

Georgic Imagery in the *Ars amatoria*

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Ovid's *Ars amatoria* is a poem about Roman ingenuity. The poet addresses his fellow citizens, offering a systematic explanation of the subterfuge and artifice necessary to the successful pursuit of an erotic object. The language and imagery of the poem celebrate the glories of urban civilization through numerous references to Roman artifacts—theatres, temples, cosmetics and gems. All of these objects acquire their highest value from their usefulness to the strategies of love.

Despite the glitter of society and material objects, the reader must also notice that Ovid balances his Roman allusions with allusions to nature, borrowing imagery from the arts of husbandry and hunting to define the art of love. Although Rome is always in the foreground of the poem, figures of speech add a georgic dimension. A close study of such figures shows that the lover's "baited hooks" and "outspread nets" are not merely incidental metaphors, but are part of a consistent chain of language extending throughout the work. Not only the figures of speech, but also the myths illuminating Ovid's doctrines bring nature before us and compare its ways with the ways of society. A study of this comparison may best be introduced by a consideration of one of those myths which contribute to its development.

In the first book of the *Ars amatoria*, Ovid demonstrates the potential extravagance of feminine passions by telling the story of Cretan Pasiphae and her love-sickness for the bull. Comedy is inherent in the subject, but here Ovid exploits the situation to the fullest. We see the queen adorning herself in her best garments for the bull, and carrying a mirror to dress her hair as she follows the cattle to pasture (*AA* 1.303–6).¹ We see her burning with envy of her bovine rivals and condemning the most beautiful

¹ Quotations and references to the *Ars amatoria* follow the text of E. J. Kenney, *P. Ovidi Nasonis, Amores, Medicamina faciei femineae, Ars amatoria, Remedia amoris* (Oxford 1961).

of the hated cows to become sacrificial victims or to bear the yoke (AA 1.313–20). The queen rejoices vindictively as she draws forth the entrails of her victims (AA 1.321–22). She wishes to be either Europa or Io, since both had dealings with cattle (AA 1.324): “altera quod bos est, altera vecta bove!”

As he tells the story, the poet suggests that Pasiphae has allowed even too much freedom to her impulses, and he recommends a measure of control. If the lady must deceive her husband, she might at least deceive him with a man (AA 1.310): “sive virum mavis fallere, falle viro.”^{1a} All the same, Pasiphae manages to overcome the limitations of her human form by the use of a stratagem. Her offspring proves that she has finally tricked the bull himself (AA 1.325–26).

Ovid's descriptions of Pasiphae have puzzled many readers. One critic explains the story as a result of the poet's interest in Hellenistic studies of pathological emotion and the concept of ruling passions in human nature.² Others have found the narrative a simple display of unthinking bad taste.

Such problems in interpretation seem to arise from failure to consider the relationship of the story to its immediate context, as well as its thematic relationship to the poem as a whole. Pasiphae can hardly command sympathy for her emotion when her sufferings have been made so grotesque. Ovid is less interested in the finer aspects of love-longing than in his witty comparisons between woman and animal. The picture that he creates is constantly reminding us of the physical discrepancy between queen and bull. At the same time we see that nothing save human features separates the lady from the animal. Given the attractiveness of the bull, we may conclude that Pasiphae's

^{1a} I would like to thank Professor Richmond Lattimore for suggesting that I consult the fragment of Euripides' *Cretans* in D. L. Page, ed. *Greek Literary Papyri* 1 [parchment 2–3 A.D.] (London 1942). A probable source for this verse may be found in Pasiphae's speech, vss. 6–8, where the queen makes the rather ludicrous suggestion that her crime would have been more shameful had the adulterer been a man. Ovid, as the elder Seneca tells us, *Controversiae* 2.2.8, had a habit of constructing witty *sententiae* from well-known sayings of the declaimers. It would seem that he also applied this technique in using poetic sources.

² Brooks Otis, “Ovid and the Augustans,” *TAPA* 69 (1938) 212–14. L. P. Wilkinson, *Ovid Recalled* (Cambridge 1955) 125, appreciates the humor in Ovid's narrative, which he calls “absurdly piquant,” but considers this myth, and all others in the *Ars amatoria*, as mere stylistic ornament. He suggests that the poet needed such padding to create three books of poetry from so slender a theme as the art of love.

forwardness would be perfectly understandable in a cow. Ovid has been using the story to demonstrate the fact that women always take the initiative in love.

As *magister amoris*, Ovid must necessarily encourage the aspiring lover with promises of success. Just before he introduces the story of Pasiphae, he has assured his masculine hearers that they will have little difficulty in finding ladies responsive to their practice of the amatory arts. An analogy from animal life supports this point. In the pastures the female cattle and horses are the ones who make overtures of love (*AA* 1.279-82). The tale of Pasiphae confirms the theory of feminine aggression and justifies Ovid's comparison of human and bovine conduct. As a story of the farm-yard, it provides a brilliant development of the poet's theme. The desires of Pasiphae are only slightly more illogical than those of most of her sex. Women are creatures of untamed nature. They are the raw materials of love. Throughout Book 1 and Book 2 Ovid illustrates his doctrines of love with imagery that provides a constant metaphorical equation between the nature and conduct of women and that of animals.

The poet's first instructions to the lover introduce the comparison. Ovid reminds his masculine pupils that the hunter must know the hiding places of the game (*AA* 1.45-50):

scit bene venator, cervis ubi retia tendat;
scit bene, qua frendens valle moretur aper;
aucupibus noti frutices; qui sustinet hamos,
novit quae multo pisce natentur aquae:
tu quoque, materiam longo qui quaeris amori,
ante frequens quo sit disce puella loco.

The primitive state of Ovid's amatory game becomes even more obvious when the poet considers the abundance of supply. By the provision of Venus herself, the girls of Rome are as numerous as fish in the sea or birds among the leaves (*AA* 1.57-60). One of the best hunting grounds is the theater, for Roman-ladies flock to the games like ants and bees bearing food (*AA* 1.89-100).

Allusions to hunting recur when the poet explains how simple it is for the would-be lover to make his capture, provided only that his strategies are correct (*AA* 1.391-94):

non avis utiliter viscatis effugit alis,
non bene de laxis cassibus exit aper.

saucius arrepto piscis teneatur ab hamo;
perprime temptatam nec nisi victor abi.

The comparison between women and domestic animals reappears when Ovid promises the lover that an unruly woman will become tractable with time, just as bullocks learn to draw the plow and horses to submit to the rein (*AA* 1.471–72). Even a Penelope will yield in time. The hunting metaphor closes Book 1 as Ovid instructs the would-be captor to adapt his methods to the peculiar qualities of the game he seeks. Some fish may be speared, other taken on the hook and still others with the net (*AA* 1.763–64). Different strategies suit different ages of women. The old deer knows the snare (*AA* 1.765–66). If the lover should fear that his aggressive approach might prove unwelcome to a delicate object, Ovid has already assured him otherwise (*AA* 1.673): “. . . grata est vis ista puellis.”³

In Book 2 the same themes are equally prevalent. The prey has fallen into the net (*AA* 2.2), but the captor must learn to hold his prize and tame her to his will. No less *virtus* is needed to keep a woman than to find one. The capture was involved with chance but the new task depends upon art (*AA* 2.13–14). As an example of perseverance and fortitude, the poet recalls Milanion who gained favor with a fierce mistress by hunting the wild boar (*AA* 2.185–92). The lover who will retain his mastery of a woman must beware of provoking her wild nature. He must avoid giving evidence of infidelity, since the jealous mistress is more violent than the hunted boar, the lioness protecting her cubs or the snake trodden by an unwary foot (*AA* 2.372–78).

In contemporary society, the ferocity of women makes love appear to be a cause of strife. When all of mankind was uncivilized, such strife did not exist. Ovid gives a historical dimension to his study of female nature by describing the primitive age of Venus when men and women pursued their pleasures with the same freedom as the animal species (*AA* 2.477–88):⁴

³ The story of Achilles and Deidamia, *AA* 1.679–720, is told to demonstrate this point and to encourage the lover in taking the initiative, but Ovid explains at great length that Achilles wore women's clothes when he approached Deidamia, and she was actually more interested in love than he.

⁴ The precedent for this bit of natural history is probably in Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 5.962–65 and 1011–12. If so, we may see that Ovid differs from Lucretius in attributing the erotic impulse to women rather than to men.

blanda truces animos fertur mollesse voluptas:
 constiterant uno femina virque loco.
 quid facerent, ipsi nullo didicere magistro;
 arte Venus nulla dulce peregit opus.
 ales habet, quod amet; cum quo sua gaudia iungat,
 invenit in media femina piscis aqua;
 cerva parem sequitur, serpens serpente tenetur;
 haeret adulterio cum cane nexa canis;
 laeta salitur ovis, tauro quoque laeta iuvenca est;
 sustinet inmundum sima capella marem.
 in furias agitantur equae spatioque remota
 per loca dividos amne sequuntur equos.

Here, as always, we find that the female of each species is the aggressor, but primitive lovers had no need for learning art. Civilization has taught women to cover their instincts with feminine wiles, thus increasing the difficulty of the lover's task. The one factor that remains unaltered is the delight that women take in love.

Other examples, too numerous to mention in detail, support and develop the georgic metaphor. The language of hunting, capture and training is applicable to almost every aspect of love. "Arte mea capta est, arte tenenda mea est," (*AA* 2.12) says Ovid. In this verse we may see how the underlying metaphor figures in creating the explicit language of love. *Capio* is one of the most common verbs in the poem; *teneo* is another.

A second current of metaphor, related to the first, extends the georgic theme by comparing women and their love to field, crops and harvest. While discussing variations in feminine temperament, Ovid reminds the lover that different soils support different plants (*AA* 1.755-58):

finiturus eram, sed sunt diversa puellis
 pectora; mille animos excipe mille modis.
 nec tellus eadem parit omnia: vitibus illa
 convenit, haec oleis; hic bene farra virent.

Allusions to the cultivation of crops are especially prevalent in Book 2 where they illuminate the poet's instructions for cultivating and maintaining a mistress. Here again we find that persevering labor will insure its own reward. The stubborn branch will

bend under discreet force (*AA* 2.179). A lover must become accustomed to the idiosyncrasies of his lady, for a new love is like a newly grafted branch. At first it is weak, but with age it becomes firm and secure (*AA* 2.647–52). The lover must ignore the age of his lady, for both old and young have their particular values. Some fields bear crops already; others are just ready to plant (*AA* 2.667–68). If, in spite of his efforts, the lover should fail, he must remember that the grain that is sown does not always yield a harvest (*AA* 2.513). Since the vegetable world is passive in contrast to the activity of the animal world, Ovid's use of plant imagery stresses women's compliance rather than their violence. Both kinds of imagery are alike in suggesting their almost inevitably favorable response to the arts of love.⁵

The poet employs only a slight variation of his agricultural terms in stating the theme of the third book. He prepares to instruct the ladies in the doctrine of *cultus*, the same art which causes plants to flourish in the field. *Cultus* prepares the grapes to produce good wine and the soil to produce fine crops (*AA* 3.101–2). It is an art by which man improves upon nature. Ovid's allusion suggests that the poet has not really altered his prejudices with his change of audience. Women are still being likened to natural phenomena, and the *magister amoris* proposes to teach them how to win lovers by overcoming their natural defects.⁶ One of his assumptions is that few women are perfect. Almost each one has some flaw of personality or appearance

⁵ The following references may be added to those above: hunting: *AA* 1.253, 263–65, 270, 403, 646; domestic animals: *AA* 1.350, 629–30; 2.99–100, 183, 341, 433–34; miscellaneous animals: 1.627; 2.147–50, 465, 517; crops and fields: 1.90, 349, 360, 399–400, 401, 450; 2.115–16, 342, 351–52. It may also be noted that animal metaphors sometimes characterize *Amor* himself (e.g. *AA* 1.19–21). The strongest love is found in women, and *Amor*, like women, is wild and needs control.

The above list does not include references which occur as part of the subject matter or description in Ovid's mythological narratives. These also deserve attention. The story of Daedalus (*AA* 2.21–98) helps to explain the difficulty of retaining *Amor* who is a winged creature (*AA* 2.19): "et levis est et habet geminas, quibus avolet, alas." In telling the story Ovid focuses our attention on the creation and use of wings. By implication, women too have wings; like Daedalus they use artifice to escape.

⁶ Some women have, of course, already achieved *cultus*. Among these are the ancient heroines who were abducted by gods or men (Helen, Europa, etc.) and the several mistresses of the elegiac poets (Lesbia, Lycoris, Cynthia, Delia, Corinna) whose charms have made them immortal (*AA* 3.533–40). Such women provide models for Ovid's *puellae* to imitate.

that she must learn to conceal (*AA* 3.261–62). The greater part of them is actually ugly (*AA* 3.255–56). Ovid warns them to admit no spectators to the dressing room (*AA* 3.227–30), and to carry out their rituals of self-improvement in private. The processes of grooming are not lovely to behold (*AA* 3.215–18):

nec coram mixtas cervae sumpsisse medullas
nec coram dentes defricuisse probem.
ista dabunt formam, sed erunt deformia visu,
multaque, dum fiunt turpia, facta placent.

Even the ornaments and instruments of beauty, the gems, cosmetics, cloths and dyes that women employ, come from nature as raw material and must, like their users, be refined (*AA* 3.169–208). But the creation of an acceptable facade involves more than cosmetics and physical grace. Above all, women must learn to curb their disagreeable personalities in public. A girl who would have a lover must not scratch the face of her hairdresser in his presence (*AA* 3.239–40). She must not lose her temper, scream, or rend her garments in games of chance (*AA* 3.369–76). She must beware of showing her Gorgon's face, for gloom is never seductive (*AA* 3.499–504).

As the *magister* urges his doctrine against female savagery, we may tend to question the common opinion that Book 3 contains a sympathetic retraction of former harshness toward women.⁷ Despite the pretense of pity for loveless ladies which opens the book, Ovid still proceeds on the assumption that women are naturally uncivilized. Their beauty depends upon their ability to deceive. Even when they are at their best, we may see in them that same combination of artifice and wild instinct that characterized Pasiphae in her passion for the bull.

It is clear that a well-organized pattern of anti-feminist humor pervades the poem; yet this humor is less important in its own right than as a part of the whole scheme of the work. Ovid's development of the georgic metaphor draws together the many aspects of his doctrine of love and organizes the several divisions

⁷ Wilkinson (above note 2) 135–36. Both Wilkinson and Hermann Fränkel, *Ovid: A Poet Between Two Worlds* (Berkeley 1945) 66, notice a difference between Books 1 and 2 and Book 3. They observe that Ovid tends to stress good character in speaking to men, and appearance when speaking to women. Fränkel finds Book 3 rather shallow and mechanical, and suggests that the poet did not warm to his subject.

of his topic within a comprehensive structural design. The metaphor has a double significance. It is not only pertinent to women, but also has implications for men. If women present nature as raw material, then men are the cultivators and controllers of their natural environment. Ovid's amatory advice is couched in language that suggests an analogy between seduction and the common skills and practices by which man extends his dominion over nature. The imagery of the opening passages creates a witty equation between the art of love and the honest arts of human society (*AA* 1.1-4):

si quis in hoc artem populo non novit amandi,
hoc legat et lecto carmine doctus amet.
arte citae veloque rates remoque moventur,
arte leves currus: arte regendus Amor.

To these we may add the arts of hunting and farming mentioned above. Just as the artisan or farmer imposes his skills upon the objects of his trade, so does the lover impose his craft upon the unruly race of women whose natures must be forced into conformity with an orderly system of love.

The implications of Ovid's scheme are manifold. His choice of animal metaphor might, for instance, seem to glance at something predatory in the constitution of society and especially in its erotic customs. The metaphor may also suggest something about the poem's background in elegiac poetry, since some similar figures and comparisons occur in Tibullus 1.4, a poem which is in itself a miniature, pederastic *ars amatoria*. In that poem Priapus speaks as a *magister amoris* advising the lover to be persistent and to heed the example set by man's conquest of the natural world: (*C.* 1.4.15-20). But the full implications of Ovid's manner of expounding the amatory arts cannot be realized without consideration of their similarity to the arts of husbandry in Vergil's *Georgics*.

This similarity may first appear upon an examination of parallel passages.⁸ Ovid gives arms to the Amazons and to the Greeks (*AA* 3.1-2): "arma dedi Danaïs in Amazonas; arma

⁸ E. J. Kenney, "Nequitiae Poeta" in *Ovidiana; Recherches sur Ovide publiées à l'occasion du bimillenaire de la naissance du poète*, N. I. Herescu, ed. (Paris 1958) 201-9, presents a preliminary study of this subject and lists several passages other than those discussed here.

supersunt/ quae tibi dem et turmae, Penthesilea, tuae." Vergil provides arms for the farmers (*G* 1.160): "dicendum est quae sint duris agrestibus arma." Ovid's insistence on the necessity of learning *cultus* recalls Vergil's recommendation to the farmers at the beginning of the discourse on trees (*G* 2.35–37):

quare agite o proprios generatim discite cultus,
agricolae, fructusque feros mollite colendo,
neu segnes iaceant terrae . . .

Ovid stresses the lover's need for adaptability. Vergil urges this principle upon the farmer. Again and again he reminds hearers that one soil cannot bear all crops (*G* 2.109–11). Ovid's allusions to the greater lust of female cattle and horses may well echo Vergil's description of the love-stricken mares who cross both rivers and mountains under the influence of Venus (*G* 3.266–70). Allusions to the art of training horses and breaking bullocks to the yoke are also reminiscent of Vergil. In the course of his instructions, Ovid advises the lover how to behave when his mistress becomes sick in the autumn (*AA* 2.315–36). The passage recalls Vergil's discussion of the animal pestilence whose dangers arise in the same season (*G* 3.440 ff.). Throughout Ovid's poem we find that love, like husbandry, goes by seasons, and that the lover, like the farmer, must know the proper lore and be ready to act upon signs and prognostications.⁹

The style of the *Ars amatoria* is also a comic imitation of that of the *Georgics*. E. J. Kenney has observed how Ovid's vocabulary incorporates words and phrases such as *quaere*, *nunc age*, *disce*, *adspicio*, *iubeo* which are important in creating the instructive tone of a didactic poem.¹⁰ To these we may add the familiar Vergilian *labor* and *opus*, which Ovid uses to imply the seriousness of the lover's task, and *via* which signifies the course of instruction and the road to success in both poems. Vergil often terms the labors of the farmers *durus*, and Ovid applies this adjective to the *puellae* themselves. Both poets place frequent emphasis on the need for

⁹ References to place and season appear frequently in Ovid's instructions (e.g. *AA* 1.229 ff.; 2.231–38) but the style of *AA* 1.67–68 and 1.399–418 seems especially reminiscent of Vergil.

¹⁰ Kenney (above, note 7) 202–4 finds that Ovid's didactic phrases suggest those used both by Vergil and by Lucretius, but his study of parallel passages leads him to conclude that references to the *Georgics* are uppermost.

vota as a part of religious dedication to the task.¹¹ Ovid seems deliberate in choosing words for their moral weight. He approaches his frivolous subject with an air of studious gravity.

The entire plan of the *Ars amatoria* seems contrived to bring Vergil repeatedly to mind. Through metaphor we see the lover undertaking the very tasks that the honest farmer performs. The virtues required of both are the same: natural intuition, patience, persistent care.¹² As a teacher of these virtues, the *magister amoris* recalls the philosophical speaker of the *Georgics*. Through the formulae of Ovid's doctrine love becomes a *technê*—a systematized body of knowledge which can be communicated by rules. Although the essential nature of women is chaotic, certain patterns of conduct appear to the serious student. Women, like animals and crops, respond in proper season to the proper stimuli. The true scientist can predict their behavior and turn it to advantage. Vergil's personification of the vegetable and animal worlds finds its counterpart in Ovid's discovery of vegetable and animal characteristics in women. It is the bounden duty of the *amator* to govern the appetites of nature and to mold formless raw material into civilized form.

The art of Vergil's *Georgics* strives to create a perfect fusion of human understanding and natural law. From the time of Deucalion's flood, nature has controlled the earth, governing each locality by its own established principles. Man's task is that of discovering these principles and using them as knowledge directs (*G* 1.60–66):

continuo has leges aeternaque foedera certis
imposuit natura locis, quo tempore primum
Deucalion vacuum lapides iactavit in orbem,
unde homines nati, durum genus. ergo age, terrae
pingue solum primis extemplo a mensibus anni
fortes invertant tauri, glaebasque iacentis
pulverulenta coquat maturis solibus aestas.

The farmer is fortunate in living with nature alone, and yet he is ignorant of the means to his own good (*G* 1.41). The didactic

¹¹ *Labor* appears 11 times in *AA*, 34 in *G*; *opus* 30 in *AA*, 7 in *G*; *via* 15 in *AA*, 15 in *G*; *votum* 10 in *AA*, 5 in *G*; *durus* 12 in *AA*, 27 in *G*.

¹² Ovid makes a humorous distinction between the lover and the worker when he observes that a pale complexion is disgraceful to farmer or sailor but must be carefully cultivated by the man who wishes to seem convincing in his protestations of love (*AA* 1.721–26).

poet serves as his interpreter of natural law, transferring the wisdom of the universe, divinely or philosophically derived,¹³ to an audience that may absorb these teachings and gain a civilized control over the natural environment. Vergil extols the virtues of the natural life but also describes the happiness of those men who become wise in natural law (*G* 2.458 ff.).

The scope of the *Georgics* extends throughout human history and the regions of the known world in search of knowledge and of ideal patterns for man's life in nature. A true understanding of the subject must involve both philosophy and mythology, insofar as each gives insight into the causes of things. The myths included in the *Georgics* set the precedent for those in the *Ars amatoria*. They are not digressions, but additions to the poem's structure and themes.

Ovid's *magister amoris* follows the lead of Vergil to become a perfect didactic poet. He marshals all of his knowledge to the task. His understanding of mythology allows him to discover examples of his doctrine in human history, and to interpret them in the light of his subject. With Venus as his divine guide, he is roughly honest. His knowledge comes from practice, not from inspiration (*AA* 1.25–30). He himself has long been a worker in his field and has learned to formulate his experience into a system, to create order through the application of his *technê* (*AA* 1.17–24). Like Vergil, he professes a strong commitment to the welfare of society, and in this commitment lies the chief irony of the poem.

The pattern for Vergil's concept of an ideal agrarian order is founded upon legends of the golden age when nature and man existed with perfect cooperation and in harmonious accord. Although civilized man can only regret the loss of the golden age, the poet has the power to envision it still. Vergil describes his own joy in the countryside (*G* 2.485–89), and celebrates the felicity of the man who has achieved a personal accord with nature and an acquaintance with the rural gods Silvanus and Pan (*G* 2.493–94). Such a man may escape the historical impingements of discord and mutability and live to inhabit his own true golden world (*G* 2.495–502):

¹³ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 1–10; *Theogony* 1–35, *et al.*, makes the didactic poet an interpreter of divine wisdom, placing himself in a position midway between gods and men. Ovid makes a facetious allusion to Hesiod's dealings with the Muses (*AA* 1.27–28). Neither he nor Vergil professes such inspiration, yet both request favor and assistance from appropriate deities. Both place emphasis upon their own ability to convey knowledge through their poems.

illum non populi fascēs, non purpura regum
 flexit et infidos agitans discordia fratres,
 aut coniurato descendens Dacus ab Histro,
 non res Romanae perituraque regna; neque ille
 aut doluit miserans inopem aut invidit habenti.
 quos rami fructus, quos ipsa volentia rura
 sponte tulere sua, carpsit, nec ferrea iura
 insanumque forum aut populi tabularia vidit.

In the course of Roman history, Vergil finds two manifestations of such a society: the first in the civilization of the good old Sabines who were the ancestors of the city (*G* 2.532–35), and the second among the Italian farmers of his own day.

Ovid has also founded his didactic poem upon the vision of a golden age. He, like Vergil, rejoices in the enjoyment of a world agreeable to his mode of life (*AA* 3.121–22):

prisca iuvent alios, ego me nunc denique natum
 gratulor: haec aetas moribus apta meis.

Finding contemporary Rome the atmosphere most favorable to a poet of love and sophistication, he declares its superiority to the past (*AA* 3.107–14):

corpora si veteres non sic coluere puellae,
 nec veteres cultos sic habuere viros:
 si fuit Andromache tunicas induta valentes,
 quid mirum? duri militis uxor erat;
 scilicet Aiaci coniunx ornata venires,
 cui tegimen septem terga fuere boum!
 simplicitas rudis ante fuit; nunc aurea Roma est
 et domiti magnas possidet orbis opes.

The lovers of legend were inelegant. No image offered by history or mythology can equal the true golden age of modern Rome. But no achievement of modern Rome can equal Ovid's doctrine of *cultus*, which alone has banished the awkwardness of former days (*AA* 3.123–28):

non quia nunc terrae lentum subducitur aurum
 lectaque diverso litore concha venit,
 nec quia decrescunt effosso marmore montes,
 nec quia caeruleae mole fugantur aquae,
 sed quia cultus adest nec nostros mansit in annos
 rusticitas priscis illa superstes avis.

Just as Vergil found an imaginatively satisfying harmony of man and environment among the Italian farmers, so Ovid finds it in the city itself. His enthusiasm for contemporary manners mocks the antiquarianism of his Augustan predecessors who turned to legend or to history for their moral examples. Whereas others find Rome degenerate, Ovid declares that its true potential has never before been known. The very achievements of the *princeps* provide a background for sophistication, yet the expansion and enrichment of the empire are only secondary to the development of *cultus*.¹⁴ The doctrine which makes women civilized represents the climax of Roman ingenuity. The *magister amoris* is the best patriot of all.

The georgic imagery of the *Ars amatoria* and its association with the theme of a golden age creates a subtle inversion of the moral values of nature and artifice. The poem is unquestionably subversive, for it parodies not only the poetic techniques of the *Georgics*, but its ideals and patriotism as well.¹⁵ Using the language and form of Augustus' major poet, Ovid celebrates those very aspects of contemporary society that Augustus deplored. But the artistry and the design of the poem go beyond parody. With his glorification of *cultus*, his witty reinterpretation of mythology and his authoritative conduct in the role of *magister*, Ovid calls attention to himself as a poet, the most brilliant artificer in an artful society.

¹⁴ Fränkel (above, note 6) 65 reads *AA* 3.121–28 as evidence that Ovid scorned lavish ostentation of wealth on the part of the Roman aristocracy, and contends that the doctrine of *cultus* is based upon simple good taste. While this theory seems plausible, we may remember that it was Augustus who “found the city brick and left it magnificent marble.” Surely Ovid is exalting his own doctrine at the expense of Augustus' achievement.

¹⁵ Kenney (above, note 7) 208 thinks that the *Ars amatoria* is definitely immoral and subversive. He refers to Ovid's echoes of the *Georgics* as “the Devil quoting Scripture.” Certainly Vergil's subject lent itself to Ovid's purposes, yet his parody is probably not aimed at the *Georgics* alone but at the great number of didactic (and patriotic?) poems produced under Augustus.