AMORES 2.1.7-8: A PROGRAMMATIC ALLUSION BY ANAGRAM

Ovid begins his overtly programmatic *Amores* 2.1 with the claim that Cupid, who had previously interfered with the poet's attempt to write an epic (1.1), has once again ordered him to reject epic subjects (this time, a *Gigantomachia*) and to compose a book of decadent love-elegies instead. Faced with this new task, the poet dutifully proceeds to warn that his elegiac verses are not suitable for the prudish but hopes that they will be read by lovers. Among the prospective readers are young men who, like Ovid himself, have been shot by Cupid's arrow:

> atque aliquis iuuenum, quo nunc ego, saucius arcu
>   agnoscat flammae conscia signa suae.   (7–8)

Although epic poetry has ostensibly been rejected in favour of elegy, this couplet tellingly draws upon passages from both elegy and epic: the hexameter recalls two lines of Propertius, 1.7.15 ('te quoque si puer hic certo concusserit arcu') and 1.9.21 ('pueri totiens arcum sentire medullis'), both of which describe those who might be stricken by the boy-god's bow, while the pentameter is quite similar to *Aeneid* 4.23: '. . . agnosco ueteris uestigia flammae'. But the couplet's ties to the *Aeneid* may not end here inasmuch as Cupid's interference in *Amores* 2.1 is paralleled by his actions at the end of *Aeneid* 1, when Dido is afflicted by his power. Furthermore, when the Dido narrative is resumed in book four, the queen's *uulnus* is immediately mentioned (2), and a simile at 68–69 likens her to a doe who has been stricken by an arrow:

> uritur infelix Dido, totaque uagatur
> urbe furens, qualis coniecta cerua sagitta.

Given these linguistic and thematic parallels with *Aeneid* 4, I think it arguable that the Ovidian *saucius arcu* not only draws upon the Propertian passages cited above but also alludes anagrammatically to Vergil's 'saucia cura' (*Aen.* 4.1). Because the use of *cura* specifically for the 'passion of love' is common in poetry,[1] the Ovidian anagram becomes particularly pointed, and the source of the lover's anxieties is found to be in the word itself: the wound inflicted by Cupid's bow (*arcu*) is the cause of the lover's passion (*cura*) and of Ovid's turn to elegy. Indeed, such anagrammatic wordplay is not uncommon in the *Amores*[2] and is appropriately indicative of Ovid's adherence to the Callimachean standard[3] of highly stylized and subtly complex poetry which he explicitly advocates later in the book (2.4.19–20), in his own inimitable way.

By invoking *Aeneid* 4, although not doing so univocally, Ovid's anagrammatic appropriation of Vergil takes on added programmatic significance, further broadening and ironizing the generic oppositions that the opening lines of *Amores* 2.1 establish. The Vergilian poem is, of course, formally an epic. It is well known, however, that

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[1] See Pease on *Aeneid* 4.1.

[2] Consider also 'nec mora, uenit amor' (1.6.13), 'ater erat' (1.14.9), and perhaps *Roma* as an anagram for *Amor* at 2.9.17. Frederick Ahl's *Metaformations* (Ithaca, 1985) provides a useful introduction to anagrammatism in antiquity (pp. 44–54) and offers numerous examples of anagrams in Latin poetry, e.g. Vergil's *Latium/maluit* (*Aen.* 8.322–23) and Seneca's *omnia/animo* (*Med.* 557). In addition, an especially clever Horatian etymologising anagram has been identified by Francis Cairns, who in his 'Horace *Odes* 3, 22: Genre and its Sources', *Philologus* 126 (1982), 235, spotted *triuia* in '**diua tri**formis' (*Carm.* 3.22.4).

[3] See also the Prolegomena to J. C. McKeown's *Amores* commentary (Liverpool, 1987) on this aspect of the *doctrina* of the poem (I, 32 ff.).

book four is structured like a tragedy and that the Dido and Aeneas love-story suggests a 'lower' genre of poetry, as the famous comments of Servius ('nam paene comicus stilus est: nec mirum, ubi de amore tractatur') rightly suggest. In short, there is already a generic indeterminacy in *Aeneid* 4 itself: because the book contains a significant mixture of elements drawn from a variety of poetic genres, one cannot say with security to what genre it properly belongs.

The dual allusions to epic and elegy and the inversion of their traditional hierarchy at the beginning of *Amores* 2.1 foreground precisely this type of generic interplay, making the specific cluster of Vergilian resonances even more apposite. Indeed, when taken together with the anagram of *saucius arcu* (7), the lines may even go so far as to ironize the entire question of genre: Ovid writes against epic even while borrowing from epic at one of its least epic moments, and the poet's own richly intertextual discourse maintains and augments Vergil's poetic miscegenations by simultaneously signalling at least two generic registers through the subtle use of an anagram. Yet Ovid also shows that those 'two generic registers' were never quite as distinct as they may have first appeared. The weapons of war are the weapons of love, and the cares of love are a subject for epic and elegy alike.[4] In sum, one aspect of Ovid's *programme* in *Amores* 2.1 is to make sport of the conventions of genre, and this principle is demonstrated, in part, by alluding to a passage in Vergil that is itself generically ambiguous, thereby enriching the poem's programmatic significance through an anagrammatic allusion.

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[4] In *Tristia* 2, Ovid defends his earlier elegies against charges of immorality and claims not to have written anything that cannot be found in 'respectable' Homeric epic (371–80) or in tragedy (381–408), the genre that the poet juxtaposes with elegy in *Amores* 3.1. In addition, the *militia amoris* conceit developed in 1.9 recurs throughout the *Amores* and is arguably of a piece with the phenomenon described here.

OVID, *HEROIDES* 6.1–2*

It is a characteristic of Ovid's *Heroides* for each epistle implicitly to establish the dramatic time, context and motive for its composition by the particular heroine to whom it is attributed. In this way the poet is able to exploit the tension between the heroine's inevitably circumscribed awareness of the development of her story and the superior information which can be deployed by a reader acquainted with the mythical tradition or master-text which dictates what is actually going to follow: Penelope hands over a letter to a man whom the reader familiar with Homer can identify as Ulysses even if she cannot, Ariadne wonders whether Naxos is infested with tigers at a moment shortly before Dionysus and his tiger-driven chariot will arrive.[1] In other cases, the ignorance exploited is that of the addressee: Medea and

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[1] For Penelope, see Ov. *Her.* 1.59–62 and D. C. Kennedy, 'The Epistolary Mode and the First of the *Heroides*', *CQ* 34 (1984), 413–22, esp. pp. 417–18. For Ariadne and the tigers, see Ov. *Her.* 10.85–6 and cf. *Ars Am.* 1.549–52. A number of examples of this phenomenon are discussed in A.Barchiesi, 'Future Reflexive: Two Modes of Allusion and Ovid's *Heroides*', *HSCP* 95 (1993), 333–65.