

AUGUSTAN LOVERS

Ovid's *Amores*: Changing the Genre

Are the *Amores* different?

- From the very first poem, the Ovidian narrator identifies **first** as a poet and only **second** as a lover
 - ▣ I'd meant in solemn metre to rehearse / a tale of arms and war and violence... (Ov. *Am.* 1.1.1f)
 - Cf. Verg. *Aen.* 1.1f: I sing of arms and of the man, fated to be an exile, who long since left the land of Troy...
- The 'love story' told by the Ovidian narrator mimics the pseudo-biographical appearance of Propertius and Tibullus, but his work as a poet remains the primary interest:
 - ▣ This effect is achieved through a series of pointedly placed programmatic poems, 1.1; 15; 2.1; 18; 3.1 and 15

Programmatic poems in the *Amores*

- These poems sketch the development of the narrator as a poet from 1.1 to his alleged swap to a different genre in 3.15
 - ▣ Mother of tender loves, find a new poet! / This is the last lap now for Elegy (3.15.1f); A greater field my *Muse* must tread (3.15.18)
 - ▣ The implication is that the narrator is moving to writing tragedies, connecting *Am.* 3.15 with the first programmatic poem of Book 3: 'sing of heroes [...] I'm Roman Tragedy, now make me famous; / You know my rules and you will rise to me'
- No reality in the progression of either the love story or the professional development of the author
 - ▣ Change of genre often connected with Ovid's presumably early but now lost tragedy *Medea*, but the implication of 3.1 and 3.15 is that the suggested (projected?) topics of the narrator's tragedy would have been more strictly historical

The collection of the *Amores* itself

- While many accept at face value the notion of two different editions of the *Amores*, some scholars view the ‘history’ of the three books of the *Amores* as equally fictional:
- The preface epigram:
 - ▣ We who before were Ovid’s five slim volumes / are three: he thought it better to compress. / Though reading us may still give you no pleasure, / with two removed at least the pain is less
- Questions: Were these books published together in a five-volume set? Or circulated separately? If so, why do no fragments survive?

The preface epigram: fictitious poetics

- On the other hand, one may see allusions to the *Ars amatoria* (published later than the main bulk of the *Amores*) and the *Heroides* (also presumed to be Ovid's second work) in several passages in the *Amores* (e.g. 2.18), which may seem to presuppose a second edition adding these references
- Counter suggestion by Breitzigheimer: the epigram wittily shows the author's preference for Callimachean aesthetics
 - ▣ *Mega biblion, mega kakon*
 - ▣ The five book 'monster' of an elegy collection pure fiction?
 - ▣ This theory is supported by the fact that our three books do tell one (two?) chronologically developing story/ies

Unity of the 3 book collection

- Further support for Breitzigheimer's hypothesis:
- *Am.* 1.3-5 share the three-step development of the Greek novel (or the present day romantic comedy!):
 - ▣ Beginning of love story; obstacles (here, the husband); happy end
- However, over the course of the three books, the relationship is gradually deconstructed and finally abandoned due to the narrator's own actions on the in-story level:
 - ▣ The narrator teaches and expects the *puella* to be unfaithful and untruthful: he is himself untruthful in his declaration of love in *Am.* 1.3, and explicitly trains her in deceit in 1.4
- Thus, the seeds of the developments taking place over the three books are all planted in the first five poems

Early hints: Book 2

- Book 2 suggests the narrator's departure from the genre of elegy in several subtle ways:
- 2.2 clearly describes the meeting with a new love interest ('I liked her looks, wrote promptly for a meeting'), not the familiar Corinna
- 2.4 is explicit about the narrator being attracted to any and every girl; steps up the frivolous tone of Prop. 2.22A
- 2.5 dismantles the illusion of fidelity: both the *puella* and the narrator are unfaithful
 - ▣ Narrator compared to Jupiter, neatly picking up references from *Am.* 1.3, where the *puella* is to be celebrated in verse like Leda, Europa and Io.

Early hints: Corinna's parrot

- The parrot resembles what the narrator says of himself in other poems:
 - ▣ Talent for imitation ('no bird in all the world a better mimic – your lisp could echo every word so true', 23f)
 - ▣ Rejection of battle: 'you fought no fierce battles; for peace and calm and talk your love was strong' (25f)
 - ▣ Preference for the simple life: 'Your fare a nut, and poppy seeds for slumber, and for a drink plain water met your need' (31f)
 - ▣ Its words are 'docta', learned, in l. 62

Her parrot, flying mimic from the Indies, is dead. Come, every bird, come flocking around, beat wings on breasts, tear tender cheeks with talons, all at her obsequies, in duty bound; like mourners tresses rend your ruffled plumage, and with your wings supply the trumpet's sound. (*Am.* 2.6.1-6)

Corinna's parrot

- 'Farewell, Corinna' suggests that the narrator may be preparing to leave Corinna and elegy
- Note that the parrot's epitaph consists of two lines – elegiacs, of course!
- Connected to the lament over the death of Tibullus in 3.9, so a metapoetic reading may be seen as retrospectively confirmed
 - Both poems direct the readers' attention to the resting place of the dead in their final section

What use the vows of my
poor frightened darling?
Those vows the stormy gales
swept out to sea. The seventh
dawn could find no dawn to
follow, exhausted now the
thread of destiny. But still that
fainting tongue was
unbewildered; 'Farewell,
Corinna' was its dying cry.
(*Am.* 2.6.45-49)

The third book – ways out of elegy

There stands an ancient grove
unhewn for ages wherein some
deity might well reside. It has a
holy spring, a rock-roofed
grotto, and birds pour their
sweet complaints on every side.
There in the woodland shadow I
was strolling and wondering
what my Muse' next work would
be, when Elegy appeared, her
coiled hair perfumed, and
limping, one foot short, it seemed
to me. [...] (Ov. *Am.* 3.1.1-8)

- Programmatic poem staging the competition of Elegy and Tragedy for the narrator's attention.
 - ▣ At this stage, Elegy wins, but the poem foreshadows the close of the book
- The opening sets a scene that is different from Ovid's earlier elegies – it has more in common with other genres; such as aetiological elegy, lyric and pastoral poetry
 - ▣ Ties in with Propertius' leave-taking of 'canonical' elegy in Book 4
- Throughout Book 3, Ovid will break or shift the limits of what is considered 'elegiac' material

Trends in Book 3

- 3.2-4 all deal with recognisable elegiac topics – although all share an emphasis on elegiac failure
- 3.5 differs markedly from these:
 - ▣ Thus often claimed to be unauthentic
- However, the opening ‘nox erat’ recalls the ‘aestus erat’ of 1.5.1f, and the ordering of the surrounding poems of 1.5 and 3.5 has also been seen as parallel
 - ▣ Next poem (1.6 and 3.6) deal with things stopping the lover from getting to the puella
 - ▣ 2nd next poem (1.7 and 3.7) deal with body parts of the narrator (hands and impotence)

One night when sleep on tired eyes weighed I had a dream and was afraid. Below a sunny hill there stood with serried trunks an ilex wood, whose branches many birds concealed, and by the wood a lush green field, a damp and grassy tapestry with water softly purling by. There, seeking shelter from the heat, in the leaves' shade I'd made my seat (the heat struck through them all the same), when cropping grass and flowers came a fine white cow before my eyes, whiter than first fresh snow that lies not melted yet by warmer skies, whiter than milk that hisses to the foaming pail and drains the ewe. (*Am.* 3.5.1-14)

Ov. *Am.* 3.5 continued

'The heat from which you sought to gain shelter, and shelter sought in vain beneath the rustling leaves is love's. the white cow, as the colour proves, that cow's your girl, and apt its hue. The bull, her mate (her man), is you; the crow that pecked her breast stands for an ancient bawd enticing her; that the cow lingered and then left, means you'll lie cold in bed bereft; her breast's black bruise declares to me a heart dyed with adultery.' The blood fled from my cheeks, and night stood deep and dark before my sight. (*Am.* 3.5. 35-46)

- The allegory here connects to...
 - ▣ ...the epiphanies of Elegy and Tragedy in 3.1 – the setting is similar
 - ▣ ...other elegies featuring a locus amoenus turned slightly sour (cf. Prop. 1.17-18)
- The presence of a dream interpreter recalls the astrologer Horus in Prop. 4.1, who also presaged a change to the genre of elegy

Other poems expanding the genre

- Extended mythological narratives in 3.6 (rivers in love) and 3.10 (the festival of Ceres, recalling aetiological elegies in Tibullus and Propertius)
- Excursus on contemporary times in 3.8 (35-56)
- Lament over the death of Tibullus in 3.9
- Catalogue of mythical transformations in 3.12.21-40
- Description of the Juno festival in 3.13 (7-36)

Trends in Book 3

- Elegy without success:
 - ▣ 3.2: the circus elegy – we never find out whether the narrator is successful in wooing the girl
 - ▣ 3.3: the *puella* has been unfaithful
 - ▣ 3.4: reversal of the traditional paraklausithyron – but note that the narrator is still outside looking in
 - ▣ 3.6: the swollen river; the narrator never reaches his *puella*
 - ▣ 3.7: the narrator's impotence
 - ▣ 3.8: the *puella* is with a rich rival (the theme of greed links neatly to the lament over Tibullus in 3.9)
 - ▣ 3.11: rejection of elegiac life + acceptance of it despite its failures and Corinna's infidelity: the reader may suspect that the narrator will soon abandon elegiac life? (Cf. Cat. 85)
 - ▣ 3.13: the wife poem

Moving on: 3.14 and 1.5

- Both poems are sexually explicit
- In 3.14 Ovid describes graphically such sexual acts as he sidestepped in 1.5 ('The rest? Who knows it not?')
 - ▣ Elegy's reticence and mystery is defused
 - ▣ The reader finally gets to know – there is nothing more to say?
- The tone of 3.14, however, has more in common with erotodidactic passages in elegy (Dipsas, Acanthis, Priapus, etc) and points forward to Ovid's own *Ars amatoria*
 - ▣ Where, coincidentally, sex is also only ever the topic of the final sections

To take away

- To think about: is the narrator's farewell to elegy to be connected with the real progress of Ovid's career as a poet?
- What links are there between the failures of elegiac lovers as depicted in Books 2 and 3 and other, earlier, elegiac texts?
- Is the elegiac genre abandoned or altered at the end of *Ov. Am.* 3?