

# A COMPANION TO OVID

*Edited by*

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

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# The *Ars Amatoria*

Roy K. Gibson

### Preliminaries

The *Ars amatoria* is a witty, colorful, and often glamorous poem in three books. It employs the romantic subject matter and elegiac meter of the earlier Roman love poetry of Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid's own *Amores*, but discards the egocentric focus of that genre on the personal erotic experiences of the poet-lover. The *Ars* adopts instead the characteristic techniques of the largely hexameter 'genre' of didactic poetry—exemplified in Ovid's time above all by Lucretius' *de Rerum Natura* and Virgil's *Georgics*—to produce a manual of instruction for all on the art of love. During the Middle Ages, the text could be used as a means for teaching basic Latin in the classroom (Hexter 2006), but increasingly acquired a reputation as a taboo or even pornographic text (Liveley 2006: 320 n. 2; Gibson 2007: 1–3). Today that reputation lingers on in the popular imagination, but, following the publication in 1977 of A. S. Hollis' commentary on *Ars* 1, the poem has begun to return to the mainstream of criticism on Augustan poetry and now has an established place on university curricula.

The first two books of the *Ars* offer men humorous and cynical instruction in the art of seducing the opposite sex, while the third teaches women how to play their (often) reciprocal and complementary part in the seduction. Ovid implies that *Ars* 1–2 were written together as a unit (1.35–40, 1.771–2, 2.733–44), while the third book for women is merely an afterthought written in response to female pleas for equality (2.745–6, 3.1–2). Some critics see here evidence of characteristic Ovidian playfulness and argue that the *Ars* was in fact planned from the start as a three-book work (Sharrock 1994a: 18–20; Holzberg 2002: 103; Wildberger 1998: 343–7; Henderson 2006). More certainly, this hybrid elegiac-didactic work stands at the midpoint of Ovid's (pre-exilic) literary career—as the *Georgics* had also done for Virgil—between his 'lighter' productions (*Amores*, *Heroides*) and the 'weightier' works of the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti* (on which he had perhaps already begun work by the time of the publication of the *Ars*). Ovid appears obsessed with the idea of ascent through the various poetic genres (Harrison 2002), and the notion of a standard literary career which progresses through the genres from low to high—

inspired by Virgil—may have already begun to make an impression on Ovid and his contemporaries (Farrell 2002, 2004).

Book 1 is divided into sections on ‘where to find a girl’ (1.41–262) and ‘how to capture her’ (1.269–770), while Book 2 is dedicated in its entirety to ‘how to keep her’ (for as long as the lover’s interest lasts). The third book is loosely divided into ‘elementary’ instruction, on personal appearance, accomplishments, and making contact with men (3.101–498), and ‘advanced’ instruction, on controlling one’s emotions and one’s lover (3.501–808). The range of subject matter included under these headings is astonishingly varied, and comes laden with quasi-technical detail (as will shortly be seen). The tendency to pack in large amounts of material into a short space is increased by Ovid’s fondness, particularly in *Ars* 3, for catalogues of subject matter, a traditional feature of didactic (e.g. 3.135–58, 3.169–92, 3.769–88; Gibson 2003: 6–7). The result is the creation of a text whose density and diversity serve to differentiate it from the more uniform character and leisurely style of treatment associated with the *Amores* and *Heroides*, which are dominated by various kinds of speech (rather than ‘technical’ exposition). In both the ‘male’ and ‘female’ sections of the *Ars*, the addressee ends the book in bed with the opposite sex, where the man learns the arts of mutual sexual pleasure (2.703–32), while the female is taught to choose her sexual position carefully and the art of faking orgasm (3.769–808). But the two journeys to these finishing posts display significant differences in emphasis. As Myerowitz (1985: 127) observes, the *Ars* involves ‘for the male . . . the taming and handling of the female, for the female . . . , to a great degree, the taming and handling of herself’. Ovid’s treatment of gender and the gendered implications of his advice remain important issues in modern scholarship on the *Ars* (Leach 1964; Myerowitz 1985, 1992; Downing 1990; Sharrock 2002a, 2002b).

A passage early in the first book on how to chat up a girl at the chariot races offers a good introduction to the character of the *Ars* (1.139–56):

proximus a domina nullo prohibente sedeto,  
iunge tuum lateri qua potes usque latus.  
et bene, quod cogit, si nolis, linea iungi,  
quod tibi tangenda est lege puella loci.  
hic tibi quaeratur socii sermonis origo,  
et moueant primos publica uerba sonos:  
cuius equi ueniant facito studiose requiras,  
nec mora, quisquis erit cui fauet illa, faue.  
at cum pompa frequens caelestibus ibit eburnis,  
tu Veneri dominae plaude fauente manu.  
utque fit, in gremium puluis si forte puellae  
deciderit, digitis excutiendus erit;  
etsi nullus erit puluis, tamen excute nullum:  
quaelibet officio causa sit apta tuo.  
pallia si terra nimium demissa iacebunt,  
collige et inmundas sedulus effer humo:  
protinus, officii pretium, patiente puella  
contingent oculis crura uidenda tuis.

Sit next to your lady, none will prevent you; sit side by side as close as you can; and it is good that the rows compel closeness, like it or not, and that by the conditions of space your girl must be touched. Here seek an opening for friendly talk, and begin with words that all may hear. Mind you are zealous in asking whose horses are entering, and quick! whomsoever she favors be sure to favor too. But when the long procession of ivory statues of the gods passes by applaud Queen Venus with favoring hand. And if perchance, as will happen, a speck of dust falls on your lady's lap, flick it off with your fingers; even if none fall, then flick off—none; let any pretext serve to show your attentiveness. If her cloak hangs low and trails upon the ground, gather it up and lift it carefully from the defiling earth; straightaway a reward for your service, with the girl's permission your eyes will catch a glimpse of her ankles. (trans. Mozley Goold)

First, the local setting for the attempted seduction is Rome's Circus Maximus, and readers—even potential readers in the provincial capitals of the Empire—are given no special explanations of specific events or conventions of behavior in the Circus, but rather are assumed to be thoroughly familiar already with the City (Volk 2006). (This is one reason why modern readers, despite the poem's reputation for hilarity, often find the *Ars* unexpectedly demanding reading.) There is a deliberate contrast here with the conventions of earlier Roman love elegy, which showed relatively little interest in the local urban setting of the poet-lover's affair (see below). Second, the context for the seduction is a public one set outdoors during daylight hours. There is another contrast here with the conventions of earlier Roman love poetry, which typically favored indoor, private or night-time occasions (Gibson 2007: 105 with n. 130). Third, the poet's style of treatment is detailed and systematic to a degree which is incongruous with the apparently trivial subject matter, and his mode is emphatically instructional, as underlined by the heavy predominance of imperatival expressions. The *Ars* in fact contains many more such expressions than either the *De Rerum Natura* or the *Georgics*, and so contrives to be more didactic than its predecessors in this sense (Gibson 1998). Furthermore, the basic assumptions behind Ovid's instruction are cynical in an uncomplicated way: he assumes that the reader wants to get physically close to his quarry (and eventually get her into bed), and—balancing wit against sleaze—supplies unromantic advice on how to achieve this. No consideration is given to the feelings of the girl, or indeed to deeper romantic longings that any male addressee might harbor. Finally (if far from exhaustively), readers familiar with Roman love elegy will instantly spot that this passage is an adaptation of the second elegy of the third book of *Amores*, where Ovid himself attempts to chat up the girl sitting beside him at the races. Readers of the *Ars* are implicitly invited to reread *Am.* 3.2 and judge for themselves the difference between elegy and didactic. Readers may also remember Ovid's striking promise earlier in *Ars* I that his teaching would be based on personal experience, and not, as more usually, on divine command or inspiration (*Ars* 1.25–30; La Penna 1979; Miller 1986; Ahern 1990). Yet the close adaptation here of *Am.* 3.2 teases the reader with the thought that 'personal' experience is in fact largely 'literary' experience.

After this introduction to some key facets of *Ars*, it is a good moment to introduce some critical questions which have dominated criticism on the *Ars*. In a detailed

survey of the last five decades of scholarly debate on the *Ars*, Green (2006) discusses six key areas of critical activity (cf. Watson 2002). These include the date and structure of the poems; the generic status of *Ars* as a cross-breed between elegy and didactic, and the range of literary influences to which the poem is subject; a search for a 'serious message' in the *Ars*, for example implicit Ovidian commentary on the nature of love or Roman culture or contemporary politics; gender issues and the social 'status' of the women of the *Ars*; the notorious series of lengthy mythological digressions which punctuate the text of the poem; and the role of the reader. This chapter will treat a selection of these issues (and has or will simply allude to others), but will also seek to focus on some less familiar aspects of the *Ars*.

### The *Ars* and Roman Love Elegy

Roman love elegy had flourished under Propertius and Tibullus in the 20s BC, with Propertius publishing his fourth and final book ca. 16 BC and Tibullus' second book appearing posthumously ca. 19 BC. Ovid had begun work on his own *Amores* ca. 26–5 BC, and may have continued revising them until 7 BC, when he published a second and definitive edition of three books. The Roman reading public would have been thoroughly familiar with elegiac love poetry as a genre when the three books of the *Ars amatoria*, at least in the form we now have them, began to appear between 2 BC and 2 AD, at a time when Ovid was now Rome's greatest living poet. (Some critics assume a 'first edition' of *Ars* 1–2 around 7 BC, and others, less plausibly, place the publication of *Ars* 3 in the year of Ovid's exile to Romania, AD 8; see Gibson 2003: 37–43, with reference to Syme 1978: 13–20; Murgia 1986a, 1986b). The common elements between elegy and the *Ars* take their most obvious form in shared conventional situations and characters. Earlier elegy had featured repeated scenarios or favored characters (Gibson 2005: 161), such as the door locked against the lover's entry (Prop. 1.16; Tib. 2.6.11–14; Ov. *Am.* 1.6, 3.11.9–16), the triangle of lover, beloved, and rival (Prop. 1.5, 1.8; Tib. 1.5, 1.6; Ov. *Am.* 2.5, 2.19), the infidelity of the poet's lover (Prop. 1.15; Tib. 1.5; Ov. *Am.* 3.8, 3.14), or the giving and receiving of advice on love (Prop. 1.10.21–30; Tib. 1.4; Ov. *Am.* 1.4). In the *Ars*, the giving of advice on love—often known as 'erotodidaxis'—becomes the dominant mode, resulting in a fundamental alteration of the other conventional elements. The locked door is no longer an occasion which allows a lover-poet to reflect on his romantic sufferings (of which the locked door is simply one more instance) but rather a practical obstacle which is to be overcome by lovers or strategically deployed against them (*Ars* 2.233–50, 2.523–32, 3.579–88). Infidelity remains a strong theme, but with a significantly different emphasis: instead of a woman's infidelity as a moment of supreme crisis, Ovid advises that lovers temper their own reactions to infidelity and accept the existence of rivals (2.535–600, 3.683–746). He also gives advice—shockingly by the standards of the exclusively male (and largely faithful) perspective of earlier love elegy—on how men may themselves be successfully unfaithful to their partners (2.373–466), and comes close to doing the same for

women (3.589–610). The commitment to practical stratagems and to the achievement of particular objectives is conditioned by the mode of advice-giving, and results in an emphasis on a systematic self-restraint and long-term strategic thinking, which is new to the genre of Roman love elegy, although significant elements are anticipated in Ovid's *Amores*. (For moderation and restraint as unexpected, but sustained, themes of the *Ars*, especially *Ars* 3, see Gibson 2007.) Another characteristic feature of love elegy transformed by the didactic mode of the *Ars* is that of myth. Propertius and Ovid in his *Amores* show a particular fondness for appealing to the world of Greek myth—occasionally at some length—whether to illustrate their plights, argue a point, or even to underline a lesson (e.g. Prop. 1.1.9–16, 1.3.1–10, 1.20, 2.9, 3.15; Tib. 2.3.11–32; Ov. *Am.* 1.1.7–16, 1.10.1–8, 3.6.25–44; Lyne 1980: 82–102, 252–7). In the *Ars* Ovid continues this tradition, but characteristically develops long mythological narratives, particularly in the first two books of the *Ars*, to illustrate key points of instruction, for example 1.101–34 (Sabine women), 1.283–342 (Pasiphae), 1.525–68 (Ariadne and Bacchus), 1.681–706 (Deidamia and Achilles), 2.21–98 (Daedalus and Icarus), 2.123–44 (Calypso and Ulysses), 2.561–94 (Mars and Venus), 3.683–746 (Procris). These myths, despite the increasingly tenuous connection of some to the initial point under illustration, usually have an ingenious or deeper didactic function intimately connected to the text's core message, and continue to be the object of intense critical focus (Watson 1983; Sharrock 1994a: 87–195; Bowditch 2005; Sharrock 2006; Labate 2006).

One of the keynotes of earlier elegy is not the exaltation often associated with romantic poetry but rather personal alienation from both the loved one and from society (Gibson 2005: 161). This alienation is reflected in the metaphors which the earlier elegists use to describe their experience of love, such as slavery, mania and disease (Prop. 1.1, 1.5.21–30; Kennedy 1993: 53–63), and also in their striking obsession with death (Prop. 1.19, 2.13b, 2.26, 4.7, 4.11; Tib. 1.1.59–68, 1.3, 1.10; Ov. *Am.* 2.10.29–38; Griffin 1985: 142–62). Mania, disease, and death are prominent features of the world of the mythological characters of the *Ars* (where they play an important role in negative didactic lessons). But they are not offered as metaphors through which the addressees of the *Ars* are invited to articulate their own experiences. If the earlier elegists like to think of love as an invasive external force of overwhelming power (Prop. 1.1; Ov. *Am.* 1.1), in the *Ars*, as Ovid makes clear in the preface to Book 1 (1.1–24), love is a force that will now be subject to the control and direction of the lover. Some critics see here a potentially serious comment on love and its expression in the cultures of civilized societies (Fyler 1971; Myerowitz 1985; Sharrock 2002b: 152–3). The amatory environment constructed for the lover in the *Ars* is, then, relentlessly positivist, where—to paraphrase Epicurus' famous dictum on pain—emotional suffering is either short lived or (for strategic purposes) easily borne. Those who do end up experiencing love as a mania or disease are unsuccessful readers of the *Ars*—and the natural audience of the *Remedia*.

Propertius and Tibullus had described themselves as slaves of their mistress or of love in order to express their alienation from the values of contemporary society (Gibson 2005: 162–3). Such alienation, again, has little role to play in an instructional poem dedicated to the goal of erotic success, and the 'slave' role figure of earlier

elegy is discarded in favor of the rather more positive (if hardly respectable) model of the *kolax* ('flatterer'). Rather than assuming the degraded role of slave in order to express their willing self-degradation outside society's structures, Ovid's lovers are to model themselves on a figure who possesses a familiar (if contested) role inside the normal operation of society (1.503–4, 1.611–16, 2.199–232, 2.281–6, 2.295–314, 2.641–62, 3.513–14, 3.673–86, 3.793–808; Labate 1984: 175–226; also Solodow 1977: 117–20). Where the slave performs services for his mistress because his condition of subjection offers no other choice, the flattering lover of the *Ars* may demean himself by holding his mistress's parasol or taking off her shoes (2.209–16), but always does so as a means of securing her affection (and eventually getting her into bed).

Ovid avoids identifying the male addressee of the *Ars* with the hero 'ego' of love elegy. This is appropriate to a non-exclusive didactic work addressed to *si quis in hoc . . . populo* (*Ars* 1.1 'If anyone among this people . . .'), but leads to the virtual disappearance from *Ars* 1–2 of the elegist's overwhelming obsession with the value and standing of his love poetry (e.g. Prop. 1.7, 2.1, 2.34, 3.1, 3.3, 4.1; Tib. 1.4.57–72, 2.4.13–20; Ov. *Am.* 1.3, 1.15, 2.1, 2.18, 3.1, 3.8, 3.15)—albeit not to the disappearance of Ovid's concern with the poetics of his own text (Sharrock 1994a; Gibson 2007: 82–99). It also produces as an apparently necessary correlative some sharp humor at the expense of the male addressee; note, for example, Ovid's acid comment on the likely quality of the love poetry written by his readers, at 2.283–6. If the male addressees of the *Ars* are not thought to be poetic geniuses like Ovid or Propertius, then the female addressees of *Ars* 3 are likewise carefully differentiated from such goddess-like creatures as Corinna and Cynthia. Ovid, for example, emphasizes the dearth of natural beauty among his readers (3.101–4, 3.251–6), in a manner that both justifies the need for controversial beauty aids and sets the tone for physical humor against his female addressees (Gibson 2003: 24–5, 35–6). Yet, for all that, Ovid cannot resist playing the lover to his pupils, and makes one last attempt to secure a privileged place for love poets in their affections (3.525–54). The character of Ovid's persona as *praeceptor* here and elsewhere in the *Ars*—self-interested, overconfident, prone to pedagogical errors—continues to attract the attention of scholars (Durling 1958: 163–4; Fyler 1971: 200–3; Wright 1984; Watson 2002: 149–51).

### The Women of the *Ars* and the *Lex Iulia*

The dissociation of the women of the *Ars* from the goddess-like creatures of earlier elegy inevitably raises the hoary issue of the status of the women of the *Ars*. There has been something of a critical consensus in recent years that Cynthia and Corinna are largely fictional creatures, frequently symbols for the poetics of the elegists (Gibson 2005: 165–6). (For the women of *Ars* 3 also as expressions of the poetics of the work, see Sharrock 2000: 23–5; Gibson 2007: 143–7.) One of the factors fueling an unwillingness to believe that these are 'real' women concealed behind a pseudonym is the observation that the status markers provided for Cynthia and her ilk shift (confusingly) between those of, for example, low-status courtesans and



libertines of 'respectable' birth (Wyke 2002: 29–31). Readers of the *Ars* find something similar: the *puellae* appear now to have the stereotypical attributes and attitudes of sexually available non-elite women (1.399–436, 3.417–24, 3.461–66, 3.479–82, 3.749–68, 3.805–8), now to possess the luxuries of upper-class women (1.351–74, 1.487–90, 2.251–60, 2.295–302), and now to appear like respectably married women in search of tips for adultery (2.355–72, 2.535–600, 3.483–98, 3.601–10). Yet there had been one crucial change in society between the heyday of love elegy and the publication of the *Ars*. The majority of earlier elegy was written—not insignificantly—before 18 BC. In or around that year, Augustus promulgated his revolutionary *lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*, whereby illicit sexual relations with married women (including widows and divorcees)—whether freeborn or of freed status—became subject to serious punishment. In such an environment, the question of the status of the women in the *Ars* necessarily became urgent. Ovid responds with assurances that respectable married women are excluded from his poem, whether as targets for men or as readers of *Ars* 3 (1.31–4, 2.599–600, 3.57–8, 3.483–4, 3.613–6). It is clear, however, that these disclaimers raise as many questions as they answer, since their phrasing is often ambiguous, or they appear in contexts where it is hard to take them seriously (Rudd 1976: 3–4; Little 1982: 330–1; Sharrock 1994b: 109–22; Holzberg 2002: 111–13). This is obvious already from Ovid's assurance at 1.34 *inque meo nullum carmine crimen erit* ('and in my verse there will be no wrong-doing'), where the alert reader will spot subversive intent in the fact that the letters of *crimen* fit literally inside *carmine* (Sharrock 1994b: 110–12). Furthermore, the *lex Iulia* appears to have offered some notable difficulties of interpretation and application to jurists. The latter, for example, found it hard to offer a positive definition of the category of women actually liable to prosecution. Thus, when Ovid declares that his legitimate female readership is made up of those whom 'shame and the laws and their own rights permit' (*Ars* 3.57 *quas pudor et leges et sua iura sinunt*), his intent is clearly disingenuous, since few of his readers can have had a clear idea of the exact extent of this group when even legal experts were at something of a loss (Gibson 2003: 25–32). One result of these (unreassuring) disclaimers is that readers are invited to watch for passages where Ovid appears to break the law. In this context, the continuation of earlier elegy's habit of providing inconsistent clues to female status appears provocative. Furthermore, as in the 'Circus' passage quoted above, Ovid often takes no great care to make clear how the seduction of his female prey might differ from attempted adultery. In *Ars* 3, however, Ovid changes his approach, and, as I shall argue below, tackles the polarity between *meretrix* and *matrona* implicit in the *lex Iulia* to produce a female addressee who is more consistently a hybrid of these two stereotypical figures.

### The *Ars*, Society, and Augustus

If the *Ars* seems dedicated to a subversion of Augustus' *lex Iulia*, it would be easy to infer from that a general program of subversion of society's values. At first sight,

the *Ars* offers plenty of material for such a reading, being filled with recommendations for behavior which is variously unscrupulous, manipulative, unethical, or simply lacking in magnanimity (frequently all four together). In the first book alone, lovers are encouraged to bribe and corrupt slaves (1.351–6), to avoid birthday gifts (1.417–8), make empty promises (1.443–4, 1.631–6), make overtures of friendship to men with the intent to deceive (1.579–88), take advantage of others' high opinions of themselves (1.611–14), act with the conscious aim of duping the opposite sex (1.645–6), simulate tears of love (1.661–2), and hide erotic intent behind a deliberate facade of innocuous friendship (1.719–22). Is this then a text dedicated to the destruction of Rome's social fabric? It was suggested earlier that the *Ars* does not in fact share earlier elegy's general stance of alienation from society. That argument can be extended here if the peculiar ethical character of the *Ars* is observed closely. It had been long asserted that love is a special arena where the normal rules of society do not apply (Plato *Symp.* 182e–83c). At several places in the *Ars amatoria*, Ovid appears to make a related point (often as a coda to some piece of shocking instruction just offered): the advice which he gives on gift-giving or deception is not to be applied outside the erotic arena to normal social intercourse (e.g. 1.641–44, 2.271–2; Labate 1984: 97–120). An illuminating parallel is suggested by Labate (1984: 225–6), who notes a connection with the special status awarded the sphere of electoral competition. Love and electioneering are separated from the rules of normal society, and constitute arenas where behavior that would elsewhere provoke outrage—such as simulation, ingratiating and flattery—are condoned (as explicitly for electioneering at [Q. Cic.] *Comm. Pet.* 42). But, crucially, both are arenas contained within the broader ambit of society, rather than being set up in opposition to it, and are not meant to threaten society's operation. Contrast the rhetoric of the earlier elegists, who drew a sharp line between 'their' society and 'normal' society, and affected that the former was in fact a threat to the latter (e.g. Prop. 2.15; Gibson 2007: 44–6). Ovid's 'moralizing' codas, nevertheless, have been ignored, or dismissed as window-dressing, sometimes even excised from the text on the assumption they are the interpolations of later readers. At 1.583–8, for example, Ovid sets down the following circumscription, after advising his readers to make a pretense of friendship with the *uir* of their female prey:

siue erit inferior seu par, prior omnia sumat,  
 nec dubites illi uerba secunda loqui.  
 [tuta frequensque uia est, per amici fallere nomen;  
 tuta frequensque licet sit uia, crimen habet.  
 inde procurator nimium quoque multa procurat,  
 et sibi mandatis plura uidenda putat.]

Be he below you or hold an equal place, let him take of all before you; nor hesitate to yield him place in talk. [\*Tis a safe and oft-trodden path to deceive under the name of friend; safe and oft-trodden though it be, it is the path of guilt. Thus too an agent pursues his agency too far and looks after more than was committed to his charge.]  
 (trans. Mozley Goold)

Lines 585–8, as Labate (1984: 108–9) points out, are routinely bracketed off from the text as interpolations, but on the grounds of incongruity with the context rather than on strong doubts about the language or style of the couplets (cf. Labate 1984: 98–9 on the ‘interpolated’ lines at *Ars* 2.669–74). Yet it is obvious that the sentiments here cohere with other moralizing passages in the *Ars*, which attempt to draw a line between the ethics to be practiced in the erotic world and those to be practiced outside it (cf. 1.739–40). Nevertheless, even if all critics agreed on the authenticity of the excluded lines, it would be easy to interpret them, along with the other moralizing codas, in a subversive manner. Like Ovid’s disclaimers of teaching adultery, these codas may be read as drawing attention to the possibility of transgression as much as to denying intent to encourage it. But Ovid’s moralizing codas, I suggest, lack the playfulness and charged ambiguity of the adultery disclaimers: critics are more often worried by the earnestness of the former. The difference in tone between these codas and the disclaimers of adultery may be polemical. Many of the old urban elite in Rome can only have found Augustus’ revolutionary sexual laws unforgivably intrusive on their traditional freedoms (Gibson 2003: 31–2, 334–5). As such, the *lex Iulia* appears in the *Ars* as a legitimate target for subversion, while elsewhere Ovid pointedly makes clear that ‘established’ ethics remain unaffected by his teaching.

There is a wider context for this reading of Ovid’s moralizing codas. It is evident that in the *Ars* Ovid is trying to move love elegy in a new direction—away, in fact, from the characteristic binary oppositions of earlier love elegy (Gibson 2007: 72–86). In earlier elegy, for example, the life of love and civil life were strongly opposed: lawyers and government officials were excluded from the fun (e.g. Prop. 1.6; Ov. *Am.* 1.15). But the *Ars* seeks rather to include such figures within its ambit (1.79–88, 3.525–54), even if they are ultimately made to appear a second best to love poets. Connected with this is Ovid’s determination to move love elegy out onto the streets of Augustus’ Rome. Earlier love elegy had either ignored Augustus’ new Rome, applauded lukewarmly from the sidelines, or ultimately seen there a potential for corruption of the poet’s beloved girl (Gibson 2005: 163–4). In Book 4 of his elegies Propertius had even contrived largely to turn his back on Augustus’ Rome in preference for the city’s grottoes and waters (Fantham 1997). But in the *Ars*, Ovid conspicuously mingles his pupils with the other citizens on Augustus’ streets (1.67–176, 1.213–62, 1.487–504, 3.387–96, 3.631–44).

Yet, for all that, there are limits to Ovid’s willingness to cooperate with new Augustan realities, and, as with the *lex Iulia*, the Emperor’s city is regarded as a target for subversion. Many of the buildings associated with Augustus and the imperial family—picked out by name in the *Ars* (cf. Barchiesi 2006 on the prominence of the imperial family in the *Ars*)—incorporated within their decorations the values of the Emperor’s new morality (Zanker 1988: 101–66). It is hard to resist the conclusion that Ovid’s use of these buildings as places for his lovers to meet is an act of mockery (Holleman 1971: 463–6; Wallace-Hadrill 1989: 162–3; Davis 1995: 186ff.). Furthermore, Ovid works hard to expose the tension between the modern splendor of Augustus’ transformed Rome and the Emperor’s claim to adhere to traditional Roman values—a tension which previous Roman poets had tried to

diffuse (Gibson 2003: 134–5, 140–1 on *Ars* 3.113–28). Ovid offers instead a celebration of the modern and a rejection of the archaic and rustic. (Ovid's thoroughgoing preference for the modern in his society is a significant feature of the *Ars*, and is the driving force behind his rejection of the 'anti-cosmetic' tradition for women—which even the earlier elegists had embraced—and of a consistent targeting of Horace in order to expose the contradiction between the latter's modernist poetics and 'archaic' moral standards; see, for the former, Gibson 2006; for the latter, Gibson 2007: 93–9).

This subversion of Augustus' Rome involves, nevertheless, the acceptance of its existence. In a sense, this is a less radical move than the tendency of earlier elegy to ignore Rome's new cityscape. Yet the *Ars* does contain—in Book 3—one subtle yet strong refusal to acknowledge Augustan 'realities'. Here I have in mind Ovid's refusal to accept the binary polarity of 'matron' and 'whore'. According to a persuasive reconstruction of the *lex Iulia*, Augustus' law, whatever its other obscurities, attempted to introduce a moral clarity into Roman society by dividing all citizen women, for legal purposes, into two highly symbolic categories: prostitutes (and procuresses) on the one hand, and, on the other, all remaining women, who either were or should aspire to be *matronae* (McGinn 1998: 147–56, 194–203, 209). The categories of *matrona* and *meretrix* carried great resonance in ancient culture, even if they bore little relation to the complex realities of the spectrum of women's social and legal statuses. It is this new clarity, precisely, which is resisted in *Ars* 3, where Ovid instead drives an unexpected middle path between the stereotypical attributes of matron and whore, and invites addressees to turn themselves into a hybrid which mediates the 'extremities' of the matron-whore polarity (Gibson 2006; 2007: 86–92). Implicit in all this is Ovid's refusal to accept the binary polarity offered by Augustus as a moral reality in his new Rome.

### The *Ars* and Erotodidaxis

It was stressed earlier that the giving of advice in love had been a significant element in love elegy, and became the dominant mode of the *Ars*. However, the 'erotodidactic' tradition in elegy (Wheeler 1910, 1911) is itself only one part of a much larger tradition of giving advice in love relevant to understanding the *Ars*. In this informal tradition (covered more fully in Gibson 2003: 13–19), it is usual to find an experienced person passing on (sometimes systematic) advice about a particular loved one or love affairs to an addressee (who may not always be strongly characterized). This tradition, partly philosophical in inspiration (Kleve 1983; Dillon 1994), may take the glamorous form of Aspasia as instructor of Socrates (Athen. 5.219d; Halperin 1990: 119–24; Henry 1995: 40–56) or the scandalous form of prose treatises allegedly written by famous prostitutes on sex and sexual positions (Baldwin 1990; Parker 1992: 92–4). The most notorious of the latter was the treatise attributed to Philaenis (Tsantsanoglou 1973; Vessey 1976; Parker 1992). When a few scraps from Philaenis were published as *POxy* 2891 in 1972, the treatise turned out instead to be a more general work on the subject of seduction, and may thus be an important

forerunner of the *Ars* itself. Rather clearer is the influence of New Comedy, where (often older) women offer instruction in their trade to fellow prostitutes (Plaut. *Cist.* 78–119, *Poen.* 210–32; Ter. *Eun.* 434–53). Of particular importance is a scene in Plautus (*Most.* 159–290), where a *lena*-procuress passes on lengthy advice to a younger female prostitute while a lover of the latter listens in the wings. This is scenario repeated by both Propertius in his fourth book (4.5) and Ovid in his *Amores* (1.8); cf. also Tibullus 1.4 (where the god Priapus assumes the role of formal instructor in love to men).

Women dominate this informal tradition, both as pupils and (more often) as teachers of love. This tradition is of particular importance for understanding the third book of the *Ars*, since the rather more respectable tradition of didactic verse represented by Virgil and Lucretius set no precedent for the instruction of an exclusively female audience. Much of *Ars* 3 makes sense when understood against a background of cynical instruction of prostitutes by older women. For Ovid contrives not only to usurp the role of *lena*-procuress (3.57–82, 3.83–98) but also to change the *lena*'s traditional emphasis on manipulation of lovers for the extraction of money and presents into the kind of manipulative behavior likely to flatter men's egos and sustain their erotic interest (3.525–54, 3.577–610, 3.673–86; Gibson 2003: 19–20). Furthermore, the scenario of a male audience eavesdropping in the wings is one explicitly maintained by Ovid in *Ars* 3 (3.1–8), and also serves to make sense of much of the humor directed by the figure of the *praeceptor* at his female pupils (Gibson 2003: 20–21, 35–6).

### The *Ars* and Didactic Poetry

Nevertheless, for all the importance of the erotodidactic tradition, didactic poetry remains important to understanding all three books of the *Ars*. As a didactic poem in elegiacs, the *Ars* is an extreme rarity in the ancient literary landscape: few other writers appear to have attempted formalized instruction in this meter (Obbink 1999: 64; Gibson 2003: 8–9). But what exactly is a didactic poem? As a 'genre', didactic poetry shares with the novel the difficulty that both, while apparently familiar forms, display little or no corresponding ancient critical categories. One recent attempt to specify necessary and sufficient conditions for membership of the 'genre'—for example explicit didactic intent, the 'teacher–student constellation' (Volk 2002: 36–41)—is useful and suggestive, but may be open to criticism (Farrell 2003: 384–5, 394–5, 400–1; Sharrock 2003). Another approach is to list an open-ended set of characteristics drawn from a wide range of poems normally thought of as didactic. The danger of circularity of argument here is obvious, but the set produced by Toohey (1996: 4) is undoubtedly good to think with, including instructional subject matter, technical treatment, illustrative (often mythological) inset panels, and a single authorial voice directed explicitly to an addressee. The *Ars*, it will now be clear, possesses all of these characteristics, but it nevertheless lacks two others listed by Toohey: seriousness of form and the hexameter meter.

Whatever the difficulties of defining didactic, and the imperfect fit of the *Ars* with any phenomenological description of the genre, it is obvious that the poem belongs to a tradition of 'frivolous' instructional verse, and is influenced both by the general character of the didactic tradition and some of its classic texts. The playful tradition of didactic verse is illustrated by *Tr.* 2.471–96, where the poet, as part of his defense of the *Ars*, catalogues works on dice and board games (cf. *Ars* 3.353–80), on ball games, swimming, cosmetics (cf. Ovid's own *Medicamina*), and dining (cf. *Ars* 3.747–68) etc. The ancestry of this tradition is often traced back ultimately to the Hellenistic poets Aratus and Nicander, who produced sophisticated versifications of prose treatises on (respectively) the constellations, and poisonous creatures and antidotes. Aratus and Nicander in their turn looked back to Hesiod's *Works and Days* (Hollis 1973: 89–90)—the text traditionally seen as the foundation stone of the didactic tradition—and Ovid certainly alludes to all three authors or their characteristic style in the *Ars* (see Hollis 1977: 107–8 on *Ars* 1.411–12 (Aratus), *idem* 47 on 1.75 (Nicander); Gibson 2003: 140 on 3.121–2 (Hesiod)). However, a rather more useful example of the 'frivolous' didactic tradition for thinking about the *Ars* is perhaps the fourth-century BC *Hedupatheia* ('*Life of Pleasure*') by Arcestratus of Gela, which combines notoriety of reputation with a similar emphasis on personal restraint; see Gibson (2007: 64–6, 110–12).

The *Ars* is also clearly influenced by the general character of the didactic tradition (Küppers 1981). It employs, for example, a range of traditional imperatival expressions (Gibson 1998); affects abrupt changes of subject in a style associated particularly with Hesiod and Lucretius (e.g. 2.467–8, 3.99–100, 3.499–500); sets out its instructional program in advance, and marks its own progress through that program in a manner established already in Hellenistic didactic (Hollis 1977: 39 on *Ars* 1.35–40; Gibson 2003: 4, and *idem* 130 on 3.101), often with nautical and chariot imagery also found in earlier didactic poetry (Kenney 1958: 205–6); and uses conventional formulae of introduction, transition, and closure (Kenney 1958: 201–4). For more examples, see Gibson (2003: 430, General Index s.v. 'didactic poetry').

On top of this one can highlight the intertextual relations of the *Ars* with the *De Rerum Natura* and the *Georgics*. The *Ars* is hardly alone in Latin poetry in making frequent reference to these two monumental works, but it is fair to say Ovid privileges reference to his two didactic predecessors, often by alluding to them at key moments, such as the reference to the halfway point of Virgil's *Georgics* (2.541–2) at the corresponding point of Ovid's own project of instructing men (*Ars* 1.771–2). In this way Ovid invites the reader to read the *Ars* alongside, and potentially in the same manner as, the two great didactic works of his time. Ovid's engagement with Lucretius and the *Georgics*—often comic or subversive in effect—is now well documented in the literature on the *Ars*: for uses of the arguments and imagery of Lucretius, see Sommariva (1980), Shulman (1980–81), Steudel (1992), and Miller (1996–97); for the use of Virgil, see Leach (1964: 149–52), Hollis (1973: 91–92, 97–100), and Steudel (1992).

### The *Ars* and the *de Officiis*

The privileging of reference to Lucretius and Virgil (and indeed earlier love elegy) has served to obscure another author to whom Ovid makes especially frequent reference in the *Ars*. That author, perhaps surprisingly for a poetic text such as the *Ars*, is Cicero, and the particular text to which Ovid refers is his *de Officiis*. Parallels between the two texts had long been noted, but it fell to Mario Labate to demonstrate why the parallels were important for understanding the *Ars* (Labate 1984: 121–74). The *de Officiis*, addressed to Cicero's son Marcus, offers practical and systematic ethical advice to the young elite of Rome, nothing less than 'a set of guiding principles for life' (Dyck 1996: 16). The target of much of Cicero's reflection and advice in this treatise is the smooth operation of society, and he emphasizes that individuals should aim to earn the esteem of their fellows and foster consensus. Paramount, in Cicero's view, are personal flexibility, the practice of the social virtues and considerate manners, and the observation of the principle of *decorum* (appropriate or becoming behavior). In earlier love elegy, relations between male and female were often characterized by violence, drunkenness, and dysfunction (e.g. Prop. 3.8; Ov. *Am.* 1.7). But in the *Ars*, Ovid regularly emphasizes that the lovers must play their part in the smooth running of a love affair, conduct themselves in an obliging manner, and practice personal *decorum* (cf. e.g. 1.709–12, 2.107, 2.145–6, 2.177–8, 2.497–500). The allusions of the *Ars* to, or consonances with, the *de Officiis* are symptomatic of this new drive toward cooperative behavior between lovers; in *Ars* 3 alone, cf., for example, 89–100 (*Off.* 1.51–2), 299–310 (*Off.* 1.128–9, 131), 305 (*Off.* 1.130), 433–66 (*Off.* 1.130), 501–8 (*Off.* 1.88), 517–24 (*Off.* 1.108), 535–48 (*Off.* 1.45), and 555–76 (*Off.* 1.47) (with Gibson 2003: ad loc.). Central to this new ethic is the concept of *decorum* (and its near relation 'moderation', mentioned earlier as a feature of the *Ars*), which Cicero helpfully insisted could 'be seen in every deed and word, and, indeed, in every bodily movement or state' (*Off.* 1.126). Although intended by Cicero as a serious guide to moral behavior among the Roman elite, *decorum* proved an easy target for transplantation to the arena of merely 'appropriate' (and not necessarily ethical) behavior for lovers (Gibson 2007: 122–26). The concept of *decorum* had been conspicuous by its near absence in earlier elegy (Gibson 2007: 118–19), but Ovid makes it central to a range of behavior in the *Ars*, from appropriate complexion and proper gift-giving for men (1.729–30, 2.262) to becoming hairstyles, clothing, and sexual positions for women (3.135–6, 3.188–91, 3.771–2); see Gibson (2007: 126–29) for a fuller analysis.

### Coda

All codas to the *Ars* are obliged to tell some version of the tragic sequel. I suggested earlier that throughout the *Ars* Ovid appears to invite readers to watch out for passages where he may break the spirit or letter of the *lex Iulia*. A dangerous game—and one which Ovid lost, if, as many critics believe, the *Ars* was the main reason for the

exile of the poet in AD 8 to a small provincial town in Romania on the outermost reaches of the Empire (see most recently Knox 2004; for powerful dissenting voices, which place emphasis instead on Ovid's mysterious 'mistake', see Green 1982a; Goold 1983).

### FURTHER READING

This short chapter inevitably presents only a partial view of the range and complexity of the three books of the *Ars*, and should be read alongside the general contributions also of, for example, Hollis (1973), Watson (2002), Sharrock (2002b), and Holzberg (2002: 92–113). The standard text for the poem is E. J. Kenney's superb revised *Oxford Classical Text* of 1994 (corrected 1995). The *Ars* has attracted numerous detailed commentaries: Hollis (1977) and Dimundo (2003) on Book 1, Janka (1997) on Book 2, and Gibson (2003) on Book 3, plus useful single-volume commentaries on all three books by Brandt (1902) and Pianezzola et al. (1991). The collection of essays edited by Gibson et al. (2006) brings together many of the critics who have worked on the *Ars* in both Europe and the United States since the 1980s, and introduces the reader to a representative range of issues and styles of criticism connected with the *Ars*. The first essay in that volume—Green (2006)—offers a detailed survey of the most important criticism on the *Ars* from the late 1950s onwards. As Green's survey shows, criticism on the *Ars*—for reasons that are unclear—has often proceeded in article form rather than in monographs. Nevertheless, two rather dissimilar monographs published in the 1980s have remained influential: Labate (1984) and Myerowitz (1985), where the first works within the traditions of German and Italian philological criticism and the second adheres to an American tradition of sociological and cultural approaches to the text. More recent monographs include Steudel (1992), Sharrock (1994a), Wildberger (1998), and Gibson (2007). On the reception of the *Ars*, Janka (2006), Hexter (2006), and Liveley (2006) provide a useful starting-point.