OVID AS *VATES* IN THE PROEM TO THE *ARS AMATORIA*

In *Ars amatoria* l. 1–24 Ovid states his theme, the guiding of love by art, and expresses variously, if not altogether convincingly, his own mastery over love as a subject. He imagines himself in several roles: first directing the course of a love-affair as its helmsman or driver, then taming the fierceness of Love (by which he means to suggest its impulsive feelings) as Chiron had tamed Achilles or as a farmer tames his livestock.[1] In l. 25–30, having just referred in the concrete language of arrows and flames to his own experience of Love (23 "quo me fixit Amor, quo me violentius ussit"), he proclaims the source of his expertise in more abstract and portentous terms. Disowning guidance or inspiration from on high, he asserts instead a reliance on practical experience (*usus*); at the same time, he adopts the authoritative voice of a *vates,* or prophet, in love, an interpreter of its signs. The amusing incongruity in this passage between prophetic authority and empirical method, and the aptness of such a voice to the paradoxical tenor of the proem, together form my subject in this paper.

The passage has occasioned much comment, chiefly in an effort to identify the apparently mysterious allusion to an inspirational bird in the second verse (l. 25–30):

> non ego, Phoebe, datas a te mihi mentiar artes,
> nec nos aëriae voce monemur avis,
> nec mihi sunt visae Clio Cliusque sorores
> servanti pecudes vallibus, Ascra, tuis;
> usus opus movet hoc: vati parete perito;
> vera canam. coeptis, mater Amoris, ades.

The allusion in the second couplet to Hesiod's encounter with the Muses on Mt. Helicon (*Theog.* 22–23), which has been demonstrated to be no less an allusion to Callimachus' several reports of that encounter in the *Aetia,* has prompted scholars to see the whole passage as specific literary polemic, and hence to identify parallel allusions in the first couplet.[2] Allusion to Callimachus himself (along with poets echoing his creed) has been suggested as an explanation of Ovid's reference to Apollo.[3] I am not convinced by this suggestion, even though I find it difficult, given the frequency of allusion to the Callimachean Apollo in Augustan poetry, to offer sufficient reasons for positively excluding him here. The specifically Callimachean Apollo and figures who substitute for him in the Roman tradition tend to make a gesture that catches the attention—they pluck an ear, strum a lyre, steal a verse foot. The reference to Apollo here, by contrast, is so generalized as to suggest that bringing Callimachus into the context at this point is misguided, a cliché of modern scholarship. In any event, the crux of the matter is in the following verse, the reference to a bird that must fit into a

1. On the ambiguity of Ovid's claim of mastery in these lines, see R. M. Durling, "Ovid as *Praeceptor Amoris,*" *CJ* 53 (1958): 159; cf. l. 21 *et mihi cedet Amor,* a proclamation that is perhaps subverted by recollection of its model, Verg. *Ecl.* 10. 69 "omnia vincit Amor, et nos cedamus Amori."

2. On the second couplet, see J. F. Miller, "Callimachus and the *Ars Amatoria,*" *CP* 78 (1983): 29; on the first two couplets regarded as a unit of literary polemic, cf. F. W. Lenz, "Das Proömium von Ovids *Ars Amatoria,*" *Maia* 13 (1961): 136 = *Opuscula Selecta* (Amsterdam, 1972), p. 266.

3. See A. S. Hollis, *Ovid: "Ars Amatoria," Book 1* (Oxford, 1977), p. 35.

framework of three parallel negations. A number of candidates for explaining the allusion have been proposed in notes and articles over the past quarter-century, including (in the order of their proposal): the harbingers of springtime in Lucretius 1. 12–13; the peacock through whom the soul of Homer passed to Ennius in *Annales* fragment 11 Skutsch (= 15 V.^{2}); the oracular doves of Dodona in Propertius 1. 9. 5–8; and the crow that reports personal and mythological lore to another crow in Callimachus' *Hecale* (frag. 260. 17–61).[4] None of these suggestions quite suits the present context. The birds in Lucretius, for instance, do not speak to the poet but signify the coming of Venus to regenerate the world in springtime; Propertius envisions the doves not as sources of his amatory insight but as inferior rivals. As a result, the birds continue to sit uncomfortably between the Callimachean Apollo—if he is such—and the Hesiodic and Callimachean Muses.

One suggestion about the bird, however, differs from the others in identifying a passage that stands as a parallel for Ovid, not a source; and it opens up the possibility of conceiving Ovid's parallel framework (*non . . . nec . . . nec*) in a different way.[5] The passage is Tibullus 1. 8. 3–6, where the poet tells the lovers Marathus and Pholoe that he requires no supernatural help to understand the meaning of their nods and whispers:

> nec mihi sunt sortes nec conscia fibra deorum,
> praecinit eventus nec mihi cantus avis:
> ipsa Venus magico religatum bracchia nodo
> perdocuit multis non sine verberibus.

Tibullus opposes several branches of augury—among them, the singing of birds—to his own experience in love (*ipsa Venus*). Lefèvre interprets Ovid as likewise referring generally to knowledge gained through augury rather than alluding specifically to an account of poetic inspiration.[6] On this view, Ovid disowns an adviser appropriate to a prophet, and he claims an adviser appropriate to a poet only insofar as the poet assumes a prophetic voice as a speaking convention. That Ovid here seems to disown a prophetic voice, and a moment later to adopt one, will indicate elusiveness, even paradox, as we shall see, but will not subvert the merit of the suggestion.

4. Lucretius: Lenz, "Das Proömium," pp. 135–38 = *Opuscula,* pp. 265–68. Ennius: D. Korzeniewski, "Ovids elegisches Proömium," *Hermes* 92 (1964): 200, n. 2. Propertius: W. Suerbaum, "Ovid über seine Inspiration (Zur *Ars Amatoria* 1, 26)," *Hermes* 93 (1965): 494–96; in this passage, however, Propertius may be comparing himself, not with the actual birds, but with the human priestesses of Dodona, known as αἱ Πέλειαι or Πελειάδες (Paus. 10. 12. 10; cf. Enk at Prop. 1. 9. 5). Callimachus: H. Tränkle, "Textkritische und exegetische Bemerkungen zu Ovids *Ars Amatoria,*" *Hermes* 100 (1972): 390–91; cf. Pfeiffer ad frag. 260. 17. See also G. Stégen, "Ovide—*Ars Amatoria* 1, 26," *Latomus* 28 (1969): 1120–21 (suggesting Vergil's personification of Fama at *Aen.* 4. 173–78), and Hollis, *Ovid,* p. 36 (suggesting the instructive partridges mentioned in connection with Alcman at *PMG* frag. 39). As good as any of these, if a literary candidate were wanted, would be the crow who taunts the seer Mopsus in Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3. 932–37.

5. E. Lefèvre, "Noch einmal: Ovid über seine Inspiration (Zur *Ars Amat.* 1, 26)," *Hermes* 95 (1967): 126–28.

6. Ovid's diction supports Lefèvre, since *monere* (cf. *Ars am.* 1. 26) is especially appropriate to divine instruction, denoting either the god's speech to his human interpreter or the interpreter's speech to his audience; cf. Tib. 1. 6. 50 (*dea magna monet*), Verg. *Aen.* 7. 41 (*tu vatem, tu, diva, mone*), Hor. *Epist.* 1. 20. 9–14 (*augur . . . monitor*), Ov. *Fasti* 6. 766 (*per volucres aequos multa monere deos*).

If the reference to birds does not, like the allusion to Hesiod, look to an account of poetic inspiration, then the reference to Apollo deserves reconsideration. The idea that a pair of parallel literary allusions, both evoking the tradition of Callimachus, should be interrupted by an intervening reference to augury is unsettling.[7] But Apollo, besides being an adviser of poets, is also a prophetic god, and this, I suggest, is the role he plays here. For a parallel to the explicit conjunction of Apollo and birds in a context of prophetic knowledge, consider Aeneas' words to Helenus in *Aeneid* 3. 359–62:

> Troiugena, interpres divum, qui *numina Phoebi,*
> qui tripodas Clarii et laurus, qui sidera sentis
> et *volucrum linguas* et praepetis omina pennae,
> fare age.

As an interpreter of divine messages Helenus does not specialize: he understands equally the will of Apollo and the language of birds, as well as the flight of birds and the conjunction of stars—no doubt, too, he understands the markings of entrails and other modes of divine speech. Likewise, but from the perspective of the gods, Apollo extends his patronage to various branches of divination, including augury. So is he addressed by Tibullus on the occasion of a new priest's entry into his temple (2. 5. 11–16):

> tu procul eventura vides, tibi deditus *augur*[8]
> scit bene quid fati provida cantet avis,
> tuque regis sortes, per te praesentit *haruspex*
> lubrica signavit cum deus exta notis.
> te duce Romanos numquam frustrata *Sibylla*
> abdita quae senis fata canit pedibus.

The prophetic Apollo is in fact scarcely less familiar a figure in Augustan poetry than the Callimachean Apollo—not that I should wish to fragment the unity of his *numen* by distinguishing absolutely his gift to prophets from his gift to poets, but different emphases are discernible in different passages. In this light I argue that verses 25–26 in *Ars amatoria* 1 go closely and coherently together. Both lines refer to prophetic inspiration, the reference being doubled to emphasize the range of such inspiration; they do not allude twice to accounts of poetic inspiration, as Lenz had argued. Prophetic inspiration is then paired with poetic inspiration in the next couplet, and the two forms of inspiration are together set in opposition to personal experience in the third couplet.

At this point consider Ovid's stance as a *vates.* The passage works primarily through parallel and opposition: not Apollo, birds, or Muses provide him his knowledge of love, but personal experience. To this antithesis between sources of knowledge, however, there corresponds a second antithesis, partly tacit, between speaking voices appropriate to the different sources: in accepting or rejecting a source Ovid also accepts or rejects a speaking convention or *persona.* Here is a scheme representing the two antitheses and the correspondence between them—read down for antithesis and across for correspondence:

7. Miller, "Callimachus and the *Ars Amatoria,*" p. 28, tacitly accepts Lefèvre's interpretation of verse 26 but does not discuss the asymmetry that it imports into his own account of Ovid's disclaimer.

8. Cf. Hor. *Carm.* 1. 2. 32 *augur Apollo, Carm. saec.* 61 *augur . . . Phoebus.*

SOURCE		SPEAKER
NOT: Apollo, birds, Muses	→	NOT: prophet, augur, inspired poet
BUT: *usus*	→	BUT: *vates peritus*

In the antithesis on the right, Ovid declines to speak as a prophet or inspired poet: such a voice, he implies, will not suit a poem fashioned, as this poem is fashioned, after the norms of technical treatises. Instead, he points—twice—to his reliance on experience, using two words familiar in technical writing (*usus* = χρῆσις, *peritus* = ἔμπειρος) to refer to it. Some questions follow: does not Ovid, by identifying himself as a *vates* in verse 29, contradict his own rejection of prophetic speech in the preceding couplets? Can a *vates,* properly so called, be a *peritus?* Or, to put it another way, will a *peritus* (a technical expert) wish to be thought of as a *vates?* To the first question the answer, I believe, is simply yes. The single word that would best encompass the speaking conventions that Ovid rejects (granted a slight laxity of usage in applying the word to Hesiod) is none other than *vates* itself.[9] To answer the other questions we need to inquire briefly into the compatibility of the words *vates* and *peritus;* this will in turn illuminate the sense of the antithesis on the righthand side above.

In referring to his own experience Ovid alludes emphatically to a vocabulary of empiricism that belongs to scientific and philosophical debate. This vocabulary had a complicated history from its origins in fifth-century science, rhetoric, and philosophy to its eventual condensation into the compact wisdom of proverbs.[10] Its key terms, to begin with, were ἐμπειρία, τέχνη, and λόγος, and on them and several related words was focused a long controversy, in practice oriented toward the concerns of rhetoric and medicine, about correct method in the exercise of an art.[11] By Ovid's time empiricist doctrine was almost obligatory for scientific and technical writers,[12] and this is no doubt his reason for alluding to it—to support his posture as a qualified professor of love. At the same time, however, empiricist doctrine sits awkwardly with the poet's proclamation of himself as *vates.* That old term for prophet and poet had been revived by Vergil and Horace in Ovid's youth to signify a poetry of public importance; they adopted it because they were conscious of the artistic position they inhabited as specifically Roman poets who were yet heirs to the traditions and literary values of Callimachean Alexandria.[13] The precise significance of the revival, though it

9. For *vates* = *augur,* cf. *Met.* 3. 348–49; for *vates* simply = *poeta,* cf. *Met.* 10. 143 (of Orpheus).

10. For a survey of the concept of ἐμπειρία before the rise of the empiric school of medicine, see K. Deichgräber, *Die griechische Empirikerschule: Sammlung der Fragmente und Darstellung der Lehre* (Berlin, 1930; repr. 1965), pp. 269–79. For proverbs, see A. Otto, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer* (Leipzig, 1890; repr. Hildesheim, 1962), p. 359 (s.v. *usus*).

11. For empiricism and rhetorical doctrine, see P. and E. DeLacy, "Ancient Rhetoric and Empirical Method," *Sophia* 6 (1938): 523–30, and *Philodemus "On Methods of Inference": A Study in Ancient Empiricism,* APA Monograph 10 (Philadelphia, 1941), esp. pp. 120–37. For medicine, see Deichgräber, *Griechische Empirikerschule;* M. Pohlenz, "Das zwanzigste Kapitel von Hippokrates *de prisca medicina,*" *Hermes* 53 (1918): 396–421; and W. Capelle, "Zur hippokratischen Frage," *Hermes* 57 (1922): 247–65. For a brief review of epistemological doctrines in Hellenistic philosophy, see A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*[2] (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986), pp. 21–30, 123–31.

12. Note the full triad of *usus, experientia,* and *ars* in Manilius 1. 61 "per varios usus artem experientia fecit"; cf. Lucr. 5. 1152–53, Verg. *G.* 1. 133, Columella *Rust.* 1. 1. 6.

13. On the early history and later revival of the term, see H. Dahlmann, "Vates," *Philologus* 97 (1948): 337–53; E. Bickel, "*Vates* bei Varro und Vergil," *RhM* 94 (1951): 257–314; and J. K. Newman, *The Concept of Vates in Augustan Poetry,* Collection Latomus 88 (Brussels, 1967).

has been studied in some detail, can scarcely be disentangled from a view of Augustan poetics as a whole; but such precision, fortunately, is not needed here. Ovid, as Newman has shown, tends to use the term rather loosely, as a fancy alternative, sometimes a jokingly pretentious alternative, for *poeta*.[14] Here, in the couplets on augury and the Muses, he seems to have implicitly defined *vates* as an inspired speaker. In fact, by repeating his denial of inspired knowledge he has pointedly alluded to the twin aspects of the *vates* as prophet and poet, stressing that he is not a *vates* in either sense. It therefore comes as an amusing surprise when the apparent rejection of a vatic *persona* concludes with Ovid's emergence as a *vates* after all. To cap the surprise he makes himself a special kind of *vates,* one who proceeds by a method of scientific empiricism that emphatically does not belong to the realm of the prophetic and the divine. He concludes, that is, with an oxymoron that blurs the distinction between inspiration and experience.[15]

Within the larger framework of the proem the paradoxical idea of a *vates peritus* lends Ovid a speaking voice closely suited to the witty but unstable tenor of his theme. Such, I believe, is the true significance of the passage under discussion: the literary polemic—the burlesque of Hesiod and of the fashion of *Dichterweihe*—is real enough but fleeting, incidental to the crafting of a suitable *persona* for Ovid in this proem. From the first couplet of the proem to the last, from *artem amandi* (1) and *doctus amet* (2) to *concessaque furta* (33), Ovid persistently hovers near paradox. Chiron has a peaceful art, but he uses it to hammer Achilles into shape (12 *placida contudit arte*); Achilles himself is terrifying yet timid (13 *exterruit,* 14 *pertimuisse*). Cupid is fierce but governable. The connoisseurs of erotic psychology in Ovid's audience will have recognized the elusiveness of his goal—his attempt to govern love by rules of art—and they will have appreciated the effort it takes to sustain the fiction that he can so govern it. In the figure of the *vates peritus* he finesses the problem by replicating it, representing himself as no less paradoxical than his theme. At the same time he provides, in his own practice as a poet, a model for the artful lover whom he means to instruct. Poets, too, harness the competing forces of irrationality and reason. *Arte regendus Amor:* the project of Ovid's comic science is to be carried out, on different planes, by poet and lover alike. In the course of the poem Ovid will offer the lover many exemplars for imitation in the realm of love.[16] He has offered several already in the proem: the lover will sail and farm and soldier no less than Ovid does here. But no exemplar is so close to home, or so gratifying to the poet, as the psychological exemplar of the *vates peritus,* supplied by himself as he composes the poem.[17]

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14. *The Concept of Vates,* pp. 100–114.

15. Cf. the paradoxical juxtaposition of Greek and old Latin words in Hor. *Carm.* 1. 1. 35 *lyricis vatibus,* and the paradox of contrary loyalties in *Carm.* 2. 16. 38 *spiritum Graiae tenuem Camenae;* for analysis, see E. A. McDermott, "Horatius Callidus," *AJP* 98 (1977): 365–68.

16. Cf. J. B. Solodow, "Ovid's *Ars Amatoria:* The Lover as Cultural Ideal," *WS* 90 (1977): 106–27.

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