

# SEXUAL PUNS IN OVID'S *ARS* AND *REMEDIA*<sup>1</sup>

## I. *ARS AMATORIA* 2.121–2

sis licet antiquo Nireus adamatus Homero	
Naiadumue tener crimine raptus Hylas,	110
ut dominam teneas nec te mirere relictum,	
ingenii dotes corporis adde bonis.	
forma bonum fragile est, quantumque accedit ad annos,	
fit minor et spatio carpitur ipsa suo.	
nec uiolae semper nec hiantia lilia florent,	115
et riget amissa spina relicta rosa:	
et tibi iam uenient cani, formose, capilli,	
iam uenient rugae, quae tibi corpus arent.	
iam molire animum, qui duret, et astrue formae:	
solus ad extremos permanet ille rogos.	120
nec leuis ingenuas pectus coluisse per artes	
cura sit et linguas edidicisse duas.	

Ovid's instructions to his student at *Ars amatoria* 2.109–22, to remember the transience of his own good looks and spend time cultivating his mind in compensation, have usually been interpreted by scholars as a manifestation of the *praeceptor's* more general concern with *cultus* – the 'civilization' or refinement central to the sophisticated urban society in which the poet sets his amatory intrigues.<sup>2</sup> But however seriously we take Ovid's dedication to a wider philosophy of *cultus*, the ultimate goal of his teachings is rarely allowed to remain latent for long: these prescriptions have a purpose, and their aim is ultimately that which informs the entire curriculum of the *Ars amatoria* – the acquisition and continued enjoyment of sexual pleasure. This passage is in fact a restatement of the famous lines in Book 1 in which the *praeceptor* with mock pomposity urges recourse to the traditional syllabus of Roman rhetorical education, but for distinctly 'un-Roman' purposes (*Ars* 1.459–62):<sup>3</sup>

disce bonas artes, moneo, Romana iuuentus,	
non tantum trepidos ut tueare reos:	460
quam populus iudexque grauis lectusque senatus,	
tam dabit eloquio uicta puella manus.	

The introduction of the extended *exemplum* of Ulysses and Calypso at 2.123 seems to have precluded a provocative concluding aphorism along the lines of 1.461–2, and the apparent omission here of one of Ovid's characteristically facetious reminders of the fundamental goal towards which these teachings are designed to lead may well contribute to the impression that his advocacy of a liberal education is intended to

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Maria Wyke, Matthew Fox and Rhiannon Ash, to audiences in St Andrews, Glasgow and Oxford, and to *CQ's* anonymous referee, for helpful comments on previous drafts of these notes.

<sup>2</sup> On Ovid and *cultus*, see e.g. J.B. Solodow, 'Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*: the lover as cultural ideal', *WS* 90 (1977), 106–27; M. Myerowitz, *Ovid's Games of Love* (Detroit, 1985); P.R. Hardie, *Ovid's Poetics of Illusion* (Cambridge, 2002), 1.

<sup>3</sup> On these lines see K. Volk, 'Ars Amatoria Romana: Ovid on love as a cultural construct', in R.K. Gibson, S.J. Green and A.R. Sharrock (edd.), *The Art of Love. Bimillennial Essays on Ovid's Ars Amatoria and Remedia Amoris* (Oxford, 2006), 235–51 at 240–1.

carry a wider significance.<sup>4</sup> But in fact the way in which Ovid characterizes the skills his student is to acquire from this education brings us immediately back to the real aim of this supposedly high-minded advice: *nec levis ingenuas pectus coluisse per artes | cura sit et linguas edidicisse duas* (121–2). Commentators rightly point out that the injunction to become conversant in *duae linguae* recalls the high value placed on bilingualism by the educated Roman elite: the two *linguae* in question are of course Latin and Greek.<sup>5</sup> As Cicero enjoins his son Marcus at *De officiis* 1.1: *ut ipse ad meam utilitatem semper cum Graecis Latina coniunxi neque id in philosophia solum, sed etiam in dicendi exercitatione feci, idem tibi censeo faciendum, ut par sis in utriusque orationis facultate*.<sup>6</sup>

Had Ovid been Cicero, he too could no doubt have used an expression similar to *utraque oratio*, or some more metrically tractable equivalent.<sup>7</sup> But Ovid is Ovid, and he does not; the expression *linguas edidicisse duas* (122) here is far from fortuitous, and its context within the *Ars amatoria* invests it with a crucial ambiguity. After all, there is more than one way ‘to learn thoroughly two tongues’, and two tongues come in handy for rather more than just public speaking (or even private reading) – we might think of the *pugnantes linguae* of Tibullus 1.8.37, for instance, or the probing *linguae* of *Amores* 2.5.57–8 (*tota labellis | lingua tua est nostris, nostra recepta tuis*). What we have here, then, is a characteristic Ovidian *double entendre*: by describing the activity he is recommending in terms of the outcome it is intended to procure, the *praeceptor amoris* conflates the means with the end, and in so doing keeps his student’s eye firmly fixed on the ultimate goal of his amatory training.

Alison Sharrock seems to have noticed this play when she detects in this passage ‘a joke about seduction for the reader’, and identifies a further pun in the use of ‘double-tongued’ to mean ‘deceitful’.<sup>8</sup> But in fact *linguas edidicisse duas* is only the clinching punch line of a sequence of smutty double meanings that has already begun in the hexameter of this couplet. Ovid’s immediately preceding precept that the would-be lover should make it his business *pectus coluisse* (121) admits a comparably anatomical meaning. On a literal level, of course, he is urging the student of love to ‘cultivate the mind’, *pectus* being the seat of thought;<sup>9</sup> but when Propertius pictures

<sup>4</sup> For a slightly more pragmatic reading of the lines, see however P. Murgatroyd, *Ovid with Love: Selections from Ars Amatoria I and II* (Chicago, 1982), 154, on 2.121–2: ‘The cultured and sophisticated Ovid advises his pupil to acquire similar culture and sophistication. This is yet another instance of good advice in this section, since such an education would make the reader more impressive in most girls’ eyes (and in those of their acquaintances) and should mean that he would be more interesting, have more depth and seldom be short of conversation (in particular a mastery of Greek would extend his reading and knowledge)’.

<sup>5</sup> M. Janka, *Ovid Ars Amatoria Buch 2: Kommentar* (Heidelberg, 1997), 125, on 121–2; A.R. Sharrock, *Seduction and Repetition in Ovid’s Ars Amatoria 2* (Oxford, 1994), 49–50 with 50, n. 45. On bilingualism at Rome, see generally J.N. Adams, *Bilingualism and the Latin Language* (Cambridge, 2003); J.N. Adams, M. Janse and S. Swain (edd.), *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Text* (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> On Ovid’s use of *De officiis* elsewhere in the *Ars*, see M. Labate, *L’arte di farsi amare. Modelli culturali e progetto didascalico nell’elegia ovidiana* (Pisa, 1984), 121–74; R.K. Gibson, *Ovid: Ars Amatoria Book 3* (Cambridge, 2003), 22–3 and index s.v. ‘*De officiis* and the *Ars Amatoria*’; id., *Excess and Restraint. Propertius, Horace, and Ovid’s Ars Amatoria (BICS suppl. 89; London, 2007)*, esp. 80–2, 117–22, 126–9, 132–3.

<sup>7</sup> For parallels in Latin verse, see Horace, *Carm.* 3.8.5, *docte sermones utriusque linguae* (impossible in dactylic metre); *Sat.* 1.10.23, *sermo lingua concinnus utraque*; Martial 10.76.6, *lingua doctus utraque*.

<sup>8</sup> Sharrock (n. 5), 50.

<sup>9</sup> See Janka (n. 5), 125.

Cynthia following his funeral cortège *nudum pectus lacerata* (Prop. 2.13.27) he is scarcely envisaging his girlfriend inflicting mental harm on herself, and when Ovid exclaims upon seeing Corinna's naked body *quam castigato planus sub pectore uenter!* (*Amores* 1.5.21), it is not perhaps the quality of her education that most excites him. So we can see that at *Ars amatoria* 2.121–2 the elegiac *magister* insinuates that his pupil should take it upon himself to 'cultivate'<sup>10</sup> not just (his) mind, but (someone else's) breast.<sup>11</sup> In conjunction with the instruction to acquire an intimate familiarity with 'two tongues', it becomes clear that there is more to this concluding couplet than a disinterested call to self-improvement – and if, with Sharrock, we see in *ingenuas ... artes* (121) a nod in the direction of Ovid's own *Ars*,<sup>12</sup> we should expect nothing less. The *praeceptor*'s sly, suggestive wit is as active as ever, and yet another series of instructions is brought to a neat climax (as it were) with outrageous epigrammatic humour.

## II. REMEDIA AMORIS 757–66

Much of Ovid's *Remedia amoris* is concerned with picking up and countering suggestions made in the *Ars amatoria* for the successful pursuit of love.<sup>13</sup> One prominent instance of this occurs towards the end of the book, where the speaker revisits the reading-list he had given to his female disciples at *Ars* 3.329–46. Unsurprisingly, the register of proscribed literature here includes much of the material we find recommended in the previous passage, described in very similar terms:<sup>14</sup>

eloquar inuitus: teneros ne tange poetas; summoueo dotes impius ipse meas. Callimachum fugito, non est inimicus amori; et cum Callimacho tu quoque, Coe, noces.	760
me certe Sappho meliorem fecit amicae, nec rigidos mores Teia Musa dedit. carmina quis potuit tuto legisse Tibulli uel tua, cuius opus Cynthia sola fuit? quis poterit lecto durus discedere Gallo? et mea nescioquid carmina tale sonant.	765

The erotic character of these poets' works – and hence their potential danger to the patient of the *Remedia* – is immediately spelled out in the adjective *teneros* (757: cf.

<sup>10</sup> Note that such agricultural metaphors repeatedly carry sexual connotations in this didactic poem: see generally E.W. Leach, 'Georgic Imagery in the *Ars Amatoria*', *TAPA* 95 (1964), 142–54; Sharrock (n. 4), 264–5; and cf. Robert Graves, 'Ovid in defeat', quoted in G. Liveley, *Ovid: Love Songs* (London, 2005), 41 and ead., 'Ovid in Defeat? On the reception of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*', in Gibson et al. (n. 3), 318–37 ('Ovid instructs you how | Neighbours' lands to plough', 13–14).

<sup>11</sup> For *pectus* = breast, see further *OLD* s.v. 1c. D.C. Feeney, 'To catch and to keep', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 4 May 2007, 8–9 at 8 sees a comparable pun in *Ars* 1.755–6, *sunt diuersa puellis | pectora*.

<sup>12</sup> Sharrock (n. 5), 49; contra, Janka (n. 5), 124–5.

<sup>13</sup> For a tabulated survey of correspondences, see A.A.R. Henderson, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Remedia Amoris* (Edinburgh, 1979), xvi; cf. also Gibson (n. 6, [2007]), 141–2.

<sup>14</sup> So Coe, *Rem.* 760 ~ *Coi ... poetae*, *Ars* 3.329; *Teia Musa*, *Rem.* 762 / *Ars* 3.330; Tibullus and Gallus by name, *Rem.* 763, 765 / *Ars* 3.334. There is nothing here, however, on Menander, Varro or Virgil: contrast *Ars* 3.332, 335–8.

*teneri ... Properti, Ars* 3.333).<sup>15</sup> Then comes the Hellenistic pairing of Callimachus and Philitas, the former ruled out as 'no foe to love' (*non ... inimicus amori*, 759), and the latter bracketed with him as one who 'does harm'.<sup>16</sup> Here the erotic implications of this kind of reading matter are not probed any further, but in the next couplet Ovid's wry humour begins to show through: on 761 *me ... meliorem fecit amicae*, Henderson, translating 'better company for my girl-friend', comments that 'the adjective is inoffensive, but a nod is as good as a wink'.<sup>17</sup> Things get worse in the following line, where the speaker declares that the erotic lyrics of Anacreon have not led him into *rigidos mores* (762). Perhaps not, if we understand *rigidus* in its primary sense here as 'strict' or 'severe', and *mores* as 'morals'. But in another sense the development of *rigidi mores*, 'stiff habits',<sup>18</sup> is precisely the kind of reaction we might have expected the reading of erotic literature to produce – and an equally good reason for the lovesick to avoid it. Whatever physical or moral effects may (or may not) have resulted from his reading of Anacreon, Ovid's pun does little to dilute the sexual content of his catalogue, and offers a further covert warning about the possible perils of engaging with these suggestive texts.

A relatively innocuous line on Tibullus (763) leads into the next pentameter, which is occupied by a periphrastic summary of Propertius' elegiac poetry: *cuius opus Cynthia sola fuit* (764). The inspiration for this description lies in Propertius' own declarations of exclusive devotion to Cynthia (see e.g. Prop. 1.12.20, 2.1.3–4, 2.13.35–6)<sup>19</sup> – but we should note that the older elegist nowhere refers to his beloved as his *opus*. This refers primarily here to Propertius' literary 'work', and at least his first book of elegies was known by its opening word *Cynthia* (Prop. 1.1.1, 2.24.1–2; Martial 14.189). In Roman elegy, however, and particularly in Ovid, who subjects the erotic death fantasies of his elegiac predecessors to hilarious if tasteless literalization by praying, at the mid-point of the *Amores*, that he may expire *medium ... inter opus* (*Amores* 2.10.36), there is an all too easy slippage between *opus*, literary work, and *opus*, sex.<sup>20</sup> So when Ovid talks of the poet whose only 'job' was Cynthia, he may be giving a précis of Propertius' poetry, a summary of his sex life, or both. Once more the characterization of this previous poet's work is carefully chosen, and points yet again to the impossibility of keeping sex off the brain when confronted with these luminaries of erotic literature.

At line 765 Ovid moves on to C. Cornelius Gallus, the first major practitioner of Latin love elegy. The proximity of the adjective *durus* to the name of this poet is striking,<sup>21</sup> given that *duritia* is the literary quality associated with Gallus' elegies by Quintilian in his catalogue of Roman elegists at *Institutio oratoria* 10.1.93:

<sup>15</sup> Henderson (n. 13), 132; C. Lucke, *P. Ovidius Naso Remedia Amoris: Kommentar zu Vers 397–814* (Bonn, 1982), 330; P. Pinotti, *Publio Ovidio Nasone: Remedia Amoris* (Bologna, 1988), 320.

<sup>16</sup> For Callimachus and Philitas as love poets, see also Prop. 2.34.31–2, 3.9.43–4; Ovid, *Rem.* 379–82.

<sup>17</sup> Henderson (n. 13), 132.

<sup>18</sup> For *rigidus* used of erect genitalia, see *OLD* s.v. 3b; J.N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (London, 1982), 46, 103. Further Ovidian examples in J. Ingleheart, 'Burning Manuscripts: the literary *apologia* in Ovid's *Tristia* 2 and Vladimir Nabokov's "On a Book Entitled Lolita"', *Classical and Modern Literature* 26 (2006), 79–109 at 85–8 with n. 29.

<sup>19</sup> For the line-ending cf. Prop. 2.29B.24, in *lecto Cynthia sola fuit*: might recollection of *lecto* in this Propertian context precondition the reader's initial interpretation of the meaning of *lecto* in *Rem.* 765 (see below)?

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. D.F. Kennedy, *The Arts of Love: Five Studies in the Discourse of Roman Love Elegy* (Cambridge, 1993), 59–60; Ingleheart (n. 18), 101 with n. 69.

elegia quoque Graecos prouocamus, cuius mihi tersus atque elegans maxime uidetur auctor Tibullus. sunt qui Propertium malint. Ouidius utroque lasciuior, sicut durior Gallus.

Could we see the appearance of *durus* in a Gallan context here in Ovid as evidence that this critical judgement of the earlier poet's work was already current before the composition of Quintilian's treatise? If so, the association of Gallus with *duritia* here could be understood in one of two ways: either Ovid is defending his predecessor from the charge later levelled against his poetry by Quintilian, claiming that it is inconceivable that Gallus' *œuvre* could contaminate a reader with its own alleged *duritia*, or he is slyly pointing to the humorous paradox of not coming away *durus* oneself after reading a work notorious for its stylistic *duritia*. Might Quintilian even have been influenced in his verdict by this line of Ovid? It is likely, moreover, that Gallus himself used the word *durus* in a highly memorable and possibly programmatic context, given the repeated occurrence of this adjective in what appear to be imitations of Gallus' own poetry.<sup>22</sup> There may then be some playful engagement here on Ovid's part with terminology used by Gallus in his elegies: who could come away 'hard-hearted' (*durus*) after reading poetry traditionally characterized as *tener*, the opposite of *durus* in its literary sense – a distinction perhaps drawn by Gallus himself?<sup>23</sup>

However this may be, it should be noted that it is only with *Gallo*, the final word of the hexameter, that the meaning of the line is actually fixed as 'who'll be able to go away hard after reading Gallus?' Before the clarification offered by this closing foot, there is no indication (unless perhaps *durus* offers a hint along the lines suggested in the preceding paragraph) that the line is about Gallus at all, and without the name at the end *quis poterit lecto durus discedere* could mean something entirely different. For *lecto* is revealed as a perfect passive participle, 'having been read', only when we reach its complementary noun *Gallo*, whereas before this resolution the reader could be forgiven for taking it as a substantive in its own right: 'who'll be able to leave the bed (*lectus*) hard ...?'<sup>24</sup> With his customary verbal dexterity, Ovid slips into his characterization of the emotional effects of reading Gallus an implicit pointer to the more physical consequences of being propelled into sexual behaviour by this kind of poetry. If you act on what you read in elegy, insinuates the *praeceptor*, there's no way you'll still be 'hard' by the time you come to leave the bed: *durus*, like *rigidus*, can be used to denote an erection.<sup>25</sup> It is an entertaining deflation, perhaps literally so, when we find out upon reaching the final word in the line that this is not in fact the sentence's primary meaning. Even then, however, there is room for doubt, given that *gallus*, indistinguishable in manuscript from the name *Gallus*, can be used in Latin to denote

<sup>21</sup> Some *recentiores* have *tutus* – see Kenney's apparatus.

<sup>22</sup> See Virgil, *Ecl.* 10.46–9, *tu procul a patria (nec sit mihi credere tantum) | Alpinas, a! dura niues et frigora Rheni | me sine sola uides. a, te ne frigora laedant! | a, tibi ne teneras glacies secet aspera plantas!*; Propertius 1.8.5–8, *tunc audire potes uesani murmura ponti | fortis et in dura naue iacere potes? | tu pedibus teneris positas calcare pruinas, | tu potes insolitas, Cynthia, ferre niues?* (and, if I am right [*PCPS* 53 (2007), 161–79 at 165], 3.7.47–8, *nunc tulit et Paetus stridorem audire procellae | et duro teneras laedere fune manus*); F. Cairns, *Sextus Propertius, the Augustan Elegist* (Cambridge, 2006), 89–90, 111, 114–15, 139, 191 (though here *mollis* is given as the opposite of *durus*).

<sup>23</sup> See passages in n. 22 above.

<sup>24</sup> For *discedere* + simple ablative, see *TLL* 5.1.1280.39–47.

<sup>25</sup> J.T. Katz and K. Volk, 'Erotic hardening and softening in Vergil's eighth *Eclogue*', *CQ* 56 (2006), 169–74 at 173–4 (*Ecl.* 8.80–1) with 173, n. 23 (*Ecl.* 4.30, after Nisbet); see also Ovid, *Fasti* 2.346, *et tumidum cornu durius inguen erat*.

a eunuch (specifically a devotee of Cybele: see e.g. Horace, *Sat.* 1.2.120–2; Ovid, *Fasti* 4.361–2; Martial 3.81, 11.74) or effeminate man.<sup>26</sup> In this case the implication would paradoxically (perhaps humorously) be one of amatory failure: who could come away *durus* after reading someone whose very name might suggest sexual impotence?

Taken together, this extraordinary accumulation of innuendo over the course of five lines is guaranteed, whatever else it does, to keep the reader's mind on the subject of sex. The dangers of reading works of erotic literature are themselves illustrated by a reading of Ovid's specification of the books to be avoided. No wonder he concludes his catalogue with the observation *et mea nescioquid carmina tale sonant* (766)<sup>27</sup> – this is after all precisely what he has been doing throughout the last few lines. And it is what he does right the way through the *Remedia*, with the result that, as much recent scholarship has observed,<sup>28</sup> Ovid's prescribed remedies are intrinsically programmed to fail in their therapeutic capacity. In Rosati's words, 'Ovid well knows that "amorous speech" (especially if made up from "fragments" from the great erotic poets) is a symptom of latent illness and is itself a source of contagion: to continue to speak of love – even if only to repeat that it is over and that one is no longer in love – means continuing to dwell in the world of desire';<sup>29</sup> for him, 'a line such as *et mea nescio quid carmina tale sonant* (...) completing a list of erotic texts to be avoided sounds to the reader of the *Remedia* like a confession (with an ironic wink) of the true nature not only of the previous Ovidian elegy, but also of the *Remedia* itself' (ibid.).

Both Rosati and Henderson, then, catch an Ovidian wink in the course of this passage, at lines 761 and 766 respectively: in combination, those two instances might be enough to prove the point. But if I am right about the verbal texture of the passage as a whole, Ovid is not merely winking but positively fluttering his eyelashes.

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<sup>26</sup> TLL 6.2.1686–7. For a possible pun along similar lines, see Prop. 1.10.1–2, *primo cum testis amori | adfueram*, addressed to one 'Gallus' (5): M. Pincus, 'Propertius's Gallus and the erotics of influence', *Arethusa* 37 (2004), 165–96 at 172–9.

<sup>27</sup> CQ's anonymous reader suggests there may be an echo here of Ovid's provocatively reticent *cetera quis nescit?* (*Am.* 1.5.25), ironically marking the avoidance of sexual explicitness in one of the poet's most sexual pieces (see esp. T. Schmitz, 'Cetera quis nescit. Verschwiegene Obszönität in der Liebesdichtung Ovids', *Poetica* 30 [1998], 317–49; although Schmitz does not mention *Rem.* 766, *nescioquid* ... *tale* would fit comfortably into his analysis).

<sup>28</sup> See especially L. Fulkerson, 'Omnia vincit amor: why the *Remedia* fail', *CQ* 54 (2004), 211–23; G. Rosati, 'The Art of *Remedia Amoris*: Unlearning to Love?', in Gibson, Green and Sharrock (n. 3), 143–65 at 164–5; P.R. Hardie, 'Lethaeus Amor: The Art of Forgetting', in Gibson, Green and Sharrock (n. 3), 166–90 at 166–7; Sharrock (n. 5), 62–3 ('The rejection of love is part of the discourse of love – it is love', 62); ead., 'Ovid and the discourses of love: the amatory works', in P.R. Hardie (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge, 2002), 150–62 at 160–1.

<sup>29</sup> Rosati (n. 28), 164.