Ovid, the love poet. Reading Antiquity lecture

A) *Amores*

• 1.1: *arma* not *amor* ("love") (contrast Propertius 1.1); books referred to by first word; *arma* associated with *Aeneid*; Ovid undercutting distinctions between lofty epic and lowly elegy

1) "I was preparing to tell of arms, and the violent wars in weighty metre, with material suited to the measure. The second verse was equal to the first. Cupid is said to have laughed and stolen away one foot." (Ov. *Am*. 1.1-4: i.e. move from hexameters to elegiac couplet)

2) "arma virumque cano" (Verg. *Aen*. 1.1) ("I sing of arms and the man")

• why write elegy? where's the mistress? Poetry important: love an afterthought (Corinna not named until 1.5)

3) "I do not have material fit for lighter metre, either a boy or a girl with long adorned hair" (*Am*. 1.1.19-20)

4) "Ye ask how it is that I compose love poems so often, how it is that my book sounds so soft upon the lips. It is not Calliope, not Apollo that puts these songs in my mind: my sweetheart herself creates the inspiration." (Prop.2.1.1-4, tr. Goold)

5) "Take this, bard, as matter for your song" (*Am*. 1.1.24, Cupid to Ovid)

6) "Offer yourself as happy material for my song" (*Am*. 1.3.19, Ovid to mistress)

7) "For I would know, I think, if I was assailed by any love" (*Am*. 1.2.5, Ovid)

• But Propertius also interested in poetry; Cynthia as a literary construct: written as well as a woman

8) "your famous book has made you a legend, and your 'Cynthia' is read all over the forum" (Prop. 1.24.1-2, tr. Goold; play on first word)

9) "There is something reductive about an opposition which on the one hand denies to Propertius his interest in literary process, while on the other denying to Ovid his interest in anything than literary process." (Hinds 1987: 13)

10) "Ovid does not 'debunk' or 'parody' Propertius. Rather, he interprets him, he alters his emphases: often towards more overt discussion of literary programme; but sometimes too ... in the direction of a vision which can be as elusive and as mysterious as anything in Latin elegy." (Hinds 1987: 13)

B) Ovid the reader in the *Amores*

• reading elegiac conventions: taking them literally, exposing them; taking elegiac ideas and attitudes to extremes

▪ using *arma* to describe his collection: NB elegiac *arma* (warfare of love)

▪ wasting away with love (elegiac motif): *Am*. 1.6 (if janitor opened door slightly, Ovid could enter)

11) "you will not so often be surprised by my wan colour, or why my whole body is shrunk to nothing" (Prop. 1.5.21-22, tr. Goold, lover on effects of serving mistress)

12) "Long love has made my body thin for this kind of practice and by wasting away my flesh, has made my limbs suitable" (*Am*. 1.6.5-6: makes literal!)

C)*Heroides*: background

• verse letters in elegiac from view of myth heroines (including 3 pairs with replies)

13) "or let some Letter be read by you with practised utterance; he first invented this art, unknown to others" (Ov. *The Art of Love* 3.345-6; tr. Mozley)

• background

i) epistles: e.g. Propertius 4.3, Arethusa's epistle to her husband Lycotas, away on campaign (isolated example; Propertius 4.3 has contemporary Rome as backdrop)

14) "This briefing Arethusa sends to her Lycotas-
If you can be mine when you're away so much.
But if a smear makes any passage hard to read
It will have been my tears that blotted it." (Prop. 4.3.1-4; tr. Lee)

ii) mythical narrative: e.g. Hellenistic elegaic narrative, like Callimachus' Acontius and Cydippe story (but Ovid writes from heroine's perspective); Propertius 4.4 (Tarpeia's lament, includes her point of view)

15) "Farewell, Roman hills and hill-established Rome
And Vesta to be shamed by my offence.
The horse whose mane Tatius himself combs to the right,

That horse shall transport my love to his camp." (Prop. 4.4.35-8; tr. Lee)

iii) love elegy (cf. Prop. 4.4 Tarpeia sounds like character from love elegy; note she betrays Rome out of love not greed)

16) "O would that I sat a prisoner by your Household Gods /If as prisoner I could see my Tatius' face!" (Tarpeia, Prop. 4.4.33-4, tr. Lee)

D) Heroides and elegy

• Elegiac material in *Heroides* e.g. excluded lover idea in *Her.* 3 - but female Briseis speaking, kept by Agamemnon (normally man can't enter lover's house) and epic setting (soliders not janitors); slavery of love (see e.g. Propertius 1.4) but real slave... Can there be love? Elegiac idea of beloved as family. Briseis has no family left.

17) “Oft have I wished to elude my guards and return to you; but the enemy was there, to seize upon a timid girl. Should I have gone far, I feared I should be taken in the night, and delivered over a gift to some one of the ladies of Priam’s sons.” (Ov. *Her.* 3.17-20, Briseis to Achilles)

18) “If ‘tis right for me to utter brief complaint of you, my master and my beloved, of you, my master and my beloved, will I utter brief complaint. That I was all too quickly delivered over to the king at his demand is not your fault – yet this, too, is your fault; for as soon as Eurybates and Talthybius came to ask for me, to Eurybates was I given over, and to Talthybius, to go with them.” (Ov. *Her.* 3.5-10)

19) “you were my master, you my husband, you my brother” (Ov. *Her.* 3.52; Briseis says Achilles her family. Her real family were killed by Achilles)

20) “I have seen fall three who were partners alike in birth and in death- and the three had the mother who was mine; I have seen my wedded lord stretched all his length upon the gory ground, heaving in agony his bloody breast. For so many lost to me I still had only you in recompense” (Ov. *Her.* 3.47-51)

21) “Ah me! I had to go, and with no farewell kiss; but tears without end I shed, and rent my hair- miserable me, I seemed a second time to suffer the captive’s fate!” (Ov. *Her.* 3.14-16)

• lovers focalize everything through a lover's perspective. *Her.* 1 all about Penelope's emotions: Trojan war seen from perspective of beloved left behind. Penelope's weaving trick evoked BUT deceiving time rather than suitors: writing in context of a woman missing her husband, not crafty epic wife

22) “It is only in elegy that the poet and the lover coincide: elegy’s horizon becomes drastically restricted and the text ends up seeing only what its protagonist sees. I would suggest that, fundamentally, elegy is born from just this loss of full vision: the greater the closure of the world represented, the greater the effort the language must make to reduce to its model all that would remain excluded from it, recuperating and converting it in any way it can.” (Conte, ‘Love without Elegy’, p.39)

23) “For by day my one relief is to weep and sigh as I go about my tasks and supervise the household work; but when night falls and brings all other asleep, I lie down on my bed, and care comes with a thousand stings to prick my heavy heart and turn dejection into torture.” (Hom. *Od.* 19.513-7; tr. Rieu)

24) “But of what avail to me that Ilion has been scattered in ruin by your arms, and that what once was wall is now level ground- if I am still to remain such as I was while Troy endured, and must live to all time bereft of my lord?” (Ov. *Her.* 1.47-50; Penelope to Odysseus)

25) “Then had I not lain cold in my deserted bed, nor would now be complaining of slowly passing days; nor would the hanging web be wearying now my widowed hands as I seek to *beguile* [*fallere*] the hours of spacious night.” (Ov. *Her.* 1.7-10, Penelope wishing Paris' ship had sunk. Penelope's speech from *Od*. 19 retold in elegiac terms. Evocation of shroud weaving)

E) *Heroides*: Why choose letter form?

i) female voice: women's perspective (not usual in e.g. epic): "correcting" canonical view?

• So e.g. more depth in Ovid's Penelope where signs of suppressed sexuality and resentment; more active e.g. claims she sent Telemachus to Pylos: lying (Penelope lies at *Iliad* 18.257-73)? or now got chance to tell truth??

26) "you may be captive to a stranger love- such are the hearts of you men!" (Ov. *Her.* 1.75-6; Penelope, after being told by Telemachus of Odysseus' stay with lover Calypso)

27) "For the whole story was told you son, whom I sent to seek you" (Ov. *Her.* 1.37-8; in *Odyssey*, Telemachus goes without Penelope's knowledge)

• So e.g. *Her.* 7: should have been warned by Creusa's fate. Dido exposes bias of Vergilian Aeneas' narrative where Aeneas claims Creusa "cheated" her friends, her son, and her husband by her disappearance (Verg. *Aen*. 2.743-4), Dido applies "cheat" verb to Aeneas: exposes his male self-justifying rhetoric

28) "You are false in everything- and I am not the first your tongue has *deceived* (*fallere*). Do you ask where the mother of pretty Iulus is?- she perished, left behind by her unfeeling lord! This was the story you told me- yes, and it was warning enough for me!" (Ov. *Her.* 7.81-5; Dido to Aeneas)

ii) fictionality and the process of reading. *Her* 3: no blots on reader's scrolls!

29) "From stolen Briseis is the writing you read, scarce charactered in Greek by her barbarian hand. Whatever blots you shall see, her tears have made" (Ov. *Her.* 3.1-3; Briseis to Achilles)

iii) limited perspective: dramatic irony

30) "writing back is pointless; come yourself!" (Ov. *Her.* 1.2; Penelope)

31) "Whoso turns to these shores of ours his stranger ship is plied with many a question ere he go away, and into his hand is given the sheet writ by these fingers of mine, to render up should he but see you anywhere." (Ov. *Her.* 1.59-62; Penelope)

• chronological clues: Telemachus' trip to Pylos recent (*Her.* 1.99): cf. *Odyssey* 17 when Telemachus tells Penelope about his trip to Pylos and Odysseus is on his way to palace

32) "We have sent to Pylos, the land of ancient Nestor, Neleus' son; the word brought back from Pylos was nothing sure." (Ov. *Her.* 1.63-4; Penelope)

33) "I swear by Zeus before all the other gods, and by the board of hospitality, and by the good Odysseus' hearth, which I have reached, that Odysseus is actually in Ithaca at this moment, at rest or afoot, tracing these crimes to their source and scheming revenge on the Suitors" (seer Theoclymenus to Penelope, Hom. *Od*. 17.155-9; tr. Rieu)

• next stranger who comes and who will get letter = Odysseus!

34) "The poetics of the *Heroides* suggest ... that new windows can be opened on stories already completed. Ovid's narrative prowess is evident in the respect he shows for the traditional script. Each epistle is written in the 'blank space' of a narration already fully and densely composed, sometimes also dramatically fast-paced and action-packed. The spectacular ability of the poet …. selects the most favourable point, cuts into it, then closes it back up without leaving a trace."(Barchiesi, 'Narrativity and Convention in the *Heroides*' p.31)

• *Heroides* 3: written by Briseis at night after Agamemnon's plea to Achilles has failed

35) "Nay, 'tis even said that when tomorrow's dawn shall have shone forth, you mean to unfurl your linen sails to the cloud-bringing winds of the south" (Ov. *Her.* 3.57-8; Briseis fears Achilles will sail away)

36) "Then with the showing of dawn we shall consider whether to return to our own land or to stay" (Achilles in embassy scene, Hom. *Il*. 9.618-9; tr. Hammond)

• Reader knows Briseis and Achilles will be reunited (*Iliad* 19), on day letter written, day of failed embassy. Briseis returned to Achilles after reconciliation with Agamemnon which only happens because Patroclus lost

37) "fetch from my ship all the gifts that we promised yesterday to give Achilleus, and bring the women too." (Agamemnon, Hom *Il*. 19.194-5; tr. Hammond)

38) "'Why do you weep? But a short time,' he said, 'will you be here'" (Ov. *Her.* 3.24, Patroclus to Briseis. He won't be there in the future...)

<u>Bibliography</u>

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