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Ovid and the discourses of love:
the amatory works

All poets speak in quotations. In the decades immediately before Ovid wrote his love poetry, Propertius and Tibullus (and Gallus and Catullus before them) developed an elegiac genre in which the speaker is enslaved to a mistress, and chooses a life of decadence and devotion rather than civic and military success. The poems beseech and reproach the beloved, show her off to friends, and occasionally celebrate her and the relationship, rhetorically laying out in public the life of a young man in Augustan Rome: all this through a poetics which is clever, difficult, artistic, and stylized. Then Ovid did it again – differently. Much of Ovid’s amatory work is infused with an aesthetics of repetition: of material, of style, of himself, and in his characters.¹

All lovers speak in quotations. This precept of the modern erotodidact Roland Barthes was implicitly foreshadowed by Ovid when he outrageously reminds us that *militat omnis amans* (‘every lover is a soldier’, *Am.* 1.9.1):² that is, every lover enters into a discourse of erotic imagery in dialogue and in conflict with his society, literary, social, and political. Ovid’s amatory works put private life on display – or rather, show us how private life is always already on display, a fiction played out for real, a reality fantasized. The discourses of love, the erotic as discourse, discourse as erotic – these things are at issue throughout the Ovidian corpus: in this chapter, I shall confine the discussion to the *Amores*, the *Ars amatoria*, and the *Remedia amoris*.

Ovid’s three books of *Amores*, which once were five (so the poems claim when they introduce themselves), are a collection of short poems playing with the *topoi* of love elegy: the locked-out lover, the slave go-between, the traditional symptoms of love, the rich rival, the witch-bawd, infidelity, the military, political, and poetic alternatives, and even the occasional successful

¹ For help with thinking through this essay I am very grateful to Sergio Casali, Philip Hardie, John Henderson, and Duncan Kennedy. They may recognize that critics speak in quotations too.

² On this conceit see McKeown (1995).

erotic encounter.³ Then he did it all again with the *Ars amatoria*, a didactic poem in elegiacs which teaches the reader how to be a good lover: how to catch a woman, how to keep her, and (addressed to women) how to catch and keep a man. And then yet again with the *Remedia amoris*, which teaches us how to be good at breaking up. In Ovidian aesthetics, and erotics, artfully judged familiarity can breed content.

Many of the issues in the discourse of Ovidian amatory poetry are raised by a poem which stands out as unusually explicit and plays with the reader's desire to know: *Amores* 1.5, in which the beloved Corinna pays a midday visit to the lover-poet. *Cetera quis nescit?* ('Who does not know the rest?') The poem plays around with light and half-light, hiding and sight, covering and uncovering. As Corinna teasingly plays at refusing to uncover herself, so Ovid-the-poet plays at refusing to uncover *himself*, his poetry, his sex, to the reader. Moreover, the poem presents Corinna as the *materia* and the *fons et origo* of erotic poetry, but also (it is almost the same thing) as the fetishized object of the gaze, the constructed thing, the fiction that guarantees the superior status of the speaker in the scale of realism.⁴ He speaks, he looks, he touches, he writes.

Most of all, he tells – or doesn't. The biggest game with telling and not telling concerns the identity of Corinna. Is she 'real'? People have been asking this since Ovid's own day, according to the poet himself (*Ars* 3.538) – but of course he could be bluffing. He places Corinna in a catalogue with other elegiac women, as an example of how poetry can give fame (so love the poet for the sake of his poetry . . .). But what use is fame based on a pseudonym?⁵ And fame which, Ovid hints, derives from a mistaken reading of the *Amores*. Important work has been done to show how the beloved of elegy may be seen as a manifestation of the poetry itself, rather than as a real woman. When the poet, thinking of writing epic, is forced back into elegy by the *puella's* erotic coaxing (*Am.* 2.1, 2.18), while the personified Elegy (3.1) and the sexy Muse (various in exile) are presented also as *puellae*, it is impossible to resist the implication that these girls are poems.⁶

But Ovid won't let us get away so easily from the tricks of realism and fiction, for *Amores* 3.12 plays a double bluff with the question of reality. The poet bewails the fact that his beloved is prostituted around the city, thanks

³ For more on the elegiac nature of the amatory poetry see Harrison in chapter 5 of this volume. On the didactic poems, see Schiesaro, chapter 4 in this volume, particularly for the discourse of knowledge which is at stake there.

⁴ On gaze-theory applied to Roman culture, including elegy, see Fredrick (forthcoming).

⁵ *Ars* 3.536 plays around with fame, the reward for being loved by a poet, and names. See Kennedy (1993) 84–5 on pseudonyms.

⁶ See especially Wyke (1989) and (1990); Cahoon (1985). The correlation between elegiac women and poetics is worked through by Keith (1994). For wider issues relating to women and writing/being written, see Gubar (1986).

to the fame of his poetry. At first sight, this looks like pretty clear support for the idea of the beloved as poetry, with the poet and his readers taking the roles of lover and rivals. But then the poem develops into a disquisition on poetic fictionality, arguing that everything in poetry is a lie, all made up, complete fiction. We poets can turn Niobe into stone, make Scylla a thief and turn her into the hideous sea-monster (conflating two Scylla-myths, by the metamorphic power of poetry) – and you persist in believing that I spoke the truth about my beloved? How naive! *Et mea debuerat falso laudata uideri | femina; credulitas nunc mihi uestra nocet* ('My woman ought to have been seen to be praised falsely; now your credulity is doing me harm', 3.12.43–4). Indeed so – except that the ostensible point of the poem is to protest at the excessive erotic popularity of the beloved, whom the poet wants to keep for himself. One level of rhetorical ploy going on here is to suggest the very reality of the beloved precisely in the attempt to deny it.

The poem may also be teaching us to read realism with care, realism as discourse. We (lovers, poets, readers, teachers, etc.) do manipulate discourse, but – from an Ovidian/Barthesian point of view – *we* are the effects of discourse, which shapes us and figures us as real. Ovid understood this well, and so manipulated (and was manipulated by) an apparent contradiction in love poetry: the lover's discourse desperately seeks sincerity, with a desire for immediacy and transparency seemingly incompatible with the necessary artifices of poetry. It may sound outrageously insincere when Ovid begs his beloved not to *be* faithful, but to act as if she were (*Amores* 3.14), but this too is part of the lover's discourse: 'if only I could avoid this suffering', so it goes, 'I'd be willing to undergo any indignities as long as I am granted a little love'. Moreover, this again is a poem about keeping things private (3.14.20). The contradiction of speaking publicly about privacy, of speaking sincerely (about insincerity) in a form full of conventions, is shown as essential to the workings of erotic discourse, for what Ovidian erotics expose is that the lover's desire for immediacy and transparency is mirrored in the reader's desire to understand, to enter and to belong. Poetic discourse constructs us as readers, just as erotic discourse constructs us as lovers.

Professor Ovid tells his pupil *est tibi agendus amans* (*Ars* 1.611): 'you must act the part of a lover' in order really to become one. It's easy to call Ovid cynical, and it is comments like this, together with the generic and traditional nature of many themes in Ovidian erotics, that have caused readers some discomfort over the question of the poet-lover's sincerity.⁷ But Ovid foreknew

⁷ Davis (1989) is a study of the varieties of acting and role-playing in the *Amores*. Although it gives, from an artistic point of view, a positive evaluation of Ovid's playful fictions, nonetheless it maintains the judgement of 'insincerity', for it argues that Ovid occasionally lets his mask drop, and shows us the reality of his feelings (see particularly ch. 4). It is not

this criticism. He instructs the reader-lover, first of all, *elige cui dicas 'tu mihi sola places'* ('choose someone to whom you can say "you alone please me"', *Ars* 1.42). Choose someone to be the recipient of your amatory discourse. On the one hand, this is an outrageous paradox, going to the heart of the conflict between love as a conscious, rational choice (therefore 'insincere') and as an irrational, overwhelming emotion (therefore 'sincere'), a contrast which informs the *Ars amatoria* in particular. But, on the other hand, the apparently awkward juxtaposition also shows how, in poetry as in life, motives and actions are complex. Moreover, the words put into the mouth of the aspiring lover are a direct quotation from Propertius (2.7.19). The lover is told, then, to 'choose someone with whom you can be an elegiac lover, with whom you can "be" Propertius'. While on the one hand this quotation constitutes a challenge to the elegiac autobiographical discourse of sincerity, on the other hand it also creates a new form of 'autobiography', one for an elegiac poet: choose a beloved, choose where to place yourself in the catalogue of elegiac poets. The amatory poetry runs the gamut of erotic discourses: declaration, desire, intimacy, celebration, conflict, absence, failure, repudiation. And of the metadiscourses: advice, fiction, realism, metapoetics. This is *agendus amans* ('acting the part of a lover'). But even if we think we know we are only acting, we may be trapped by the constructing power of discourse. However strong the pose of sophisticated detachment with which we approach the Ovidian erotic corpus, delighting in our knowledge that the question of sincerity need not trouble us, we had better watch out, because *fiet amor uerus qui modo falsus erat* ('love will become real which just now had been false', *Ars* 1.618).

Truth and falsehood, fiction and reality, secrets and publicity, sincerity and pose: these are the concerns of a lover, and are at issue throughout the amatory poetry, for they are central to the project of subjectivity which always raises crucial questions in Augustan poetry. How does a public discourse relate to the private I (and eye)? Why does a lover tell his secrets? – as Ovid complains in *Ars* 2.625–38. His own enigmatic claim about truth, honesty, and discretion in talking about love hardly settles the matter: *nos etiam ueros parce profitemur amores, | tectaque sunt solida mystica furta fide* ('I indeed only sparingly proclaim my real affairs, and my mystic thefts are hidden under firm fidelity', *Ars* 2.639–40). Really? The refusal to tell secrets, to let us see fully what is going on, the pretence that we are spying on something private – all these things contribute to creating the poetic and erotic force of love poetry.

self-evidently clear to me that anger and abuse against slaves is any more or less real, any more or less a pose, than praise and concern (Davis, p. 102). A similarly positivist attitude to role-playing mars the discussion of *persona* in Stapleton (1996). See also Connor (1974). For a different attitude to Ovidian insincerity see Cahoon (1985).

In love poetry, a private matter is played out in the public domain. But in Augustan Rome, ‘sex’ is not left at home; it becomes a site for the construction of the individual self precisely because the self’s relationship with society has been problematized by the coming of the principate, not only by the legislation about marriage and adultery which Augustus successfully introduced in 18 BC, but also more widely in the challenge the principate posed to Roman notions of manly autarky and freedom of speech (for upper-class males).⁸ Ovid is constantly half-denying, half-proclaiming that he is really saying this stuff: *nos Venerem tutam concessaque furta canemus | inque meo nullum carmine crimen erit* (‘I will sing safe Venus and allowed thefts and in my song there will be no crime’, *Ars* 1.33–4); *en iterum testor, nihil hic nisi lege remissum | luditur* (‘look, again I bear witness, no games forbidden by law are played here’, *Ars* 2.599–600). Well, did he say it or didn’t he?⁹ For this game of playful denial Ovid invokes – and denies – his muse towards the end of *Ars* 2. She is to stay outside the bedroom; she isn’t needed (*Ars* 2.705) because the lovers will know what to do and say without any instruction – this, followed by another 20-odd lines of intimate, public instruction about this intimate, private activity. ‘Look at me not saying this!’ The same thing happens in even more explicit terms in the parallel passage at the end of *Ars* 3. Ovid claims that *pudor* stops him from saying anything more (3.769), but Venus insists that he must finish the job (*opus*). With this, Venus drives to its climax the joke on *opus* as sex and as poetry which has been active throughout the amatory poetry.¹⁰ And so finish it he does, with an extraordinary passage of advice on the varieties of sexual positions which suit different figures. There is a nice irony in the literary, even pompous erudition of the mythological *exempla* which are the vehicle for the instruction about sexual positions. Can you say these things or not?

Part of the erotic delight of poetry, especially subjective poetry, is the pretence that we are sneaking a look at something hidden. Ovid plays on that desire again in the context of secrets when he strikes a pose of pious indignation at anyone who would divulge the secrets of the mystery religions (*Ars* 2.601–24) – having just told the story of Mars and Venus, in order to encourage lovers to be relaxed about infidelity. Symbolic of this erotic covering and uncovering are the representations of Venus herself in this passage: at 2.613–14 we are reminded of the famous covering-cum-pointing gesture of Venus in art, but in the adulterous story Venus is presented as

⁸ See in particular Wallace-Hadrill (1985). Our gut reaction that love and sex are ‘private’ must be a triumph of optimism over experience, since not only our national laws but also our popular culture deny that this is so. Yet the belief remains.

⁹ As in the famous case some years ago as to whether a TV personality actually said **** when he enclosed the word in a conditional clause.

¹⁰ See Kennedy (1993) 58–63.

unable to cover her *pudenda* because she is caught in Vulcan's trap (583–4). The attraction of the forbidden fruit is, of course, almost over-determined in erotic discourse.

It's this issue of desire for what is hidden that Ovid exposes in two more poems (outrageous poems, by the standards of naive, biosynthetic realism): *Amores* 2.19 and 3.4. The first complains about a husband who does not guard his wife well enough, and so fails to offer the lover sufficient challenge; the second complains that the husband's careful guard is pointless, and just makes his wife more desirable. Metapoetic readings of these poems, as referring to the writing of poetry as well as the furthering of an erotic relationship, seem almost inevitable, since the objectification of the beloved as 'poetry' is particularly in evidence.¹¹ For the poet to love, and the lover to write, there needs to be both an opportunity and a challenge. The poems also show how the lover's discourse is not just something between himself and the object of his desire. A third party comes into it as well: it might be a 'rival' or a 'friend' (or even both at once), but what is crucial about this 'other person' is that he breaks down the pseudo-barriers of intimate exclusivity which the discourse of love poses for the loving couple, but can never deliver.¹²

All this about doing private things in public hits at the heart of subjectivity in poetry. How does one 'speak love' when the material of 'love' and of 'poetry' comes already in inverted commas? The issue is intensified for Ovid, writing as he is in a tradition of subjective love poetry which is already well developed. Genre, topos, tradition – how can you say anything privately in the midst of that, when Propertius, Tibullus, and others now lost to us have been there before? Programmatic for such issues of repetition and privacy is the dinner-party in *Am.* 1.4, in which the poet instructs his beloved in the range of lovers' tricks for private communication. The point comes home to roost in *Am.* 2.5, when these techniques are turned against Ovid himself, as his beloved and another man engage in the same 'private' language. The supposedly private instructions, to be used as a secret language for communication which is exclusive to the lovers, even in the presence of a party-load of people, are given in public, in a public poem.¹³ Communication through writing in wine on the table, through drinking from the same cup as the

¹¹ See Lateiner (1978). The argument is that the lover's desire for a challenge in his relationship is a reflection of the Callimachean poet's high valuation of difficulty in poetic production. The beloved is the poetry, more attractive in proportion to the difficulty of access.

¹² Another interesting 'other' is the witch (especially *Am.* 1.8), who is remarkably like Ovid himself. See Gross (1996) and Myers (1996).

¹³ We ought to notice that the prequel to 2.5 is 2.4, a poem about Ovid's *ambitiosus amor*, which is excited by any kind of girl. He gives the game away, a bit, that this is also all about poetry, when he says that he likes tall girls and short ones ... *corrumpor utraque; | conueniunt uoto longa breuisque meo* (2.4.35–6). The reference to the elegiac couplet is, to say the least, obvious.

beloved, through pre-arranged body-language and touching under the table: this is hardly secret when *everyone knows* about these things.¹⁴ The lover can speak and act only because there have been lovers speaking and acting before.

The subjective position of love poetry foregrounds the dynamics of communication and representation in the power-relations between speaker, subject, and reader. The *Amores* offer us a realist speaker who cannot simply be divorced from the 'I' of the individual poem, still less from the 'I' of the body of the poetry. The gap between lover and poet is paradoxically both more and less wide in Ovid's amatory poetry than in the elegiac tradition of Propertius and Tibullus: more ironically detached, and also more challengingly personal. While both lover and beloved are both artificial and realist, nonetheless he, we might say, 'seems real', but she 'seems like an illusion of reality', because the subjective nature of elegy creates a powerful realism for the speaker/poet, and a totalizing, objectifying, illusionism for the mistress, and moreover the speaker's realism is actually predicated on the mistress' objectification. If, for example, we take the first seven poems of Book 1 as a group, we can see a gradual unfolding of the story through the construction of the speaker and the unveiling of the mistress. The build-up from poetics to erotics, culminating in subjective self-absorption, successfully constructs the speaker as holding the power to be real, and the beloved as his object.

Notoriously, Ovid introduces the elements of elegy in reverse order. Where Propertius has *Cynthia prima* bringing love bringing elegy bringing elegiac couplets, in Ovid's schema the enforced elegiac couplet brings elegy bringing love bringing a beloved.¹⁵ But it can be taken further. The collection starts with metre and the generic game of the foot with Cupid (in which the love god steals one metrical foot from Ovid's second line, thus turning his poetry from epic hexameters to elegiac couplets); then the *opus* (poetry and sex) with which the love god shot the poet catches hold of him, but still without an object (1.2); then comes the object, just about, in very nebulous terms (1.3), an object who is to be 'fertile material' for the poet, answering the *opus* of poem 1; then in poem 4 we seem finally to break out of the constraints of poetry and into the world of a Roman dinner party, as realism takes over (but note that a veil is still drawn over the mistress, 1.4.41–8); next – *ecce*

¹⁴ See Wilkinson (1955) 143: 'Surely we have heard before, and more than once, of lovers communicating by writing on the table in wine, exchanging glances and signs, drinking from the side of the cup where the other has drunk, and touching hands.' Surely we have, although, as McKeown notes ad loc., the *topos* of secret language is considerably more common in Ovid than in the other elegists. My point here, however, is about *topoi* in general.

¹⁵ See Buchan (1995).

Corinna uenit – comes a name, and a body constructed by the eye of the I. We may have reached a kind of erotic climax here, but there is still some way to go towards full-blown subjectivity. *Amores* 1.6 is the crucial next move – instead of going further *into* the relationship, as the movement of 3–4–5 might have encouraged us to expect, the poet-lover moves *out* onto the street, and into himself for a classic moment of elegiac self-absorption which hides the beloved. From there, we can move to the climax of subjectivity: the pain, the suffering, the guilt, the parody. But before we look at that poem, let's try that sequence again. These poems take us through a lot of ground in erotic discourse: Ovid starts as a poet, emulating Virgil and forced into a world he didn't choose; he becomes a lover surprised by his senses; then a lover declaring himself, though we are not sure who to; a jealous lover plotting; a successful lover; a desiring frustrated locked-out lover; an angry, crazy, remorseful lover. It's all there.

Amores 1.7 expresses the feelings of a man who has made a savage attack on his beloved, and is now filled with remorse, with the fear that his madness might be repeated, and with a desire for reconciliation. It's not hard to see an element of parody here, even before the final sting in the tail when the mistress is told simply to tidy up her hair, for the poem constitutes an exaggerated version of the self-flagellation and slightly worrying erotic violence that is found in Propertius and Tibullus. The *persona* Ovid adopts, then, must be quite separate from the poet himself, for that's how parody works. So it might seem – but this is not all that the poem does. The massive concentration on the Big Self which this poem presents, in the first person, denies us any easy splitting up of the poet from the *persona*. Moreover, it is with regard to this poem that Ovid makes one of his most explicit extra-generic comments, enticing and tempting us to read further between the lines and fill in the gaps of his self-presentation, to link the speaker of one work with the speaker of another. In *Ars* 2.169–72, playing now the role of teacher of love, Ovid refers again to this 'same incident', inviting us to learn by the example of his mishandling of his mistress. (Or was it?) We are tempted to ask: did he really hit her? Did he really tear her dress (he says not; he says she says he did)? Did he really just mess up her hair? The link between the poems creates a powerful sense of realism.

But this I – this Big Self – as soon as he sees the beloved, becomes an eye making erotic and aesthetic judgements which size the beloved up. She is moulded into being the embodiment of the 'lovely fault' (cf. *Rem.* 350),¹⁶ and immediately becomes entangled in a web of literary and artistic

¹⁶ See Cunningham (1958) for the argument that Ovid subscribed to the theory of the pleasant or appropriate fault, and applied it to the elegiac couplet. Here, I am moving the image from metre to mistress.

allusions.¹⁷ She is like Atalanta (13–14), from Propertius 1; Ariadne (15–16), from Catullus 64; Cassandra (17–18), from *Aen.* 2. The beloved is a simile, whether of a mythological heroine or of nature (54–8); or joining the two in 51–2, where she is turned into a statue (the line evokes both the living rock in the hillside and the artistic creation hewn from it). Like Catullus' Ariadne (64.61), the beloved is frozen by her poetic creator, fixed by his gaze and by his aesthetic judgement into the form of a beautiful statue. The fact that it is the poet who is doing the looking (with a bit of connivance from the reader) makes him partake in an apparently living reality while the beloved becomes an image, a thing-to-be-looked-at. The emphasis on her silence (20–2) can only make his own voice louder.

Despite the fact that the *Amores* is so strongly focalized through the speaker-lover and his beloved, however, the 'private' Ovidian erotic world is actually quite crowded, with a range of other people who act as foils to the intimate relationship. One group, the slaves, provide in their powerlessness an interesting counterpart to the elegiac erotic ethos, which is founded on the figure of *seruitium amoris*, in and through which the lover-poet presents himself as eager (or forced) to throw away his manly Roman autarky and become a slave to a woman (e.g. 2.17).¹⁸ Elegy offers an alternative world, where power relations supposedly work in the opposite direction from those of normal society. Slavery is thus a powerful metaphor for love, and the 'powerful' slave with control over the mistress's door looks at first sight like a neat and expressive inversion of the impotent lover. But just as the erotic 'slave' is actually the one constructing the relationship, so too the real slaves actually serve to underline the uneven power-relations of Ovidian erotics as much as of conventional Rome. Ovid-the-lover needs favours from the *ianitor* (1.6), Nape (1.11), Bagoas (2.2 and 2.3), and Cypassis (2.7 and 2.8),¹⁹ but he can still make them dance to his tune.

The slaves of elegy have in common with the beloved *puella* also the manner in which they contribute to the realist illusion without themselves appearing real. They are part of the literary and cultural furniture, things for looking at and working with. By contrast, there are other characters in the *Amores* who seem to gain a realist status denied to the less-privileged: various addressees, who go by proper Roman names. There is Atticus in 1.9,

¹⁷ The poem has been analysed by Morrison (1992) as a transgression of poetic genre, the poet's *furor* setting him up as an epic or tragic hero. This, I would say, both is and is not a parody.

¹⁸ The image, as McKeown notes on 2.17.1 and 1.3.5, is much less common in Ovid than in the other elegists.

¹⁹ On this diptych, see, crucially, Henderson (1991) and (1992). On slaves in Roman literature, see Fitzgerald (2000), especially the discussion (59–67) of elegiac slaves and their uncomfortable 'intrusions on [the] privacy' of free lovers.

Graecinus in 2.10, and Macer in 2.18. There is also ‘Ovid’s wife’ in 3.13. What the wife (as an extension of Ovid-the-man), and still more the Roman friends have, along with the poet himself – P. Ovidius Naso – is realism. These Roman named men are invited to join with the poet (and the reader is allowed to tag along as well) and stand on the edges of the dramatic illusion of the elegiac erotic world. With Atticus we look at the figure of *militia amoris*. With Graecinus we play around with the ideas of exclusivity (the poem starts with a boast-cum-lament that the poet is in love with two women at once), of sexual and poetic potency (2.10.23–4) and especially of the interconnectedness of poetry and sex, when the poet hopes to die in the midst of the ‘work’ (sex) – this, as others have noted, in the midst of the work, the middle of the *Amores* (2.10.35–6).²⁰ With Macer, we enter into the generic battle for Ovid’s poetic soul. His attempts to give up elegy for something more elevated are forestalled by the *puella*’s charming entreaty. But the *puella* of 2.18, even though she actually has some words to speak, is an embodiment of the poetry, and seems like an object of the poetic illusion. Macer, Ovid, and we, if we play the game as we are told to, have subjectivity, realism, and power.²¹ Or so we are encouraged to think.

Another group of ‘others’ who are important in the lover’s discourse are other lovers. In Ovid’s amatory poetry, these are enormously important people for the construction of the erotic ethos: they are the rivals, the friends, and the recipients of Ovid’s advice. It is when the ‘natural’ discourse of friendly advice meets the scientific discourse of didactic explication that love really becomes a communal matter. This is especially so since the *Ars amatoria* has always one eye on Virgil’s *Georgics*, a didactic poem teaching its readers good societal relationships through the medium of skill in farming.²² The power relations in erotodidaxis change also, for the reader is no longer an accomplice, or a spy onto Ovid’s private erotic world, but rather himself (and, in a sense, herself) takes a step into that world, to become the recipient of Ovid’s advice, and erotic attentions. The poet now tells us how to read, how to look at the world, how to engage with erotic discourse. The reader learns not only where to find a girl, how to choose, how to make the first approach, how to avoid giving expensive presents, and how to feel like a lover, but also how to read love poetry, how to write himself into the *Amores*.²³

²⁰ See Henderson (1992) 81.

²¹ I do not intend to say that the Roman men are ‘really’ more real than anyone else, but, rather, to move from the straightforward question of ‘real or not?’ into thinking about representation and realism as a mode of perception, as a discourse.

²² On the relationship between the *Georgics* and the *Ars amatoria* Leach (1964) is still a classic.

²³ See Allen (1992).

Is this realistic, or ‘just literary’? Certainly, it is literary, for the *Ars amatoria* is nearly as much obsessed with its own metapoetics as it is with *eros*. But also, it seems to me, the didactic form brings to the surface tensions of representation inherent in love poetry. The worldly-wise teacher, his naive pupil, and the universal subject-matter make this the most realistic of love poems, and yet to many people the idea that love is a skill which can be taught is also a patent absurdity. It is a joke on the rhetoric of knowledge, and yet love is presented from the very start as precisely a matter of knowledge (*Ars* 1.1). But Love keeps fighting back (*Ars* 1.9) and, like Daedalus (*Ars* 2.19–98), will not keep still while the Professor tries to beat it into shape and present it for us as a study-pack. The reader cannot really learn how to control love, but he might learn love’s discourses: *cum dare non possem munera, uerba dabam* (‘when I couldn’t give gifts, I gave words’, *Ars* 2.166).

Lovers are most likely to seek advice when things go wrong, so in steps Aunty Ovid with the answers to our problems, the *Remedia amoris*. This underrated, superbly sexy poem pulls off a brilliant coup, pretending to be the rhetorical ‘other side’ of the argument, and the ultimate retraction and denial of the world of erotic elegy, in preparation for greater things, but actually being a seductive song, which will draw us further into the world of Ovidian erotics. The poem, like the *Ars*, flirts with the discourses of medicine and philosophy, but in the end we cannot escape, because the rhetoric of renunciation is so crucial a part of erotic discourse. Much of Ovid’s anti-erotic advice is likely to trap the unwary reader, as even the teacher admits. For example, the unhappy lover is invited to come on his mistress unawares, in the hopes of catching her out without *cultus* and so arousing disgust in himself (341–8). But, as Ovid says, *non tamen huic nimium praecepto credere tutum est: | fallit enim multos forma sine arte decens* (‘it is not, however, safe to trust to this precept, for many have been deceived by beauty attractive without art’, 349–50). The problem is that the discourse of *eros* constantly struggles with the rhetoric of renunciation: the images with which the reader-lover is invited to compare himself are those of wild *eros* – bull, fire, ranging torrent, thirst, hunt. Any contact with the world of *eros* is likely to cause a problem. For this reason, the lover is invited to avoid friends who will go on about love and make things worse (619–26).

Such a ‘friend’ is the poet himself. The very closeness of the *Remedia amoris* to the *Ars amatoria* and the *Amores* has contributed to the poor critical appraisal of it in much modern reading (it is ‘more of the same’), but really this is the point. The poems present themselves *paruo discrimine* (‘with little distinction’). The way the *Remedia* partakes in the discourse of the *Ars* can be seen most forcefully at the climax of each poem. The supposedly cured lover, by *Rem.* 785, is meant to be able to go past his

mistress' door without a qualm. Now's the moment when, if you want to, you can do it (787): *nunc opus est celeri subdere calcar equo* ('now you need to apply the goad to the swift horse', 788). Where have we learned about that before? *Ars* 2.731–2: *cum mora non tuta est, totis incumbere remis, | utile et admisso subdere calcar equo* ('when delay is not safe, it is useful to press forward with full sails, and to apply the goad to the horse given its head'). In case we missed the allusion, Ovid gives us a second try at it two lines later (*Rem.* 790), telling us to use all speed to get past the house: *remis adice uela tuis* ('add sails to your oars'). We have to remember both *Ars* 2.731 *totis incumbere remis* and 2.725–6 *sed neque tu dominam uelis maioribus usus | desere* ('but you should not desert your mistress, using larger sails'). The context, in *Ars* 2, was the right management of mutually satisfying sex. If the lover has the opportunity, he must take his time to make sure that he and his mistress reach climax together; if not, he should press ahead like a rower or a rider in a race.

So, is the *Remedia amoris* really setting itself up as a didactic poem that *doesn't work*? At one level, yes: after all, if it really worked, in the sense of curing all lovers, it would be the end of erotic discourse, and almost the end of literature. Ovid himself makes this clear at 47–72, when he declares that if Dido, Pasiphae, Paris and others had read the *Remedia amoris*, their stories would have been insignificant. If the *Ars* didn't kill literature off (*Ars* 3.33–40), then the *Remedia* will surely finish the job, if we let it. The implications for Roman literature, and indeed Roman history, are momentous – if Dido had had no amatory difficulties, where would we be?

But, on the other hand, perhaps this is the final test for us, his pupils. If we can resist all the erotic enticements of this poem, then we really will have learned our lesson. Until we reach that moment of ataraxia, we still have the discourse of renunciation. As Ovid knew perfectly well: *qui nimium multis 'non amo' dicit, amat* ('he who keeps telling everyone "I'm not in love", is', *Rem.* 648).

FURTHER READING

The *Amores* benefits from the extensive and highly learned, useful, and readable, but at the time of writing not fully published commentary of McKeown, in four volumes (the first containing text and general introduction). In addition, there is Barsby (1973) on *Amores* 1, Booth (1991) on *Amores* 2, Hollis (1977) on *Ars* 1, and Gibson (forthcoming) on *Ars* 3. The *Remedia amoris* has a commentary by Henderson (1979), but otherwise lacks significant modern scholarship. Among monographs, Kennedy's (1993) book on elegy is difficult but excellent, while Greene (1998) makes a valuable contribution to feminist reading of elegy, including Ovid. Allen (1992) is excellent both on the Ovidian poems themselves and on their later influence. Boyd (1997) is

a rare full-scale treatment of the *Amores*, concentrating mainly on literary sources. Mack's general introductory book (1988) is a good starting place for all aspects of Ovid. On the *Ars*, there is a fine book in Italian (Labate, 1984). Myerowitz (1985) is particularly concerned with the poem as about 'serious play' and the interactions of nature and *cultus*, while Sharrock (1994a) looks at the aesthetics of repetition in *Ars* 2.

As regards articles, the chapters by DuQuesnay and Hollis in Binns (1973) make good readable introductions to the amatory works. Crucial to the reading of *Corinna* as poetry is Wyke (1989) and (1990), with also Greene (1998) and Keith (1994), while there have been several important pieces on Ovid's amatory poetry in *Helios*. Finally, on a topic which has always been in the background but never quite made it to centre-stage, Barsby (1996).