),[40] in the other fables does not employ Latin elegy as one of his primary poetic models, but only as a repository of verbal *iuncturae* such as *ire pedes*, which, as we have seen (§ 2.2), he borrows from Propertius (2.12.24) only to use it in his third fable with a meaning that is different from that which it has in its original context. In the fables of Avianus, elegiac is the metre, but not the style, which is distinctly Vergilian, nor the contents, which are Aesopic. Avianus' fables are, as it were, elegiac poems without elegy — not an insignificant feature of a βιβλίον that is characterized by intersections of genres.

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40 See Gärtner 2022, 47–54.

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