

**Lecture-seminar 3: *Amores* 3.7 and the creative-erotic potential of impotence****1. The poet's / lover's stamina: sizing Ovid up in *Amores* Book 3**

*Amores* 3.7, the drama of the poet-lover's sudden impotence while in bed with a girl, is 84 lines long. Compare:

3.1: 70 lines	3.9: 68 lines
3.2: <b>84</b> lines	3.10: <u>48</u> lines
3.3: <u>48</u> lines	3.11a: 32 lines
3.4: <u>48</u> lines	3.11b: 52 lines ( <b>84</b> in all)
3.5: 46 lines	3.12: <u>44</u> lines
3.6: <b>106</b> lines (central swell)	3.13: 36 lines (flagging now)
3.7: <b>84</b> lines (still big!)	3.14: 50 lines
3.8: 66 lines	3.15: 20 lines (burnt out)

- A 'thick middle'? *Amores* book 2 has 19 poems; books 1 and 3 have 15.
- **Key idea.** *Amores* 3 as a whole is a book in which (sexual-poetic) failure and vulnerability are enmeshed with (sexual-poetic) success and virility.

**2. Circuits, detours and 'other places' at the races**

- Am.*3.2.69: 'Tragic me, her guy has circled the post (*meta*) in a wide curve!' Compare *Am.*3.15.2: 'The last turning post (*meta*) is grazed by my elegies' (*raditur haec elegis ultima meta meis*)
- Am.*3.2.3-4: *risit, et argutis quiddam promisit ocellis./ hoc satis est, alio cetera rede loco!* ('She smiled, and with speaking eyes she promised I know not what. / That's enough, give me the rest in **another place!**').
- Cf. *Am.*1.5.25: *cetera quis nescit?* ('who doesn't know the rest?')
- And *Am.*3.14.17: *est qui nequitiam locus exigat* ('there is a place that demands wantonness.')

**3. Desire is always perverse, and cannot be legislated?**

- Am.*3.4.17: *nitimur in vetitum semper cupimusque negata* ('we always strive for what is forbidden and covet what is denied us.')
- Am.*3.4.25-6: *quiduid servatur cupimus magis, ipsaque furem / cura vocat. pauci quod sinit alter amat* ('Whatever is guarded we desire all the more, and care itself invites the thief.')

- c) 3.4.31: *iuvat inconcessa voluptas* ('Pleasure delights in the forbidden.')
- e) *Am.3.4.29: nec proba fit, quam vir servat, sed adultera cara* ('She whom her husband guards is not made honest, but becomes instead a mistress much desired.')

#### 4. The (long) precedent of *Amores* 3.6

- **Key idea:** the river in flood figures raging lust / arousal, inspiring an overflow of elegiac lament. Ovid's failure to cross is a poetic tour-de-force. But will swollen elegy ever lay claim to the kleos/fama of those 'bigger' genres (epic and tragedy, cf. *Am.3.1*)?

*Am.3.6.87-8: quid mutua differs / gaudia?* – 'Why do you defer the joys I am to share?'

#### 5. The 'other place', through the keyhole (*Amores* 3.14.17-26)

There's a place (*locus*) that demands naughtiness: fill it (*inple*)  
with all delights, let shame be far away!  
Likewise when you leave off, straightaway forget  
all lasciviousness: leave the sin there, in your bed.  
There, don't let your slip (*tunica*) make you over-shy,  
or not allow your thigh to press against a thigh: cf.3.7.10  
there, let tongue **be buried** between rosy lips,  
and let desire shape (*figuret*) a thousand ways (*modos... mille*) to love:  
there, don't let your words and sounds (*voces*) of delight cease (*cessent*),  
let the naughty bed tremble at your agility!

6. 'The edges of Ovid's elegiac collections are marked by a method of structuring editorial meaning which emphasizes circularity, open-endedness, and renegotiating cultures of reading, ...' (Jansen 2014 *The Roman Paratext*, p.280).

#### 7. MORE *amor*, MORE *mora*

*Am.3.7.80: nec mora...* (without delay)

*Remedia Amoris*, 83-4

*nam mora dat vires: teneras mora percoquit uvas  
et validas segetes, quae fuit herba, facit.*

(For delay adds strength: delay ripens the tender grapes and makes what was once young shoots strong crops).

*Remedia* 91-2

*principiis obsta; sero medicina paratur,  
cum mala per longas convaluere moras.*

(Oppose beginnings/at the beginning; treatment is applied too late when troubles have grown strong through long delays.)

## 8. Pacing back and for in the enclosure of femininity/desire?

Phyllis at *Remedia* 55-6, 591-608

55-6: Phyllis would have lived, had she used my counsels / and taken more often the path she took nine times.

599ff: There was narrow path, overcast by the long shadows, by which she often went down to the sea. For the ninth time she trod that unhappy path!

Cf. *Am.* 3.7.25-6: I remember Corinna requesting, and me supplying, nine times in one short night!

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## Seminar

### *Amores* 3.7

Not that I think she isn't lovely, and so cultured,  
not that I haven't often wished for her in my dreams!  
Yet I held her, all in vain, completely slack,  
lay there a limp reproach, a burden to the bed:  
though I really wanted it, and the girl wanted it too, 5  
I could get no more from my exhausted parts.  
She threw her ivory arms around my neck,  
arms whiter than the Scythian snows,  
struggling, she inserted kisses with eager tongue,  
and slipped a wanton thigh beneath my thigh, 10  
and spoke coaxing words, **called me her master**,  
and all those usual words that might help.  
Yet my member, as if touched by cold hemlock,  
was sluggish and denied my every effort:  
I lay an inert body, a sham, a useless weight, 15  
unsure whether I was a body or a ghost.  
What old age will come, to me, if it does come,  
when youth itself fails me in this way?  
Ah, I'm ashamed of my years: why youth and strength  
if my girl can't feel my youth or strength? 20  
She rose like a holy priestess going to the eternal flame,  
like an elder sister leaving a beloved brother.  
Yet I lately had golden Chlide twice, Pitho  
the beautiful and Libas, three times without stopping:  
I remember Corinna, in one short night, demanded 25 So this isn't Corinna, then?!

I keep it up for her nine times together.  
Has some Thessalian poison weakened my cursed body?  
Do charms and herbs hurt my poor self now,  
some witch transfixes my name in scarlet wax  
and sticks fine needles right into my liver? 30

Charms turn the stricken wheat to barren grasses,  
 charms stop the stricken waters at their source,  
 through incantations oaks drop acorns, vines their grapes,  
 and the apples fall down without being shaken.  
 Why shouldn't I be stopped, and my **vigour numbed** 35  
 by magic arts, my body by that made unable to endure?  
 Add shame to it: the shame itself, of it, hurt me:  
 that was the secondary cause of my failure.  
 But what a girl, whom I only saw and touched!  
 Just as her slip itself touches her. 40  
 At her touch Nestor might be made young again,  
 and Tithonus stronger in old age.  
 I held her, but she did not hold a man.  
 What can I think of now to beg for in prayer?  
 I think the great gods were sorry they gave the gift 45  
 that I've made use of so shamefully.  
 I wanted to be welcomed – I was truly welcome:  
 to kiss – I kissed: to be near her – I was.  
 What was such good luck worth? Why have and not enjoy?  
 Why eager for wealth and not possess its power? 50  
 I'm parched like Tantalus, silent now, in the midst  
 of fruit and water, he who can never touch it.  
 Has anyone ever risen early from his girl  
 so he can go straight to the gods and pray? 55  
 No, she's seductive: squandered so many kisses on me:  
 urged me on with every one of her powers!  
 She could have moved heavy oak-trees,  
 stirred hard adamant, or the deafest stones.  
 She'd have moved all men, all living things for sure: 60  
 but I was neither man nor living, as once before.  
What joy can deaf ears have when Phemis sings?  
What joy can blind Thamyras have in painted things?  
 But **what silent delights my mind invented!**  
 What did I not imagine, all the various ways! 65  
 But still my sex lay there prematurely dead,  
 shamefully, limper than a rose picked yesterday –  
 Look, now, he's lively at the wrong time, able,  
 now he's demanding work and service.  
 Why can't you lie down modestly, worst part of me? 70  
 You've caught me like this with your promises before.  
**You failed your master:** I was left weaponless, through you,  
 enduring sad hurt and great embarrassment.  
 Not even this did my girl disdain to try,  
 to rouse me with her gently moving hand: 75  
 but when she couldn't make me rise, **with her art,**  
 and saw it sink down there, ignoring her,  
 'Why toy with me, why, if you're sick,' she said,  
 'did you invite your unwilling body to my bed?  
 Either some Circean sorceress has bewitched you, 80  
 or you come here wearied by another lover.'

With that, she leapt up, veiled by her loose slip –  
 and how her fleeing naked feet became her! –  
 And lest her servants thought that all was chaste,  
 I scattered water there, to cover the disgrace. 85

**Latin:**

At non formosa est, at non bene culta puella,  
 at, puto, non votis saepe petita meis!  
 hanc tamen in nullos tenui male languidus usus,  
 sed iacui pigro crimen onusque toro;  
 nec potui cupiens, pariter cupiente puella,  
 inguinis effeti parte iuvante frui. 5

**illa quidem nostro subiecit eburnea collo**  
 bracchia Sithonia candidiora nive,  
osculaque inseruit cupida luctantia lingua  
lascivum femori supposuitque femur,  
 et mihi blanditias dixit **dominumque vocavit,** 10  
 et quae praeterea publica verba iuvant.  
 tacta tamen veluti gelida mea membra cicuta  
 segnia propositum destituere meum;  
 truncus iners iacui, species et inutile pondus,  
 et non exactum, corpus an umbra forem. 15

Quae mihi ventura est, siquidem ventura, senectus,  
 cum desit numeris ipsa iuventa suis?  
 a, pudet annorum: quo me iuvenemque virumque?  
 nec iuvenem nec me sensit amica virum!  
 sic flammam aditura pias aeterna sacerdos 20  
 surgit et a caro fratre verenda soror.  
 at nuper bis flava Chlide, ter candida Pitho,  
 ter Libas officio continuata meo est;  
 exigere a nobis angusta nocte **Corinnam** - So this isn't Corinna, then?!  
 me memini numeros sustinuisse novem. 25

Num mea Thessalico languent devota veneno  
 corpora? num misero carmen et herba nocent,  
sagave poenicea defixit nomina cera  
et medium tenuis in iecur egit acus?  
 carmine laesa Ceres sterilem vanescit in herbam, 30  
 deficient laesi carmine fontis aquae,  
 ilicibus glandes cantataque vitibus uva  
 decidit, et nullo poma movente fluunt.  
 quid vetat et **nervos** magicas torpere per artes? Cf. Am.1.1.18, *attenuat nervos* (pentameter)  
 forsitan inpatiens fit latus inde meum. 35  
 huc pudor accessit: facti pudor ipse nocebat;  
 ille fuit vitii causa secunda mei.

At **qualem vidi tantum tetigique puellam!** Cf. Am.1.5.19: quos umeros, quales vidi  
 sic etiam tunica tangitur illa sua. tetigique lacertos  
 illius ad tactum Pylius iuvenescere possit 40  
 Tithonosque annis fortior esse suis.  
 haec mihi contigerat; **sed vir non contigit illi.**  
 quas nunc concipiam per nova vota preces?  
 credo etiam magnos, quo sum tam turpiter usus,  
 muneris oblatis paenituisse deos. 45

optabam certe recipi — sum nempe receptus;  
 oscula ferre — tuli; proximus esse — fui.  
 quo mihi fortunae tantum? quo regna sine usu?  
 quid, nisi possedi dives avarus opes?  
 sic aret mediis taciti vulgator in undis                    50  
 pomaque, quae nullo tempore tangat, habet.  
 a tenera quisquam sic surgit mane puella,  
 protinus ut sanctos possit adire deos?  
 Sed, puto, non blanda: non optima perdidit in me  
 oscula; non omni sollicitavit ope!                            55  
 illa graves potuit quercus adamantaque durum  
 surdaque blanditiis saxa movere suis.  
 digna movere fuit certe vivosque virosque;  
 sed neque tum vixi **nec vir**, ut ante, fui.  
**quid iuvet, ad surdas si cantet Phemius aures?**            60  
**quid miserum Thamyran picta tabella iuvat?**  
 At quae non tacita formavi gaudia mente!  
 quos ego non finxi disposuique modos!  
 nostra tamen iacuere velut praemortua membra  
 turpiter hesterna languidiora rosa —                    65  
 quae nunc, ecce, vigent intempestiva valentque,  
 nunc opus exposcunt militiamque suam.  
 quin istic pudibunda iaces, pars pessima nostri?  
 sic sum pollicitis captus et ante tuis.  
**tu dominum fallis**; per te deprensus inermis                70  
 tristia cum magno damna pudore tuli.  
 Hanc etiam non est mea dedignata puella  
 molliter admota sollicitare manu;  
 sed postquam nullas consurgere posse per artes  
 inmemoremque sui procubuisse videt,                    75  
 'quid me ludis?' ait, 'quis te, male sane, iubebat  
 invitum nostro **ponere membra toro**? Cf. *Am.1.5.2, adposui medio membra levanda toro*  
 aut te traiectis Aeaea venefica lanis  
 devovet, aut alio lassus amore venis.'  
 nec mora, desiluit **tunica velata soluta** —                    80 cf. *Am.1.5.9 tunica velata recincta*  
 et decuit nudos **proripuisse pedes!** —                    girly, elegiac feet  
 neve suae possent intactam scire ministrae,  
 dedecus hoc sumpta dissimulavit aqua.

## Questions for discussion

1. Read lines 7-10 closely. How does Ovid's poem-as-body perform the girl's seduction?
2. In the same lines, what is the significance of Ovid's description of the girl wrapping her arms around his neck and 'inserting' her kisses with an eager tongue?
3. To what extent is *Am. 3.7* a reversal of *Am.1.5* (see next page for text), or a replay? Is it all foreplay? [PADLET EXERCISE]
4. How and to what effect does Corinna take on the poet's voice and author-ity in this poem?

## Amores 1.5

It was hot, and the noon hour had gone by:  
I was relaxed, limbs spread in the midst of the bed.  
One half of the window was open, the other closed:  
the light was just as it often is in the woods,  
it glimmered like Phoebus dying at twilight,  
or when night goes, but day has still not risen.  
Such a light as is offered to modest girls,  
whose timid shyness hopes for a refuge.  
Behold Corinna comes, hidden by her loose slip,  
scattered hair covering her white throat –  
like the famous Semiramis going to her bed,  
one might say, or Lais loved by many men.  
I pulled her slip away –not harming its thinness much;  
yet she still struggled to be covered by that slip.  
While she would struggle so, it was as if she could not win,  
yielding, she was effortlessly conquered.  
When she stood before my eyes, the clothing set aside,  
there was never a flaw in all her body.  
What shoulders, what arms, I saw and touched!  
Breasts formed as if they were made for pressing!  
How flat the belly beneath the slender waist!  
What flanks, what form! What young thighs!  
Why recall each aspect? I saw nothing lacking praise  
and I hugged her naked body against mine.  
Who doesn't know the story? Weary we both rested.  
May such afternoons often come for me!

Aestus erat, mediamque dies exegerat horam;  
adposui medio membra levanda toro.  
pars adaperta fuit, pars altera clausa fenestrae;  
quale fere silvae lumen habere solent,  
qualia sublucent fugiente crepuscula Phoebos,                   5  
aut ubi nox abiit, nec tamen orta dies.  
illa verecundis lux est praebenda puellis,  
qua timidus latebras speret habere pudor.  
ecce, Corinna venit, tunica velata recincta,  
candida dividua colla tegente coma—                   10  
qualiter in thalamos famosa Semiramis isse  
dicitur, et multis Lais amata viris.  
Deripui tunicam—nec multum rara nocebat;  
pugnabat tunica sed tamen illa tegi.  
quae cum ita pugnaret, tamquam quae vincere nollet,                   15  
victa est non aegre prodicione sua.  
ut stetit ante oculos posito velamine nostros,  
in toto nusquam corpore menda fuit.  
quos umeros, quales vidi tetigique lacertos!  
forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi!                   20  
quam castigato planus sub pectore venter!  
quantum et quale latus! quam iuvenale femur!  
Singula quid referam? nil non laudabile vidi  
et nudam pressi corpus ad usque meum.  
Cetera quis nescit? lassique quiescimus ambo.                   25  
proveniant medii sic mihi saepe dies!