

XXXIX. Two Problems in Roman Love Elegy

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Critical discussion of Roman elegiac poetry is bedevilled by problems of method. Two topics in particular constantly recur, and they seem to me to have larger implications than at first sight they appear to promise. They are not so much questions of literary criticism as obstacles to it, for they hamper the discussion of Roman elegiac poetry, particularly Ovid's, *as poetry* by substituting for such discussion various irrelevant investigations or by importing into it preconceptions which may preclude a genuine understanding of that poetry.¹ The two questions I have in mind are, first, *was Ovid's Corinna a real person?* and, secondly, *is the love we find described in Roman elegy different in kind from what we consider "romantic" love?*

I. OVID'S CORINNA

In most discussions of Ovid's Corinna two main theses may be distinguished:

(a) that *Corinna* is a pseudonym for some one definite person (*nomine non vero dicta Corinna mihi* [*Trist.* 4.10.60]) who bore roughly the same relation to life and the poet's emotions and poetry as did Catullus' Lesbia, Gallus' Lycoris, Propertius' Cynthia and Tibullus' Delia;²

¹ Some of the points in the first part of this paper have been made in a general context by H. C. Cherniss, "The Biographical Fashion in Literary Criticism," (*U. Cal. Pub. Class. Phil.* 12 [1943] 279-91) and in a Propertian context by A. W. Allen, "'Sincerity' and the Roman Elegists," *CP* 45 (1950) 145-60. These articles however seem to have had little effect on recent Ovidian criticism.

² Adherents to this thesis are e.g., E. Nageotté, *Ovide, sa vie, ses oeuvres* (Paris 1872) 50 ff., who does not mention the problem involved and may therefore be taken as representative of contemporary opinion; C. Lamarre, *Histoire de la littérature latine au temps d'Auguste* 3 (Paris 1906) 54-57; L. Herrmann, *Rev. belge de philol.* 17 (1938) 695-725; R. P. Oliver, *TAPA* 76 (1945) 205 ff., who however strengthens his thesis by arguing for such a drastic revision of the *Amores* that the progress of the liaison with Corinna and Corinna's own character is thoroughly obfuscated; and, most recently, E. de Saint Denis, "Le malicieux Ovide," *Ovidiana*, ed. Herescu (Paris 1958) 185 ff. and P. Green, *Essays in Classical Antiquity* (London 1960) 118 ff.

(b) that Corinna did not exist but is a fictitious character, composed of the literary characteristics of mistresses in erotic poetry, set in traditional elegiac situations, or at best is a compound of these and Ovid's various unimportant liaisons; *ipso facto* this gives her a very different status from that of Lesbia or Cynthia. One chief object of this second thesis is to contrast Ovid's love poetry unfavorably with that of Catullus and Propertius in terms of "sincerity" and "relation to life."³

The factual arguments used by the defenders of each of these theses admittedly come to nothing. We do not have the sort of external evidence such as Apuleius provides (*Apol.* 10) for Catullus' Lesbia, Tigidius' Perilla, Propertius' Cynthia and Tibullus' Delia nor the scattered evidence which tells us so much of the career of Gallus' Lycoris (*RE* 4 [1901] 1345, s.v. "Cornelius"). The seemingly factual information which some have tried to adduce from Ovid's own works is quite inconclusive. Such lines as (*AA* 3.538):

et multi, quae sit nostra Corinna, rogant,

or (*Trist.* 4.10.59-60):

moverat ingenium totam cantata per urbem
nomine non vero dicta Corinna mihi,

are counterbalanced by such lines as (*ibid.* 65-68):

molle cupidineis nec inexpugnabile telis
cor mihi, quodque levis causa moveret, erat.
cum tamen hic essem minimoque accenderer igni,
nomine sub nostro fabula nulla fuit,

or (*ibid.* 2.339-40):

ad leve rursus opus, iuvenalia carmina, veni,
et falso movi pectus amore meum.

Similarly the avowal (*Am.* 3.12.16):

ingenium movit sola Corinna meum,⁴

³ Those who favour various forms of this thesis include F. Leo, *Philologische Untersuchungen* fasc. 2, 20; E. Ripert, *Ovide, poète de l'amour des dieux et de l'exil* (Paris 1921) 49 ff.; G. Showerman, *Ovid, Heroides and Amores* (London 1921) 361; L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (Cambridge 1955) 46: "there is nothing to persuade us that Corinna really existed."

⁴ Martial's line *Norat Nasonem sola Corinna suum* (5.10.10) is sometimes wrenched from its context. But Martial is making the point that poets are unread in their lifetime, and the reference to Corinna is no more than a poetic *exemplum* and cannot be used as evidence of anything.

can be taken no more literally than Ovid's boasting of (*ibid.* 1.3.13-14):

nulli cessura fides, sine crimine mores
nudaque simplicitas purpureusque pudor,

in a volume which presents us with the unscrupulous Cypassis diptych.

The portrait of Corinna which can be drawn from the *Amores* has little enough individuality, even if we assume that the first hypothesis is defensible and that all the love poems were written to her. Those who adopt the first hypothesis might argue that Ovid, like most elegiac poets, is more interested in his own reactions and emotions than in the objective character of his mistress. But however individual she appeared, it is still impossible to argue with conviction that she *must* be drawn from life. Can we argue that Dido or the more individualized heroines of Greek tragedy *must* be drawn from life? Corinna's physical characteristics are not inconsonant with a minimally imaginative portrait,⁵ particularly as the more striking items of the catalogue—the loss of her hair and her abortion—are both given in poems which are constructed round these very facts. It would be a bold critic who offered to determine for us whether Corinna's abortion prompted *Am.* 2.13 or whether the idea of a poem on abortion was so tempting to Ovid that he added this disreputable incident to the slender history of his imaginary mistress.

Granted the utter inconclusiveness of such internal "factual" evidence, it is natural that the main arguments deployed by the respective upholders of the two theses should be subjective interpretations of the "sincerity" of the *Amores*. If the descriptions of Corinna ring true and have the accents of real life, then Corinna did exist; or, if Ovid sounds as though he were genuinely in love, then as real love implies an object, he must have been in love

⁵ Corinna was free-born (1.7.50), poor (1.8.15), avaricious and unfaithful (3.8.11a *passim*), married or kept by someone other than Ovid (1.4, 2.2); she was sensual (1.5), and Ovid at one time describes her as gentle and submissive (1.14.13 ff., 1.7 *passim*) and at another as cruel and violent because of her vanity (2.17.5 ff.), which also induced her to have an abortion (2.13); she was jealous of Ovid but she herself gave him frequent cause for jealousy (2.5, 3.1 etc.); she was unreliable, coquettish and full of feminine wiles (2.19, 3.11a). Physically she was *candida* with rosy cheeks, tall and dignified (3.1 *passim*) with small feet and an abundance of fine closely-curled hair, which she dyed but whose normal color was between black and gold (?), like peeled cedar (1.7.11, 1.14 *passim*). For further discussion see Oliver (above, note 2) 203 ff.

with Corinna, who must therefore have been a real person,⁶ and *vice versa*. It is significant that the dispute has not been settled.

The disagreement continues because scholars can produce only "subjective" evidence to settle what is clearly a factual question about Ovid's biography. Neither side will accept the other's interpretation and for good reasons. In fact this sort of evidence is quite unacceptable for such a problem. Whether Corinna existed is a minor question of no literary interest, insoluble unless some genuinely factual evidence turns up, and it deserves no more space in our critical histories than the lingering doubts as to the exact identity of Catullus' Lesbia. This last question does not bulk so large in Catullan studies because Catullus is taken as a paradigm of "sincerity" and "genuine poetry." In Ovidian studies however, where for various reasons the exact nature and status of Ovid's art is the main critical problem, the parallel question about Corinna is debated endlessly. I wish to suggest that the whole discussion is misconceived. There is a real disagreement in Ovidian criticism, but the dilemma about Corinna is false, false in the sense that the debate is really a *critical* disagreement about the nature of poetry in general and Ovid's poetry in particular, which happens to have crystallized around an unimportant question of fact. The insistence on the reality or unreality of Corinna, like the pseudo-problem "was Ovid ever *really* in love?," has subtly distorted much criticism of Ovid's poetry by making any genuine admiration for or dissatisfaction with Ovid as a love poet (generally by comparison with Propertius) a matter of autobiographical sincerity, fidelity to life's concrete events or emotional truth. But this is a romantic canon of criticism which is both inadequate and misleading about the nature of art and poetry, and there have been protests, rightly, against this pre-

⁶ Green (above, note 2) is representative of the first type of argument: "... it is hard to believe those scholars who suppose her to have been a figment of Ovid's imagination. We have already met her at siesta time; that poem [*Am.* 1.5] does not bear the stamp of literary fantasy. The *Amores*, indeed, have been consistently under-rated by critics who ... doubt their sincerity (118) ... These poems possess a passion, an *immediacy* from which Ovid steadily moved away ... The impact of Corinna on Ovid is as devastating as that of Lesbia on Catullus or Cynthia on Propertius ... his poems attain a corresponding height of intensity" (120). The second type of argument is offered by de Saint Denis (above, note 2): "J'admire l'intrépidité avec laquelle les critiques assurent qu'Ovide n'a point aimé. Parce qu'on n'a pas pu identifier sa Corinne ... ils doutent que Corinne ait existé (185) ... je ne peux pas conclure qu'il n'a pas aimé (190)."

occupation.⁷ Nevertheless even those few percipient critics who have tried to depart from this sterile investigation have contented themselves with stressing the different conception which Ovid had of his art and thus withdrawing him from the critical comparison with Propertius which often underlies adverse comment on the *unreality* of Ovid's personal poetry in the *Amores*. One critic, for example, concludes:

If sincerity is considered a function of style, both Propertius and Ovid, writing in their characteristic manners, are sincere because each employs a style which accords with the character his elegies portray . . . We may still prefer Tibullus or Propertius to Ovid, as Quintilian did, but we shall be able to do so in terms pertinent to poetic style rather than in terms of uncertain inferences drawn from style (Allen 157).

But this gives us no criteria of evaluation other than consistency within a given style and fidelity to a poetic *persona*, a minimal requirement, if it is a requirement at all. Our preferences still have to be given a more objective organization than this; otherwise they remain purely personal likes or dislikes which are beyond argument. The admittedly inadequate criterion of personal "sincerity" has not been replaced by an adequate criterion. Similarly E. Reitzenstein in his analysis⁸ of the scope of Ovid's *Amores* protests (62) that:

Die moderne ästhetische Kritik steht diesem Werk in allgemeinen kühl oder ablehnend gegenüber, und es wird aus ihr keineswegs verständlich, warum sich die Zeitgenossen so sehr dafür haben begeistern können. Man hebt, zweifellos mit Recht, hervor, dass 'in keinem der Corinnalieder ein echter Herzenston erklingt,' dass an den *Amores* 'kunstlerisches Studium, Witz und Phantasie mehr Anteil haben als das Gemüt,' dass 'es ihm (dem Dichter) nie Ernst ist mit seiner moralischen Entrüstung,' dass er so sich im Gegensatz zu seiner Vorgängern 'in der Ausbeutung gegebener Situationen und Motive für Kabinettstücke prickelnder Rhetorik gefällt.'

His own discussion, however, concludes (88):

Die behandelten vier Gedichte ergeben ein völlig einheitliches Bild von den allgemeinen Zielen, die Ovid in seinen *Amores* verfolgt, von seiner Grundauffassung der Erotik als Gegenstand der Liebeselegie.

⁷ In particular Allen (above, note 1) 153.

⁸ "Das neue Kunstwollen in den *Amores* Ovids," *RhM* 84 (1935) 62-88.

Er will nicht Nachfahr sondern Neuschöpfer sein. Das Material ist ihm im wesentlichen durch Properz und Tibull geliefert, aber der neue Baugedanke, nach dem das echt ovidische Werk ausgeführt wird, ist in erneuter Hinwendung zur alexandrinischen Kunst gefunden worden. Das römische Streben seiner Vorgänger, auch diesem Zweig der Poesie eine gewisse Würde zu verleihen, ist bewusst aufgegeben, das zum Grundprinzip erhoben worden: 'Dichter ist ein Übermut.'

Now although an understanding of the nature of a poet's work is vital for criticism, this understanding is a preliminary to judgment rather than a substitute for it. Those who rated Ovid inferior to Propertius on grounds of sincerity were at least making a value judgment, however much they may have misinterpreted the question by discussing Corinna's reality or unreality. This is the significance of the fierce dispute about Corinna and it puts into an interesting perspective the fact that most critics have found her an unreal character. I believe that it is important that this feeling of dissatisfaction should not be replaced by a critical indifferentism. A defence of Ovid against his detractors cannot take the form simply that he was *different* from Propertius or Tibullus or that his attitudes are more "complex."

The majority of scholars who impugn the reality of Corinna on *internal* grounds are offering us then a disguised critical reaction, which one might regard as the reaction of the common reader. This reaction is not to be shrugged off lightly, "for by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtilty and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetic honours."⁹ The lack of "sincerity" which the majority of readers have felt and perhaps misconstrued as a false representation of Ovid's life and psychology has some value as a critical insight, if interpreted in a much broader and general sense. The problem of "sincerity" in poetry is still the most difficult problem for the critic. Poetry is not biography, but it has a real relationship to life and human experience. Propertius too has been the object of similar biographical investigations; but although the fruitlessness of the labors to establish the *chronological* progress of his liaison with Cynthia has been exposed, we are left with no lingering critical doubts about Propertius' sincerity in the broadest sense or

⁹ Johnson, *Life of Gray*, *ad fin.*

the very real relationship of his poetry of life.¹⁰ We are with Ovid.

It is not my purpose here to sketch the principles and methods whereby criticism of Ovid's poetry would replace the biographical discussions which center on Corinna. Such principles could only emerge from a close and detailed examination of the texts.

II. ROMANTIC LOVE IN THE ROMAN ELEGISTS

In discussing Corinna we glanced at a connected question of a similarly misleading nature: was Ovid ever *really* in love? This psychological question (apart from the obvious difficulty of definition) can be given no answer by the literary historian; and even if it could be answered, it would be irrelevant to the literary examination of the *Amores*. But there is a related and more general question which does concern the critic. There is a view, the evidence for which can only be literary, that the ancient world had no conception of "romantic love" between the sexes but reserved the more idealistic and tender forms of passion for homosexual relationships. The acceptance of this thesis is fairly general among students of literature and historians of ideas. The most familiar statement of this view is by C. S. Lewis:

In ancient literature love seldom rises above the levels of merry sensuality, . . . except to be treated as a tragic madness, an *ἄττη* which plunges otherwise sane people (usually women) into crime and disgrace . . . and if we turn to ancient love-poetry proper, we shall be even more disappointed. We shall find the poets loud in their praises of love, no doubt,

τίς δὲ βίος, τί δὲ τερπνὸν ἄτερ χρυσῆς Ἀφροδίτης;

'What is life without love, tra-la-la?' as the later song has it. But this is no more to be taken seriously than the countless panegyrics both ancient and modern on the all-consoling virtues of the bottle. If Catullus and Propertius vary the strain with cries of rage and misery, this is not so much because they are romantics as because they are exhibitionists. In their anger and their suffering they care not who knows the pass to which love has brought them. They are in the grip of the *ἄττη*. They do not expect their obsession to be regarded as a noble sorrow—they have no 'silks and fine array.'¹¹

¹⁰ A tentative attempt to define this relationship to life may be found in my recent article "*Castas Odisse Puellas: A Reconsideration of Propertius 1.1*," *WS* 74 (1961) 96–112.

¹¹ *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford 1936) 4 f. Lewis wishes to argue that romantic love came into existence as courtly love in the eleventh century in Languedoc with the

Lewis and those who follow him wish to claim that the courtly love of the troubadours was a new and unique phenomenon; the new sensibility that originated in the Languedoc in the eleventh century and which may be seen in the *Roman de la Rose*, for example, is unparalleled in ancient literature; this new complex of emotions and attitudes, we are told, once stripped of its purely accidental and temporal characteristics, became what is termed "romantic love" and is the foundation of modern Western sexual attitudes. These attitudes find their finest and most sensitive expression in literature, particularly in love poetry, and this is the literature on which our own sensibilities are based. As a consequence, if it is true that ancient love poetry is systematically different in tone and attitude from modern love poetry, then the interpretation of Roman elegiac poetry labors under an enormous handicap, quite different from the usual handicaps which we are used to in dealing with a different civilization and culture. Roman love poetry ceases to be love poetry as we know it.

It is obvious that such a question as this is particularly liable to conceptual confusion and the abuse of evidence. That there are differences between any area of ancient literature and any similar area of our own literature is undeniable, but it is important that we should neither import into our studies our own prejudices and modern feelings nor deny utterly on *a priori* grounds the common humanity which may underlie any part of Western literature. Each case must be judged on its merits, and we must bring to each case the finest and most sensitive perceptions which we can command. In history we must and do assume that the motives of ancient statesmen are rational motives, comprehensible to and therefore discoverable by us. Similarly in Roman elegy I do not believe that Lewis' contention can be proved; but if it becomes an

rise of the Minnesänger and that this was a revolution in sensibility previously unparalleled. Although his views have been attacked by Romance philologists, his remarks on classical attitudes to love are becoming a modern orthodoxy. J. O. Bayley, e.g., (*The Characters of Love* [London 1961] 52) says: ". . . love was not invented in the Middle Ages so much as granted full recognition and honours, and we continue to honour a phenomenon which was thought of before—when it was thought of at all—as an illness or a divine affliction. The appearance of Courtly Love was singularly abrupt and local, but it has left an immense legacy of received ideas about sex and society—the idea of love at first sight, of fidelity and secrecy in love, of the lady being seldom or never at fault, most of all the superior status of the lover." The application of this to Roman elegy is made by Green (above, note 2, 113) ". . . he [Ovid] antedates the Romantic Ideal (a point often forgotten in dealing with ancient erotic poetry)."

idée reçue, it can only damage the critical study of Latin poetry by arousing *a priori* expectations which we will bring to our reading of that poetry. Whatever differences of sexual and social attitudes may be found in a detailed study of the elegists, the love which is their prime subject may with propriety be described as "romantic."

Were there a simple and acceptable definition of modern romantic love, we might compare directly the elegists' attitudes and ours, but here it will be convenient to begin with Lewis' definition of courtly love, which is the first expression, he argues, of romantic love. The features of courtly love are *humility*, *courtesy*, *adultery* and *the religion of love*. The first of these features, the so-called *Frauendienst*, explains Wechssler's description of the whole phenomenon as the "feudalization of love." Most of these features can be paralleled *mutatis mutandis* in Roman love poetry from Catullus to Ovid. The *servitium amoris* of the elegists is an exact parallel to the feudal obeisance of the troubadour to his *midonz*. The importance of adultery echoes the significance of the *alter vir* in elegy. Consider its dramatic presentation in Propertius 2.23.19-20:

Timeo, propera iam surgere, quaeso:
infelix, hodie vir mihi rure venit.

The troubadour's preoccupation with the religion of love recalls how Roman elegy also moves between two planes, one the actual relationship with a mistress and the other the invocation and descriptions of the deities that guard or torment a lover (cf. e.g. Prop. 2.29a, Ovid, *Am.* 1.2 etc.)¹² Courtesy is more difficult to parallel. As the word implies, it is not a concept that would be familiar to Republican Rome in its more technical sense. Essentially it is the treatment of the beloved or any lady as a social superior in accordance with the elaborate code of manners prescribed by chivalry. There is no precise classical equivalent, but the treatment of the lady as real *domina*, prescribed by Ovid as a technique of seduction (*AA* 2. 209-32) and described ironically by Propertius in 4.8, comes to much the same thing. From this

¹² On the *servitium amoris* see F. O. Copley, "Servitium Amoris in the Roman Elegists," *TAPA* 78 (1947) 285-300; for further references to the *alter vir* in Propertius, Sullivan (above, note 10) 99-100. The religion of love in Roman elegy had also its ritualistic aspects such as the *paraclausithyron*, on the elaborations of which see F. O. Copley, *Exclusus amator* (Madison [Wis.] 1956).

it should be clear that, if the formula "Ovid misunderstood" is a convincing description of courtly love on the grounds that the troubadours took Ovid seriously and followed his ironical recommendations *au pied de la lettre*, yet if we go beyond Ovid, we shall find the earlier elegists have a serious attitude to sexual passion and love which is more or less identical, for literary purposes, to that of courtly love and its later derivative modern romantic love.

The main argument which Lewis employs to distinguish sharply the ancient conception of love from romantic love is that the ancients always regarded love as a madness and a disease, whereas the modern world does not. Now this is an accepted comment on elegiac poetry in classical discussions of the subject, and it is quite true that the notion of love as a madness is a commonplace in Greek and Latin literature and nowhere perhaps commoner than in elegy, where descriptions of love as a *furor* and of the lover as *insanus* are frequent.¹³ But two points should be remembered, first, that *any* strong passion or abnormal behavior might be so described, and secondly, not all madresses were to be deplored.¹⁴ Moreover, even in the modern world our ways of speaking about love and passion are exactly similar in both literary and colloquial language; we too talk of love as a madness.¹⁵ The humorous

¹³ For general reff. see A. W. Allen, "Elegy and the Classical Attitude toward Love" *TCIS* 11 (1950) 261 ff., and for details R. Pichon, *De sermone amatorio apud Latinos elegiarum scriptores* (Paris 1902) 157-58, 172-73, and A. S. Pease, *Virgil, Aeneid* iv (Cambridge [Mass.] 1935) 84-85.

¹⁴ See Pichon's analyses of the various emotional states that may be described as *furor* (note 13 above) and in general E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 3 ff., and "The Blessings of Madness," 64 ff. The four types of madness (prophetic, teletic, poetic and erotic) and the high status accorded to them as divinely inspired should be borne in mind in discussing ancient attitudes to madness. It is too readily assumed that abnormal psychological states were regarded as bad without qualification, but different views are implicit in Plato (*τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἡμῖν γίγνεται διὰ μανίας*), and the sacred status of the lover because of his connection with the god of love is well brought out by Propertius (3.16.11-16):

nec tamen est quisquam, sacros qui laedat amantes.
Scironis media sic licet ire via.
quisquis amator erit, Scythicis licet ambulet oris,
nemo adeo, ut noceat, barbarus esse volet.
Luna ministrat iter, demonstrant astra salebras:
ipse Amor accensas praecutit ante faces.

This is not unlike Plato's description of love as *πασῶν τῶν ἐνθουσιάζσεων ἀρίστη* (*Phdr.* 249E).

¹⁵ Consider "to be mad" (or "crazy") "about someone"; most of the idioms describing the behavior of the lover are modeled on abnormal states of some sort, e.g. "to be intoxicated by, to be bewitched by." Even the description of love as a *vulnus*

definition of Ambrose Bierce expresses modern views as well as recalling ancient:

Love. n. A temporary insanity curable by marriage or the removal of the patient from the influences under which he incurred the disorder. This disease, like *caries* and many other ailments, is prevalent only among civilized races living under artificial conditions; barbarous nations breathing pure air and eating simple food enjoy immunity from its ravages. It is sometimes fatal, but more frequently to the physician than the patient (*The Devil's Dictionary*, s.v.).

In fact even the putative originators of courtly and romantic love took over the conception of love as a sickness, and this was as much part of their picture of love as was the notion of it as a form of warfare and a science that can be taught. All of this derives from Ovid and the other elegists.¹⁶ This view of love as a madness cannot then be sufficient to distinguish the ancient and modern conceptions of passionate love. It is true that we can distinguish the official or philosophical Roman attitude to love from that held by poets, just as we can distinguish the Christian norm from that of the troubadours, and in both cases the official social attitudes make themselves felt in love poetry as a norm from which the poets diverge. A modern love poet has a background of more complaisant social conventions about romantic love (unless he writes of an adulterous liaison), but this is to point out a difference between modern social attitudes and ancient attitudes, not to a different amorous sensibility. I see therefore no reason to accept a radical dichotomy between the passionate love of Roman elegy or the passionate love of modern civilization. Both accept what psychologists call the *compulsive* nature of love and reflect this in their metaphors and descriptions of love. The technical use of *miser*, which is sometimes regarded as significant, reflects no more than the fact that Roman amatory elegy, like most love-poetry, is about frustrated or blighted love; and a similar case could be made out for such poetical uses in English poetry of *pale*, *wan*, etc,

or a *morbus* have their English equivalents, e.g. "to be smitten, to be love-sick"; cf. Shakespeare's "the wound's invisible/that love's keen arrows make (*As You Like It*, 3.5.30-31) etc.

¹⁶ Cf. D. Scheludko, "Ovid und die Trobadores," *Zeitschr. f. romanische Philologie* 54 (1934) 129-74.

(cf. Keats' lover in *La Belle Dame sans Merci*—"alone and *palely* loitering").¹⁷

Behind Lewis' distinction then between ancient and modern types of passionate love is the unexamined belief that in Greece and Rome at all periods deeply passionate love was regarded without qualification as a bad and deplorable state and that this was the view not only of society and philosophy, but also of love poets, whereas in the modern world (except in certain communities) love is accepted as a good state of mind, is held to be a suitable basis for marriage (a sign of its domestication since the days of the troubadours) and an invaluable spiritual experience ("it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all"), and if a madness, then it is a madness one would not wish to be cured of. But it is my contention that the Roman elegists took a similar view of love, whatever the views of the *austeri*,¹⁸ and may therefore be regarded as romantics; they only wished to be cured of their passion when they were *unhappily* in love. If we postulate a revolution in sentiment in eleventh century troubadour poetry, we may with equally good reason postulate a revolution in sentiment in first century Rome (or any other civilized period where the evidence warrants it). A simple inspection of the work of Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus and even Ovid (although with him the situation is rather different) will provide the necessary evidence. What we are looking for is indications in these poets that love is a desirable state which has a positive and spiritual value over and above sensual pleasure or the satisfaction of bodily needs; that though a madness, like the *μανία* of poetry and prophecy, it is not a madness one would wish to cure in all instances.

¹⁷ The use of *misellus* in Cat. 45.21, in a poem on a pair who are happily and mutually in love, cannot be used to argue that for Catullus even happy love was a deplorable state; it has no more significance in that lightly ironic poem than "love-sick" would have in a similar poem in English. Any adverse connotation is cancelled not only by the use of the diminutive but also by lines 25-26: *Quis ullos homines beatiores / vidit? Quis venerem auspiciorem?* Is Septimius *beatus* or *miser*?

¹⁸ The views of the *austeri* are best represented by the Catos (cf. e.g. Hor. *Sat.* 1.2.31 ff.), but the younger Cato's divorce of his wife in order to allow Hortensius to marry her and his remarriage to her after the latter's death is a remarkable instance of unromantic behavior. The philosophical attitude to love (cf. Lucr. 4.1058 ff. and Cic. *Tusc.* 4.32.68, 35.75) adopts the common post-Aristotelian stance of *ataraxia* and *autarkeia* and aims at minimizing all external forces. For the elegists' departure from Roman *gravitas* and socially acceptable ways of living, cf. J. Fontenrose, "Propertius and the Roman Career," *U. Cal. Pub. Class. Phil.* 3 (1949) 370 ff.

Despite the predominantly unhappy tone of most of his love poetry, Catullus' descriptions of the happier times with Lesbia show all the tenderness and willing acceptance of the state which we associate with romantic love (72.3-4):

dilexi tum te non tantum ut vulgus amicam,
sed pater ut gnatos diligit et generos;

he can pray that his relationship with her will last forever (109.6):

aeternum hoc sanctae foedus amicitiae;

while the affair prospers, Catullus is happy and enviable (8.3-5):

fulsere quondam candidi tibi soles,
cum ventitabas quo puella ducebat
amata nobis quantum amabitur nulla,

and his high estimation of the bliss of the fortunate lover is to be seen in his translation of Sappho:

ille mi par esse deo videtur,
ille, si fas est, superare divos . . .

It is only when Catullus' love is no longer returned and he is miserable that he employs all the linguistic idioms which cluster around the notion of love as a madness and the technical terms of unhappy love in elegy (8.1):

miser catulle, desinas ineptire;

76.20:

eripite hanc pestem perniciemque . . .;

and 76.25:

ipse valere opto et taetrum hunc deponere morbum.

Catullus offers nothing like the wealth of material that Propertius offers for analysis. Propertius corresponds exactly to a certain type of romantic lover, and an examination of him alone would dispel the illusion that nowhere in ancient literature does a poet treat of romantic love in a romantic tone. I have offered the detailed evidence for this elsewhere¹⁹ and will content myself with just one quotation (2.15.36-40):

huius ero vivus, mortuus huius ero.
quod mihi si secum talis concedere noctes
illa velit, vitae longus et annus erit.
si dabit haec multas, fiam immortalis in illis:
nocte una quivis vel deus esse potest.

¹⁹ Sullivan (above, note 8) 98-105.

To understand romantic love in modern love poetry and *Roman* love poetry we have to realize that for all its compulsive character, which made it an object of suspicion to official social theory in the ancient world (and still so makes it to a smaller extent to certain communities and *milieux* in the modern world), it could be accepted as an enviable state, gloried in and idealized. The idealization of love and the beloved is common to *all* love poets, just as a dislike of being unhappily in love is common to all lovers, not just Roman lovers. If the Roman elegists are more on the defensive than later love poets, this is not because they are fundamentally different but because the society in which they lived had a more rigid and strenuous social theory and a more socially-conscious set of conventions. All the attitudes to passionate love which we find in ancient literature and society should not be lumped together nor should one be singled out as *the* classical attitude to love, any more than the idea of marrying for love is to be regarded as *the* modern attitude to marriage. It is not valid for dynastic marriages nor for certain bourgeois societies. Once we reassert the community of love poetry to which Catullus and Propertius belong and contrast them with the social and philosophical theory of their *milieu*, we may have some insight into Ovid. For in Ovid, as the Corinna dispute hinted, we find something akin to the reaffirmation of what has been taken as *the* classical attitude to love: *arte regendus amor*. I would just suggest here briefly that, if "Ovid misunderstood" is the key to courtly love, then courtly love is rather a return to the romantic love of the earlier elegists which Ovid had denatured rather than something new and unique in the evolution of the human spirit. Ovid represents a debasement of the elegiac tradition; he is a parody of his predecessors, not representative of them.

III. CONCLUSION

The two topics I have discussed in this paper have distorted criticism of Ovid, the one by substituting for the criticism of his *poetry* a predominantly biographical interest, which considers his poetry not in relation to life but in relation to *Ovid's* life; the other by blurring important critical distinctions to be made between Ovid and the other elegists. If all the elegiac poets share *the* classical attitude to love, the anti-romantic attitude of Roman social and philosophical theory, it becomes more difficult to

appreciate fully the enormous differences in tone and feeling in their works. My own view of Ovid may be disputable, but of this I am sure, that we must read elegiac poetry for what it is—love poetry—and we must consider it, not in the light of modern orthodoxies or prejudices but in the light of Henry James' remarks²⁰ on criticism:

To lend himself, to project himself and steep himself, to feel and feel until he understands, and to understand so well that he can say, to have perception at the pitch of passion and expression as embracing as the air, to be infinitely curious and incorrigibly patient, and yet plastic and inflammable and indeterminable, stooping to conquer and serving to direct—these are fine chances for an active mind, chances to add the idea of independent beauty to the conception of success. Just in proportion as he is senseless and restless, just in proportion as he reacts and reciprocates and penetrates, is the critic a valuable instrument.

²⁰ "Criticism," *ad init.*, *Essays in London and Elsewhere* (London 1893).