
The Cambridge Companion to Latin Love Elegy

Edited by Thea S. Thorsen

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# 7

THEA S. THORSEN

# Ovid the love elegist

'I hate it when a page is shining all over and empty' (*Am.* 1.11.20, *odi cum late splendida cera uacat*) says Ovid, the last of the great Augustan poets and the most prolific of them all. Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso) was born on March 20th 43 BC (*Tr.* 4.10.13–19) as the second son of a fairly well-off family of ancient equestrian rank (*Am.* 1.3.8, *Tr.* 4.10.7–8) in the city of Sulmo (*Am.* 2.1.1; 3.15.3, 8–14; *Tr.* 4.10.3).[1] In his autobiographical poem *Tristia* 4.10, written late in life, Ovid states that when he and his brother, who was exactly one year older, were still children, they made the roughly 150-kilometre journey to Rome, where their father financed their upper-class education in rhetoric and law (*Tr.* 4.10.15–16, Sen. *Controv.* 2.2.8–12, cf. 9.5.17). Ovid further tells us how he always felt the urge to compose poetry and that, although his father warned him that not even Homer died rich, all his attempts to write prose resulted only in the outpouring of verse (*Tr.* 4.10.21–25). Ovid embarked nevertheless on a career as a public official, but when he in due course was expected to take up a seat in the Senate, he decided to abandon any such career and dedicated himself entirely to poetry (*Tr.* 4.10.33–8).

Ovid was probably in his twenties when he made this decision. He had, however, pursued his poetic interests well before that. Perhaps he had even already made the acquaintance of Valerius Messalla Corvinus (cf. *Pont.* 1.7.27–8), the great aristocrat who famously sponsored poets, among whom Tibullus was the most prominent. Ovid claims that he at least caught a glimpse of Virgil, who died in 19 BC (cf. *Vit. Don.* 35); that Tibullus, who also reportedly passed away in 19 BC (Dom. Mars. fr. 7.3 Courtney), would have made a great friend; and that he enjoyed friendship with Propertius, who inspired him by reciting his own elegies (*Tr.* 4.10.45, 51–2). And while

I am grateful to Stephen Harrison for generous feedback on this chapter.

[1] The city is today's Sulmona in the Italian Abruzzi.

Ovid was still torn between his father's expectations and his poetic vocation, he did of course compose poetry, too:

> carmina cum primum populo iuuenalia legi,
> barba resecta mihi bisue semelue fuit.
> mouerat ingenium totam cantata per urbem
> nomine non uero dicta Corinna mihi.
> (*Tr.* 4.10.57–60)
>
> When I first recited the poems of my youth in public, my beard had been shaven once or twice. Corinna, called thus by a name which was not true, inspired my talent, [and was] sung all over the city [of Rome].[2]

To judge from this passage, Ovid was only a teenager when he first performed in public at Rome, reciting from the work that was later to be known as the collection of elegies entitled *Amores* ('Loves'), centred precisely on Corinna as not the only, but the most important *puella* ('girl'). Ovid loved to write, and Ovid wrote of love: *tenerorum lusor amorum* (the playful poet of tender loves) is the title he chose for himself both in his imaginary epitaph (*Tr.* 3.3.73) and in his autobiography (*Tr.* 4.10.1).[3] And the love Ovid most frequently wrote of was of the elegiac kind, that is, sexy, elegant and light-hearted, but also unhappy, plaintive and even tragic. To be an elegist was a fundamental part of Ovid's poetic identity; he repeatedly claimed to be the successor of the canonical Roman elegists Gallus, Tibullus and Propertius (*Tr.* 2.467, 4.10.53), and he boasted that his elegiac achievement was only comparable to the epic accomplishment of Virgil:

> tantum se nobis elegi debere fatentur
> quantum Virgilio nobile debet epos.
> (*Rem. am.* 395–6)
>
> Elegies admit they owe me as much as noble epic owes Virgil.

## Love elegy of epic dimensions

Most of Ovid's elegies about love were produced during the first half of his poetic career, from the moment he made his public debut until he was about forty-five years old: the single *Heroides* ('Heroines'), the three books of the *Amores*, the three books of the *Ars amatoria* ('Art of Love') and *Remedia amoris* ('Cures for Love').[4] The chronological order of these works

[2] All translations are my own. [3] Cf. *Am.* 3.15.1.

[4] For the title of the *Heroides*, cf. Priscian (*Gramm. Lat.* 2.544.4 Keil); alternative titles are *Epistula(e)*, (*Ars* 3.345) and *Epistulae Heroidum* ('Letters of Heroines'). For the title of the *Amores*, cf. *Ars* 3.343. For the title of the *Ars amatoria*, see Seneca (*Controv.* 3.7.2); the metrical version is *Ars amandi* (*Ars* 1.1).

is notoriously difficult to establish. As we have seen, the *Amores* is the first work Ovid claims to have recited publicly, and this must indeed have been one of his very first poetic undertakings (see above, *Tr.* 4.10.59–60). But Ovid simultaneously confesses that in his youth he 'wrote a lot, but that which [he] found imperfect, [he] let the flames improve' (*Tr.* 4.10.61–2), and this claim seems to be substantiated by the introductory epigram of the *Amores* (*ipsius epigramma*), where the poet claims to have reduced the original five-book work to one of only three. Furthermore, the second book of the *Amores* refers to his now lost tragedy *Medea* and the single *Heroides* (*Am.* 2.18.13–14, 19–34), which makes it plausible that the extant *Amores* is a second edition, that might well have been begun before but finished after Ovid wrote *Medea* and the single *Heroides*. As a consequence, the single *Heroides* antedates the extant version of the *Amores*.

Curiously, there seems to be a reference to the *Ars amatoria* as well in the second book of the *Amores* (*Am.* 2.18.19–20). The implication that the *Ars amatoria* was produced before the *Amores* is hard to assess, since the *Ars amatoria* establishes a chronology of fiction by means of numerous allusions to 'previous' events that take place in the *Amores*.[5] To complicate matters still more, the last date that it seems possible to establish for the *Ars amatoria* (*c.*AD 2, cf. 1.177–212) coincides with that of the *Remedia amoris* (155–8), which certainly reads as a sequel to the *Ars amatoria*.[6] These complications do indeed hamper attempts to establish a clear-cut chronological order for Ovid's love elegies. At the same time the same complications also attractively suggest that not only did Ovid compose – or at least modify – all of these works more or less simultaneously, he may also at some point (around AD 2) have published them in a joint edition.[7]

In the *Ars amatoria* (3.205–8) there is furthermore a reference to Ovid's *Medicamina faciei femineae* ('Make-Up for Female Beauty'). This didactic work can rightly be categorized among Ovid's love elegies, but the extant fragment is arguably more concerned with *cultus* ('cultivation'/'culture') than the theme of love, although the two are cognate (cf. *Rem. am.* 45 and 50, and *Ars* 3.101 and *passim*).[8] The final work that belongs with Ovid's love elegies is the double epistles (16–21), often entitled *Heroides* despite (naturally) featuring as many heroes as heroines.[9] Persuasive arguments

[5] Cf. e.g. *Ars* 1.135–62 and *Am.* 3.2; *Ars* 1.417–36 and *Am.* 1.8; *Ars* 2.547–52 and *Am.* 2.5; *Ars* 2.169–72 and *Am.* 1.7.

[6] For the date of the *Amores*, see McKeown (1987) 74, n. 1. For the relationship between the *Amores*, the *Ars amatoria* and the *Remedia amoris*, see Syme (1978) 13–20, Murgia, (1986a) 80, 86, *passim*, (1986b) 203, Hollis (1977) xiii, Cameron (1995) 116 and Gibson (2003) 39–43.

[7] Syme (1978) 20, Harrison (2002) 84.

[8] Cf. Myerowitz (1985).

[9] Cf. Kenney (1996) 1, n. 1.

suggest that the double epistles were produced in Ovid's exilic period, which would imply that Ovid engaged in love elegy from the very beginning of his poetic career to its very end.[10] More important, perhaps, is that the single *Heroides* (*c.*2, 400 lines), the *Amores* (*c.*2, 400 lines), the three books of the *Ars amatoria* (*c.*2, 400 lines), the *Remedia amoris* (*c.*800 lines) and the double *Heroides* (*c.*1, 600 lines) represent almost ten thousand verses in total, an epic *quantum* (cf. again *Rem. am.* 395–6) matching that of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In the following we shall explore the world of Latin love elegy that these works constitute.

## The single *Heroides*: Latin love elegy is *puella* poetry

At first glance, Ovid's single *Heroides* bear little resemblance to the love elegies composed by his elegiac precursors. Ovid makes no secret of this, choosing rather to vaunt the originality of his *opus*, in a passage where he imagines that a future admirer will recommend his *Heroides* thus (*Ars* 3.345–6):

> '. . . uel tibi composita cantetur EPISTVLA uoce;
> ignotum hoc aliis ille nouauit opus.'
> (*Ars* 3.345–6)

> '. . . or you could have a LETTER of well-composed words sung to you; he made that an original work, previously unknown to all others.'

The *Heroides* are indeed a novel creation that consist of versified letters, purportedly written by legendary heroines who address absent husbands and lovers and who are all referred to in Greek and Roman literature: Penelope, famous from Homer's *Odyssey*, writes to Odysseus (*Her.* 1); Phyllis, probably alluded to in Callimachus (fr. 556 Pf.), writes to Demophoon, (*Her.* 2); Briseis, famous from Homer's *Iliad*, writes to Achilles (*Her.* 3); Phaedra writes to Hippolytus, both famous from Euripides' eponymous tragedy

[10] In particular two features of the double *Heroides* suggest that they were written late in Ovid's career: the usage of *nec* in the sense of *et ne* in the introduction of direct speech, which Ovid applies only here and in the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*; and three instances of polysyllabic pentameter endings (*Her.* 16.290, 17.16 and 19.202), found only at *Fast.* 5.582 and 6.660 and in the exile poetry, cf. Courtney (1965) 63–4, Kenney (1996) 21–22 and Platnauer (1951) 16–17. Furthermore, Platnauer (1951) 9–10 observes the frequency of weak caesurae in the third foot of the hexameter in the double *Heroides* (*c.* 3.6%) and the exile poetry, including *Ibis* (*c.* 4%), while the works of Ovid's early poetry has a higher frequency of the same caesura (between 7.5 and 9%). There are also interpretative reasons to view this work in connection with Ovid's exile elegies, cf. e.g. Ingleheart (2010b) 21 and Barchiesi and Hardie (2010) 63.

(*Her.* 4); Oenone, attested in Hellenistic sources,[11] writes to Paris (*Her.* 5); Hypsipyle, famous from Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* and maybe the lost Latin translation of this epic by Terentius Varro Atacinus, writes to Jason (*Her.* 6); Dido, famous from Virgil's *Aeneid*, writes to Aeneas (*Her.* 7); Hermione, attested in Sophocles' lost, eponymous tragedy and Euripides' *Andromache*, writes to Orestes (*Her.* 8); Deianira, famous from Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, writes to Hercules (*Her.* 9); Ariadne, famous from Catullus' *carmen* 64, writes to Theseus (Her. 10); Canace, attested in Euripides' lost tragedy *Aeolus*, writes to Macareus (*Her.* 11); Medea, famous from Euripides' eponymous tragedy, Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, perhaps Terentius Varro Atacinus' lost Latin version and Ovid's own lost tragedy, writes to Jason (*Her.* 12); Laodamia, featuring in Catullus' *carmen* 68, (probably) Euripides' lost *Protesilaus* and Laevius' fragmentary iambic dimeter poem *Protesilaodamia*, writes to Protesilaus (*Her.* 13); Hypermestra, known from several of Aeschylus' tragedies and Horace's *carmen* 3.11, writes to Lynceus (*Her.* 14); and finally, Sappho, famous in her own right as a lyric poet and attested in Attic and Latin comedy, writes to Phaon (*Her.* 15).[12]

From this brief outline it is evident that the single *Heroides* are heavily indebted to non-elegiac genres, primarily epic, tragedy and neoteric lyric. By focussing on the theme of love and the mode of lament within works that belong to the 'great' (and some 'minor') genres mentioned above, Ovid seems to locate generic loopholes through which he can translate the heroines into the world of elegy.[13] The main vehicle of this translation is the epistolary form of the heroines' poems, which famously has a pendant in Propertius' elegiac letter 4.3, in which Arethusa writes to her absent husband Lycotas.[14] Both in Propertius 4.3 and the single *Heroides* the act of writing letters fits into what might be called erotic-elegiac fundamentalism, where life consists of only one of two activities, depending on the beloved's presence or absence: making love or writing about love. The occasional improbability of the writing situation (e.g. *Her.* 10.135–40), as well as self-designations like

[11] Parthenius tells the story in *Amat. narr.* 4; cf. Lightfoot (2009) 558–61. Ps.-Lycophron mentions Oenone in *Alexandra* 57–68. Quintus of Smyrna later wrote of Paris and Oenone in his *Posthomerica* (10).

[12] Comic fragments and titles of relevance are Alexis (135; 136; 137 K-A), Amipsias (15 K-A), Amphis (32 K-A), Antiphanes (139; 140; 194 K-A), Diphilus (52 K-A; 70), Ephippus (20 K-A), Menander (fr. 258 Körte), Timocles (32 K-A), and Turpilius (2.113–18 Ribbeck; 29–37 Rychlewska). The ascription of *Heroides* 15 to Ovid is disputed, cf. Thorsen (forthcoming).

[13] The verb *queri* (to lament) is far more frequent in the single *Heroides* than in any other work by Ovid; cf. Anderson (1973) 82, n. 11.

[14] Prop. 4.3 is normally regarded as a model for Ovid's *Heroides*, but considering the chronological order of Ovid's work and Propertius' fourth book, the possibility remains that the latter is a response to the former. I owe this observation to Stephen Harrison.

*scribentis imago* (*Her.* 7.183 and *Her.* 11.5, 'the writer's image') subtly disclose the fiction of these letters, which of course are poems. Fittingly, a real woman poet, or rather, the woman poet, Sappho, purportedly writes the final elegiac epistle. Sappho also allows for the insertion of meta-elegiac reflections – a hallmark of Ovidian love elegy – into the single *Heroides*, as she ponders on the relationship between life and poetry (*Her.* 15.1–8; 79–84), defining elegy as *flebile carmen* (*Her.* 15.7, 'tearful composition').

Transformed and transported into Ovid's *Heroides*, the outlook, behaviour and experiences of the heroines resemble those of the *poeta-amator*, or the *poetria-amatrix,* as Holzberg (2002b: 71) has dubbed the concept (cf. *Her.* 15.183). Each letter represents a kind of *paraklausithyron* ('lament by the closed door'), except that in the single *Heroides* the door which conventionally bars the lover from the beloved is most frequently replaced by the sea over which the hero has sailed away, leaving the heroine in the situation of an *exclusa amans* ('rejected lover'). There are examples of the elegiac topos of *seruitium amoris* ('slavery of love', especially Briseis, cf. *Her.* 3.75–80, 101–102) and among the numerous instances that recall the topos of *militia amoris* ('soldiery of love') the two most arresting are perhaps those of Hypsipyle and Canace. The queen Hypsipyle is experienced in real warfare; she has led the army of women who killed all the men on her island of Lemnos and readily transfers military jargon to the field of love when she calls Jason's new wife Medea her *hostis* (*Her.* 6.82, 'enemy'). Canace is in an entirely different situation; she has no experience of war, as far as we can tell, and yet when she gives birth to the child she has conceived with her brother Macareus, she describes herself as a *rudis . . . et noua miles* (*Her.* 11.48, 'raw military recruit').

Remarkably, Hypsipyle's *hostis* and Canace's *miles* (soldier) are the only instances in the Latin language where these nouns are attested in the feminine. Rosati's astute observation that the *Heroides* is *L'elegia al femminile* ('women's version of elegy') is thus rendered true even on a lexical level (Rosati 1992). The implications of Ovid's elegiac 'feminization' have at least as much to do with genre as with gender. One of the most striking features of the new kind of poetry that emerges concurrently with Catullus, and is distilled into the genre of Latin love elegy by Propertius, Tibullus, Sulpicia and Lygdamus, is the figure of the *puella*. There are attestations of Greek-style predilection for pederasty even in Roman elegy, but the Latin *puer* remains totally eclipsed by the *puella*.[15] The term not only denotes a

[15] E.g. Tib. 1.4, 1.8; Valgius in Hor. *Carm.* 2.9; Ov. *Am.* 1.1.20 and *Ars* 2.864; also relevant are Catullus' Juventius poems. See Luck (1969) 83–99; relevant is also Miller (2004) 60–94.

morally and psychologically complex female figure, which vacillates between being the distinct other and similar for the elegist, but also occurs with such frequency in this poetry that it arguably assumes the function of a generic marker. Ovid's *ignotum opus*, with its astonishing range of heroines, who incessantly use the term *puella* about themselves and other women, thus highlights a crucial characteristic of Latin love elegy, namely that it is *puella* poetry.

## The extant *Amores*: love elegy by the book and beyond

If the single *Heroides* tend to be unexpectedly elegiac (cf. Spoth 1992), the extant *Amores* have 'love elegy' written all over them. The title itself seems to be a tribute to the canonical proto-elegist Gallus, who probably also called his elegies *Amores* (Servius *ad Buc.* 10.1). Furthermore, Ovid's *Amores* are set in the contemporary world of Rome – with plenty of political poignancy – and the protagonist lover (*amator*) throughout the work is *Naso poeta* (*Am.* 2.1.2, Ovid the poet). He conventionally defends his own *nequitia* (*Am.* 2.1.2, 'morally reproachable incapacity and laziness') in the face of traditional masculine ideals (*Am.* 1.15.3, *mos patrum*) and produces *recusationes* ('excuses') not only for being a poet instead of something useful like a soldier or lawyer, but also, as a poet, for not writing of serious matters. But the poet claims that he must love and write about his love for (predominantly) Corinna, his *puella*, who has a meaningful name – notably that of the most famous female poet after Sappho,[16] which simultaneously is Greek for 'little girl'[17] – and appealing body language, but otherwise is virtually silent.[18] Nevertheless, she behaves like a wilful *domina* and only rarely accepts the advances of the poet, who suffers *seruitium amoris* (*Am.* 2.17), but also actively engages in *militia amoris* (*Am.* 1.9), exposing himself to the hardships befalling an *exclusus amator* (*Am.* 1.6) and complaining at the closed door of his beloved (*paraklausithyron*).

By including all these features, Ovid's *Amores* abide by the rules of Latin love elegy, which apply to all the works of the canonical Roman erotic elegists. But only in Ovid does Elegia appear in person:[19] the embodiment of the genre emerges as a luscious, slightly limping female figure (*Am.* 3.1.7–10) in a competition with another personification of a genre, the more serious Tragoedia. The two divinities contend for Ovid's poetic favours, and as

[16] See Keith (1994) 32. Regarding Sappho and Corinna it is interesting to note that there were in fact statues of the two poets in ancient Rome; see Thorsen 2012.
[17] Cf. Hardie (2002b) 2.
[18] Cf. Prop. 2.3.19–21, McKeown (1987) 19–24, Hardie (2002b) 2.
[19] Cf. Perkins (2011).

might be expected, Elegia triumphs (if only for the moment). The arguments she uses to win Ovid over are perhaps more surprising. First, she stresses that both she and the god of love are *leuis* (*Am.* 3.1.41) and that her gentle touch (that of a procuress) has refined even Venus. Furthermore, she reminds Ovid of how she has taught Corinna to dupe her husband and draws attention to the distress and degradation she, Elegia, continues to suffer – often in the shape of roughly treated letters – for the sake of love (*Am.* 3.1.41–58).

Ovid's Elegia is sexy (like the *Amores*), didactic (like the *Ars amatoria*) and not afraid of getting her hands dirty, even if that means assuming the shape of a common letter (like the *Heroides*).[20] This *leuis Elegia* seems alien to the definition of elegy as *flebile carmen* (*Her.* 15.7), but is later in the *Amores* juxtaposed with a second portrayal (*Am.* 3.9), where Ovid bids her to loosen her hair in grief at the bier of Tibullus:

> flebilis indignos, Elegia, solue capillos:
> a, nimis ex uero nunc tibi nomen erit!
> (*Am.* 3.9.3–4)
>
> Tearful Elegia, loosen the hair that you should not have had to loosen: ah, too much of a truth will your name now become.

The distribution of poems that contain meta-elegiac reflections and dramatizations constitutes one of the more important structures of the *Amores*. Metapoetic reflections are indeed embedded in the portrayal of Elegia, too, but also – and more explicitly – in the framing poems of each of the three books of the *Amores*. When the first book opens, Cupid has laughingly attacked Ovid and his fine intentions, reducing his hexameter on Virgilian *arma* (*Am.*1.1, 'wars') to a pentameter characterizing the present elegy.[21] Ovid reproaches the god of love for stepping out of line and asks *an, quod ubique, tuum est?* (*Am.* 1.1.15, 'or is everything everywhere yours?') The question seems rhetorical, but considering the imperialist strategy towards other, traditionally greater genres on behalf of love elegy in the *Heroides*, the question can also be genuine. The all-embracing ambition of the god of love, who finally shoots his dart into Ovid's heart, has a pendant in the finale of the first book, where Ovid asserts his place in the all-embracing history of Graeco-Roman literature (*Am.* 1.15.9–42).

The humorous drama of *Am.* 1.1 also stages a *recusatio* for not writing literature of a higher order, most prominently represented by epic and tragedy.

[20] For Ovid's *Elegia* in the context of Propertius and Augustan politics, see Wyke (2002) 115–54.

[21] For an attractive disclosure of the ambiguous vocabulary of *Am.* 1.1, see Kennedy (1993) 58–63.

And at *Am.* 2.1 it is precisely another attempt at epic, more precisely that of a *Gigantomachia* ('Clash of the Titans'), that must cede to elegy in a poem that also stages a topos of Latin love elegy, namely the *paraklausithyron*. Towards the end of the book we find the next poem with meta-elegiac qualities, *Amores* 2.18, in which Ovid, now an incurable love poet, challenges his epic-composing friend Macer to convert to elegy. Finally, two poems, *Am.* 3.1 and *Am.* 3.15, frame the third book, where the choice between tragedy and elegy is dramatized.

Between the framing poems of the *Amores* – which first invoke all genres versus elegy in book one, then epic versus elegy in book two, and finally tragedy versus elegy in book three – a love story evolves, not so much chronologically, perhaps, as thematically (Holzberg (2002b) 46–53).[22] McKeown (1987: 92–4) has however pointed out a strikingly coherent line of development that entails both love and lament, but not quite in the traditional elegiac manner. In *Am.* 1.3 Ovid declares that he will always be faithful to his beloved *puella* and not play 'love's acrobat' (*desultor amoris*),[23] and in *Am.* 1.5, the first poem in which Corinna is named, the two of them are in bed. In book two, however, Ovid confesses that he does have an eye for most women (*Am.* 2.4) and soon thereafter he reports to 'love' two girls at the same time (*Am.* 2.10). Each is more beautiful than the other, both are more pleasing; what can Ovid do with such abundance – for which he assures us he is man enough – but to wish to die of sex? And die in the embrace of a woman he will, but not in the way he imagines: at *Am.* 3.7 he finds himself in bed with a most able and attractive *puella*, but despite (as he brags) having recently satisfied Chlide twice, Pitho thrice and Corinna no less than nine times – a Catullan hyperbole (Catull. 32.8) – in one short night (*Am.* 3.7.23–6), still his member is lying *praemortua* (*Am.* 3.7.65, 'dead before time') and *turpiter languidiora hesterna rosa* (*Am.* 3.7.66, 'shamefully more drooping than the rose of yesterday').[24] Whatever the intentions, there is a lesson to learn from that!

## The *Ars amatoria*: Latin love elegy is the art of love

In the *Ars amatoria* Ovid wants to help readers to be wise lovers who avoid failure, are loved in return and enjoy the pleasures of sex. With successful sex as the ultimate goal, Ovid sets out, entitling himself both *praeceptor amoris*

[22] For a splendid analysis of the traditionally most 'offensive' poems (e.g. about female baldness *Am.* 1.14 and abortion 2.13 and 2.14) included in this 'love-story', see James (2003) 155–211.

[23] See however Gibson (Chapter 13) in this volume. [24] Cf. Sharrock (1995).

(*Ars* 1.17, 'professor of love') and *Naso magister* (*Ars* 2.744, 3.812, 'Ovid the teacher'), to coach men (books one and two) and women (book three) through the stages of finding, seducing and enjoying a lover. By choosing the theme of love, Ovid aligns the *Ars amatoria* with the tradition of trivial sex manuals allegedly written by women (cf. Gibson 2003: 14–19). At the same time – by choosing a poetic form (the elegiac distich, cf. *Ars* 1.264), by rivalling the prototypically didactic poet Hesiod (*Ars* 1.25–8) and by inserting – almost as a slip of the tongue – a cosmogony (*Ars* 2.467–80), a hallmark of the didactic genre (cf. e.g. Hes. *Theog.* 115–20, Lucr. 5.416–508) – Ovid makes it clear that this time he has set out to conquer this 'great' genre for Latin love elegy.

Closer examination reveals that Ovid in his *Ars amatoria* continues to appropriate other non-elegiac genres *sub specie Amoris*. The all-pervasive erotic perspective seems to be vouched for by Venus, whom Ovid invokes in the first (*Ars* 1.30) and second book (*Ars* 2.15) and who finally appears to him when he writes the third book (*Ars* 3.43–56). Venus' epiphany is the last of three instances where a god addresses Ovid as poet. In the first book (*Ars* 1.525) Bacchus requires Ovid's attention, and the poet responds by telling how the god, accompanied by bacchantes, Silenus and satyrs, fell in love with Ariadne on the island where Theseus had abandoned her (cf. *Her.* 10). The narrative serves numerous purposes: erotically it provides a divine example of male desire and rape (cf. Catull. 64, *Fast.* 3.459–517, cf. Conte, 1986b: 59–63); metonymically it illustrates the usefulness of (moderate quantities of) wine in the process of seduction (*Ars* 1.565–9); and metapoetically it underscores that Bacchus presides as a vatic deity not only over tragedy, but also over its sexualized relative, the satyr play, in which Silenus is a stock figure.

The second book of the *Ars amatoria* opens with Ovid's appraisal of the god Apollo, who then, almost halfway through, actually appears to the poet (*Ars* 2.493–510). Both Bacchus and Apollo are patron gods of poetry in general (cf. *Her.* 15.23–4, *Am.* 1.3.11), but whereas drama is predominantly Bacchus' genre, Apollo is mainly the 'protector of epic singers and lyre-players' (Hes. *Theog.* 94), plus oracular verse and philosophy. Apollo has a habit of manifesting himself to poets (e.g. Callim. *Aet.* 1.1.21–4; Virg. *Ecl.* 6.3–5; Prop. 3.3.13–16; Hor. *Carm.* 4.15.1–4), urging them to pursue his different interests. In Ovid's *Ars amatoria* the god, conspicuously vatic – lyre in hand, laureate and *uates uidendus* (*Ars* 2.497, 'looking like a bard') – is both oracular and philosophical: he instructs the poet to 'know himself' and wants him to break off his cosmological excursion (which has been dangerously close to a natural history of beastly desires) so that he can pursue

his teachings.[25] Fittingly, philosophical reflections on decay and mortality permeate the whole of this book, where Ovid, not denying the power of appearances in the game of love, asserts that inner qualities (enhanced, we will be pleased to know, by the knowledge of Greek and Latin, cf. *Ars* 2.121–2) are far more important: *ut ameris, amabilis esto* (*Ars* 2.107, 'in order to be loved, you must be loveable').[26]

Finally, Ovid chronicles his encounter with Venus. The goddess has ordered him to teach women as well as men and thus follow the example of the lyric poet Stesichorus; he was famously blinded by the Muses when he wrote poetry chastizing Menelaus' unfaithful wife Helen, but regained his vision when he subsequently composed palinodes in her praise. Ovid, who has already acquitted Helen of all blame (*Helenen ego crimine soluo*, *Ars* 2.371), rises enthusiastically to the occasion, not only to teach women to love the right men, but also to teach them about Augustan Rome – replete with political tensions – and himself as a poet. Towards the end of the poem (*Ars* 3.769–70) Ovid again reports the words of Venus as he hesitates with embarrassment before the task, assigned to him by the goddess herself, of describing different sexual positions, an undertaking he eventually embarks on – with bravado (*Ars* 3.771–88).

The idea that love can be taught is (still today) profoundly unromantic and seems to undermine the love elegist's very *raison d'être*. But by exploring the complex of love as systematically as the Roman erotic elegists do, they necessarily acquire a rare expertise in the field (cf. *Tr.* 2.447–66). Ovid insists that it is precisely his personal experience that enables him to appropriate even the didactic genre for love elegy (*Ars* 1.129–30): he has made his mistakes, and learned from them. An inevitable consequence of this profoundly elegiac insight is that the carefully crafted *effet de réel* of the genre is simultaneously disclosed as an act of art.

## The *Remedia amoris*: suicidal tendencies

The *Remedia amoris* opens with a dramatic scene: Amor, god of love, has just read the title and furiously accuses Ovid of waging war against him (*Rem. am.* 1–2). In Ovid's ensuing defence he reassures the god that his *Remedia amoris* are only meant for the extreme cases of lovesickness that result in suicide (*Rem. am.* 15–22) and that he will not interfere with anyone who loves happily (*Rem. am.* 13–14). Love is fine, Ovid argues, but it has

[25] For the Augustan aspect of Apollo in *Ars* 2, see Miller (2009); for the Callimachean aspects of Apollo in *Ars* 2, see Sharrock (1994).
[26] Cf. Labate (1984).

nothing to do with death, since Amor is a peace-loving and playful deity, distant from all bloody atrocities (20, 23–4, 27–8), not unlike Elegia as she was portrayed in the *Amores* (3.1) and as she will reappear almost halfway through the *Remedia* (*Rem. am.* 379–80).

Ovid makes the connection between Amor and the genre of elegy, too, when he bids the god to continue to employ *iuuenes* (young men) and *puellae* (girls) in classical topoi of Latin love elegy, exemplified by the *paraklausithyron* and *furtiuus amor* ('stolen love'). Finally Ovid bids Amor: *modo blanditias rigido, modo iurgia, posti/ dicat et exclusus flebile cantet amans* (*Rem. am.* 35–6, 'let the shut-out lover both coax and swear at the unresponsive door and sing a tearful song').[27] But how is it possible to love happily at the same time as you are rejected and cry? There are at least two answers to this question: either Ovid, who often delights in the fine line between faking and aching, wants Amor to bid young people to act like elegiac lovers (as he does at e.g. *Ars* 1.611–12), or there is a genuine conflict at the heart of the poetic project of the *Remedia amoris*. In the following I will maintain the latter view.

One of the central lessons in the *Remedia amoris* is to unlearn to love women, but although Ovid keeps a sharp focus on saving lives by preventing heartache, he has such a hard time lecturing on how to be disgusted with girls that he literally begins to contradict himself: *'quam mala' dicebam 'nostrae sunt crura puellae'/ (nec tamen, ut uere confiteamur, erant)* (*Rem. am.* 317–18, cf. 319–20, 'I used to say "how ugly the legs of my girl are!" (And yet they were not, should I confess the truth)'). Ovid's denigration of the girl gains momentum only when he recalls her avarice, which enables him to reverse the arguments at *Ars* 2.657–62, proving yet again that a flaw can be an advantage – and vice versa – depending on the perspective.

What Ovid finds even more distressing than to teach men how to dislike girls is to instruct his readers not to read love poetry: *eloquar inuitus: teneros ne tange poetas; summoueo dotes impius ipse meas* (*Rem. am.* 757–8, 'I will speak against my will: do not touch the tender poets; I am sacrilegious and withdraw my own treasures (from you)'). Ovid then (re)produces a list (cf. *Ars* 3.329–34) of the erotic poets Callimachus, Philitas, Sappho, Anacreon and the Latin love elegists, before including himself thus: *et mea nescioquid carmina tale sonant* (*Rem. am.* 766, 'and my poems sound somewhat like these'). At this point, towards the end of the *Remedia amoris*, it is important to remember how the beginning of the work evokes all of Ovid's preceding elegiac compositions. The opening conflict with Amor recalls that of *Amores* 1.1, Ovid refers openly to the *Ars amatoria* (*Rem. am.* 43) and includes four

[27] Cf. *Her.* 15.7 and *Am.* 3.9.3.

of his *Heroides* in an exemplary catalogue of unhealthy love (*Rem. am.* 55–64, see also 591–608). The reader who is about to finish the *Remedia amoris* should now in hindsight grasp the severity of the conflict at the heart of the work, which is that Ovid's attempt to separate love from death is his own attempt at suicide as a poet.

## A couple in the end of love or: a couple in love in the end?

As we know, Ovid survived. But what about Latin love elegy? Firstly, Ovid did not regard himself as the last love elegist in the history of Latin literature (cf. *Tr.* 2.467–8, *Pont.* 4.16). Secondly, if Ovid wrote his double *Heroides* while in exile, the *Remedia amoris* was not a final farewell to the genre even within the framework of his own literary career. The double *Heroides* include Paris' letter to Helen (*Her.* 16) and Helen's reply (*Her.* 17); both characters are famous in general, but especially from Homer's *Iliad*; Leander's letter to Hero (*Her.* 18) and Hero's reply (*Her.* 19), a couple which features in Virgil's *Georgics*; and Acontius' letter to Cydippe (*Her.* 20) followed by Cydippe's reply (*Her.* 21), whose relationship is described in Callimachus' elegiac *Aetia*.[28]

The three couples embody very different kinds of loves: Paris and Helen commit adultery, Leander and Hero share true love (i.e. mutual and exclusive, innocent and forbidden) and Acontius and Cydippe will be united in (forced) marriage. This diversity of erotic relations is furthermore furnished with a variety of elegiac features. Alessandro Barchiesi (1993) has brilliantly shown how the letters of Acontius and Cydippe re-enact the Callimachean origins of Latin love elegy, in which reading and writing are key components, by entering on a sophisticated game of creative genealogies and original repetitions, all features essential to Augustan poetry. While Acontius and Cydippe thus reiterate the poetic starting point of the genre in question, Paris writes as if he has been an eager reader of both Ovid's *Amores* and *Ars amatoria* (cf. *Her.* 16.215–18) and Helen sympathizes with her rival Oenone, as well as Hypsipyle, Ariadne and Medea (*Her.* 17.193–6, 231–4), all abandoned heroines from the single *Heroides*.

The Heroidean version of the elegiac topos of the *paraklausithyron* is furthermore activated in the case of Leander and Hero, as they desperately long for each other on opposite sides of the Hellespont. The young lovers would normally enjoy the elegiac *furtiuus amor* each time Leander swam across the strait, guided by the light in Hero's tower. But on the night he writes his epistle, a week-long storm prevents him from swimming. A sailor

[28] Cf. Hunter in this volume (Chapter 1).

dares to tempt the waters and Leander sends his letter off with him, assuring Hero that he would have jumped into the boat himself, were it not that his parents (who apparently would disapprove of their liaison) were watching the departure. Hero then receives Leander's letter, and replies.

Among the many meta-elegiac features of the letters of Leander and Hero is their shared obsession with death. True, romantic love knows no limits, not even those imposed by the end of life; this is fundamentally why (romantic) love and (plaintive) elegy are inseparable. Leander relishes his fantasies about his future death (*Her.* 18.169–79, 189–200) because it would prove his love for Hero. Her terrified fascination with the same deadly scenario – mediated through an ominous dream – reveals that she has got the message (*Her.* 19.191–204).

It was at dawn when the lamp in her tower was dying down that Hero had her dream vision. Although she does not attribute much importance to the detail as she writes her letter, it is of course fatal: at the same time as the flame flickers, Leander is swimming towards her, but as his guiding light vanishes, he gets lost and drowns. His body will soon be washed ashore on Hero's side of the strait, where she will find him and commit suicide by throwing herself from her tower.

The timing of Leander and Hero's letters is thus crucial to their tragedy, which is a tragedy that holds insights into the genre of love elegy. As in the case of the re-enacting closure of the letters of Acontius and Cydippe, reading and writing are key elements here too. Hero reads Leander's letter as he throws himself into the waves for the very last time, while she writes her reply virtually as he dies, and when her letter is written, she will soon be dead as well. The epistolary elegies of Leander and Hero thus frame a moment of death, but this death is at the same time overruled, as the lives that are lost during the time it takes to read and write the texts in question are simultaneously preserved in the eternal now of literature.

## Further reading

The bibliography on Ovid's love elegies is enormous and the following titles are some highlights. First, Latin texts: for the *Heroides*, the only complete edition (1–21) and commentary remains Palmer and Purser (1898, reprinted with introduction by D. Kennedy 2005). Dörrie (1971 and 1975) is a somewhat more bewildering critical edition of *Her.* 1–21, with plenty of useful material for the patient reader. Splendid is Knox (1995), covering *Her.* 1, 2, 5, 7, 10, 11 and 15, as is Kenney (1996), covering *Her.* 16–21. In Italian there is a most commendable series published by Felice le Monnier and most recently de Gruyter of editions and commentaries on select *Heroides*: 1–3

(Barchiesi, 1992), 7 (Piazzi 2007), 8 (Pestelli 2007), 9 (Casali 1995), 10 (Battistella 2010), 12 (Bessone 1997), 13 (Reggia 2011) and 18–19 (Rosati 1996b). Kenney (1995) has brilliantly edited all of Ovid's amatory works (OCT), as has Ramírez de Verger (2003, BT). For *Amores* only, McKeown's Latin text and commentaries on book 1 and 2 are indispensable (1987–98), while Booth (1991) has produced a fine commentary to book 2 and Ingleheart and Radice have composed a fresh commentary to select poems of *Amores* book 3 (2011). Hollis (1977), Janka (1997), in German, and Gibson (2003) each provide highly valuable commentaries on the three books of the *Ars amatoria*.

Both the single and double *Heroides* are available along with the *Amores* in Latin with en face translation by Showerman (1977), revised by Goold (LCL), as are the *Ars amatoria and Remedia amoris* translated by Mozley (1929) (LCL). Furthermore, there are English translations of the *Amores* by Lee (1968), of the *Heroides* by Isbell (PC, 1990), the *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris* by Melville (WC, 1998) and of the *Amores*, the *Heroides* and the *Remedia amoris* by Slavitt (2011).

Among overview works that present Ovid's entire output I recommend Hardie (2002b), Holzberg (2002b) and Volk (2010), which include stimulating outlines of Ovid's erotic-elegiac phase within the framework of his career. Conversely, Harrison (2002) is an original and compelling interpretation of Ovid's career, including the *Metamorphoses*, from an elegiac point of view. Spoth (1992) systematically explores the elegiac nature of the single *Heroides* for those who read German, while Rosati (1992), in Italian, and Fulkerson (2009), in English, are seminal and highly accessible regarding the crucial, Heroidean connection between the female voice and the genre of erotic elegy. The *Heroides*, *Amores* and the *Ars amatoria* are all at the centre of attention in Scivoletto's study (1976), in Italian, as are the same works, plus *Medicamina faciei feminea*, in Sabot's more extensive francophone monograph published the same year (1976), as well as in Thorsen (forthcoming), in English. Deremetz and Fabre-Serris (1999) offer, in French, a wide range of approaches to the *Heroides* together with the *Amores*. Boyd (1997) is a comprehensive study, which in its entirety is dedicated to Ovid's *Amores*. Luck (1969) on the *Amores* remains remarkably valuable, while Kennedy (1993) is brilliantly thought-provoking. Armstrong (2005) and Liveley (2005) give thorough presentations of Ovid's entire amatory output, which is explored in relation to Augustan politics by Davis (2006). Sharrock (1994) offers a sharp analysis of the second book, which includes plenty of sophisticated reflections on the genre of elegy. Conte's study (1989) is seminal for the understanding of the genre of Latin love elegy and for the *Remedia amoris*, and should be read together with Fulkerson (2004). For

both the *Ars amatoria* and the *Remedia amoris*, see the rich volume edited by Gibson, Green and Sharrock (2006). Barchiesi (1993) on both the single and double *Heroides* is highly recommended, as are – for the latter – Kenney (1996), Barchiesi (1999) and Acosta-Hughes (2009). In general all three companions to Ovid, Boyd (2002), Hardie (2002a) and Knox (2009) remain highly useful for the scholar as well as the student of Ovid's love elegies.