

## 9. *Amores* plural: Ovidian homoerotics in the elegies

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Although the genre is frequently characterized as overwhelmingly interested in heteroerotic love, Latin love elegy is far more homoerotic than most scholars allow. Ovid in particular has been seen as the ‘most heterosexual’ representative of the genre, and indeed ‘the most heterosexual’ poet of his age.<sup>1</sup> Ovid has even been characterized as *the* poet of heterosexual love; Tom Habinek went so far as to claim that Ovid “invents the category of the heterosexual male”.<sup>2</sup> Habinek is far from the only scholar to present us with an Ovid who strikingly departs from the norms of Latin love elegy and, indeed, a much longer Greco-Roman erotic literary tradition of homoerotic poetry, in that his first-person elegies focus almost exclusively on what we would now call heterosexual liaisons. Some readers have claimed that Ovid even displayed hostility towards what we would most conveniently label homosexuality; for example, Peter Green claims that Ovid’s ‘attitude to adult homosexuality is casual, pragmatic and dismissive’ and John Makowski talks of Ovid’s ‘aversion to pederasty’.<sup>3</sup> Such characterizations of Ovid are highly problematic, for a number of reasons, which will be discussed here. Readers of Ovid who characterize him in this way have ignored the precise terms in which some of his most often quoted elegiac comments on homosexuality are framed, and have consequently failed to explore the rest of his elegies for hints of homoeroticism.

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<sup>1</sup> Makowski 1996, 29.

<sup>2</sup> Habinek 1997, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Green 1982, 355, Makowski 1996, 30. Cf. McKeown 1989, 23 on *Am.* 1.1.19-20.

If we look outside Ovid's subjective love elegies, Ovid's other works should emphatically disprove the notion that Ovid was in some way hostile to, or chose mostly to ignore, homosexual love. In the epic *Metamorphoses*, Ovid explores a vast range of human passions, including same-sex desires and liaisons: much of book 10 comprises songs about the loves of gods for beautiful boys, performed by the bard Orpheus, who has himself turned to the exclusive love of boys after the loss of his wife, Eurydice.<sup>4</sup> Leading in to Ovid's account of the myth of Orpheus is the story at the close of book 9 of Iphis' love for Ianthe. Iphis, born a girl, but raised a boy, falls in love with Ianthe, who loves her back, unaware that Iphis was born female, and Iphis is eventually transformed into a young man so that a marriage between Iphis and Ianthe can be accomplished. Nor are such lengthy episodes the only passages involving homosexuality within the *Metamorphoses*; there are various other references throughout its 15 books to same-sex passions and configurations.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, if we believe that Ovid wrote *Heroides* 15, the *Epistula Sapphus*,<sup>6</sup> then he, unlike the majority of writers in antiquity, took an interest in what we would now call lesbian love, as part of his project of exploring the many varieties of human passion; *Her.* 15 is much concerned with how lesbian passion is similar to and different from both heteroerotic love and pederasty, as insightful studies by Judith Hallett and Pamela Gordon have shown.<sup>7</sup> Even if we do not believe that this poem was actually written by Ovid, it is clear that an imitator took some pains to write it in an Ovidian manner, believing that the treatment of lesbianism was Ovidian, perhaps building on Ovid's brief reference to Sappho's love of girls at *Tristia* 2.365:

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<sup>4</sup> Ovid's depiction of Orpheus as a boy lover (following a Greek tradition that goes back to at least Phanocles fragment 1), is in marked contrast to Virgil's famous account of Orpheus' loss of Eurydice, in which, as Makowski 1996, 25 observes, Virgil 'does not breathe a word on the subject of homosexuality'. McKeown 1989, 23, in his comments on *Am.* 1.1.19-20 on Ovid's attitude towards homoerotic love, observes: 'Even in the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid makes very sparing use of the rich resources of Greek homosexual mythology, the greatest concentration of such stories being the brief accounts of Cyparissus, Ganymede and Hyacinthus at 10.106-219'.

<sup>5</sup> Although McKeown 1989, 23 notes that the longest treatments of homosexual themes in the *Metamorphoses* are cordoned off in Books 9 and 10, briefer, more allusive references appear elsewhere in the text. Most notably, the Callisto episode in Book 2 (404-507), for which see Oliver 2015, and the brief allusion to the homoerotic attachment of Phaëthon and Cycnus at *Met.* 2.367-9.

<sup>6</sup> For arguments in favour of authenticity, see Baca 1971, Kirfel 1969, Showerman & Goold 1977, Rosati 1996, Thorsen 2014; 2019 xxx and Elisei, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon 1997, Hallett 2005.

*Lesbia quid docuit Sappho nisi amare puellas?* ‘what did Sappho teach, except how to love girls?/ girls how to love’.<sup>8</sup> Another poem of disputed authorship perhaps suggesting Ovid’s interest in homoerotic themes is *Priapeia* 3, attributed to him by Seneca the Elder,<sup>9</sup> although this attribution has been doubted.<sup>10</sup>

Even if we leave aside these other works, it would be incredibly anomalous if Ovid departed to such a great extent from the homoerotic tradition of love poetry in his first person subjective elegies, as to either ignore or reject homoeroticism, and this essay argues that he does no such thing. Ovid’s *Amores*, the elegies that relate what he presents as his own love affairs, are far from being exclusively heterosexual, and we should take their programmatic titular plurality seriously. These are not poems that are limited to heterosexual passions; they treat many different varieties of love.<sup>11</sup> Extended scholarly analysis of Ovid’s treatment of sexuality has largely focused on studies of the *Metamorphoses*,<sup>12</sup> but there is a great deal to be gained from analysing Ovid’s treatment of homoeroticism in his earlier works as well. I argue that Ovid is far more concerned with homoerotic passion, and with homosociality, in the *Amores*, *Ars amatoria*, and *Remedia amoris* than has previously been recognized, and that Ovid’s homoeroticism has important consequences for the broader erotics of Ovidian elegy and its place in the wider tradition of love poetry, as well as for the history of sexuality. This essay proposes that homoerotic passion is a programmatic and significant part of Ovidian

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<sup>8</sup> See Ingleheart 2010, 297; either translation contains innuendo about lesbianism, given ancient erotic pedagogy and Sappho’s reputation as a teacher.

<sup>9</sup> *Contr.* 1.2.22.

<sup>10</sup> McKeown 1989, 23 claims that ‘Ovid is unlikely to be the author of the homosexual *Priap.* 3’, for which also see Buchheit 1962. Whether *Priap.* 3 is Ovidian is immaterial: when Seneca ascribed the poem to him, he clearly did not think the poem’s homoerotic themes inappropriate for Ovid; see also Richlin 1992, 141–3.

<sup>11</sup> Compare the putative use of the title *Amores* for the poems of Cornelius Gallus (*Serv. ad Ecl.* 10.1), who is often portrayed as the poet-lover of Lycoris (e.g. *Prop.* 2.34.91–2; *Ov. Am.* 1.15.29–30; *Verg. Ecl.* 10); yet Gallus’ title suggests other beloveds too, and Virgil seems to suggest that Gallus’ affections were not solely heterosexual at *Ecl.* 10.37–43, a claim presumably evidenced by his now lost poetry.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Nagle 1984, Makowski 1996, Hallett 1997, Oliver 2015.

erotics, demonstrating the breadth of his elegiac world, innovative engagement with the wider tradition of love poetry, and subversion of societal and generic norms.<sup>13</sup>

My starting point, after a brief introductory discussion of the terminology and approach that inform this essay, is the first reference to the possibility of homoerotic passion within Ovid's first person erotic elegies: *Amores* 1.1.19-20. The way in which Ovid programmatically suggests here that a boy may be his beloved, his poetic inspiration, and his theme, has not received sufficient attention. This essay aims to redress this gap in scholarship by exploring in some detail the ways in which *Amores* 1.1 and 1.2 further the hint of homoeroticism in *Amores* 1.1.19-20. I then turn to a poem that is highly loaded in homoerotic terms, Ovid's elegy lamenting the death of his fellow elegiac poet, Tibullus; *Amores* 3.9 has not previously been read in this way,<sup>14</sup> but it is revealing to look for hints of homoeroticism and homosociality in a poem which treats the only Roman love elegist whose surviving poetry presents himself as being in love with a boy. In my final section, I turn to the *Ars amatoria* and its companion piece, the *Remedia amoris*, which have done much to cement the stereotype of an exclusively heterosexual Ovid. The erotodidactic *Ars* purports to teach men how to win over women in its first two books, and instructs women how to pursue men in its third and apparently concluding book. This advice is followed, however, by precepts to both genders on how to get over unhappy love affairs in the *Remedia*, the final instalment of Ovid's didactic elegies. Nevertheless, despite the heavily heterocentric focus of these books, Ovid continues to develop the hints at homoeroticism that are found in his *Amores*, with important consequences for his depiction of love.

At this juncture, I ought to say a few words about the terminology and approach of this essay. Although the term 'homosexual' and its cognates are anachronistic as applied to antiquity, I nevertheless use such terminology as a convenient shorthand when referring to same-sex desire and relations. In order to avoid lengthy and inelegant phrasing, I also refer throughout this paper to ancient poets by their names, both when I make reference to the poet

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<sup>13</sup> My essay is thus parallel to Harrison 2018's attempt to bring out the (much more obvious) homoerotic elements in Horace's erotic verse.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. McKeown 1989, 23, claims *Am.* 3.9 'ignore[s]' the homosexual content of Tibullus' Marathus elegies (1.4, 1.8 and 1.9).

and to the poet-lover who appears as a character in subjective Latin love elegy,<sup>15</sup> but this should not be taken to imply that I subscribe to what I would deem a naive biographical reading of elegy. In fact, biographical interpretations of the elegists' attitudes towards love probably have to bear a large amount of responsibility for readers' failure to explore Ovidian homoeroticism fully. Ovid himself, however, invites us to conflate the poet with the lover *Naso* who appears in his poetry and, ultimately, biographical readings of his poetry must be traced back to Ovid himself.

*aut puer aut ... puella*

Let us now turn to the start of Ovid's elegiac corpus. As I observed earlier, Ovid dangles out the possibility in *Amores* 1.1 that his first-person erotic elegies will treat homoerotic love: in this programmatic opening poem, Ovid has not yet become a lover but presents himself as already a poet even before the 'narrative' of the elegy begins. Ovid responds to Cupid's theft of a foot of his epic hexameter verse, a theft which forces him to write in the elegiac metre (1.1.1-4), with a lengthy speech complaining about Cupid's interference in the poetic sphere (5-20). Ovid's protest culminates in the objection that he is not in love, and consequently cannot write love elegy, at lines 19-20:

nec mihi materia est numeris levioribus apta,  
aut puer aut longas compta puella comas.

I do not have material that is suited to lighter metres,  
Either a boy or a girl with beautifully arranged long locks.

(*Am.* 1.1.19-20)

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<sup>15</sup> For the *poeta-amator*, see Holzberg 2002, 10-20 = Holzberg 1998.

The generic necessity for an elegiac love poet to be in love is immediately resolved by Cupid shooting Ovid and forcing him both to fall in love and to accept his new task as a *poeta-amator* (21-30). But this resolution is notably partial: even as Ovid accepts his identity as a love elegist, he teasingly keeps the reader in the dark as to the identity and the gender of the beloved about whom he will write poetry.<sup>16</sup> His focus in the closing lines of this programmatic elegy is upon his own transformation into a poet of love, and we receive no information about the beloved with whom he has fallen in love; by the poem's end, we do not know even whether it is a boy or a girl.

The gender of Ovid's beloved is revealed only at the start of the next but one elegy, when Ovid declares that he has fallen in love with a woman:

Iusta precor: quae me nuper praedata puella est,  
aut amet aut faciat, cur ego semper amem.

I pray a just prayer: may the girl who has recently taken me as her prey  
either love me or give me a reason why I should always be in love.

(*Am.* 1.3.1-2)

Indeed, when we go on to read the rest of the erotic elegies, the priority, in terms of word order, that was given to the *puer* as love object in *Amores* 1.1.19 seems to be revealed as a generic tease, a playful hint at a possible direction in which Ovid might take his love elegy, that looks to the presence of boy-love in his elegiac predecessors Tibullus, Propertius, and Gallus, and in earlier erotic poetry such as that of Catullus, the Hellenistic epigrammatists,

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<sup>16</sup> Ovid may teasingly draw attention to the fact that this is love elegy as yet without a beloved, when he notes that 'Cupid reigns in my empty heart' (in *vacuo pectore regnat Amor*, 1.1.26). McKeown 1989, 27 *ad loc.* argues well for *vacuo* = '(still) fancy-free', suggesting the 'witty paradox that Ovid should be consumed with love even though he does not yet have a beloved'; he notes also the interpretation that *uacuo* may mean 'fancy-free (until Cupid took possession)'.

and the archaic Greek lyricists.<sup>17</sup> Despite what Jim McKeown refers to as Ovid's 'casual attitude to the sex of his beloved' in 1.1.19-20,<sup>18</sup> reflecting an ancient understanding that adult males desired both boys and women, Ovid's erotic elegies go on to be overwhelmingly concerned with the love of *puellae*,<sup>19</sup> as many readers have noted. For most readers, then, Ovidian elegiac homoeroticism starts — and ends — with the opening elegy of the *Amores*.

Yet while the *puer* as elegiac beloved/theme may seem to drop out of sight between the first and third elegies, a closer reading of the opening sequence of the *Amores* can help to complicate the characterisation of Ovid's elegiac corpus as focused on heterosexual love. On the way in which *Amores* 1.3.1-2 resolves the tease about the gender of the beloved that is found in *Amores* 1.1.19-20, Katharina Volk has recently noted with reference to *Amores* 1.3 that: 'Once the object of Ovid's desire has been revealed to be a woman, same-sex love is excluded from the *Amores*'.<sup>20</sup> This is, as we shall see, a partial reading of the erotics of the *Amores*, but it provides us with a useful route into exploring Ovidian homoerotics: that is, I argue that a homoerotic dimension can be detected in *Amores* 1.1 and 1.2, which can be seen as the gap between the lines in which Ovid raises the possibility of same-sex love and *Amores* 1.3, where he appears to shut down that possibility. Crucially for our purposes, *Amores* 1.1 and 1.2 occur at a point in the work at which Ovid has not yet revealed to the first-time reader of the *Amores* that he has a female and not a male beloved;<sup>21</sup> a close reading

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. Tib. 1.4, 1.8, 1.9, 2.3; Prop. 2.12; Catull. 15, 21, 23, 24, 48, 81, 99; Anacr. frs. 1, 14, 62; Thgn. 1259-1380; (Call.) *AP* 12.43, 12.73; Theoc. 12. Gallus' boy-love does not survive in any of the fragments (for which, see Anderson et al. 1979), but there is allusion to it in Prop. 1.20 and Virg. *Ecl.* 10.37-41. See e.g. Cantarella 2002, Dover 1989, Patzer 1982.

<sup>18</sup> McKeown 1989, 23; he provides parallels from elegy and elsewhere in which the beloved is male (Virg. *Ecl.* 10.37-8; Hor. *Epod.* 11.3-4, 27-8, *Carm.* 4.1.29-8; (Mel.) *AP* 12.86). However, McKeown implies that Ovid is antipathetic towards homosexuality, despite quoting a passage (*Ars* 2.683-4, see below) in which Ovid insinuates that he feels some level of homosexual sentiment.

<sup>19</sup> Volk 2010, 89.

<sup>20</sup> Volk 2010, 89.

<sup>21</sup> *Contra* Turpin 2014, who argues that the Muse with whom *Am.* 1.1 closes should be understood as Corinna, Ovid's Muse in the sense that she inspires his work; Turpin does not cite perhaps the best evidence I am aware of for the Romans having a concept of a 'Muse' as erotic/poetic inspiration: Catull. 35.16-17 *sapphica puella / musa doctor* ('girl more learned than the Sapphic muse').

of these poems can illuminate the presence of homoeroticism within the *Amores* and enable us to recognise its programmatic importance for the erotic elegies.

I detect complex play with eroticism and, in particular, homoeroticism in *Amores* 1.1.19-20 and in the first elegy of the *Amores* more broadly. While Ovid's poetic *materia* will eventually turn out to be a *puella* rather than a *puer*, Ovid's description of the *longas compta puella comas* recalls homoerotic depictions in both Greek and Latin verse of beautiful boy love-objects as having long hair, which is often in attractive disarray.<sup>22</sup> As scholars have noted, Ovid here recalls Horace, *Epod.* 11.27-8:

... alius ardor aut puellae candidae  
aut teretis pueri longam renodantis<sup>23</sup> comam.

... another flame, either for a fair girl  
or a slender boy, knotting up again/unknotting his long locks.

Here, the poet contemplates a future beloved who might set him free from his current passion for the boy Lyciscus. Ovid's readers are encouraged to spot the allusion by the close verbal echo of Horace's *longam ... comam* in the Ovidian *longas ... comas*, as well as the contextual similarity of a poet looking forward to having either a female or a male beloved.<sup>24</sup> Jim

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<sup>22</sup> Mankin 1995, 205, commenting on Hor. *Epod.* 11.27-8 (see below) notes (e.g.) Hor. *Carm.* 129.8, 2.5.23, 3.20.14, 4.10.3; Chaerem. fr. 1.5; Theoc. 5.91; Philostr.Jun. *Im.* 1.23.5; Archil. fr. 31; see Nisbet & Rudd 2004, 244. Such hair is often associated with the homoerotic and 'somewhat androgynously handsome' figures of Apollo and Bacchus (McKeown 1989, 376): e.g. at Tib. 2.5.8; *Am.* 1.1.11, 1.14.31-2, *Ars am.* 3.141-2. For hair and gender, see Pandey 2018. Apollo is regularly found in the homoerotic sphere: e.g. Tib. 2.3.11-14; Ov. *Met.* 10.162-219. However, the eroticism of unkempt hair is not uniquely male: e.g. Daphne (Ov. *Met.* 1.497-8), Naiads (*Fast.* 1.405), and Propertius' Cynthia (4.8.51-2). Ovid himself connects unkempt female hair with eroticism at *Ars am.* 3.153-60; for more on messy hair in Ovid, see Sande 2017, Olson 2017, 139, Pandey 2018, especially 458-9. For the eroticism of messy hair in elegy more broadly, see Burkowski 2012, 184-92

<sup>23</sup> See Mankin 1995, 205 for the ambiguous meaning of the prefix *re-* of this verb, found here for the first time; Watson 2003, 381 argues convincingly for the sense of 'unbinding'.

<sup>24</sup> Anticipating Ovid's order in which a boy appears before a girl, Horace describes himself as subject to *Amore*, *qui me praeter omnis expetit/mollibus in pueris aut in puellis urere* ('love/ Love [the relative clause suggests the

McKeown attributes Ovid's change of emphasis in his Horatian allusion to a personal erotic preference: the desirable boy has long hair in Horace, but this attribute is given to the girl of Ovid's poem, showing the real direction of Ovid's desires on McKeown's interpretation, while Ovid's boy receives no distinguishing features whatsoever, in marked contrast to the *puella*, and to Horace's more balanced description.<sup>25</sup>

McKeown sees the boy as a mere cipher, a nod to the importance of boy-love in earlier erotic verse. While the change of emphasis does matter, it seems highly reductive to approach Ovid's Horatian intertextuality in such biographical terms. Rather, Ovid's play with Horace is significant insofar as it blurs the boundaries between the two genders as love objects, endowing the *puella* with an attractive feature commonly associated with the *puer* as object of homoerotic desire.<sup>26</sup> That the *puella* is described with reference to an aesthetically pleasing attribute frequent in poetic descriptions of beautiful boys suggests, then, both that desire will be no simple matter in the *Amores*, and that homoerotic aesthetics will inform the poet's experience of heterosexual desire. This slippage between male and female objects of desire is more than just a matter of Ovidian 'casualness' with respect to the gender of the beloved: it features throughout Ovid's corpus and acts as an important way of keeping homoerotic desire in focus, and, crucially, it has an elegiac precedent.

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latter is more likely], who seeks me out, more than anyone else, to set me on fire for soft boys or for girls' (*Epod.* 11.3-4).

<sup>25</sup> McKeown 1989, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Ovid plays with Horace's description of the boy as *renodantis* when he describes the *puella* as *compta*, with well dressed locks; as noted above, *pueri delicati* are often described as having hair that is sexily free. Ovid's reference to the girl as *compta* as to her locks therefore either presents her as different from a boy who is letting his hair down in Horace, or as parallel with the boy who is knotting his hair up in Horace - for the ambiguity of *re-nodantis*, see above. The word *comptas* may also hint at a more metapoetical thrust, in which the literary artefact of the beloved is itself 'composed' by the poet; see Burkowski 2012, especially 3, 21, 36-7, 61. For the connected motif of weaving as metapoetic synecdoche for poetic composition (sometimes tied up with hairstyling), see Nethercut 1975, Papaïoannou 2006, 56-8, Snyder 1981, Zetzel 1996, 77-9. In Ovidian elegy the hair of the beloved woman is a part of her charms that is frequently foregrounded (e.g. *Am.* 1.1.20, 1.5.10, 1.14 passim, *Ars.* 3.141); indeed, some scholars have even gone so far as to call this a 'fetish' (e.g. Kennedy 1993, 73, Frazel 2003, 74). This may in itself respond to references to the hair of the *eromenos* in pederastic verse; see Dover 1989, 78-9, Lear & Cantarella 2008, 28, Harrison 1988.



Myiscus, shooting me, unwounded by the Loves, in the breast

with his eyes, shouted out this:

“I have captured the bold one. See, I trample underfoot that insolence on his brow  
that projects sceptred wisdom.”

Just gathering my breath, I said this to him, ‘dear boy, why are you amazed? 5

Love brought down Zeus himself from Olympus.’

((Meleager) *AP* 12.101)

In these lines, Propertius could be seen to heterosexualize for Latin love elegy the homoerotic scenario of the Hellenistic epigrammatist, by bringing his female beloved, Cynthia, centre stage, and making her, rather than the boy-beloved Myiscus, responsible for his erotic capture, effected through the eyes. Propertius’ readers, versed in Greek epigram, would have been highly alert to Propertius’ manipulation of his Hellenistic predecessor and to his switch in the beloved’s gender, which nevertheless does not fully erase the homoerotic element of his Greek model. As various scholars have noted,<sup>27</sup> traces of Meleager’s homoerotic scenario are not confined to Propertius’ inversion of the gender of the beloved, but can also be detected in Propertius’ treatment of the role of boy-god of love, who takes on the role of conqueror that Myiscus himself had played in Meleager’s epigram. Meleager’s depiction of Myiscus had nevertheless aligned the beloved boy strongly with the boy-god of love, an identification that is frequently made in both pederastic Greek epigram and earlier homoerotic Greek lyric.<sup>28</sup> In our epigram in particular, the metaphor of Myiscus shooting (*toxeusas*, 2) at Meleager recalls the bow and arrows, the usual weapons and attributes, of the love god, even as Meleager’s language is revealed as metaphorical by the unexpected combination of this verb with *ommasi* (2). Meleager’s opening and closing references to *Pothois* and *Eros* also serve to strengthen the link between Myiscus and Eros, and hint that

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<sup>27</sup> Propertius’ play with Meleager, and particularly the implications of the gender switch, are well discussed by Miller 2004, 85–8, Höschele 2011, 20–6, Heslin 2018, 68, see also Ingleheart 2015.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Anacr. fr. 396, 413; Ibyc. fr. 287; (Mel.) *AP* 12.127.

Myiscus' erotic power and victory have been gained through the workings of the personified god of love. While Meleager's boy-beloved is replaced by Propertius' Cynthia, then, the reader is reminded that the poet is defeated by a boy-beloved in Propertius' model by the boy-god of love performing the same role as the boy himself had done in Meleager. The homoerotic has a significant presence in Propertius 1.1.

This matters, since Propertius' opening poem constitutes an important precedent for *Amores* 1.1, not only as an elegiac opening, but also because Propertius has influenced the specific scenario of Ovid's poem, in which the god of love imposes desire upon a man who has not experienced it previously.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, traces of Meleager, via Propertius, can be read in Ovid's first poem. Propertius' opening lines offer us a scenario in which the poet-lover simply accepts his ill-treatment and subjugation by forces divine and human, and becomes a passive victim of love, but Ovid's spirited reply to the Cupid who dares to steal a foot of his putative epic work, and who will soon enough shoot him with a love-inspiring arrow, just as Myiscus shoots Meleager, recalls the (much shorter) response of the epigram's Meleager to Myiscus' apparent victory, *AP* 12.101.5-6. Ovid's response to Cupid is quite different from Propertius' passivity and lack of quoted speech, and clearly looks to Meleager's epigram. Jim McKeown's (in many ways excellent) commentary does not note the window-reference to Meleager via Propertius 1.1 in *Amores* 1.1;<sup>30</sup> indeed, he even claims that there are 'no certain conceptual or verbal links' between Propertius' first elegy and *Amores* 1.1.<sup>31</sup> The homoerotic scenario of Meleager's epigram, via Propertius 1.1, nevertheless colours our reading of Ovid; while Propertius had inverted, if never wholly removed from view, the homoerotic elements of his Hellenistic model, the first-time reader of

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<sup>29</sup> In Fowler 2002's model, poetic 'inspiration is an invasive process, like being the "passive" and "penetrated" partner in intercourse' (150). Fowler does not, however, discuss our passage (*Ov. Am.* 1.1) in his analysis of poetic inspiration scenes.

<sup>30</sup> For the 'window reference', see Thomas 1986, especially 188-9. This specific link has not been noted, while some scholars have posited Ovidian play with Propertius/Meleager: for example, Höschele 2011, 21 suggests Amor's theft of one foot in the fourth line of Ovid's *Amores* is 'a witty reversal and metrical elaboration' of Propertius' double allusion to Myiscus *possi pato* with *pressit pedibus* and the verbal echo of *possi* in *impositis*, the participle that qualifies *pedibus*.

<sup>31</sup> McKeown 1989, 27 does note that *me miserum* (*Am.* 1.1.25) may allude to Prop. 1.1.1's *miserum me* (see also Hinds 1998, 29-34), and contrasts 'Ovid's light-hearted detachment' with 'the urgency and emotional intensity of Propertius' first elegy' (McKeown 1989, 11).

*Amores* 1.1 cannot be sure that Ovid will follow the same erotic path,<sup>32</sup> of devotion to a one and only female beloved, as his Roman predecessor had done with his Cynthia.

Although I can detect no specific verbal reminiscences of either Propertius 1.1 or Meleager *AP* 12.101 in *Amores* 1.2, the poem as a whole expands upon their scenario of the erotic conquest of the poet-lover. The second poem of the *Amores* creates an entire elegy on the theme of the triumph of Cupid over his victim, drawing on the vocabulary of capture (*eilon*, *AP* 12.101.3; *cepit*, Prop. 1.1.1) and the image of trampling underfoot, the action of the military conqueror, in Propertius and Meleager (*AP* 12.101.4; Prop. 1.1.4). *Amores* 1.2, then, constitutes an important continuation of the homoerotics of Ovidian elegy, not least in its presentation of Cupid as the conqueror of Ovid.

As we have already noted (see note 31), slippage between the beloved boy and Eros, the boy-god of love, was frequent in Greek erotic verse. Such slippage can also be detected in *Amores* 1.2, to homoerotic effect, and it is set up by *Amores* 1.1, a poem in which various erotic slippages and homoerotic hints are found. Some, although not all of these, have been detected in scholarship: the potential homoeroticism in 1.2 of Ovid's presentation of Cupid as his conqueror, effected via his reading of Meleager through Propertius, as discussed above, has not been considered previously. However, Duncan Kennedy has astutely noted homoerotic overtones in the interaction between Cupid and Ovid in 1.1, arguing that, in Cupid's command to Ovid to *accipe ... opus*, 'he ensures that the poet is receptive, thus graphically figuring the passive role which is incorporated in elegy's own representation of itself as *mollis*'.<sup>33</sup> The presentation of Ovid, at the very outset of his corpus, being penetrated by the boy-god Cupid, and therefore being less than manly in Roman terms, matters for our understanding of Ovid's self-presentation in the *Amores*. Ovid in this poem is far from the heterosexually fixated, swaggering lover who boasts about his many female conquests in later poems; indeed, his humiliation in this poem may perhaps account for his later boasting, as a form of overcompensation.

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<sup>32</sup> Martelli 2013, 35-38 discusses Ovid's presentation of the *Amores* as a second edition, adapted from a longer, five book original (see *Am.* 1 epigr.); this makes the experience of a 'first-time' reader impossible to reconstruct from the extant text.

<sup>33</sup> Kennedy 1993, 62.

The idea that Cupid and Ovid have an erotic relationship is further hinted at by *Amores* 1.1.26 *uror, et in vacuo pectore regnat Amor* ('I am burned, and Cupid rules in my empty heart'). Traditionally, this description of the dominion of Amor over Ovid has been interpreted as a metaphor for Ovid having fallen in love, although the description of Ovid's heart as 'empty' and the fact that no object for Ovid's love is revealed here has caused readers some disquiet.<sup>34</sup> However, perhaps we may recognise that there is no lack of a love relationship in Ovid's life if we are alert to the erotic overtones of this phrasing, for the idea that an individual rules erotically over their lover is a commonplace.<sup>35</sup> While we also find Eros/Cupid ruling over others in the sense that he makes them be in love,<sup>36</sup> the homoerotic play that we have already detected in *Am.* 1.1 suggests that we should be alert to the former meaning here. Love's dominion over Ovid might precisely be that of a *lover*.

The homoeroticism of Cupid's power over Ovid, and Ovid's erotic submission to Cupid, continues in the portrait of Cupid's triumph in *Amores* 1.2. Before we go on to consider Cupid's triumph, it is worth noting that the initial set up of *Amores* 1.2, before the triumph scene, is homoerotically tinged. For the first four lines, in which Ovid cannot sleep, and wonders why, recall the homoerotically tinged Catullus 50, where Catullus is well aware that his sleeplessness is caused by his (homoerotic) desire to be with his friend and fellow

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<sup>34</sup> McKeown 1989, 27-8; for a summary of different interpretations of *Am.* 1.1.26, see Turpin 2014.

<sup>35</sup> E.g., as noted at Murgatroyd 1980, 276-7, Hor. *Carm.* 3.9.9 (*me nunc Thressa Chloe regit*, 'now Thracian Chloe rules over me'); Prop. 2.16.30 (*subito felix nunc mea regna tenet*, 'now some other man gets lucky all of a sudden and holds my kingdom'); [Tib.] 4.5.3-4 (*Parcae ... servitium et dederunt regna superba tibi*, 'the Parcae gave slavery and proud sovereignty to you'); Ov. *Am.* 2.17.11 (*non, tibi si facies animum dat et omina regni*, 'not even if your appearance gives you haughtiness and intimations of ruling'). Cf. Prop. 4.7.50 and 3.10.18 (*inque meum semper stent tua regna caput*, 'and may your sovereignty always stand over my head').

<sup>36</sup> E.g. Ov. *Met.* 5.369-72: *tu superos ipsumque Iovem, tu numina ponti/ victa domas ipsumque, regit qui numina ponti: / Tartara quid cessant? cur non matrisque tuumque/ imperium profers?* ('you rule over the gods and Jupiter himself, you rule over the conquered powers of the sea and he who reigns over the sea; why should Tartarus hold back? Why do you not extend your mother's empire - and your own?'). Cf. Ovid's comments that *regendus Amor [est]* (*Ars am.* 1.4; 'Eros must be ruled') and that his *aetas* is *apta regi* (*ibid.* 1.10; 'age is appropriate to be ruled over').

poet Calvus,<sup>37</sup> in contrast to the amusingly clueless Ovid. Indeed, Ovid's apparent ignorance about the erotic nature of his insomnia,<sup>38</sup> is made even funnier by his apparent lack of awareness of this literary precedent, despite his grandiose claims to literary mastery in *Amores* 1.1. Despite the lack of verbal parallels between the poems, Catullus' homoerotic scenario is very much a precedent for this scene of Ovidian sleeplessness, and ought to be read against it.

The opening lines of *Amores* 1.2 also look back to the sexualized suggestiveness of *Amores* 1.1: the hardness of the covers, described as *dura* in line 1, recalls that the poet has, in the opening poem, been the opposite of *durus*, in terms of Roman ideas about masculine behaviour, as he is emasculated through his penetration by Cupid. Further, the description *lassaque versati corporis ossa dolent* ('the shagged out bones of my tossed about body ache', 4) begins with two sexually loaded terms: *lassus*, as opposed to its synonym *fessus*, is often found in contexts of *sexual* weariness;<sup>39</sup> indeed, Ovid will use it of the postcoital exhaustion he and Corinna experience at 1.5.25. The fact that this adjective is applied to Ovid's bones may also recall frequent descriptions of Cupid's arrow piercing the bones of those he forces to fall in love, given the previous poem's play on Ovid's sexual penetration by Cupid.<sup>40</sup> The passive participle *versati* hardly looks innocent in this context, either; for despite the absence of *verso* from Adams' study of the Latin sexual vocabulary,<sup>41</sup> the vocabulary of turning *is*

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<sup>37</sup> Catull. 50.11-13: *sed toto indomitus furore lecto / versare, cupiens videre lucem, / ut tecum loquerer simulque ut essem* ('but wild I am tossed about in madness over the whole bed, wishing to see the dawn that I might talk with you and be with you').

<sup>38</sup> On erotic sleeplessness, see Thomas 1979, 203-5, Miller 2004, 79, Pasco-Pranger 2009.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. Plaut. *Asin.* 873, Ov. *Am.* 1.5.25; 3.7.80; 3.11.13, Apul. *Met.* 2.17. Cf. the use of the verb *lasso* at Tib. 1.9.55, Juv. 6.130, *SHA Max.* 4.7. See also the noun *lassitudo* at Apul. *Met.* 2.17; Adams 1990, 196.

<sup>40</sup> E.g. Ov. *Am.* 2.9a.13-14, *Her.* 16.277-8, *Met.* 1.472-3; cf. the similar, though not osseous, sentiment at Prop. 2.12.17.

<sup>41</sup> McKeown 1998, 36 cites for *versati* Catull. 50.11-12, Prop 1.14.21; 2.22b.47-8, Sen. *Tranq.* 9.2.6 (*quibus difficilis somnus est versant se*; 'people do toss themselves, as it were to help sleep'), Juv. 13.218. *Verso* does not seem to connote a specific sexual practice, but the contexts in which it is found are ones of heightened sexually frustrated sleeplessness; it seems a metaphor ripe for sexual exploitation and innuendo. Kennedy 2012, 201 suggests some protracted connection between the verb *verso* and matters sexual, but he does not fully commit to it.

found with play on its sense of ‘turning about in coitus’ in Greek texts.<sup>42</sup> Ovid may hint, then, that his body is sexually worn out from its encounter with Cupid in the previous poem. There may well be further innuendo in the next line, as Ovid states *nam, puto, sentirem, siquo temptarer amore* (‘For I think I’d know it if / I were being teased by Love’, 1.2.5);<sup>43</sup> appreciation of the innuendo has not been helped here for modern readers by the way in which editors are forced to print the ‘a’ of *amore* either capitalized or lowercase. If we print *Amore* with a capital A, Ovidian homoeroticism comes into clearer focus,<sup>44</sup> for *tempto* had been used to refer to feeling up, or ‘attempting’ in a clearly sexualized sense, at Propertius 1.3.15,<sup>45</sup> and the line thus seems to look back to Cupid’s erotic assault on Ovid in *Amores* 1.1. The sexualized possibilities of *temptarer* in our passage are reinforced by the recall, through the use of the passive voice, of Ovid’s sexual position *vis à vis* Cupid in 1.1, and also by the verb *sentirem*, which can be understood have a knowingly *sensual* dimension here,<sup>46</sup> and so continue the vocabulary of touch and feeling at which *temptarer* hints.

Thus, the erotics of Ovid’s submission to Cupid are already established. In the lines that follow, we read of Ovid’s acceptance in 9-10 of the need to yield to Amor, and then a

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<sup>42</sup> See Henderson 1975, 176 for examples, to which should be added Zeus’ dirty-minded interpretation of Ganymede’s innocent words about tossing on his bed in Lucian, *DDeor.* 10; a scenario highly relevant to the discussion above. For the motif of ‘turning words’ relating, eventually, via Greek *tropos*, to words associated with sexuality, see Kennedy 2012, 201 and Gibson 2003, 391.

<sup>43</sup> Commenting on *si quo temptarer amore*, McKeown 1998, 36 notes ‘I can cite no exact parallel for this phrase’, but the sole Ovidian parallel he cites, *Ars am.* 1.365 (*tum quoque temptanda est, cum paelice laesa dolebit*; ‘then she too must be teased, when she grieves, hurt by a rival’), may include the same sexual innuendo as in Prop. 1.3.13-15 (*iuberent .../ subiecto leviter positam temptare lacerto*, ‘they commanded me to gently tease the girl with my arm beneath her’), not least given that the situations are nearly parallel, as Cynthia in 1.3 suspects that Propertius’ absence from her bed earlier in the evening is due to his pursuit of other erotic interests.

<sup>44</sup> McKeown 1998, 37 on 5-6 notes that *callidus* in line 6 strongly suggests that ‘*Amor* is to be extracted from *amore* (5) as the subject of *subit* and *nocet*’, reinforcing my reading of *Amore* already at 5.

<sup>45</sup> See Preston 1916, 28 and *OLD* 1915 s.v. ‘tempto’ 9b. See also the presentation of Pygmalion’s treatment of his ivory statue at Ov. *Met.* 10.254: *saepe manus operi temptantes admovet* (‘often he moved his teasing [I am tempted to translate ‘randy’] hands to his work’).

<sup>46</sup> *Sentio* may suggest sexual submissiveness, as in the innuendo of Cic. *Phil.* 13.24: ‘*puerum*’ *appellat quem non modo virum sed etiam fortissimum virum sensit et sentiet* (‘he calls him “boy”, but he has “experienced” him (and will “experience” him) not only as a man, but as a very masculine man’).

description of Cupid's triumph over the poet-lover. We may detect a further erotic charge to Ovid's declaration that *tua sum nova praeda, Cupido* ('I am your new prey, Cupid', 19), not least because Ovid will go on to use the vocabulary of erotic predation of his having fallen in love with the *puella* of 1.3.1: *quae me nuper praedata puella est* ('the girl who has recently taken me as her prey'). Once more, then, we have Ovidian slippage between eroticized males and females, as he refuses to distinguish between the genders, his relations with them, and the terms in which those relations are portrayed. Ovid's description of the beauty of Cupid as he rides in triumph and parades Ovid with his other captives at lines 23-48 is also strongly homoerotic, although it has not previously been read as such. In an article on *Amores* 1.2, Lucia Athanassaki rightly observes that when this description focuses on Cupid's appearance at 1.2.39-46, 'the emphasis is ... on the charioteer's alluring figure and irresistible appeal',<sup>47</sup> but she does not consider the specifically homoerotic dimension of Cupid's depiction as supremely attractive, a literal golden boy in these lines.<sup>48</sup> Homoeroticism may further be detected in the early instruction to Cupid, *necte comam myrto* (23) ('bind your locks with myrtle'), given homoerotic descriptions of beautiful boys with their hair unbound in other poems;<sup>49</sup> this is an image that will more readily have occurred to readers thanks to Ovid's allusion to the boy of Horace's *Epodes* 11 knotting or unknotting his hair in *Amores* 1.1. Ovid's erotic submission to Cupid remains a subtext to the first two books of the *Amores*, and in the programmatic 2.1, he is still Ovid's erotic *dominus*; Ovid clarifies his subservience in the assertion *hoc quoque iussit Amor* (3, 'Cupid also commands this'). Cupid also appears in prominent position, yet again described in wording that implies his erotic dominance over Ovid, at the start of the third book of the *Amores*. The description of Ovid at 3.1.20 as *hic, hic*

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<sup>47</sup> Athanassaki 1992, 131.

<sup>48</sup> *Ov. Am.* 1.2.42.

<sup>49</sup> There may be homoerotic overtones in the selection of the god Dionysus as a simile for Cupid's appearance as conqueror at lines 47-8; although Amorini were often portrayed in Hellenistic and Roman art with Dionysiac attributes (McKeown 1989, 32, Stuveras 1969, 13, 13-23 and Huwé 2017, 23), Dionysus is portrayed as raping Adonis in the Hellenistic poet Phanocles' elegiac catalogue of the gods' loves for beautiful boys (Phanocles fr. 3: 'and how mountain-haunting Dionysus seized the godlike Adonis, as he visited holy Cyprus'). Ovid's *talis* may be equivalent to Phanocles' ὤς, and the situation of Ovid's poem - a male god makes a same-sex conquest - recalls Phanocles' myth; *domita* (*Am.* 1.2.47), although applied to the land of India, keeps the notion of *erotic* conquest clearly in focus.

*est, quem ferus urit Amor* ('he, he is the one whom savage Love burns') recalls 1.1 and in particular 1.1.26's *uror* (discussed earlier in this essay).

### **Tibullus and Tibullan homoerotics in *Amores* 3.9**

From Ovid's teasing hints that he is himself involved in a homoerotic relationship with the *puer* Cupid in the opening sequence of the *Amores*, I now turn to an elegy in the third book of the collection where scholars have previously seen only the absence of homoeroticism. *Amores* 3.9, Ovid's lament over the death of his fellow elegist Tibullus, has been read as confirming the heterosexual bias that readers have detected in Ovidian elegy: Ovid presents Tibullus as the poet of the two female beloveds who appear in the first and second books of his poetry respectively, Delia and Nemesis, whereas the boy Marathus, Tibullus' other named beloved, is not named in the poem. Yet the absence of Marathus' name in Ovid's poem should not be taken to indicate a lack of homoeroticism in Ovid's portrait of Tibullus; indeed, it would be surprising if this poem did lack homoeroticism. For Ovid is a very attentive and close reader of Tibullus' verse, as this poem shows,<sup>50</sup> and it is highly unlikely that he would ignore completely the homoeroticism that is found in Tibullus' poems: particularly in 1.4, 1.8, and 1.9, but also in 2.3, which treats Apollo's suffering in erotic subjection to Admetus, and so carries on homoeroticism as a theme into Tibullus' second book (although this poem is much less frequently cited in discussions of Tibullan homoeroticism).<sup>51</sup>

Marathus may not be named in *Amores* 3.9 whereas Delia and Nemesis are both named and presented in a manner which draws heavily on their portrayal in Tibullus' poetry,<sup>52</sup> but a teasing hint at Marathus' presence may be found in line 7 of the poem, before

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Ov. *Tr.* 2.447-64 on Tibullus. In the *Tristia*, Ovid presents Tibullus' erotodidaxis as heterosexually inclined, but the context demands that Tibullus' poetry is presented as a parallel for the offence of Ovid's *Ars*, as I observe at Ingleheart 2010a, 350.

<sup>51</sup> For instance, James 2003, 9-12 omits reference to Tib. 2.3 in her discussion of homoerotic love both in Tibullus and in elegy more broadly.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. Ovid's Nemesis repurposes Tibullus' hyperbolic declaration of love for Delia as a eulogy: *me tenuit moriens deficiente manu* ('as he died, he held me in his ailing hand', Ov. *Am.* 3.9.58) and *et teneam moriens*

either of Tibullus' mistresses have been mentioned: *ecce, puer Veneris fert eversamque pharetram* ('look, the boy of Venus carries a reversed quiver'). While the *puer* of this line is revealed to be Cupid by the word that follows immediately on from it, the reader may initially assume that the *puer* who is mentioned in connection with Tibullus is none other than his beloved Marathus, explicitly characterized as a *puer* in Tibullus' first address to him at 1.4.83: *parce, puer, quaeso* ('spare me, boy, I pray'). Once again, Ovid plays on the interchangeability of boys and the boy-god of love, Cupid. It is surely no accident that Ovid's teasing hint that this poem will treat Tibullus' pederastic relationship recalls the way in which the first elegy of the *Amores* presents us with a *puer* before a *puella* as a possible love object; yet, ultimately, Ovid is only teasing, as here too Marathus fades from view as Ovid concentrates on Delia and Nemesis as Tibullus' beloveds.

Nor is this the only homoeroticism lurking in Ovid's lamentation for Tibullus' death; indeed, Ovid reminds the reader of Tibullus' homoerotic poetry by linking him to other poets whose verses had a homoerotic dimension. For, just as Tibullus had pictured himself in a lover's Elysium in his own poetry (albeit without poet-companions),<sup>53</sup> Ovid depicts Tibullus in the Elysian vale in lines 59-66 and he is accompanied there by a highly suggestive set of companions: Catullus together with his own Gaius Licinius Calvus, and Cornelius Gallus.<sup>54</sup> There has been scholarly discussion of why Ovid selects these particular poetic companions for the dead Tibullus,<sup>55</sup> but readers seem to have missed the homoerotic dimension. In a suggestive reference to the heavily eroticized link between Catullus and Calvus in Catullus 50, these two republican love poets are depicted as very close: not just by the fact that they are with each other, but also by the description of Calvus as *tuo*, 'your Calvus', in the address to Catullus, which draws on Catullus' description of Calvus as *meus ... Calvos* at 53.3 and

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*deficient manu* ('may I hold you in my ailing hand as I die', Tib. 1.1.60). For the Tibullan resonances of *Amores* 3.9 more generally, see Taylor 1970, Perkins 1993 and Huskey 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Tib. 1.3.57-8: *sed me, quod facilis tenero sum semper Amori, / ipsa Venus campos ducet in Elysios* ('but, because I am always yielding to gentle Cupid, Venus herself will lead me into the Elysian fields').

<sup>54</sup> Compare the first line of Domitius Marsus' epitaph for Tibullus (fr. 7 Courtney), which has Tibullus as *comes* to Virgil (who is much linked with homoerotic love in the biographical tradition, e.g. Donat. *Vit. Verg.* 9 and Apul. *Apol.* 10) in the Underworld; no beloveds are mentioned here at all, with homosociality a strong presence.

<sup>55</sup> These discussions tend to revolve around Ovid's inscription into the poetic mode of Latin love poetry (not simply elegy): see e.g. Putnam 2005, 130, O'Rourke 2012, 402 and Ingleheart 2010b, especially 171-2.

self-description in an address to Calvus as *tuum Catullum* (14.13). While this pair of friends whose friendship has highly homoerotic colouring in Catullus' poetry are routinely linked in Latin poetry,<sup>56</sup> the homoerotic dimension to their portrayal should not be overlooked in this context.

The reader should also recall that Gallus' poetry had a highly homoerotic flavour, at least on the evidence of Propertius 1.20, which alludes to a Gallus' poetry on a male beloved,<sup>57</sup> and Virgil, *Eclogues* 10.37-38. With this in mind, then, the reader may further find suggestive the fact that the first of the poets with whom Tibullus is aligned in the poem is the mythical bard Orpheus, at 21-22 (*quid pater Ismario, quid mater profuit Orpheo? / carmine quid victas obstipuisse feras?*, 'what good to Thracian Orpheus was his father, what good was his mother? / What good was the fact that the conquered beasts were stunned by his song'). While there is no hint at Orpheus' sexuality in this poem, the reader would have recalled Orpheus' prominent placement as a representative of homoerotic love in Phanocles' *Erotes* or *Kaloi* (fr. 1 Powell); the former title translates, of course, into the Latin *Amores*, and it is possible that both Gallus and Ovid's use of this title for their collection of love poems has some of this flavor (perhaps also accounting for Gallus' presence in *Amores* 3.9 and his presentation in other poets as homoerotic).<sup>58</sup> Ovid's later reception of Phanocles, in his *Metamorphoses* 10, has been largely responsible for Orpheus' reputation for exclusive pederasty; after the death of Eurydice, the Orpheus of the *Metamorphoses* wanders Thrace and initiates the practice of pederasty there (10.79-85). Ovid, then, may present us, by analogy, with a Tibullus who is separated by death from his mistresses, yet also in death reunited with the company that he may have been happiest in all along: that of his fellow, homoerotically inclined male poets. It is they, not Delia and Nemesis, who provide the conclusion to Ovid's portrait of Tibullus.

### ***si quis ...: homoeroticism in the Ars amatoria***

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<sup>56</sup> See Hollis 2007, 58-9.

<sup>57</sup> I believe that this Gallus is Cornelius Gallus (on this issue, see e.g. Cairns 2012, 65-66), but this is not a view that is universally held.

<sup>58</sup> I am grateful to the editors for this suggestion.

Ovidian homoeroticism, then, extends beyond the ‘personal’ treatment of the theme to teasing allusions to the homoerotic themes and attachments of his poetic predecessors. The *Amores*’ mixture of the ‘personal’ and the more distanced treatment of homoeroticism can also be observed in the didactic *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris*, although only the former has received much attention to date, and this section of my essay aims to redress a gap in scholarly studies as it considers both.

While the *Ars* has been read as almost overwhelmingly heterocentric in terms of its love advice, this is only a partial interpretation. Indeed, the *Ars* begins with the appearance of being a genuinely comprehensive guide to love, as its first couplet tells us:

Siquis in hoc Artem populo non novit amandi  
hoc legat et lecto carmine doctus amet.

If anyone among this populace does not know the art of loving,  
let him read this poem and love, an expert.

*Si quis* highlights the potential for anyone in Rome, of any gender or erotic persuasion, to become a reader of the *Ars*. Those who pursue homoerotic passions, who, as we shall see, are acknowledged on a few occasions within the text of the poem, would seem to be included in the audience. The suggestion that homoerotic love is encompassed may also be reinforced by Ovid’s frequent references to boys and submission in the prologue: lines 7-10 refer to Ovid’s mastery over Cupid:

me Venus artificem tenero praefecit Amori;  
Tiphys et Automedon dicar Amoris ego.  
ille quidem ferus est et qui mihi saepe repugnet;  
sed puer est, aetas mollis et apta regi.

Venus has appointed me as the artist of tender Love;  
I shall be called the Tiphys and Automedon of Love.  
He is certainly savage and prone to fight against me often;  
but he is a boy, of an age that is soft and can be ruled.

Although the primary sense of *mollis* at line 10 is to the malleability of boys, and hence the ability of Ovid as *praeceptor Amoris* to gain Cupid's submission, the word *mollis* has a very strong sexual charge, suggesting the desirable softness and effeminacy of the boy-god. The sexual sense of *mollis* is increased by the wider context of Ovid's relationship with Cupid, given the opening of the *Amores*. Ovid's claim in the prologue of the *Ars* at 21-22 that he will gain mastery over Cupid suggests perhaps that their erotic situation might have changed after the *Amores*, although there are still strong hints that they have a heavily eroticised dynamic of domination and submission.

Furthermore, the passage contains suggestive hints at erotic pedagogy in Ovid's claims that he is Cupid's teacher, with *me Venus artificem tenero praefecit Amori* ('Venus has appointed me the teacher of tender Love' 7), and line 17's *ego sum praeceptor Amoris*, which has the sense 'I am the tutor to Love', with a capital L, referring to the relationship between Ovid and Amor, as well as the broader sense 'I am the teacher of love', lower case l; that is, 'I am the teacher of the art of love'. Given that erotic pedagogy was indelibly connected with pederastic relationships in antiquity,<sup>59</sup> the homoerotics of Ovid's relationship with Cupid remain to the fore. Alison Sharrock's 1994 *Seduction and Repetition in Ovid's Ars amatoria* argued that homoerotic pedagogy and aesthetics alike are very much a feature of the relationship of Ovid as *praeceptor amoris* with his inexperienced, young male addressees in the *Ars*, and that he seduces them into becoming more appealing to an older lover - that is, himself. Her argument is based for the most part on a passage in *Ars* 2 on how young men can make themselves attractive (2.99-122); the passage includes suggestive references to Ovid's male readers, cast in the roles of attractive boys of myth, such as Nireus as loved by Homer, and Hylas as stolen by the nymphs (that is, from his lover, Heracles: *Ars am.* 2.109-110), as well as many allusions to the aesthetics and themes of pederastic poetry. Nevertheless, her argument also applies more widely to the entirety of the first two books of

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<sup>59</sup> See Percy 1996, and Provencal 2013.

the *Ars*, and the fact that the work as a whole opens with a pedagogic relationship that brings pederasty to the fore very much strengthens her thesis.<sup>60</sup>

The impression that the *Ars* offers love advice for all, and is not heterocentric, is then further suggested within the prologue by Ovid's use of a neuter pronoun when he refers to the object of love at line 35: *principio, quod amare velis, reperire labora* ('in the beginning, work at finding what you might want to love'). Ovid will often go on to denote the beloved with the neuter pronoun in the *Ars*, an idiom that is not found in Propertius and Tibullus, although it is anticipated in the *Amores*.<sup>61</sup> The use of the neuter in the *Ars* has been read as depersonalizing the hunt for an erotic target, and as part of what Hollis referred to as 'the dry and unemotional tone of a technical treatise'.<sup>62</sup> However, the fact that he uses the neuter at this juncture does not just establish Ovid's credentials as the author of a practical didactic manual, nor simply look to the detachment that comes from the fact that the would-be lover of the poem has not yet met the woman he will pursue. *quod* also serves to hint that the beloved could be of either gender, and is thus equivalent here to *Amores* 1.1.20. However, at line 37, a *puella* is mentioned for the first time as the love object of the male reader and from this point on, the poem *is* focused largely, though not exclusively, on the pursuit of love objects of the opposite sex.

The *Ars amatoria*, then, follows exactly the same pattern as is laid out in the opening poems of the *Amores*: it starts with the possibility of love affairs both homosexual and heterosexual, features the boy-god Cupid and the erotics of submission and domination in prominent positions, and then almost exclusively narrows down to heterosexual possibilities. Yet the *Ars*, as befits the apparently all-embracing nature of its opening announcement of the erotic instruction that it will provide, does also include homosexual configurations, and these are more various than have previously been recognised. The most famous statement of what has been read as Ovid's attitude towards homosexuality is found at *Ars am.* 2.683-4:

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<sup>60</sup> Sharrock 1994, 26-50.

<sup>61</sup> E.g. 1.91-2, 263. For the neuter *quod* of the love object in comedy (and Lucretius 4.1061, *nam si abest quod ames*, 'if your love-object is absent', with obvious didactic crossover with the *Ars*), see Pinotti 1988, 81, commenting on the same usage at *Ov., Rem.* 13.

<sup>62</sup> Hollis 1977, 39 *ad Ars am.* 1.35. James 2016 reads the use of the neuter gender in both Plautus and the *Ars* as a way for male authors to depersonalise the *meretrix*, or sex worker, class.

odi concubitus, qui non utrumque resolvunt;

hoc est, cur pueri tangar amore minus.

I hate embraces which do not give satisfaction to both partners;

that's the reason why I am touched by boy-love – less.

The bathetic and suggestive force of the concluding and comparative *minus* has been overlooked by some readers, who have taken this couplet straightforwardly as expressing Ovid's preference for heterosexual sex, and distaste for sex with boys.<sup>63</sup> Yet Ovid does not here disclaim desire for boys, nor suggest that he does not have sex with boys, but that he is less inclined to pederastic sex because he enjoys it *less* than heterosexual couplings.<sup>64</sup>

Ovid's apparently 'personal' statements of his erotic experience and tastes in the *Ars* and *Remedia* often direct the reader back to his depiction of his erotic adventures in the *Amores*.<sup>65</sup> Yet readers have not been inclined to look to the *Amores* for 'evidence' of Ovid's homoerotic liaisons to support this particular claim. What happens if we do this in this particular case? We may then read Ovid as here encouraging his readers to spot the hints of his erotically unequal relationship with Cupid in the opening sequence of the *Amores*, in which Ovid plays the sexual role usually taken by a penetrated boy. The precise form of Ovid's wording here makes these hints more concrete:<sup>66</sup> the reference to being touched by

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<sup>63</sup> E.g. Habinek 1997, 31, Makowski 1996, 30. Cf. however, e.g., the very clear discussion of the possibility that *minus* here (as elsewhere) has not a comparative but a simple negative force at Sharrock 1994, 27. For the presentation of pederasty as a sexual mode which only pleasures one partner, see (Mel.) *AP* 5.208 = *GP* 9, Luc. *Am.* 27.

<sup>64</sup> Lilja 1983, 79.

<sup>65</sup> See Gibson 2003, 195 on how, in the *Ars*, Ovid often refers to his own 'biography' of personal experiences, to be found in the *Amores*.

<sup>66</sup> Ovid uses the genitive singular, *pueri*, not the plural, *puerorum*, probably for metrical reasons, but thereby also recalls the singular *puer* of both Cupid and the unspecified boy at *Am.* 1.1.20.

boy-love (*tangar*) contains a punning allusion to the way in which one particular *puer* had touched Ovid in *Amores* 1.1, that is, to the eroticized touching of the poet by the boy-god, Amor, with a capital A.<sup>67</sup>

Ovid's few comments within these mostly heteroerotically directed poems concerning males who desire other males have sometimes been read in a very simplistic biographical way, as evidence of his alleged hostility to those who experience such desire. In fact, they are far more interesting than this. At *Ars am.* 1.523-4, Ovid concludes a longer section on male grooming with a comment on taking this to excess, the first explicit reference in the work to males who desire other males:<sup>68</sup>

cetera lascivae faciant, concede, puellae,  
et si quis male vir quaerit habere virum.

Let wanton girls do anything further than this,  
and if there is any man, hardly a man, who wants to have a man.

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<sup>67</sup>We might be tempted to speculate that Ovid may refer not only to the 3-book second edition of the *Amores* which is extant, but to the earlier 5-book edition, which may have contained a greater number of elegies with even more homoerotic flavour. For the 5-book first edition, see Martelli 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Similar phrasing, implying effeminate, overgroomed men, is found in what McKeown 1989, 23 labels 'the censorious tone' of *Ars am.* 3.437-8: *femina quid faciat, cum sit uir leuior ipsa/ forsitan et plures possit habere uiros?* ('what can a woman do, when her lover is smoother than she herself is, and perhaps has more men than she does?'). I see here, rather than disapproval of effeminate men (who seem to captivate many female beloveds through their appearance at 3.433-6, in line with Roman ideas about the *cinaedus*: see Williams 2010, 227-30), Ovid's acknowledgement of a range of erotic possibilities in Rome. At Rome, male grooming was not forbidden to all men, but was only impermissible to *viri*, a subset of men who embodied the socio-sexual impenetrability of Roman masculinity (Ov. *Ars am.* 1.505-12; see Tohm 2011, 57-65. For Roman masculine impenetrability, see Walters 1993, 1997.

This couplet is fascinating, for even more reasons than those which have usually attracted attention. Adrian Hollis in his commentary takes *male vir* together,<sup>69</sup> translating as ‘of doubtful masculinity’, and understanding Ovid to subscribe here to typical Roman views of the unmanliness of overgroomed men. Hollis does not note Ovid’s allusion to Catullus,<sup>70</sup> who in poem 16 attacks those of his readers who have thought him *male ... marem* (‘badly male’, 16.13) because of his kiss-poems; that is, he is feminised because he has not carried out the proper, penetrative role of a man. Too few readers have noted the significance of the change from Catullus’ wording; Ovid refers not, as Catullus had done, to being badly *mas* but to a *vir* who is not properly masculine, and who desires another man, *virum*. Craig Williams in his ground-breaking *Roman Homosexuality* provides an exception: he notes specifically that Ovid is, unexpectedly, referring here to an adult male’s desire to be penetrated by another adult male, an act rendering the penetrated partner effeminate in Roman eyes.<sup>71</sup> It is unexpected to encounter a reference to this particular variety of homosexual desire in Latin love elegy, a genre that otherwise treats pederastic desire,<sup>72</sup> which is far more socially

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<sup>69</sup> Hollis 1977, 121 ad loc. Boswell (1980, 83 n. 106), rather unexpectedly, took *male* with *quaerit* as suggesting a man who wants to have a man by deceit – this seems to stretch the Latin, and the allusion to Catullus’ *male marem* (see above) tends not to support this interpretation. However, some support for Boswell’s interpretation is found in *Ars* 3’s advice to women, where a couplet about the overly groomed effeminate man whose desires are homosexual (3.437-8; discussed above) is followed by a longer warning (443-6) to women to be on their guard against deceptive effeminate men - who, it turns out, want to steal female clothes from the women they consort with.

<sup>70</sup> Unlike Murgatroyd 1982, 117 ad loc.

<sup>71</sup> The precise force of Ovid’s phrasing, however, which seems to have been ignored by all readers, may be revealing: Williams 2010, 144 evidently understands *habere* in the sense *haberi* here, in order to see the desiring subject of line 524 as penetrated. This would make sense of the juxtaposition of the two *viri*: one (the latter) is a true *vir*, acting as the penetrative partner, whereas the other (the earlier *male vir*), is not really a *vir* at all, as he desires to be penetrated.

<sup>72</sup> Ovid may also treat adult males who desire other adult males at *Am.* 1.8.67-8, with Dipsas’ scornful portrait of a lover of women who is himself *pulcher* and who has a lover of his own, although there is some ambiguity about the situation. The characterisation of the lover as *pulcher* might suggest that he is a beautiful boy, as may the detail that he has an *amator* who should give him gifts — the gift-giving homosexual *amator* is common (e.g. Tib. 1.4.58, 1.8.29-30, 1.9.11; Juv. 6.35-7; see Koch-Harnack 1983, 191-72 and Krenkel 1979, 181, 183) — but the scenario seems to envisage an adult male who is erotically involved with both a male and female simultaneously. Serv. *ad Aen* 3.119 claims that *exoleti*, adult male homosexuals, were in earlier times referred to

acceptable. The adult male who performs the more usual role of the boy-beloved is a despised and abject figure who normally appears in genres such as Atellan farce, satire, imperial biography, and invective;<sup>73</sup> Ovid's inclusion of such figures in his elegiac world reflects the fact that his brand of elegy is far less romantic, and far more interested in the realities of contemporary Roman life and contemporary Roman love lives, than the poems of Propertius or Tibullus.

Ovid's advice here to the male lover who is assumed to wish to conduct affairs with women further acts as a subtle form of advice to any of his male readers who are in fact erotically interested in other men; that is, the *Ars* genuinely offers advice on how to appeal to your object of desire for anyone, *si quis*, who wants to experience love. Ovid's recall here, via *si quis*, of the opening words of the *Ars amatoria*, seems pointed. Is this echo an acknowledgement that the apparent catholicity of the opening is in fact just a tease? Or may Ovid hint that erotic advice for such men *is* to be found in the *Ars*? Indeed, the passage on male grooming in *Ars* 1 which contains this reference to effeminate men-who-desire-men could constitute such advice: men are told that, if they achieve anything more than the simple, rugged masculine looks that Ovid advises, they will succeed in attracting homoerotic attention. It is instructive to compare Ovid's advice here with Tibullus 1.8.9-15, addressed to a *puer delicatus*, informing him that over-grooming does not lead to erotic success; Ovid here stealthily rewrites Tibullus' homoerotic didactic. In so doing, he implicitly reverses its thrust: in pointed contrast to Tibullus' focus on male beautification being *frustra*, 'in vain' (Tib.1.8.13), Ovid suggests that elaborate male self-care in fact leads to *homoerotic* success.

I suggested earlier in this essay that the homoerotic dimension to Ovid's elegies is an important and programmatic feature of these works, demonstrating the great variety of desire that can be found in Roman elegy. I want to suggest that one of the possibilities that Ovid dangles out for the future direction of his love elegies in his supposed 'farewell' to the genre, the *Remedia amoris*, is that his elegiac lovers, unhappily engaged in love affairs with women after successfully following Ovid's advice on how to conduct affairs with them, can turn to homosexual passion. This may be hinted at by the focus on undesirable female bodies that is

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as *pulchri*, reinforcing the case that we are, in *Ars am.* 1.523-4, dealing with two adults; for the *exoletus* as an adult male homosexual, not, as it is often taken 'male prostitute', see Butrica 2013, 225-30.

<sup>73</sup> E.g. Juv. 2, Cic. *Phil.* 2.44, Mart. 1.24; 12.42, Suet. *Nero* 28-9, Tac. *Ann.* 15.37, Dio 62.28; 63.13; 63.22; 79.5, Aurel. Vict. *Caes.* 5.5, SHA *Heliogab.* 10.5, 11.7.

found in Ovid's address to women almost at the end of book 3 of the *Ars am.*: *nec lucem in thalamos totis admitte fenestris;/ aptius in vestro corpore multa latent*; 'Do not let light into the bedchamber through all the windows;/ it is better that many aspects of your body should be hidden', 807-8. This advice to women about what to do when they come to bed with their man constitutes the very last bit of erotodidactic instruction of the *Ars*, as the final two couplets of the third book focus on Ovid's didactic achievements, and it is suggestive for the new direction of his *Remedia amoris*. When the male readers at whom this misogynistic comment is clearly actually aimed turn from the love advice of the *Ars* to the *Remedia*, a book that purports to tell them how to get over love, they might reasonably expect that one way to get over the love of women, whose bodies are painted as inadequate by Ovid, would be to turn to sex with boys instead. After all, Ovid insists in the *Remedia* that the cure for love is ... another love affair;<sup>74</sup> so, for the man who is thoroughly sick of women, boy-love is an obvious alternative.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Propertius 2.4.17-22 seems to hint at precisely such a scenario when he suggests that boy-love is easier than difficult relations with girls,<sup>76</sup> although Propertius does not personally follow up on this hint and pursue boys as an antidote to his troubles with Cynthia.

It is no surprise, then, that the prologue to the *Remedia*, significantly, recalls and even intensifies the homoerotic hints of Ovid's relations with Cupid at the start of both the *Amores* and *Ars amatoria*. In the opening 40 lines of this poem, Ovid and Cupid have their longest and most homoerotically charged interaction, as Cupid confronts the poet about the title of a work that seems to declare warfare on Cupid as the god of love. The *Remedia* prologue looks very like a meeting between two lovers. Ovid refers to himself as *tuum vatem* (3), a possessive which may indicate his erotic possession by and submission to Cupid in *Amores* 1.1 and 1.2. Ovid also looks like a lover in his various professions of loyalty and devotion to Cupid, including his claim at 11 that he has never betrayed Cupid. There may be a

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<sup>74</sup> *Rem. am.* 441-88 deals with the theme of using a new love to cure the old one: see especially the advice at 452 that a new love should be found, and the examples of mythical figures getting over love affairs by pursuing love with others at 453-60, 462, and 484.

<sup>75</sup> The editors nicely point out that the idea that boy-love follows on from unsatisfactory girl-love finds a notable parallel in *Met.* 10.79-85, where Orpheus (disastrously) moves from loving Eurydice to exclusive boy-love.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. the comical claim at *Juv.* 6.28-38 that marriage with a woman is a fate worse than death, whereas a sexual relationship with a *pusio* would be far easier.

homoerotic charge to Ovid's address to Cupid as *blande puer* (11), 'winsome/charming boy', and this is reinforced by the focus on the beauty of the god in the closing lines of this poem, where he appears as golden and bejewelled. While golden hair is a conventional feature of the gods, the reader may recall both Ovidian play on the hair of the beloved in *Amores* 1.1.19-20, and the frequent presentation of desirable boys in pederastic poetry as having precisely this attribute.<sup>77</sup> There are also further reminiscences of pederastic verse in this encounter: Ovid's insistence on Cupid's boyish and playful nature at lines 23-24 evokes the frequent and homoerotically loaded presentation of the play of Eros and the beautiful boys who are aligned with him in erotic verse, from archaic Greek lyric onwards.<sup>78</sup>

We may also see a hint that it is precisely *heterosexual* love that is rejected in lines 15-16, which focus on the unhappy love of men for women; here, the neuter *quod* (13) may insist upon homoerotic possibilities in a way that is more charged than ever, given the context of the rejection of heterosexual love. Even the words of Cupid's initial complaint have a homoerotic intertext that has gone unnoticed, but appears highly suggestive in this particular context. Cupid's *bella, mihi, video, bella parantur* 'wars, I see, wars are set in motion against me,' (2) parallels the opening of another poem, Horace, *Odes* 4.1, where the ageing poet asks: *Intermissa, Venus, diu/ rursus bella moves? parce, precor, precor*, 'Venus, do you again start a war after a long time? Spare me, I pray, I pray' (1-2). Horace's scenario, in which a love poet is clearly unhappy that Venus is waging war against him by making him fall in love, is wittily reversed in Ovid by the complaint of Venus' son, Cupid, that a mortal poet is waging war against him by rejecting love.<sup>79</sup> Ovid further alludes to Horace's poem in line 15 when he talks about the lover who *male fert indignae regna puellae* ('badly bears the reign of an unworthy girl'), recalling Horace's early reference in *Odes* 4.1 to his previous erotic experience *bonae/ sub regno Cinarae* ('under the reign of good Cinara', 3-4). Although Horace's poem refers in lines 29-40 to the possibility of love with either a male or a female partner, in typical Horatian fashion, it suggests precisely that the poet has moved on from his

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<sup>77</sup> E.g. Theoc. 13.36. The line also possibly recalls Anacr. fr. 358's χρυσοκόμης Ἔρως ('golden-haired Eros').

<sup>78</sup> E.g. Anacr. 357, 358.

<sup>79</sup> The likelihood of Ovid's reference to Horace is somewhat heightened by the fact that Venus is explicitly identified as the *mater saeva Cupidinum* ('savage mother of Cupids') at Hor. *Carm.* 4.1.5. Harrison 2018b argues that Ovid is the influence on Horace here rather than vice versa; an ingenious possibility, but one which I do not myself accept.

affair with Cinara only to fall in love with a boy, Ligurinus, and, more broadly, that the lover may believe themselves to be over love, but that love comes to them nevertheless. Ovid's poem on the rejection of love, then, recalls a poem in which love returns to Horace, despite his rejection of it, in the form of a boy. These allusions to Horace may hint at homoerotic love as an alternative for the lover of the *Remedia* who wishes to escape from unhappy love with a woman. Yet ultimately the teasing of the *Amores* and the *Ars* continues here too, as the focus of the rest of the *Remedia* remains heteroerotic.

## Conclusion

Having examined a number of allusions to homosexual love in Ovidian elegies that have been overlooked, I wish in conclusion to briefly outline some broader consequences of Ovidian homoeroticism.

One wider issue that these homoerotic interpretations of Ovid can illuminate is the erotics of submission. While there have been many studies of the theme of *servitium amoris* and the elegists' erotic submission to their mistresses, the homoerotic possibilities have escaped scholarly attention. Indeed, Sharon James has argued that the Roman elegists were more interested in heteroerotic than homoerotic love precisely because the latter did not give them the same opportunity for the exploration of the paradoxes of gender inversion and powerplay within a situation where the poets, elite adult Roman males, presented themselves as being under the erotic power of those who occupied a less powerful position in society than themselves. Ovid's presentation of himself as erotically dominated by Cupid, a mere boy, shows that James' interpretation is partial, and indeed should encourage readers of elegy to revisit in particular poems such as Tibullus 1.4 and 2.3 to analyse exactly how the poets present themselves and other men as emasculated through their *homoerotic* subjection.

This study, particularly in its reading of *Amores* 1.2, has also demonstrated that Ovidian elegy contains more sexual innuendo than readers have usually found there, given beliefs about generic decency of elegy. My interpretation enables us to supplement Adams' *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* with further examples of sexualized vocabulary and imagery in Ovid, and should encourage us to look for parallel instances in the works of the other elegists.

Finally, this study should have helped to demonstrate the inadequacy of conventional readings of Latin love elegy as overwhelmingly concerned with the love of the poet for his *puella*. The *amores* of the Roman elegists, as I hope to have shown, were never so simple and so limited. They were instead genuinely plural.

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