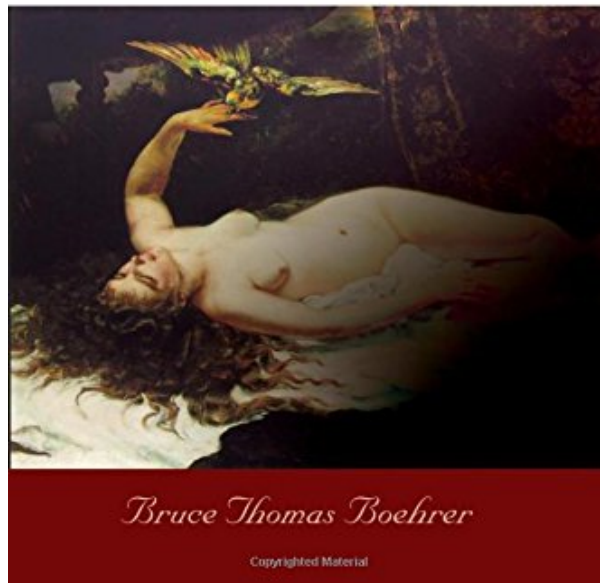


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Parrot Culture

Our 2500-Year-Long Fascination with the
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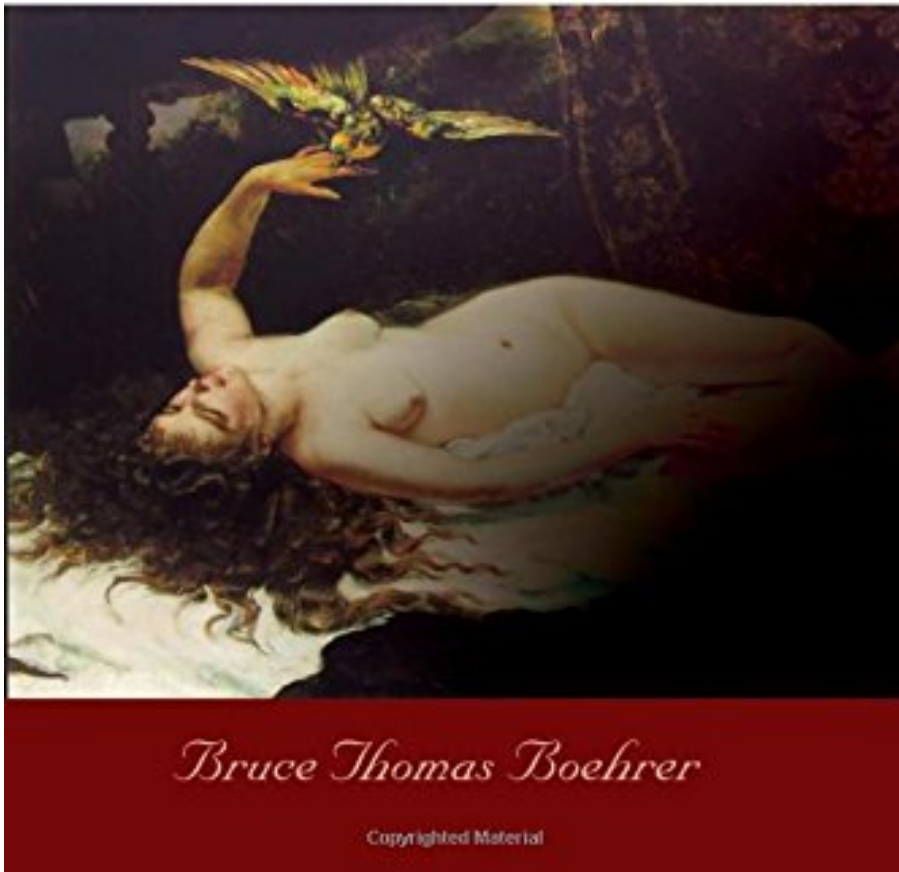
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PARROT CULTURE: OUR 2500-YEAR-LONG FASCINATION WITH THE WORLD'S MOST TALKATIVE BIRD BY BRUCE THOMAS BOEHRER PDF

After completing his conquest of the Persian empire, Alexander the Great maneuvered his army across the Hindu Kush and into India. During his two years there, he traveled from dry frigid mountains to humid tropical lowlands and then back across one of the most punishing deserts on the planet. He fought a series of desperate battles against strange foes mounted on war-elephants, suffering wounds that nearly killed him. And when he eventually turned homeward, he brought with him specimens of a rare, magical species, a bird that could speak with a human voice.

Introduced to Europe by Alexander, parrots were quickly embraced by Western culture as exotic and astonishing, full of marvelous powers, and close to the gods. Over the centuries they would become objects of veneration or figures of folly, creatures prized for their wit—or their place on the dinner table. Ultimately, they would become emblematic of the West's interaction with the world at large. Identifying a deeply rooted obsession with these beautiful and loquacious birds, Bruce Thomas Boehrer provides the first account of parrots and their impact on the Western world.

Parrot Culture: Our 2500-Year-Long Fascination with the World's Most Talkative Bird traces the unusual history of parrots from their introduction in the Graeco-Roman world as items of oriental luxury, through the great age of New World exploration, to the contemporary ecological crisis of globalism. Boehrer identifies the poignant irony in the way parrots became ubiquitous as symbols and mascots, while suffering near extinction at the hands of those who desired them. Exploring their presence and meanings in the art, literature, and history of Western civilization, Parrot Culture also celebrates the beauty, intelligence, and personality of these birds, whose fate will say as much about us and the world we have created as it will about them.

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Features

- Used Book in Good Condition

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8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Such great potential...

By Rachel B. Vekseth

I was very excited when I bought this book. After reading it once, I still found it quite wonderful, but since I'm writing a book of my own (on African greys), I had to check up on some of the "facts" I wanted to use myself. I'm sorry to say that some of the historical facts don't add up to other, reliable sources. For instance, one painting is dated to 1889, but the painter died in 1883, and according to the book it was the French who invaded The Canary Islands in 1402. It was the Spanish... A few other dates are wrong as well. I haven't found (or searched for) many errors, but this makes me question the rest of the book as well. But if you're not really "hung up" on historical accuracy, this is a very good book indeed. The facts themselves still hold water, although some dates and such may be wrong.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

The Parrot as Bird, Myth, and Metaphor in Western Art and Culture.

By mirasreviews

"Parrot Culture" is an exploration of the "presence and meanings in the art, literature, and history of Western civilization" of parrots since their introduction to Europe by Alexander the Great in the 4th century BC. Bruce Thomas Boehrer is a literary historian and parrot-lover. The book excels where the author brings his background in literary criticism to bear on the presence of parrots in literature, particularly that of the 19th and 20th centuries. But he starts off with a look at the place of parrots in ancient Greek and Roman civilization, then proceeds through the Middle Ages, Renaissance, 19th century, 20th century, and beyond, dedicating a chapter to each period.

For each historical period, Boehrer examines how parrots are portrayed in literature, art, the role they play in the lives of humans, and how human culture views them. It's interesting to view the vagaries of Western culture through the lens of the ultimate foreigner - another species whose role is to be both property and a kind of self-reflection of its human overlords. Renowned for their intelligence in the ancient world, then taking on mythical status as parrots became more rare in the Middle Ages, through their debasement and subordination in the Renaissance, the preponderance of dead parrot representations in both art and science in the 19th century, and perhaps the beginnings of respect in the 20th century, the parrot has fascinated humans for more than two millennia.

It is, of course, not only their intelligence which has so enamored parrots to humans, but their speech. I found the first couple of chapters of "Parrot Culture" a little dry, but the material takes off as it moves into Boehrer's native territory, literature, about which he is obviously passionate. The last chapter points out that of the 350 or so extant parrot species, about 100 are threatened due to habitat loss, extermination by farmers, and the continuing illegal pet trade. The author discusses some of the problems inherent in keeping intelligent, effectively wild animals as pets and companions. I think he misconstrues the situation of the near-extinct Spix macaw and places the blame in the wrong place, but "Parrot Culture" offers much food for thought and intriguing parrot history, as well.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

fascinating look at the history of human-parrot interactions

By birdloverus

This interesting book by Bruce Thomas Boehrer, professor of English at Florida State University, takes us on a journey from ancient times through the present day and documents the effects parrots have had on us and vice-a-versa, for good and for bad. Being a life-long parrot enthusiast himself, his personal opinions interject frequently into the overall academic tone of this book. The book starts with a mention of fossilized parrot bones found in Europe and Australia some 40 million years ago. From there, we learned about parrots were first brought into the Persian, Greek, and Roman empires and became the subject of artwork, poetry, and

culinary recipes (ouch!). The first parrots brought to this part of the world came from India and were the *Psittacula* species, such as the ring-necked parakeets. As one can imagine, ancient peoples were often uncertain what to make of these creatures that could speak in their own tongue. Moving into the age of mysticism in the Middle Ages, parrots were often revered and endowed with magical properties. They were often royal bling. Unfortunately this was probably the high point of their association with humans. Once the explorers started sailing to other parts of the world, they encountered vast numbers of other species of parrots, particularly in the New World, and the age of exploitation began. Parrot collection began in earnest, and parrot ownership became more and more commonplace in the middle classes. The parrot (also called popinjay) joke came into being. Boehrer recounts modern jokes that we are all familiar with, and traces their origins to the Renaissance. Parrots starting appearing more often in paintings and sculptures.

As Boehrer moves forwards in time to the last few centuries, the book becomes less academic and more conversational. He discusses Audubon in detail, why his paintings were superior to others of the time, and how Audubon was aware of the decline of the Carolina parakeet, our only native parrot. He discusses the extermination of the Carolina parakeet. He also talks about his favorite illustrator of the 19th century, British artist Edward Lear, and how Lear captured the essence of parrot personality in his work. He uses lost and found notices from French periodicals in the late 1700's to show that parrots were now commonplace, and that owners formed intense emotional bonds with their birds. He discusses our presidential parrots, starting with George Washington. We even learn which novel established "the greatest psittacine cliché" of modern times - the link between parrots and pirates!*

And, of course, what parrot culture book would be complete without mention of the Dead Parrot Sketch by Monty Python? There's even discussion of a Perry Mason book called, "The Case of the Perjured Parrot", in which a parrot was a witness in a legal proceeding. This tale is followed by a true story out of Germany in which a parrot is ordered to take the stand on its own behalf (and ends up "testifying" against its owner).

The final chapter, entitled, "Extinction and Beyond", is, of course, the saddest. Boehrer discusses parrot smuggling and the pet industry. He talks about modern conservation efforts at parrot entertainment parks, such as Parrot Jungle in Florida, Loro Parque in the Canary Islands, and Jurong Bird Park in Singapore. He discusses the monk parakeets in the U.S. Sprinkled throughout are interesting anecdotes, such as that Thor Heyerdahl actually had a parrot aboard the Kon-Tiki when he made his historic voyage from Peru to Polynesia aboard a raft. No parrot book would be complete with a mention of Alex, the African grey, of course. He finishes the book with an epilogue about his own parrots.

This book also contains reproductions of many works of art with parrots over the centuries. If I have one complaint, it's that these reproductions are in black and white, though I presume that was done for cost-savings.

Boehrer does an admirable job of tracing the history of human interaction with parrots, warts and all, over the last several millennia and showing how perceptions of parrots have run the gamut from objects of reverence to objects of exploitation to objects of love. While the book can be fairly academic and dry at times, particularly in the earlier chapters, his love for these feathered marvels always shines through. I know of no other book that tackles this subject so thoroughly and really shows the history of human involvement with another species. Parrots have always fascinated us, and for good reason, so it is not surprising that they have featured so prominently in our history and in so many ways. Whether you like Boehrer's style of writing or not (and I should point out that it varies widely over the course of the book from very professorial to very conversational), this book is a fascinating read and full of all kinds of interesting tidbits. I recommend it for anyone wanting to know more about the history of parrots in human culture.

*Treasure Island, written in 1883 by Robert Louis Stevenson

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