William Ben Worthington 1900221

HPAH5074: Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World: Latin Sources.

Part commentary of Publius Ovidius Naso's *Amores* 1.3 **(lines 17-26).**

This is a commentary, in part, of Ovid's *Amores 1.3*, the commentary's main focus will be to explore ideas of gender, and sexuality. The Latin text used is that of J. C. M^c^Keown.[1]

Augustan poet, Publius Ovidius Naso (Ovid) born in 43 B.C. in Sulmo, a city south-east of Rome, into a family whose men had a long history of holding the equestrian rank. Afforded an education typical of a man from an elite Roman family, with time spent studying in the cities of Rome and Athens[2]. With such an education Ovid would presumably have had the credentials to pursue a career in Roman politics, as was hoped for by his family (father), instead, Ovid showed little interest in this option, and devoted his life to poetry[3]. Ovid was a prolific poet, who tackled many of the genres, and forms of poetry (elegy, epistles, and epic) which were popular in his day. Ovid died in Tomis in 8 A.D. after having been banished from Rome by the Emperor Augustus. The reasons for this punishment are uncertain and debated, but Ovid's 'crime' may have involved the Emperor's granddaughter Julia.[4] Ovid himself is never explicit about the reasons, though they are alluded to in his works, the *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto,* as a combination of his erotic poetry (*Ars Amatoria*) offending the Emperor Augustus, and a certain 'act' he happened to assist, or be involved in.[5]

Ovid's *Amores* are a collection of love elegies consisting of three books of poems. Ovid follows the strict form of couplets (distichs) consisting of a line of hexameter followed by a line of pentameter, six and five metrical feet respectively.[6] Ovid explains his topic, and method of expression, in the opening epigram and elegy.[7]

[17] tecum, quos dederint annos mihi fila sororum,

Ovid expresses the limitation of (his) life as designed by the **'fila sororum',** the three Fates and the threads that they weave together, a material that Clotho spins on her spindle, is measured by Lachesis, and cut by Atropos.[8] J. C. M^c^Keown's commentary suggests Ovid is also referencing Horace with this particular phrase concerning the Fates.[9] Horace, in *Ode* 2.3*,* encourages Dellius to enjoy the good things in life (in a dignified way) when the opportunity permits, as life is inevitably cut to a length as governed by the Fates.[10]

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[1] M^c^Keown, 1989, pp.139-140.
[2] Showerman, 1977, pp.2-4.
[3] Turpin, 2016, p.1-2.
[4] Showerman, 1977, pp.2-4; Goold, 1983, pp.102-104.
[5] Ovid.Ars.; Ovid.Trist.; Ovid.Ex Pont; Goold, 1983, pp.94-107.
[6] M^c^Keown, 1987, pp.108-123; Ovid.Am.1.1.
[7] Ovid.Am.Epi; Ovid.Am.1.1.
[8] Graves, 2017, p.48-49; Hes.Theo.217-218.
[9] M^c^Keown, 1989, pp.71-72; Hor.Odes.2.3.
[10] Hor.Odes.2.3; Rudd, 2012, pp.3-6.

[18] uiuere contingat teque dolente mori.

As expressed by the subjunctive, Ovid wishes that he will be able to live his life with his lover, and that upon his death his lover will suffer. The lover suffering, because of the poet's actions, or demise in this particular case, is a key component of Roman elegiac verse, and here Ovid expresses that sentiment. In another example from Roman elegy, Propertius replies to a friend that he could not possibly sail abroad with him for fear of what injuries Cynthia (his lover) may cause to herself in, and because of, his absence.[11]

Hallett suggests, that in the time during the collapse of the Roman Republic, and the beginnings of the Empire, the role of the woman was supportive, and submissive in behaviour when it came to social interaction between females and 'non-females'.[12] Also, that 'women were not as a rule admired for their individual qualities'.[13] However, in Roman elegy, Hallett suggests that the normal societal behavioural roles of the male and female are in fact reversed, the male (non-female) poet assumes the submissive role in the interaction/relationship.[14] A good example of this submissive behaviour on part of the male can be found in Propertius' *Elegies 1.3.*[15] However, in *Amores* 1.3*,* Ovid slightly confuses this issue, highlighted by Hallett, by the fact that up to this point (and further) in the *Amores*, we are yet to learn of any of the individual qualities of Ovid's lover, or even her name (we do not learn of Ovid's lover's name (Corinna) until *Amores* 1.5). All we know of the woman/lover is that she has captured Ovid's heart.[16] The poem seems impersonal with regards to the supposed dominant figure of the lover, and on Ovid's behalf or 'role', self-centred, which perhaps suggests that Ovid is not applying this idea of role reversal to the extent that perhaps the other Augustan elegiac poets do.[17]

[19] te mihi materiem felicem in carmina praebe,
[20] prouenient causa carmina digna sua.

Ovid's lover provides him with inspiration for his verse, though at the same time is referred to in a derogatory sense as 'material'. Also, though his lover maybe the 'inspiration', the lines are still impersonal, and are therefore lacking in romantic sentiment. The lines can be read as Ovid still being preoccupied with himself, and his work.[18] The 'woman' exists only as a created object, nothing more than a poetical device. The 'woman' is an object of desire, granted, but only because an object of desire is a necessary requirement given the genre.[19] This is also a brief moment of control for Ovid, the shaping of the song and all that is involved is being moulded by Ovid and his poetic/artistic abilities. It is just a moment though, as we see in the preceding lines (17-18) Ovid having no control over the length of his life, that is governed by the Fates. Also, in the opening lines of Amores 1.4 (and in fact the whole of 1.4) Ovid's lover is accompanied to the feast by another man ('**vir'**). Ovid has

[11] Prop.Ele.1.6.
[12] Hallett, 1973, p.103.
[13] Hallett, 1973, p.103.
[14] Hallett, 1973, pp.103-124.
[15] Hallett, 1973, p.103-124; Prop.Ele.1.3.
[16] Ovid.Am.1.
[17] Tib; Pro.Ele.
[18] M^c^Keown, 1989, pp.72-73
[19] Wyke, 1987, pp.47-61; Sharrock, 1991, 36-49.

no control over either of their actions (man and/or lover), and is at times barely able to control his own behaviour, as he is controlled by Love.[20] Ovid does attempt to control his lover in *Amores* 1.4, though realises that it will most probably be in vain, as Ovid will inevitably be 'shut out' come the night.[21]

[21] carmine nomen habent exterrita cornibus Io

In lines 21-24, Ovid lists a catalogue of mythical women all seduced, coerced, and/or raped by the god Jupiter. Line 21 references Io, terrified by her own horns, having been transformed into a heifer. In Ovid's own telling of the myth, from his *Metamorphoses,* Jupiter transforms the object of his desire, Io, daughter of Inachus, into a (still beautiful) heifer in an attempt to hide her from Juno, Jupiter's wife[22]. In other versions of the myth, it is Juno who transforms Io, as an act of jealously and revenge.[23]

[22] et quam fluminea lusit adulter aue

Ovid continues with a reference to Leda, mythical Queen of Sparta.[24] Jupiter, the adulterer, seduces Leda (**et quam-**and she who), whilst in the form of a swan (**fluminea aue-**river bird).[25] There are a number of ancient variants of this particular, complicated, mythological story.[26] It is said that after this coupling Leda produced an egg, out of which hatched Helen of Troy, and Polydeuces.[27]

[23] quaeque super pontum simulato uecta iuuenco
[24] uirginea tenuit cornua uara manu.

In Ovid's own telling of Europa's encounter with Jupiter, Jupiter transforms himself into a white bull. At first Europa is intimidated by the bull's strength and size, however, the bull gives Europa no reason to fear him. Europa offers the bull flowers to eat, the bull takes them in his lips and kisses her hand in return. With this encouragement, and her inhibitions lowered, Europa climbs onto the bull's back. Sensing this as his opportunity to abscond with Europa, the bull (Jupiter) enters the sea so that Europa is essentially trapped on Jupiter's back. The bull swims away with Europa clinging to his horn.[28]

The *Amores* can hardly be read as something that a modern-day audience would term Romantic. The mythical stories Ovid chooses being a prime example, they are inappropriate, are unsympathetic towards women.[29] However, the use of this particular catalogue of mythical women can be interpreted in several ways. Perhaps, by choosing such myths Ovid

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[20] Ovid.Am.1.4.
[21] Ovid.Am.1.4.
[22] Ovid.Met.1.568-779; Aes.Prom.589-592.
[23] Graves, 2017, pp.190-193; Turpin, 2016, p.48; Aes.Prom.589-592; Ovid.Met.1.568-779
[24] Howatson, 2011, online.
[25] Turpin, 2016, p.48; Showerman, 1977, p.327
[26] Graves, 2017, pp.206-208.
[27] Howatson, 2011, online.
[28] Ovid.Met.2.844-875; Graves, 2017, pp.194-189; Turpin, 2016, p.48; McKeown, 1989, pp.73-74.
[29] Turpin, 2016, p.44.

is attempting to 'mock', and 'satirize', the elegiac poetry of his day.[30] Or, taken from a Roman perspective**,** 'a liaison with a god was normally considered sufficient in itself to ensure a mortal woman immortality or, at least, immortal fame'.[31] Which, perhaps, in some respects may almost qualify to modern audience, as it perhaps did to a Roman audience, as a slight romantic gesture. However, taking into account that, in all likelihood, Ovid's lover is 'poetic fancy', and does not exist in the flesh, this mythical catalogue could be seen as Ovid showing off his education, and rhetorical skills.[32] Or, maybe, Love has caused Ovid to lose his sense, and control, and the poet is not thinking before 'speaking'.

[Whether an act of rape, or, to the Romans, 'seduction, attempted seduction, adultery, abduction' and 'ravishment', had been committed or not, and if punishment of the perpetrator, as deemed by law was required to be handed out, depended solely on the victim's social status.[33] 'The sexual integrity of a woman was vital' in ancient Rome, as if this was brought into question via any such acts as stated above, so would the legitimacy of her children be questioned and, therefore, the 'legitimacy of future Roman citizens'.[34] Though 'all sexual assault' was a crime under Roman Law, how it was adjudicated, and what punishments were given out is unclear.[35] What is of relevance to this particular commentary, is that the 'rape' of a woman of high socially status was seen almost as a crime against the husband and his family, for reasons as stated above. Also, that 'rape', was not legally deemed to have taken place on women of a low social status, such as 'prostitutes and foreigners'. The same went for slaves as they were not recognised by Roman Law as having any 'legal standing'.[36] Also, of note, the myth of the founding of Rome does include the abduction, and rape, of Sabine women, which may go some way in trying to understand the strange relationship that seems to have existed between Rome, and the act of rape.[37]]

[25] nos quoque per totum pariter cantabimur orbem
[26] iunctaque semper erunt nomina nostra tuis.

In the final couplet of *Amores* 1.3*,* Ovid tells how the pair of lovers will forever remain linked because of their love (and Ovid's resulting verse), yet the lover, as stated above, remains anonymous.[38] In 'Learned Girls and Male Persuasion', Sharon Lynn James argues that this 'lover' of Ovid's is a character type universal to Roman elegiac poetry.[39] James states that, the 'generic' object of the elegiac poets desire is a 'courtesan of formidable intelligence, education, and independence'.[40]

The poems that make up the *Amores*, as suggested by their content, are for the eyes of his lover (real or not), and the style, and the devices Ovid employs, throughout the *Amores,*

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[30] James, 2003, p.155-211.
[31] M^c^Keown, 1989, p.73.
[32] Showerman, 1977, pp.316-317.
[33] Nguyen, 2006, p.76.
[34] Nguyen, 2006, p.76-80.
[35] Nguyen, 2006, p.83-85.
[36] Nguyen, 2006, p.85-86.
[37] Livy.1.IX-X.
[38] Showerman, 1977, p.327.
[39] James, 2003, p.ix.
[40] James, 2003, p.ix.

along with the mythological content, suggest a reader who is indeed intelligent and well educated. Also, taking into consideration the opening lines of *Amores* 1.4;

[1]Vir tuus est epulas nobis aditurus easdem;
[2]ultima cena tuo sit, precor, illa viro.

Ovid finds himself at the same banquet as his lover and her '**vir**'. It is debated how '**vir**' in this context is to be translated. What does Ovid mean by '**vir**', is 'man' the lover's husband which William Turpin in his commentary believes is the most likely meaning.[41] Or, as suggested by J. C. M^c^Keown, that Ovid's lover is in fact a 'freed-woman', and the '**vir**', Ovid's rival, is her 'patron'.[42] Another option, which would agree with James' argument, is that Ovid's lover is a courtesan, and that '**vir**', in this context, simply means 'man', implying another man/client of his lover.[43]

The above evidence offered for *Amores* 1.3.25-26 and *Amores* 1.4.1-2 seemingly gives credence to the argument offered by James. James' elegiac character is 'independent of male control', though perhaps not in a monetary sense, hence Ovid's lover can hold her own in the company of the elite men who make up her clientele, though she still needs to make a living.[44] However, what must be taken into consideration is that James' Roman elegiac ideal was certainly not an 'average' Roman prostitute. It must also be stated that James believes this educated courtesan is 'nothing more than a metaphor' used by elegiac love poets.[45]

[The buying, and selling, of sex in Augustan Rome was a common occurrence, and, as Thomas A. J. Mc Ginn states, 'an important aspect of the economy in terms of upper-class investment, state revenue, and female employment' (it must be noted that male prostitution existed. Also, the taxation of prostitution came at a later date than Augustan Rome, being introduced by Emperor Caligula in 40 C.E.).[46] The average Roman female prostitute was either a slave, or a 'freed-woman' (having come from slavery), and evidence suggests they were kept by their pimps in conditions customary for a slave.[47] Women were often being sold for sex in the background, 'under the arches', at public events such as 'circuses, baths, and festivals', anywhere where large crowds were gathered, and potential custom existed.[48] Roman prostitutes were controlled, and exploited, by their pimps, and in some cases, by other slaves on behalf of elite Roman men/owners who could not be seen to be involved in prostitution, or be identified as pimps.[49]]

If the readings of M^c^Keown, and Turpin, are taken into consideration, with regards to the opening lines of *Amores* 1.4. Ovid's relationship with his lover is an altogether much more salacious, and risky, affair given the laws of Augustan Rome concerning marriage and

[41] Turpin, 2016, pp.52-53.
[42] M^c^Keown, 1989, 76-80.
[43] James, 2003, p.ix.
[44] James, 2003, p.ix.
[45] James,2003, p.212-213.
[46] M^c^Ginn, 2010, online.
[47] M^c^Ginn, 2010, online.
[48] M^c^Ginn, 2010, online.
[49] M^c^Ginn, 2010, online.

adultery. An adulterous relationship such as the one Ovid describes, and is, 'involved in', would, perhaps, have been deemed unlawful.[50]

[The laws concerning marriage and adultery, as introduced by the Emperor Augustus, were complicated. Essentially, they were introduced by Augustus in an attempt to quell the opulent, extravagant, and adulterous behaviour that was perceived to be on display in the early years of the Roman Empire.[51] The *Lex Julia De Maritandis Ordinibus*, passed in 18 B.C., encouraged marriage and the production of legitimate children. It also relaxed who could marry, and from what class, elite men (except senators) could now marry freed-women.[52] This was an attempt by the Emperor Augustus to place social stigma (and of course legal implications) on extramarital relationships, the relationships of unmarried men and 'women without husbands', and other acts of sexual promiscuity.[53]]

word count: 2537

[50] Ovid.Am.
[51] McGinn, 2010, online; Seu.Div Aug.33-40.
[52] McGinn, 2010, online; CasDio.54.16; Hor.CarSae.17-20.
[53] McGinn, 2010, online; CasDio.54.16; Hor.CaeSae.17-20.

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