

A COMPANION TO ROMAN LOVE ELEGY

Edited by

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CHAPTER 5

Ovid

Alison R. Sharrock

par erat inferior uersus; risisse Cupido
dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.
(*Am.* 1.1.3–4)

The lower verse was equal; Cupid is said to have laughed and to have snatched away one foot.
(All translations are my own.)

uenit odoratos Elegia nexa capillos,
et, puto, pes illi longior alter erat.
forma decens, uestis tenuissima, uultus amantis,
et pedibus uitium causa decoris erat.
(*Am.* 3.1.7–10)

Elegy came, her perfumed hair tied up, and, I think, one of her feet was longer. Her appearance was beautiful, her clothing of the finest, her face that of a lover, and the fault in her feet was a cause of beauty.

The Ovidian corpus begins with an act of vandalism by the god of Love against the poet's attempts to write in continuous hexameters (equal lines of six metrical feet) and thus in the lofty vein of epic: Cupid steals a foot from every second line and forces the poet into a different mode. This action turned out, despite the poet's protestations, to be a *felix culpa* (a happy fault), since it inaugurated Ovid's lifelong love affair with the elegiac couplet (hexameter alternating with five-footed pentameter). Apart from one tragedy, a *Medea*, of which all but a single line is lost, and one great foray into epic, a 15-book compendium of mythology and poem on change called the *Metamorphoses*, all Ovid's substantial output is written in the elegiac metre and is therefore, according to

the Roman conventions of poetic propriety (*materia conueniente modis*, “with material appropriate to the metre”, *Amores* (hereafter *Am.*) 1.1.2), inevitably affected by the generic expectations of elegy. The corpus begins with the *Amores*, love poems in the tradition of Gallus, Propertius, and Tibullus, with which this chapter will be mostly concerned. From this beginning derives a range of elegiac experiments (Hinds 1992, Harrison 2002), which develop the genre in different directions, importing hybrid vigour from other genres and stretching the capabilities of the elegiac couplet.

From around the same time as the *Amores* come the *Heroides*, unframed letters from mythical heroines abandoned by their lovers, in which the poet’s own voice is wholly subsumed within that of the heroine. The exploration of intense emotion, erotic and romantic grief, introspection and personal feelings given precedence over political and social concerns – all these belong as well to conventional elegy as they do to the *Heroides* experiment. Even the use of myth has plenty of precedent in elegy, where the beloved might be compared with an abandoned Ariadne or some other heroine of myth (Propertius 1.2, 1.3, 1.15, 2.28; Hardie 2005), such that we might think of these heroines as waking up from the poet’s elegiac dream and speaking for themselves (Spentzou 2003). New, however, is the extent and range of this collection’s strong intertexts from outside elegy: Penelope writes at the very moment in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus has entered the palace and is about to make her dreams come true (Kennedy 1984); Dido is about to kill herself with Aeneas’ sword, but hints that Virgil’s hopeless dream of a *paruulus Aeneas* (‘baby Aeneas’) might actually be growing inside her, while all the grandeur of the Roman mission is so much trash by comparison with her love and her grief; both Hypsipyle (from Apollonius’ *Argonautica*) and Medea (between Apollonius and Euripides’ iconic tragedy) have words to say to Jason. The form of the collection itself, however, owes something also to the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, which tells the stories of heroines in the form of an expanded list (Hardie 2005, 292–3, Hinds 1999).

Roman elegy already had a didactic strand (erotodidactic: teaching love), for example in Tibullus 1.4, on which Ovid could draw for his next great innovation. This was a combination of the metre, style, and subject matter of elegy with the purpose, conventions, characters, and pretensions of didactic poetry, which was usually written in hexameters and with something of the seriousness of epic. Most important for Ovid was Virgil’s *Georgics*, a four-book poem on farming published some 30 years before Ovid’s didactic foray, together with the *Georgics*’ own crucial intertext, Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*, a late Republican poem which teaches the ethics and physics of Epicureanism. The first founder of this tradition is again Hesiod, with his poem on farming, the *Works and Days*, and his poem on the nature of the world understood through the generations of the gods, the *Theogony*. The great joke which Ovid plays with this tradition is the absurdity of the idea that love could be taught. And yet, as with so many acts of Ovidian outrage, the poet shows quite clearly that it is by no means absurd: if we can learn to care for animals we can learn to care for the self; if we can learn to manage and control our behaviour and that of others in accordance with the tenets of traditional wisdom then we can learn to manage a relationship; if we can learn to be good citizens then we can also learn to be bad citizens, for all that he claims – disingenuously – that his flirtatious and potentially adulterous advice is not for married women. The didactic group has three parts: a fragment on cosmetics for women (*Medicamina Faciei Femineae*), three books of *Ars*

Amatoria, the first two of which teach a young man how to catch and keep a girl while the third does the same for women; and finally the *Remedia Amoris*, which purports to teach you how to get out of the mess in which your fledgling erotic skills may have landed you.

The poetic family of Roman elegy counts among its ancestors the aetiological poetry of the Hellenistic scholar poets, most especially the *Actia* of Callimachus (see Hunter in this volume). Propertius experimented with elegiac explorations of origins in his fourth book, but it was Ovid who developed the idea into a work of a scale and significance to rival that of the master. Like Propertius, Ovid saw the opportunity to use this elegiac tradition as a vehicle for poetry on Roman themes which would be an alternative to the expected and much refused epic. Ovid structured his aetiological elegy around the Roman calendar of festivals and important political/religious moments of the year. His *Fasti* consists of six books, one for each of the first six months of the year, in which he delves into the origins of contemporary festivals, sometimes seeking the authority of divine interlocutors, sometimes faced with a range of possible explanations none of which commands obvious assent. As such, the poem may well reflect the experience of the contemporary audience when faced with the rituals and practices of Roman religion, since it is clear that by historical times the purpose and meaning of many rites was already obscure. Whatever the reason why only half the projected 12-book poem exists, it is surely provocative that the poet, now in exile because of some offence against the increasingly tyrannical Augustus, breaks off before the two most Julian months of the calendar, July and August. The extent to which one can see an effective continuity between this poem and conventional Roman love elegy, other than by the intertextual link of Propertius and Callimachus, remains a subject for debate, but it is now generally accepted, at least, that there is generic clear water between the *Fasti* and its near-contemporary the *Metamorphoses*, for all the playfulness and eroticism of the epic against all the relative seriousness and maturity of the elegiac poem (Hinds 1987).

Ovid's final experiment in developing the elegiac genre came as a result of his exile (or rather, as he reminds us, relegation, which did not include loss of possessions and civic status) to Tomi, on the shores of the Black Sea, in 8 CE. The exile poetry consists of three collections: five books of *Tristia*, whose title "sad things" alludes to the supposed etymology of elegy from *e-legein*, "to say alas"; four books of *Epistulae ex Ponto*, letters from Pontus (the Roman province in which his place of exile was to be found), which allude to his early experiment in elegiac letters, the *Heroides*, or *Epistulae Heroidum*; and a magnificent piece of excessive invective called the *Ibis*, after an invective poem of the same name by Callimachus. Although the exilic works are emphatically not young man's poetry, as would be a generic necessity of conventional love elegy, while the poet is at pains to show that there is nothing erotic (honest!) about his latest elegiac work, nonetheless some elegiac themes have mutated rather than disappeared (Harrison 2002, 90–2). Exclusion from the house (and body) of the beloved has become exclusion from Rome; the role of elegiac *puella* is now shared, between on the one hand Ovid's wife, who acts as a respectable version of the disreputable and potentially adulterous mistress, and on the other hand the hardhearted Augustus who must be wooed, coaxed, and entreated to allow the poet in from the cold. Stalking the entire collection is the ghost of the *Ars Amatoria*, the pretext for the poet's relegation and now repeatedly rejected, apologised for, and explained away – or rather, perhaps, celebrated. The second book of

the *Tristia* contains a single poem, a reprise of the didactic mode of the *Ars Amatoria*, which it seeks to defend. Ovid's instruction of the Emperor in how to read poetry (Barchiesi 2001) draws also on Horace's epistle to Augustus (*Epistles* 2.1) on the nature of poetry, while its outrageous aim, in part, is to "prove" that all literature, even Augustus' favoured *Aeneid*, is about sex. For all that Ovid presents his exilic project as an inversion of everything that went before, even down to a dishevelled Cupid who comes to comfort the poet only to be upbraided for his role in the entire elegiac enterprise (*Pont.* 3.3.30), nonetheless the poems from exile represent the final experiment in Ovidian elegy. Many scholars think that the double *Heroides*, letters between both sides of a couple, are themselves also works from exile.

When Ovid took up the mantle of Roman love elegy, it had already seen intensive active service from Gallus, Propertius, and Tibullus, not to mention its precursor Catullus. It was, to change the metaphor, well formed. Erotic discourse has never been a matter of spontaneous creation from nowhere, or from the individual heart (Barthes 1979), but in the case of Roman elegy the building blocks were by now well positioned, such that the poetry was constructed out of established images and scenes (*topoi*) which the poet could manipulate to his own ends. As a discourse predicated on opposition to conventional lifestyles, elegy presented itself as the product of leisure as opposed to business, laziness and self-indulgence as opposed to hard work and duty, personal pleasure (even when it comes in the form of erotic pain) as opposed to patiently endured pain for the sake of the state.

Since the ideology and much of the reality of Roman society was military, the image of the soldier presented itself to the elegists as a vehicle for both appropriation and inversion (Gale 1997). One of Ovid's most famous and outrageous poems, *Am.* 1.9, 'proves' point by point the essential connection between the soldier and the lover (the phrase *militat omnis amans*, "every lover is a soldier", opens and closes the first couplet, 1.9.1–2), whether through youthful age (3–6), endurance (15–16), night-time activity (21–26), or the capacity to slip past guards (27–8). Ovid even inverts the normal language of elegiac poetic production, laziness, leisure and softness (41–2), as applying not to his current state of erotic and elegiac activity but to his previous state before Love made him active: *agilem nocturnaue bella gerentem* ("active and engaged in nightly battles", 45). The language of Roman military, political and social activity (*agilis* from *ago*) has become a barely veiled euphemism for sexual prowess. The other side to the metaphor of *militia amoris* (soldiering of love), however, presents the lover not as the soldier himself but as the victim of a military alliance between Cupid and the beloved (*Prop.* 1.1.1–4). Ovid engages with this image playfully in *Am.* 1.2, when he capitulates with unseemly haste to the arrows and torches of Cupid, to be led in triumph through the streets of Rome by the god as conquering general; and also more painfully in *Am.* 2.9, when the wounds inflicted by Cupid become a metaphor for the sufferings of love, with the essential paradox of *militia amoris* expressed through the complaint:

quid me, qui miles numquam tua signa reliqui,
laedis, et in castris uulneror ipse meis?
(*Am.* 2.9.3–4)

Why do you harm me, I who as a soldier have never left your standards, and why am I myself wounded in my camp?

Another essential prop in the construction of Roman society is the slave, on whom not only do the economy and the daily lives of the elite depend but also against whom the social identity of citizens is defined. It should be no surprise, therefore, that slavery provides a central image in elegiac discourse, in which the normal power relations of conventional society are inverted, such that the male, socially and politically elite lover subordinates himself to a woman who is his inferior in every way (however exactly we choose to construe her social position). In addition, the realities of slave life provide a metaphorical vehicle for expression of the lover's emotions of suffering, hurt, pain, and loss of control (McCarthy 1998). The imagistic nexus of *seruitium amoris* (slavery of love) had been so extensively developed by Propertius and Tibullus that Ovid does not give it the expansive treatment that he applies to *militia*. *Am.* 2.17 opens with a clear signal towards a treatment of the image:

Si quis erit, qui turpe putet seruire puellae,
illo conuincar iudice turpis ego.
(*Am.* 2.17.1–2)

If there is anyone who thinks it foul to be a slave to a girl, by his judgement I shall be convicted of foulness.

As the poem develops, however, it is not so much a blow-by-blow account to show how every lover is a slave (in the manner of soldiering in *Am.* 1.9), but rather an exploration of the pose of inferiority as seductive rhetoric. Examples of goddesses who loved heroic mortals, such as Calypso (Odysseus), Thetis (Peleus), and the prophetic nymph Egeria (the mythical Roman king Numa) are offered as persuasion to Corinna as to why she should love the poet. The culminating example is Venus and Vulcan, perhaps not an entirely happy precedent given Vulcan's marital difficulties. If we note that these examples of unequally matched couples not only draw on the elegiac tradition of deifying the beloved but also place the poet-lover in a heroic role, we might also consider that the role of Vulcan as creative artist makes him a more suitable comparandum for the poet than do his erotic credentials. From there it is only a small step to another unequal couple, the elegiac couplet (21–2), artistically limping like Vulcan himself. The poem which began in self-humiliation ends as a celebration of poetic power, in which the poet-lover holds all the most desirable cards (Gold 1993, Wyke 2002), while the beloved is left even without knowledge of her own identity:

noui aliquam, quae se circumferat esse Corinnam;
ut fiat, quid non illa dedisse uelit?
(*Am.* 2.17.29–30)

I know someone who puts it about that she is Corinna; what would she not give actually to be so?

In 2.17, Ovid has hinted at exposure of the lie which is at the heart of *seruitium amoris* and its claims of self-abasement. The Cypassis poems, 2.7 and 2.8, explore something closer to the reality of slavery and love, when the poet-lover first hotly denies the charge of having betrayed Corinna by sex with her slave-hairdresser, and then blackmails the unhappy girl into more sex on pain of exposure to all too real

slave punishments (Henderson 1991). It is this diptych which puts on show the scarred back (2.7.22) and the powerlessness (2.8.21–4) of the literal slave. When it comes to passing on erotic knowledge to the next generation, the teacher of the *Ars Amatoria* has extensive instructions on how to play the role of slave for the purposes of keeping your beloved sweet (*Ars* 2.179–242). His recipe for success (2.199–202) clearly signals its affinities with the manipulative programme of the parasites and powerful slaves of Roman comedy, the characters who are always in control (James 2003). The Ovidian erotic slave never allows his pose of humility and powerlessness too close a brush with social realities.

A defining *topos* of elegy is the paraclausithyron, the song of the locked-out lover (Tib. 1.2, Prop. 1.16). Ovid stakes his claim to a place on the elegiac doorstep with a full-scale exploration of this *topos* in *Am.* 1.6, a poem in which the unusual inclusion of a refrain (*tempora noctis eunt; excute poste seram*, “the hours of the night are passing; undo the bolt from the door”, 40, 48, 56) alludes to the ancestry of the paraclausithyron in Roman door magic (cf. Plautus *Curculio* 147–55) as well as in the *komos* of Greek epigram. Development and variation of the image comes in a range of forms: in *Am.* 3.6 the barrier which needs to be crossed is not a door but a river which, once small (3.6.5), has now become a raging torrent (7–8), with tempting metaphorical hints both at swelling poetry (at 106 lines long, this poem is itself somewhat swollen) and at sexual potency. Just as the closedness of the girl who is the real object of the paraclausithyron is displaced on to the door by elegiac convention and then on to the doorkeeper by Ovid (*Am.* 1.6), so now the personified river becomes the recipient of the poet-lover’s seductive rhetoric. Elsewhere, the *topos* of exclusion evokes its programmatic force for elegiac poetry in just a few words: in *Am.* 3.8, which explores the traditional idea that poetry does not get the rewards it deserves, even the praised poet has the door shut in his face (3.8.7); in the explicitly programmatic *Am.* 2.1, in which elegy is the magic spell which aims to soften the hard doors of the beloved (22), the poet’s attempts at writing epic were brought quickly back down to elegiac earth when *clausit amica fores* (“my girlfriend closed the door”, 17). Ovid excuses himself to Jupiter, whose battle with the giants he had just been re-enacting, with the claim that the closed door of elegy has more poetic power (20). In *Am.* 3.11, the poet-lover finds himself again in the classic elegiac position on the doorstep (9–12), where he makes explicit the extent to which erotic rivalry relates not only to competition in the achievement of the desired object but also to prestige and status in the battle with other males:

uidi, cum foribus lassus prodiret amator
 inualidum referens emeritumque latus;
 hoc tamen est leuius quam quod sum uisus ab illo:
 eueniat nostris hostibus ille pudor.

(*Am.* 3.11.13–16)

I have seen the exhausted lover coming out from the door, dragging along his knackered side into retirement; but this is easier to bear than the fact that I have been seen by him: may such shame come to our enemies.

Other elegiac *topoi* given particularly Ovidian treatment include the following: the living metaphor of love as magic, especially in *Am.* 1.8, 2.1, *Ars* 2.99 (cf. Prop. 1.1.1, 1.2.19,

4.5; Tib. 1.2.59–64; (Sharrock 1994)); the rare celebration of erotic success, especially in *Am.* 1.5, 2.12, 2.15 (cf. Prop. 1.8b, 2.15); the beloved girl's unfortunate vice of materialism, for example in *Am.* 1.10 (cf. Prop. 1.2; Tib. 2.4; James 2003); the (related) problems of fidelity and faithfulness (cf. Prop. 1.15; Tib. 1.2), for example in *Am.* 1.4, 2.4, 3.3, 3.11, 3.14, and manipulated in both directions in *Ars* 2, when the teacher explains the advantages of both hiding and exposing one's infidelities; and competition from a rich rival, like the one in *Am.* 3.8 whose war-bought wealth gives him access where Ovid's poems fail. But is it possible for us to characterise "love" in Ovid's elegy other than by calling it elegiac?

It is easy to be cynical about the view of love presented in Ovid's *Amores*, and still more so in the *Ars Amatoria*. After all, we have here a lover and a teacher whose main aim is to get himself and his pupil into bed with their chosen girl as easily as possible (*Ars* 1.453), with no intention of restricting himself to just one girl (*di melius!*, as the teacher exclaims in horror at such a suggestion, *Ars* 2.388); whose vaunted devotion (*Am.* 1.3.5–6) is not only self-seeking but also not above both physical and sexual violence (*Am.* 1.7, *Ars* 1.673); and whose pose of servitude and almost religious admiration does not preclude moralistic preaching, with more than a hint of Schadenfreude (*Am.* 1.14, 2.14). Perhaps we might want to say, then, that this "love" is not romantic or "sincere", but is undoubtedly erotic and has a certain kind of realism. On the other hand, Ovid goes further than the conventions of Latin love poetry in exploring the range of emotional experience as a fact of life. It is a new idea, and perhaps almost impossible to develop in the "lyric" (in the modern, rather than the ancient generic sense, P. A. Miller 1994) voice of conventional elegy, to explore the question of how to make love last (*ut ... duret amor*, *Ars* 1.38). Tibullus might have dreamt of himself and Delia as a white-haired couple faithful to the end (Tib. 1.6.86), but in context it is an obvious absurdity. Only Ovid gives advice on how one might behave in order to keep the relationship going, *nec te mirere relictum* ("and not to find, to your surprise, that you've been left," *Ars* 2.111).

But is not this "love" which Ovid teaches and preaches a bit basic, something of a letdown from the emotional intensity of his predecessors in Latin love poetry? *Am.* 3.11(a+b) (Perkins 2001–2002, Cairns 1979, Ferguson 1960, Damon 1990) is a lover's cry of pain at his beloved's hardness of heart, infidelity, and ingratitude for his unflinching devotion. His patience is at an end, he claims, and he no longer cares – which, as always in erotic discourse, means its opposite. The poem is also an engagement with a poetic tradition, drawing on a Catullan moment (*perfer, obdura*, "endure, be firm", Cat. 8.11; cf. *perfer et obdura*, *Am.* 3.11.7, both phrases followed by a series of questions which undermine the speaker's obduracy), and then in the second half developing the famous paradox of Cat. 85, *odi et amo* ("I hate and I love") and the agony it brings. Intertwined with these two iconic Catullan poems are also two flashpoints of Propertian emotion: captivating eyes (*Am.* 3.11.48 and Prop. 1.1.1, supported also by the inversion at *Am.* 3.11.5 of Prop. 1.1.4, trampling on the head of love/the lover), and the notion of the beloved as everything to the lover (*Am.* 3.11.49 and Prop. 2.6.42). It would be easy to accuse Ovid of simplification (or parody) of his predecessors' complex emotional states, especially when he turns Catullus' torment at his conflicting feelings of love and hate into a simple mind-body dichotomy (*Am.* 3.11.37: *nequitiam fugio, fugientem forma reducit*, "I run from her wickedness, her beauty draws me back as I flee"). A reprise of the paradox comes at:

tunc amo, tunc odi frustra, quod amare necesse est;
tunc ego, sed tecum, mortuus esse uelim.

(*Am.* 3.14.39–40)

Then I love, then in vain I hate, because it is necessary to love; then I want to be dead, but with you.

In part this is an extension of the pleasures involved in erotic pain, as exemplified in the lover's refusal to take up the god's offer of a loveless life (*Am.* 2.9b) and in his requirement that his rival should make things difficult for him:

quo mihi fortunam, quae numquam fallere curet?
nil ego quod nullo tempore laedat amo.

(*Amores*, 2.19.7–8)

What use to me is fortune which never cares to deceive? I don't love anything which never hurts.

We need to separate the question of whether this is good love from whether it is good poetry: there has been a strong tradition of literary criticism which associates good poetry with intense emotion (often, by implication, emotion of which the critic approves, although most people would insist that this is not necessary) and on this score Ovid has been found wanting. I suggest, however, first, that it is possible to read poems like 3.11 as intense (albeit, indeed, misguided) emotion and as parodic at the same time, on different levels, and, moreover, that Ovid's entanglement with the poetic tradition and exposure of its potential for shallowness forms part of his poetic-erotic program in the elegiac works – which is that you never quite know how to take it.

Romantic notions of love would put a high premium on sincerity and truthfulness, “real love” not something faked, but both the *Amores* and the *Ars Amatoria* are obsessed with faking and not telling the truth. We might not feel that this adds up to the kind of love which we would personally endorse (at least, I don't), but that it involves a high degree of emotional complexity and intensity is harder to deny. Could it be, even, that Ovid is suggesting that the artificiality of poetry makes sincerity impossible? A strand runs through the erotic corpus which plays with the question of knowledge, interspersing exposure and concealment which tempt and seduce the reader into wanting to know, but ultimately deny that possibility. The first relational poem of the collection, *Am.* 1.4, the adulterous dinner party, plays this out. It presents a scenario in which the “truth” is to be hidden from the beloved's official partner; supposedly private communication takes place through the well-known and conventional system of lovers' signs (writing in wine on the table, drinking from the cup from which the lover has drunk, “secret” meanings in ordinary actions); the poet-lover threatens to expose himself as *manifestus amator* (“an open lover”, 39); there is a suspicion of sex in public hidden under a cloak; and it culminates in the lover's fantasy about the private space of the bedroom. He tells his mistress not to yield to her *uir* in bed, or only unwillingly, not to give him pleasure, or at least not to take pleasure herself, and finally – whatever happens, to deny it tomorrow. That Ovidian sting in the tail is close to the

essence of the program – we don't and can't know. The next poem taunts us with a similar challenge when the description of a sex scene cuts out at the moment of consummation with the provocative *cetera quis nescit?* ("Who does not know the rest?", 1.5.25). But the crowning glory of hiding and exposure comes in *Am.* 3.12, which is a multiple bluff on the question of whether Corinna is a real person. Ovid upbraids the naive reader who takes his celebration of his mistress for truth and so falls in love with her himself. On the one hand, this poem is "telling" us that Corinna is not a real person (or rather, that we *should think* that Corinna is not a real person), but on the other hand the speaker's purpose in telling us this is to keep Corinna for himself (which implies that she *is* a real person). It is of the essence of this poetry that we should not know.

What can we know about the "self" who speaks these poems? What is the relationship between the poet, the poet-lover, and the lover? What is the relationship between (the speaker of) one poem and another? These are questions which are constantly at play in the *Amores* and throughout the Ovidian corpus (Volk 2005). Like other Augustan poetry books (Hutchinson 2008), the *Amores* do not tell any straightforward quasi-autobiographical narrative, no simple story of lover and beloved meeting, desiring, consummating, fighting, and parting. Rather, the arrangement of poems owes as much to patterning as it does to linearity. On the other hand, traces of such a love story lurk beneath the surface, tempting the reader into the construction of narrative, and playing to the desire for story with which we necessarily approach these first person poems (Sharrock 2000 and 2006; Liveley and Salzman-Mitchell 2008). Each book opens with a strongly programmatic statement: 1.1 with Cupid's metrical vandalism, 2.1 with the poet's attempts at writing an epic on gods and giants being undermined by the closed door of elegy, 3.1 with a competition between personified Tragedy and Elegy for the poet's allegiance. Each second poem, however, answers the overt poetics of its respective opener with a narrative of beginnings: 1.2 with the poet discovering himself unaccountably in love (although he should hardly have been surprised, since in the previous poem Cupid's arrow shot him with the right kind of *opus* (work) for elegy; Kennedy 1993); 2.2 with an exploratory communication to a new beloved, by means of an intermediary; and 3.2 with a dramatic-monologue account of a scene of initial chatting-up at the races. By contrast, already by poem 1.4 the lover appears to be in a well established, albeit illicit, relationship with the *puella*, while 1.5 plunges us straight into the middle of an affair with the most erotic and the most relaxed sex scene in Roman poetry. The collection offers us the possibility of envisaging an overall narrative in which the poet-lover, Ovid, is involved in several affairs, serially and simultaneously, which we might even be tempted to try to unpick. At the same time, there is the possibility of reading each poem as a unit by itself, independent of others.

Throughout the collection Ovid tries on a range of erotic and emotional roles which he will not let us beat into the shape of a single simple story able to be attached to a unified individual (P. A. Miller 2004). On the other hand, Ovid's first-person self-presentation is a Big Self whose presence can be felt across the entire corpus, tempting the reader to identify his various *personae* as the same person. Although few people now would read the lover of the *Amores* straightforwardly *as* Ovid the poet, and indeed some people want to see the teacher of the *Ars Amatoria* as a bumbling old fool who is satirised by Ovid

the poet (Durling 1958), nonetheless this Big Self stretches between works. *Am.* 1.7 expresses the lover's wild grief at having attacked his beloved, his real (lack of) concern for whom slips out in his final callous invitation to her to cover the evidence by tidying up her hair. We might see this as a satire on the typical elegiac position of self-absorption and casual violence, with Ovid the poet standing apart from the speaker. But in the *Ars Amatoria* the teacher offers his own experience (*Ars* 2.173) to warn his pupils of the dangers of angry girls, using precisely this poem as his own past.

At no stage in the history of Roman love elegy is it a straightforward task to distinguish between (the poetic expression of) love for another person and love for poetry, but with Ovid the traditional slippage between mistress and metaphor (Wyke 2002, Keith 1994) reaches new levels of complexity – alongside the outrageous quasi-simplification which reduces love to a matter of metre (1.1) and makes the personification of Elegy into an elegiac mistress (3.1). The joke with which Ovid flirts throughout the erotic corpus is a metaphorical equivalence of loving and writing, *amare* and *scribere*: even in the supposed recantation, *Remedia Amoris*, the poet programmatically defends himself against Cupid's accusations of infidelity to his cause with the claim that right now he is in love:

saepe tepent alii iuuenes; ego semper amaui,
et si, quid faciam, nunc quoque, quaeris, amo.
(*Rem. Am.* 7–8)

Other young men often cool off; I have always been a lover, and if you ask what I'm doing now also – I'm loving.

What he is actually doing, right now, is writing. (Cf. the same idea at *Am.* 2.1.7, *quo nunc ego saucius arcu*, “wounded by the same bow as I am now”.) The equivalence between writing and loving is developed to an amusing, if outrageous, degree when Ovid reflects on his experience of impotence (writer's block?), in *Am.* 3.7. I have argued elsewhere (Sharrock 1995) that this unusually sexually explicit poem is a reflection on the nature of writing love elegy and its inherent threats to masculinity. As the poet writes, his *pars pessima* (69) is right now up to the task:

quae nunc ecce uigent intempestiua ualentque,
nunc opus exposcunt militiamque suam.
(*Am.* 3.7.67–68)

... now look it's vigorous and full of valour at the wrong moment, now it demands its work and military action.

Very many of Ovid's love poems open themselves to such poetological readings, in which it is impossible to distinguish between the love of a girl and the love of poetry. *Am.* 2.4 and 2.10 both celebrate, albeit with an introductory pose of deprecation, the poet's capacity for love, in the former poem any girl in the whole city (2.4.47–8) and in the latter just two. Such a celebration of erotic sensibility and prowess has elegiac precedent, for example in Propertius 2.22a, but Ovid has taken further the poetological possibilities of the *topos*. From a programmatic point of view, a closer parallel with *Am.* 2.4 and 2.10 is Propertius 2.1, in which the poet

claims that the driving force for his poetry is his beloved. Whatever she wears and whatever she does creates a new poem:

QVAERITIS, unde mihi totiens scribantur amores,
unde meus ueniat mollis in ora liber.
non haec Calliope, non haec mihi cantat Apollo:
ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit.
(Prop. 2.1.1–4)

You ask whence my loves come so often to be written, why my book comes soft into my mouth. It is not Calliope, not Apollo, who sings these things to me: my girl herself is my inspiration.

seu nuda erepto mecum luctatur amictu,
tum uero longas condimus Iliadas;
(Prop. 2.1.13–14)

Or if she struggles with me, naked, with cloak torn away, then indeed we compose long Iliads.

Propertius' opening reference to *amores* clearly applies to the title of elegiac collections (Gallus and Ovid, cf. *Am.* 2.4.9, and perhaps Propertius' own), while many of his words and images are poetologically suggestive, but Propertius maintains the reality effect, according to which the beloved is the *cause* of the poetry rather than the poetry itself. We might even say that *Am.* 2.4 and 2.10 do to the conventional image of the written girl, *scripta puella*, what *Am.* 1.9 does to that of *militia amoris*. 2.4 not only celebrates any girl as a possible love object, but pairs them together like a series of elegiac couplets. This pairing comes to a head at 2.4.33–6:

tu, quia tam longa es, ueteres heroidas aequas
et potes in toto multa iacere toro;
haec habilis breuitate sua est: corrumpor utraque;
conueniunt uoto longa breuisque meo.
(*Am.* 2.4.33–36)

You, because you are so tall, are like the heroines of old and can sprawl over the whole bed; this one is handleable in her littleness: I am tempted by both; both long and short is suited to my prayer.

Not only do the tall girl and the short girl clearly add up to an elegiac couplet, but together they cite two of Ovid's works: the *ueteres heroidas* allude to the *Heroides* while *conueniunt* offers an echo of the opening couplet of the *Amores* with its *materia conueniente modis* ("material appropriate to the metre").

Elegiac pairing is the object of Ovid's erotic interest also in *Am.* 2.10, this time in the form of just two girls. But this poem is really interested not so much in the girls (couplets, poems) themselves but in the lover's capacity to perform them. The poem culminates in a prayer to die on the job, *medium...inter opus* (2.10.36), which comes conveniently near to the middle of the three book collection of *Amores* (Kennedy 1993).

The period during which Ovid wrote erotic elegy saw significant developments in the relationship between Roman private life and the state. Augustus' moral legislation

promoted marriage, punished adulterers, and made it illegal for a husband to overlook his wife's infidelity, but the propaganda went further than the legislation in its encouragement of associations between sanctioned sexual behaviour and other aspects of good citizenship, including loyalty to the princeps himself. Interaction between this propaganda and the poetic values developed during the late Republic and early imperial period had the effect of constructing a space in which the elegiac position construed itself as countercultural. Even though there may be no inherent reason why the elegiac mode should not be engaged in the service of the Augustan state (as both Propertius and Ovid were to explore in their later elegiac developments), the building blocks readily presented themselves whereby the poets could fashion the choice of elegy as an oppositional political as well as poetic stance.

As is shown in Hunter's contribution to this volume, Ovid draws on the Callimachean pose of opposition between epic and lighter genres to set up the programme for his second book of elegies through a staged conflict between the epic battle of gods and giants and the elegiac paraclausithyron. The poet who had one moment been usurping the role of thundering Jupiter (according to the conceit whereby the poet does what he describes), the next moment drops his thunderbolt when his beloved closed the door:

in manibus nimbos et cum Ioue fulmen habebam,
 quod bene pro caelo mitteret ille suo.
 clausit amica fores: ego cum Ioue fulmen omisi;
 excidit ingenio Iuppiter ipse meo.
 Iuppiter, ignoscas: nil me tua tela iuuabant;
 clausa tuo maius ianua fulmen habet.

(*Am.* 2.1.15–20)

In my hands I had the clouds and along with Jove the thunderbolt which he well casts on behalf of his own heaven. My girlfriend closed the door: I dropped the thunderbolt along with Jove; Jupiter himself fell out of my mind. Forgive me, Jupiter: your weapons were no help to me; the closed door has a bigger bolt than yours.

Many critics find it irresistible to make a connection between "Jupiter" here and that Jupiter on earth, Augustus. In that case, we could charge Ovid first with usurping the Emperor's role, then with deserting him for a different allegiance, and finally with accusing him of (sexual) impotence, since his thunderbolt, now deemed smaller and weaker than the force of elegy, is clearly phallic.

Ovid's *Amores* make relatively few direct political allusions: one example is in the list of battles waged as a result of love, which culminates in reference to the civil war between Antony and Octavian (2.12.23–4, placing Cleopatra in the tradition of Helen and Lavinia), while the case against abortion includes the killer argument that if Venus had aborted Aeneas the world would have been denied the Caesars (*Am.* 2.14.17–18). More extensive, however, is the poet's countercultural self-positioning, such as that displayed in his representation of the triumph of Cupid in *Am.* 1.2 (Galinsky 1969, J. F. Miller 1995; see the essays by Leach and Welch in this volume). As elsewhere, Ovid starts with conventional ideas (*militia amoris*, the image of Cupid in a chariot), but develops them in outrageous ways. Respected Roman personifications, *Mens Bona*

(“Right Thinking”) and *Pudor* (“Shame/Modesty”), suffer the violence of the conquered, while the notions such as *Error* and particularly *Furor* (1.2.35), who really ought to have their hands tied behind their backs (Virg. *Aen.* 1.294–6), are promoted to the position of general’s guard. Finally, the triumph scene ends with an explicit connection between Cupid and his cousin Augustus. (Cupid’s mother Venus is the vaunted ancestor of the Julian family, through Aeneas’ son Iulus.) This is the period during which the celebration of a triumph came to be restricted to members of Augustus’ family (the last non-imperial full triumph was that of Lucius Cornelius Balbus in 19 BCE). But of course, since Cupid *is* a member of the imperial family, it is quite okay to him to have a triumph.

Ovid eventually got on the wrong side of the Augustan regime. It is important to stress, however, that it is not around a question of sexual obscenity that the political “problem” of Ovidian erotic elegy revolves. In this regard, Roman society maintains a fair degree of consistency over the centuries immediately before and after the publication of the *Ars Amatoria* in its lack of inhibition about the representation of sexuality, in art, literature, and indeed political invective. The “problem” for the elegists, and especially for Ovid, is twofold: first, the Romans, to generalise, don’t have a problem with sex, but do have a problem with love, which makes a man lose his self-control and perhaps also his ancestral material wealth; and, second, the Augustan attempts to control what we loosely call morality are bound up not so much with personal sexual values but with the stability and control of middle and upper-class society. Adultery is an offence which you (as a man) commit, not against your own wife, but against the husband of your lover. In addition, and therefore, sexual behaviour became a site for the imposition and contestation of Augustus’ authority.

It is in the didactic mode of the *Ars Amatoria* that the problems of authority are foregrounded (Sharrock 1994). Here, Ovid’s speaker is not just a bad lad playing around but a teacher in the tradition of Virgil’s *Georgics*, that celebration of the land of Italy in its reconstruction after the Civil Wars. It is suddenly all much more serious. There has always been ambiguity as to the social status of the elegiac *puella* and therefore to the position of the elegiac relationship vis-à-vis the Augustan marriage legislation, but the didactic voice is more direct, several notches closer to real life, further from a youthful *Musa iocosa* (“playful muse”) whom no one takes seriously, than is the case in straight elegy, such that an ambiguity of this nature is harder to maintain. Ovid is teaching his readers how to pursue relationships outside the Roman norms either of arranged marriage or paid prostitution (*hoc opus, hic labor est, primo sine munere iungi*, “this is the work, this is the task, to be joined together without an initial gift”, *Ars* 1.453, a quotation of the Virgilian entry to the underworld, *hoc opus, hic labor est, Aen.* 6.129). It now matters a great deal whether those relationships come under the jurisdiction of the Augustan legislation. Ovid makes a series of disclaimers in which he denies everything, such as that in the proem to *Ars* 1:

este procul, uittae tenues, insigne pudoris,
 quaeque tegis medios instita longa pedes:
 nos Venerem tutam concessaque furta canemus
 inque meo nullum carmine crimen erit.

(*Ars* 1.31–34)

Keep far away, slender ribbons, insignia of modesty, and you long dress covering to the toes: we will sing of safe Venus and permitted thefts and in my song there will be no cause for accusation.

But no one really believes him, especially not, as has been several times pointed out, since the letters of *crimen* fit neatly into those of *carmine* – there is indeed a crime/charge in Ovid’s song. Rather, we might feel, the disclaimers themselves call attention to the relevance of the Augustan legislation to Ovid’s poem. Another protestation of innocence mentions “law” explicitly:

en iterum testor: nihil hic nisi lege remissum
luditur; in nostris instita nulla iocis.
(*Ars* 2.599–600)

See, again I bear witness: there are no games here except those allowed by the law; there is no long dress in my jokes.

Ovid has just told the story of how Vulcan came off worse when he laid a trap to catch his adulterous wife Venus with her lover Mars. According to Ovid’s advice, only *uiri* should try to catch their wives: in this, he uses that ambiguous term *uir* which has allowed so much slippage in the elegiac relationship between “husband” and “man”. Are those husbands who catch out their wives, in accordance with the Augustan legislation against *lenocinium*, the only real men? The implication of the Vulcan paradigm, rather, is that they are fools who don’t know the art of love. But Ovid certainly knows the art of ambiguity – and perhaps Augustus does also. As Gibson (1998) has argued, the moral legislation is in fact rather vague about the categories into which it divides the Roman world, despite the importance of those status categories in defining legal and illegal behaviour. That, perhaps, is Augustus’ trap for the unwary.

FURTHER READING

Essential commentaries include J. C. McKeown’s (1987–) multivolume work on the *Amores*, Hollis (1977) on *Ars Amatoria* 1, Gibson (2003) on *Ars Amatoria* 3. The following general books are particularly recommended: Armstrong (2005), Kennedy (1993), Holzberg (2002), Boyd (1997), Gibson, Green and Sharrock (2006).

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