

TWO NOTES ON THE TEXT OF OVID'S *AMORES*(i) *Am.* 2. 5. 5–6

non mihi deceptae nudant tua facta tabellae  
nec data furtive munera crimen habent.

'It is not *deceptae tabellae* which reveal your conduct to me nor secretly given presents which incriminate you.' So does Ovid, according to the vast majority of our MSS, complain of the openness of his mistress's infidelity (the point of this couplet does not emerge fully until line 13, *ipse miser uidi*. . .). *Tabellae* causes no difficulty – wax tablets traditionally carried elegiac love-letters<sup>1</sup> – but *deceptae*, which obviously cannot bear its most usual meaning here, has often been declared corrupt. Burman favoured the variant *decepto* given by the 'Sarravianus' of Heinsius;<sup>2</sup> it certainly qualifies *mihi* aptly enough but leaves *tabellae* without a much-needed epithet.<sup>3</sup> Other editors have resorted to conjectures of widely varying distinction,<sup>4</sup> of which easily the most seductive is Heinsius' *male deletae* for *mihi deceptae*. It was prompted by the *mihi deletae* which appears in one fifteenth-century MS<sup>5</sup> and would seem to derive considerable support from *Ars Am.* 3. 495–6 *nec nisi deletis tutum rescribere ceris, | ne teneat geminas una tabella manus* (cf. also *Ars Am.* 2. 395–6 *et, quotiens scribes, totas prius ipse tabellas | inspicere: plus multae, quam sibi missa, legunt*).

The vulgate, however, has always had its defenders, and I shall join their ranks, though not on the strength of any interpretation so far offered. Some critics have simply given in to wishful thinking in claiming that *deceptae* may be taken as the equivalent of *interceptae* here,<sup>6</sup> and others have followed Housman along the right path only to be deflected from it with him, and indeed by him, in the end. For Housman it was who first observed that *decipere* may sometimes be virtually synonymous with *dissimulare*,<sup>7</sup> but unhappily attached to his citation of our *deceptae* as a case in point the comment, 'quomodo intellegendum sit docet pentameter'.<sup>8</sup> Munari and Kenney duly glossed *deceptae* with 'dissimulae' in their respective editions, but then, almost as it were at Housman's bidding, and no doubt influenced also by passages such as *Ov.* 2. 19. 39–41, 3. 1. 56, 14. 31, *Ars Am.* 3. 619ff. and *Tib.* 2. 6. 45–6, they added, by way of further explanation, 'furtim redditae'.<sup>9</sup> In general sense this is satisfactory enough;<sup>10</sup> the trouble is that *decipere*, when it is the equivalent of *dissimulare*, as Housman himself originally asserted and his own examples clearly show, does not mean simply 'to make secret', but 'to make (something) seem not to be what it is',

<sup>1</sup> See especially *Ov. Am.* 1. 11. 7 ff., 1. 12, *Prop.* 3. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Par. Lat.* 7997, saec. xv.

<sup>3</sup> G. P. Goold, *HSCPh* 69 (1965), 33.

<sup>4</sup> All are recorded in Munari's apparatus.

<sup>5</sup> *Vat. Pal. Lat.* 910. The reading may be traditional, but it could equally well be the result of a copyist's error, since *mihi delatae* appears in the thirteenth-century B.L. Add. 49368, to which the renaissance MS in question is obviously directly or indirectly related; see Munari's 1970 edition, pp. xxxiv–xxxv.

<sup>6</sup> Thus Marius *apud Burmannum*, A. Ernout, *RPh* 26 (1952), 125, 'une lettre surprise (*ou saisie*) par moi'.

<sup>7</sup> *CR* 14 (1900), 259 = *Classical Papers*, ed. J. Diggle and F. R. D. Goodyear (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 521–2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ad Man.* 1. 240.

<sup>9</sup> cf. Lenz's translation, 'eingeschmuggelte Täfelchen'.

<sup>10</sup> Goold's difficulties in comprehending this interpretation in its context (*HSCPh* 69 [1965], 33) are largely of his own making.

in other words, 'to disguise'; see especially Sen. *HF* 154–7 *hic exesis | pendens scopulis aut deceptos | instruat hamos aut suspensus | spectat pressa praemia dextra*, Liv. 22. 4. 4 *ab tergo ac super caput deceptae insidiae*. If, therefore, Ovid wrote *deceptae*... *tabellae* here, he could only have meant 'disguised' or 'camouflaged' *tabellae*. And that this is indeed what he did write, and what he did mean, I have little doubt in the light of *Ars Am.* 3. 483 ff., where the camouflaging of love-letters is specifically recommended as a safeguard against discovery by suspicious *uiri* and precise instructions are given on ways of effecting the disguise:

sed quoniam, quamuis uittae careatis honore,  
est uobis uestros fallere cura uiros,  
ancillae pueriue manu perarate tabellas...  
ducere consuescat multas manus una figuras... 493  
femina dicatur scribenti semper amator: 497  
'illa' sit in uestris, qui fuit 'ille', notis.

Had a lover of Ovid's disposition and experience intercepted, or chanced upon, any *tabellae* of this nature, he would immediately have suspected infidelity on his mistress's part – and yet been spared the cataclysmic horror of being able to prove it.

(ii) *Am.* 2. 6. 39–40

optima prima fere manibus rapiuntur auaris;  
implentur numeris deteriora suis.

An extremely problematical couplet which has never been satisfactorily explained. In lines 25–8 of this funeral dirge for Corinna's pet parrot Ovid complains that the excellent parrot is dead while birds of little virtue live on, and in 41–2 he reminds us that Protesilaus was survived by Thersites and Hector by his brothers. It therefore seems reasonable to suppose that 39–40 will also deal with the tendency of Death to take the good first and spare the bad for longer. Thus when we read in 39 (if the text printed above is sound, and such minor discrepancy as there is in the MSS<sup>11</sup> gives no real reason to doubt it) 'Greedy hands generally carry off the best things first', we confidently expect 40 to say, 'Inferior things (*deteriora*) are spared for longer' or 'have a normal span of life'. Kenney has asserted<sup>12</sup> that there is nothing in the Latin to indicate that the 'greedy hands' are those of Death, and Heinsius, Lucian Müller<sup>13</sup> and Baehrens<sup>14</sup> before him all found it necessary to supply by conjecture the explicit reference to *Mors* not present in the transmitted text. The circumstantial evidence, however, which suggests that the *manibus*... *auaris* of line 39 are indeed those of Death seems to me to be overwhelming. The general rapacity of *Mors* and its tendency to carry off the best are both age-old notions well attested in ancient literature; see e.g. Call. *Anth. Pal.* 7. 80. 5–6 ὁ πάντων | ἀρπακτῆς Ἀΐδης, Catul. 3. 13–14 *tenebrae | Orci quae omnia bella deuoratis*, Ov. *Am.* 3. 9. 19 *omne sacrum mors importuna profanat*, 35 *cum rapiunt mala fata bonos*.<sup>15</sup> And the 'hands' of Death are well attested too; see e.g. Ov. *Am.* 3. 9. 20 *omnibus obscuras incit illa* (i.e. *Mors*) *manus* and especially Tib. 1. 3. 4, where the *greedy* hands of Death are explicitly mentioned: *abstineas auidas Mors modo nigra manus*.

But if Kenney is over-cautious about 39, he is right to insist<sup>16</sup> that it is no simple

<sup>11</sup> S (Sangallensis 864, saec. xi) omits *manibus* and K (Vat. Lat. 1602, saec. xiv) has *amaris* for *auaris*.

<sup>12</sup> CQ n.s. 9 (1959), 240–1.

<sup>13</sup> *Philologus* 11 (1856), 71.

<sup>14</sup> *Ad Catul.* 3. 14.

<sup>15</sup> For examples from Greek and Latin inscriptions see R. Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* (Urbana, 1962) (= *Illinois Studies in Language and Literature* 28 [1942]), pp. 146–7, 153–4.

<sup>16</sup> loc. cit.

matter to extract from the Latin the sense we look for in 40; many have nevertheless tried to do so, and Kenney gives examples of their unconvincing efforts. Kenney himself, citing numerous parallels for *numeri* = 'parts' (of a whole) and *impleri* = 'to be equipped with', interprets 40, "'Inferior things are complete'", i.e. remain untouched'. There is no doubt that the Latin will yield this sense, but for a proper contrast between the fate of *optima* and *deteriora* this interpretation of 40 would require in 39 a description of some gradual process of decay affecting 'the best things'; as it is, the text simply says that they are 'carried off by greedy hands', and there is nothing to indicate that, when they are carried off, they are not just as 'complete' or 'equipped with all their parts' as the 'inferior things' which are left behind.

I suggest that there is an alternative interpretation of 40 which gives a more tolerable contrast with 39. *Numeri* may be understood as 'numerical strength' or simply 'numbers'; the singular *numerus* is regularly used in this fashion (see e.g. Verg. *A.* 12. 230–1 *numerone an uiribus aequi | non sumus?*, Sal. *Jug.* 97. 5 *hostes numero plures*,<sup>17</sup> and Ovid uses the plural in the same manner at *Am.* 3. 9. 66 *auxisti numeros, culte Tibulle, pios. Implentur* could then be taken in the sense that Kenney proposes and the whole line construed, 'Inferior things have their full complement of numbers', i.e. their numbers remain at full strength, whereas (we may assume) the numbers of 'the best things' tend always to be depleted because they are generally the first to be carried off by Death. This is not easy, but it seems a suggestion at least worthy of consideration where total satisfaction is so elusive.

University College of Swansea

JOAN BOOTH

<sup>17</sup> See further *Oxf. Lat. Dict.* s.v. *numerus*, 5.