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# THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO OVID

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*Remedia amoris*, it provides creative insights into Ovid's treatment of and variations on the 'elegiac code'. Jacobson (1974) contains much of interest on generic issues in the single *Heroides*; the paired *Heroides* 16–21 have much to offer here too (some material in Hintermeier (1993) 152–79, but more could be said). Hinds (1985) and Williams (1994) open up some stimulating perspectives on generic play in the *Tristia* and *Ex Ponto*, and this is again an area where much interesting work remains to be done. Most recently, Barchiesi (2001) contains much of interest on generic issues in Ovid.

## 6

ALISON SHARROCK

## Gender and sexuality

Ovid has been called sympathetic to women.<sup>1</sup> While many modern feminists would be unhappy about this chivalric designation, there is no doubt that the Ovidian corpus provides a particularly rich site for gendered study. More than any other non-dramatic ancient poetry, male-authored as it overwhelmingly is, Ovid's work gives space to a female voice, in however problematic a manner, and to both male and female voices which reflect explicitly on their own gendered identity. It is also driven by a troubled relationship with the purveyors of Roman masculinity – the army, politics, Augustus, epic, and so on. Moreover, the poet – par excellence – of the fluidity of identity clearly provokes a gendered reading.

## Unstable categories

Although sexual identity, in its modern form of a choice between homosexuality and heterosexuality, is not the driving force of ancient constructions of personality, the development and maintenance of Gender was a major preoccupation.<sup>2</sup> Engendering the self is as crucial as it is unstable in Ovid, poet of fluidity. The tidiest story of growing up to gendered identity is that of Iphis (*Met.* 9.666–797).<sup>3</sup> Before her birth, her father instructed that the child should be killed if it were a girl, but her mother saved her, and brought her up as a boy. On reaching adolescence, she was due to be properly and respectably married to someone with whom she herself was in love. The trouble

For this essay, I am especially grateful to Effie Spentzou and Patricia Salzman, from whom I have learned so much about Ovid and gender.

<sup>1</sup> See for example Wilkinson (1955) 86: '[Ovid] had also a tender side to his nature which gave him an interest in the weaker sex and a certain insight into what their feelings might be'; Griffin (1977) 59: 'Ovid actually liked women as a sex.' Despite the fact that such statements can look a little condescending in the present day, it seems to me that, with a bit of cultural translation, a valid point is being made.

<sup>2</sup> See Williams (1999), esp. 4–7, Gleason (1995).

<sup>3</sup> See Wheeler (1997) and (1999) 57 for an interesting connection with the other Iphis in the poem.

is that she and her bride are both women. Isis comes to the rescue, by turning her into a man. The story shows the anxieties surrounding the acquisition of gendered identity, and especially male gender. Precisely because its fantasy solution is so neat and nice, the difficulties in the interaction of nature and nurture in sexual identity are exposed as well as fudged. There are far more stories of the failure of entry into adult sexuality: Phaethon, Pentheus, Actaeon, Hermaphroditus, and most of all Narcissus. Narcissus embodies an essential paradox in desire: the lover desires union with the beloved, but desire requires distance. That lesson is painfully learned by the transgressive women Myrrha and Byblis, lovers of their father and brother respectively.<sup>4</sup> These too are forms of arrested development.

One of the oddest aspects of Roman sexuality to modern eyes is that male love, even in its most conventional manifestations, is not unproblematically masculine for the Romans. Masculinity is predicated not only on sexual performance but also on autarky, control of the self both internal (in the emotions) and external (in political liberty).<sup>5</sup> If the very thing that makes a man (sexual power) also unmakes him (by undermining his autarky), then gendered categories are never going to be easy and stable. It is very difficult to come to a sense of Roman constructions of femininity that do not tell us more about masculine attitudes to the Other (female, slave, foreigner) than they do about real Roman women, but since the lives of real Roman women will have been partly shaped by these masculine attitudes, such a sense is still useful. The category 'Woman' is crucially important, and perhaps at first sight simple, since you just need to look at the opposite of the ideal Man (start with 'soft, passive, and silent') – but in practice this simplicity is deceptive ('just like a woman?').

Sexual performance is of course a part of the definition of virility, but even this virility is not without its anxieties. When Semele, mother of Bacchus, is tricked by Juno into asking Jupiter to make love to her in all his glory, the father of gods and men knows that his *uis*, his sexual power, will be too much for her (*Met.* 3.256–315). He tries to wear himself out first, by casting thunderbolts around. Even with these precautions, however, he cannot control himself, and Semele is burnt to a crisp. The story, almost too funny to be as troubling as it should be, nonetheless shows us how this very *uis* may be the cause of its own undoing. So it was also for Phaethon (*Met.* 1.747–2.332): this high-spirited boy overreached himself by demanding that his father, the Sun, give him proof of his paternity by letting him drive the Sun's chariot

<sup>4</sup> See Janan (1991).

<sup>5</sup> The gendered constructions of society in Roman culture exist not only in the relationship between the sexes but also in the interactions of power and identity in terms of slavery, class, and race.

across the sky. The boy himself, and nearly the whole world, is burned up when he cannot control the chariot's raging course. A thunderbolt from Jupiter stops him, but it is clear that the wild sexuality that runs out of control in the adolescent remains as the driving force also of the adult: while Jupiter is surveying the damage, fire courses through him at the sight of Callisto, the next victim of his sexual interest. In his loss of control over his sexual power, Jupiter is at once both hyper-masculine and feminized.

A man, to be a man, must be *durus* (hard), but love (for which he needs to be *durus*) will make him *mollis* (soft).<sup>6</sup> He must also be impenetrable. Historians of sexuality express something of the defining characteristic of Roman sexuality through the distinction between the active penetrator and the passive penetrated. Real men are not penetrated; 'women' are, as the notorious phrase *muliebria pati* ('to suffer female things') eloquently proclaims.<sup>7</sup> Among the many Ovidian stories illustrating this point, particularly telling is that of Caenis/Caeneus. Caenis was a virgin who was raped by Neptune. In recompense, she asks to cease to be a woman, so that she cannot suffer the same thing again. Neptune recognises the significance of her request, and makes her not only a man but also completely invulnerable to weapons, military as well as sexual (*Met.* 12.168–209).<sup>8</sup> We might illustrate the feminine alternative to such extreme masculine invulnerability through the story of Cyane (*Met.* 5.409–39). This nymph rose up from her pool to try and block the passage of Pluto with his stolen bride Proserpina, but her physical and verbal attempts to stop him were destroyed when the god hurled his spear into her pool, and through it opened up a way into the underworld. The pool stands here not just for Cyane but for all femininity; the spear is the raping phallus of masculine penetration.

But – these gendered norms don't tell the whole story. Time and again in Ovidian erotics, the lover, even when he is a rapist, is himself the victim of a wound. In the very first erotic adventure of the *Metamorphoses*,<sup>9</sup> Apollo the archer has been vaunting his masculine prowess in overcoming the monstrous Python, when he makes the mistake of provoking Cupid, claiming that the love-god's arrows have no place in a real man's epic (*Met.* 1.452–567). Cupid's reply is to shoot. Apollo is stricken with love; his beloved Daphne

<sup>6</sup> See Edwards (1993). <sup>7</sup> See Williams (1999) 7.

<sup>8</sup> It is probably telling that both Caeneus and the other invulnerable man, Cycnus, are finally killed by being suffocated. Keith (1999) 234 sees death by suffocation as a return of the invulnerable super-men to female status. It seems to me, however, that the sheer excess required to suffocate them leaves the problems of masculinity and violence intact. Instead of a straightforward, forceful thrust into the opponent's body, the perplexed heroes are reduced to a frenzied crushing, almost like a travesty of a toddler's tantrum.

<sup>9</sup> So it is generally characterized, but Deucalion and Pyrrha comes first. Marriage is a badly neglected topic in Ovid, as I discuss further at the end of this chapter.

is shot with an antaphrodisiac and made to flee, and so begin the *MetAMORphoses*.<sup>10</sup> So began also the *Amores*: love poetry came into being when the poet, who was trying to wield the *arma* of epic (1.1.1), was instead himself penetrated by the arrow of Cupid, and received the *opus* – elegiac poetry and sex – which constitutes the *Amores*. The immediate result of Cupid's arrow is *Amores* 1.2, which is primarily concerned with portraying the lover as *inermis* (unarmed) and as wounded. The elegiac lover's classic (generic) desire is for entry to the beloved, and his classic song is the paraclausithyron (song before the locked door of the beloved), but as a poet he must constantly fail to penetrate the door; he must surrender to love (*Am.* 1.2.9–10) in the hopes that the promise of *Ars* 2.197 ('by yielding you'll leave as victor') will offer him some consolation. The point, then, is that even though Roman sexuality is constituted on the basis of penetrability or otherwise, nonetheless even the penetrator himself can be characterized as suffering a *uulnus* through being a lover, and so the gendered categories will not stay neatly separate.

Nowhere is this more true than in the discourse of poetics itself, since the act of writing is *both* an active, masculine activity (speech, *authority*), *and* also insecure in its masculine position by comparison with political and military activity. To be a love poet, in particular, is both to be virile and to be effeminate.<sup>11</sup> This paradox develops a particular poignancy for Ovid in exile: on the one hand, we have the elegiac limp and the failing poetic powers,<sup>12</sup> but on the other hand the sexiness of his poetry which caused his downfall is also what makes his exilic poetry attractive. Moreover, this is a heroic failure. Ovid in exile is Ulysses – an epic hero but weaker, more vulnerable to suffering than his *exemplum*. The terminology of wounding is again very active: Ovid has been wounded by his poetry, both literally hurt and in love; and wounded by Augustus, who has also been wounded by him.<sup>13</sup> The *uulnus* both gives and destroys his poetic *uires*. It is the *uulnus* itself which stimulates the poetry, gives it *materia*, as in erotic elegy, and yet it is the *uulnus* for which he seeks a cure through the poetry.

The erotodidactic poems, at first sight, take a very clear line on the constructions of gender, engendering the addressee in a manner far more explicit than most ancient poetry. This engendering happens not only in the division between *Ars amatoria* 1 and 2 (for men) and *Ars* 3 (for women) but also in the

<sup>10</sup> The outrageous bilingual wordplay is typically Ovidian. The proper derivation of the word 'meta-morphosis' is from Greek words meaning 'changing shape', not the Latin word for love.

<sup>11</sup> See Wyke (1995), Sharrock (1995), Wheeler (1999).

<sup>12</sup> Williams (1994), Rosenmeyer (1997).

<sup>13</sup> The erotic connotations of wounding are never far below the surface in the elegies from exile. In *Trist.* 2.568 Ovid singles himself out as the only poet whom his muse harms.

explicit rules and regulations about the appropriate dress and behaviour of the genders.<sup>14</sup> But all these clear-cut distinctions are nuanced, if not undercut, by the intrusion of a third party – the author – and by the problematizing of the gendered imagery. The young lover, learning to be an adult male, is himself seduced by the poet-teacher, and is taught to win by losing. Despite, or because of, the military and gladiatorial vocabulary, it seems that perhaps learning to be a lover is not the best and most manly way of learning to be a Roman man.

### Who speaks?

Writing poetry, for Ovid, is not just *about* 'sexuality'; it is itself an erotic experience, in which it is impossible to distinguish clearly between sex and poetry. But despite all the instabilities and subversions of gender in the poet's voice and in Roman sexuality, the fact remains that poets are nearly all men, and Ovid is a man. This makes it all the more remarkable that so much space in the Ovidian corpus (*sic!*) is given to women. The *Heroides* are of particular interest here, for a crucial question is the extent to which we may be able to read a 'woman's voice'. What kind of gendered voice is produced by a male author speaking through a female mask, but completely subsuming his masculine authority into the female writing? The poems have no frame, no explicit sign from the author that we are really reading a male text.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, as is often noted, the poems partake of several 'feminine' features, such as repetition and absence.<sup>16</sup> Even if from one point of view this is (just) a reality effect, a more recuperative reading would see these poems as expressive of the feminine.<sup>17</sup> The temptation is to ask 'what does Ovid mean by this? – to make us hear Dido, or hear Ovid playing Dido?'<sup>18</sup> The same question arises when we try to confront more widely the very high profile of women in the corpus: is it friendly or not? How far is Ovid implicated in the exposure and objectification of women and denigrating violence towards them, perpetrated in and by his texts? The theoretical questions are too big

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, *Ars* 1.505–24, on how a lover should cultivate his appearance, but not too much, because all sartorial excess should be left to those who are not really men. In *Ars* 3, by contrast, most of the instruction is about cultivating the appearance. As often, the *Ars amatoria* treads an uneasy and playful line between opposition to and appropriation of conventional Roman mores. Ovid's advice has a lot in common with serious philosophical and moral writing on manly deportment. See Gleason (1995), esp. ch. 3.

<sup>15</sup> See Kennedy, ch. 13 in this volume, Farrell (1998).

<sup>16</sup> Rosati (1992), Spentzou (forthcoming), and on absence as 'feminine', Barthes (1990) 13–4. See also Harvey (1989).

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the old 'sympathetic to women' judgement is perhaps an early twentieth-century version of such a reading: Cormier (1992).

<sup>18</sup> Desmond (1993).

to address here:<sup>19</sup> perhaps we may side-step them by looking at what the text does.

Woman are 'meant' to be silent. The suppression of women's voices, bodies, and sexuality is an all-too-common story in (ancient) culture and in the Ovidian corpus, where it is one of the meanings of metamorphosis.<sup>20</sup> We can see how the loss of humanity, autonomy, and speech is tied in with sexuality for women, in three early stories of rape and metamorphosis: Daphne, loved by Apollo and turned into a laurel tree, Io, loved by Jupiter and turned into a cow, Syrinx, loved by Pan and turned into pan-pipes. In each case, the changed woman is made to acknowledge her domination, by an act of para-speech that accentuates her loss of voice. The laurel tree nods assent to becoming a symbol for triumphs; the cow lows; the pan-pipes have music made through them by their player/lover. Io does also communicate by writing her name on the sand, in an attempt to hold on to her identity in the face of divine attempts to submerge it, but as Wheeler points out, her father takes this written communication as a sign of her loss of humanity through her loss of voice.<sup>21</sup> But these stories are mild compared with another set in which the voice and sexuality are violently entwined.

The most gruesome of these is the story of Philomela (*Met.* 6.424–674). After being raped by her barbarian brother-in-law, this eloquent Athenian virgin took him verbally to task, only to suffer a second, more absolute rape when he cut out her tongue, metaphorically castrating as well as deflowering her.<sup>22</sup> The resourceful Philomela still manages to find a way to communicate, by weaving a picture of her sufferings, and sending it to her sister. Her action here, again, reflects on the ambiguous gendering of the act of poetry, since weaving is a clear signifier both of Woman and of the poet, while the very fact of the communication is a challenge to Tereus' masculine domination.

<sup>19</sup> On this subject, Richlin (1992) is crucial. See also Curran (1978) and Sharrock (forthcoming).

<sup>20</sup> The loss of control in metamorphosis itself may be regarded as gendered and unstable: see Segal (1998).

<sup>21</sup> Wheeler (1999), especially 50–8. Wheeler sees writing in the *Metamorphoses* as particularly associated with the feminine, an association which would contribute to the problematic gendering of the author himself. Farrell (1998) 314 links the story of Io with the advice to Ovid's female pupil in *Ars* 3.617–18 to send a message, even if she is being watched by an Argus (who guarded Io). Writing becomes a way out of silence for women. On the significance of the proper use of the voice in developing gendered identity see Gleason (1995) chs. 4–6.

<sup>22</sup> See Richlin (1992). For a powerful feminist reading and appropriation of this story, see Joplin (1984=1991), who argues for a positive sense in the enabling power of the tapestry and its communication, as bringing to light all injustices against women (48). Segal (1994b) sets the issue of violent rape within the context of voyeuristic violence in Ovid and in Roman society more generally. Miller (1988) ch. 4 takes up the metaphorical force of weaving for the positive valuation of women's activity as writers.

The sequel is well known – Procne and Philomela kill, cook, and serve Procne and Tereus' son to his father, and the principals are all turned into birds. The story allows some measure of positive activity to these women, but only up to a point, for in the process of taking action and communication into their own hands, they turn into monsters, like their enemy.<sup>23</sup>

In the *Fasti*, a story of rape and mutilation stands at the foundation of Roman religion. The avoidance of ill-omened or inappropriate words was crucial to Roman ritual, and was under the tutelage of Tacita, the silent goddess. Her children were the Lares, the gods of the Roman household. This is how she came by them: Lara was a chatty nymph in early Latium, who told her sister Juturna of Jupiter's plan to capture and rape her, and told Juno of this next offence against her marriage. Jupiter therefore cut out her tongue and sent her down to the underworld, place of the silent, in the company of Mercury. But on the way, the soul-guider raped her, despite her mute appeals, and the Lares were the result. Her silencing and sexual domination are necessary to the foundation of Roman culture.

This story reflects a common calumny against women, that of excessive talkativeness. The most famous illustration of this pattern is Echo (*Met.* 3.355–401), whose story is one of several Ovidian myths to be appropriated by modern feminist thought.<sup>24</sup> Echo was punished, for keeping Juno talking while Jupiter pursued the nymphs, with a literalization of a normative situation for ancient women – she can only repeat, not initiate. This handicap is eloquently displayed in the story of her love for the beautiful boy Narcissus. But this is more than just a charming tale. Along with Pygmalion's statue,<sup>25</sup> Echo's shadowy semi-existence, mirrored and reflected in the male text rather than seen face-to-face, encapsulates the representation of women in (Ovidian) poetry generally. The elegiac woman is as much muse and poetry as she is flesh and blood; even in exile, the elegiac pattern remains in more respectable form. The role of *puella* is now shared between Augustus and Ovid's wife,<sup>26</sup> but remains as shadowy as before, an echo of the poet's voice.

<sup>23</sup> In this series of stories in the *Metamorphoses*, gender and race are tied up in each other. See Segal (1994), esp. 268–9, 276–7, and Joplin (1991).

<sup>24</sup> As is Philomela: Joplin (1984=1991), Marder (1992). For Echo, see Berger (1996), Spivak (1993); for Arachne, Miller (1988).

<sup>25</sup> See Sharrock (1991) and Hillis Miller (1990) 1–12. Liveley (1999) argues for the positive valuation of the statue as a woman, actively playing a role in her own metamorphosis, deliberately acting like an elegiac *puella*. This is typical of a new strand in feminist readings of classical literature, in which a 'releasing' reading offers a more positive evaluation of women's roles. My own answer to this approach is still that the woman of *Ars* 3 is 'womanaufactured', but I expect to see more of this debate in the future.

<sup>26</sup> Rosenmeyer (1997).

## The masculine order

The entire Ovidian corpus is in dialogue with the most powerful contemporary signifiers of the masculine order: Augustus, *arma* (war and epic), and political life.<sup>27</sup> It is a dialogue full of tensions, but it would be wrong to see it as a simple opposition between Roman masculinity and Ovidian difference.

The images for love which help to construct the elegiac world of the *Amores* and *Ars amatoria* both oppose and partake in the norms of Roman masculinity. The well-known figure *militia amoris* (the soldiery of love) is the most obvious example. *Amores* 1.9 'outrageously' compares the lover and the soldier down to the finest detail: it is outrageous because conventionally the lover is the exact opposite of the soldier, as the effeminate is of the super-masculine. But on the other hand Ovid is exactly right: his poetry is constantly showing us both the violence and the *uis* of love and also the vulnerability of violence. Again, in *Amores* 2.11 the lover is set up in opposition to the sailor, and yet in 2.12 he precisely is the soldier, only his is a victory *sine sanguine* ('without blood'). Even this itself is not so straightforward an opposition as it might seem, since 'blood' is very often used as a figure for sexuality.

The *Fasti* is, in some ways, Ovid's most Roman and even most masculine work. It also has almost as many rapes as the *Metamorphoses*. If it is useful to say that Augustan ideology appropriates to itself the discourse of positively-valued masculinity, and predicates that on Romanness (and Romanness on that), then we need to consider the construction of gender-difference in the work in which Ovid most of all confronts and perhaps conforms to 'Roman values', especially when he does so in elegiacs. The play and interplay with masculinity and intertextuality is most explicit in the opening of Book 2, where the little elegies have grown, but not into epic. Instead, they have developed this new genre of aetiological (patriotic? propagandistic?) elegy.<sup>28</sup> The phrase *haec mea militia est* ('this is my soldiering', 2.9) is a statement of the *Fasti*'s engagement with and opposition to epic, but it is also a commemoration of another famous line *militat omnis amans* ('Every lover is a soldier', *Am.* 1.9.1), and a reminder that the poetic pose, in erotic and in non-erotic elegy, is as much an appropriation of Roman masculinity as it is opposition to it. The proem to *Fasti* 2 continues to dwell on the *arma* the poet does *not* have. On the other hand, it also introduces the celebration of Augustus as *Pater Patriae*, the most patriarchal of all Roman designations of civic authority. This teasing refusal to tell us whether Ovid is being a man hits at the heart of the gendered oddity of the *Fasti*. Although Ovid

<sup>27</sup> For Roman attitudes to masculinity and soldiering see Alston (1998).

<sup>28</sup> Hinds (1992).

sets himself up as the poet of Augustan peace,<sup>29</sup> in which he is caught up in the ideology of Roman masculine social order and authority, the poem constantly undermines its own, Rome's, and Augustus' authority. The very choice of religion as a vehicle for celebrating the (masculine) status quo is itself not unproblematic, for the appropriation of religion in the service of the state and for the ordering of society on neat and clear gendered lines is full of contradictions inherent in the gendered complexity of the religion itself. And Ovid is the poet of contradictions.

Illustrative of this ambivalence is the story of the Roman cults of Cybele, the Great Mother of the gods. The Muse Erato gives Ovid lots of information about this strange Eastern goddess whose rituals have been integrated into Roman civic religion. Why, in the name of all that is holy, asks Ovid (I am paraphrasing a bit here), do we virile Romans celebrate within our manly culture a goddess whose priests are eunuchs? The answer is a myth (*Fasti* 4.223–46). Attis was a Phrygian boy loved 'chastely' by the goddess Cybele. He promised to remain a virgin, but broke his promise with a nymph, whom Cybele killed in vengeance. Attis castrated himself, in remorse for his broken pledge and the death of his beloved. The story plays on various psychological themes: the sexiness of virginity, the castrating mother, the boy who tries to grow up but fails. And that is meant to *explain* the presence of such a cult in Roman society? Foreignness and effeminacy act as signs of the risks to Roman masculinity, risks which must be controlled, but also they are somehow expressive of drives and desires which, to borrow the language of psychoanalytical film criticism, are more scopophilic than voyeuristic.<sup>30</sup>

Erato's sequel is the story of the goddess's reception into Rome,<sup>31</sup> a story full of emphasis on chastity and pious respect for motherhood. Most interesting is the role of Claudia, an aristocratic lady whose doubted chastity is exonerated by the goddess's favour. The East, the effeminate, the wild, the female, these things must all be controlled by civic religion, but religion contains (includes) as well as contains (keeps under control) these forces. Roman religion is about control of deviancy, but it is also about the expression of deviancy and is itself threatening to the very civic order it is enlisted to uphold. In choosing religion as the vehicle for his Roman Poem, Ovid exploits these ambiguities. When he calls Aeneas *Phryx pius* ('the pious Phrygian'), in close echo of the *Phryx puer* ('the Phrygian boy') who is Attis, he will not

<sup>29</sup> Hinds (1992), Newlands (1995).

<sup>30</sup> The terms have been made famous by, in particular, Mulvey (1975). To put it simply: the voyeuristic gaze is a controlling, dominating, active kind of looking, while scopophilia (literally, love of looking) is a more passive process, concentrated its pleasure on the act of looking itself rather than on the control of its object.

<sup>31</sup> Livy 29.10. On the function of Cybele and of Venus in Republican Roman constructions of femininity see Stehle (1989).

tell us whether the connection is subversive of Roman masculinity or expressive of the range of possible appropriations inherent in that monolithic but amorphous institution.

The gendering of genre is nowhere more at issue than in Ovid's one great extant foray outside elegy,<sup>32</sup> the *Metamorphoses*, written under the shadow of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which constructed (and deconstructed) the ideal of Roman masculinity and structured itself around the heart-rending force of sexual love. The problem of the interactions of virility and autarky, to which I referred earlier, is fundamental to the construction of the epic hero, who is both defined and undone by his *thumos*,<sup>33</sup> his driving force as man and hero. Ovid's odd epic poses the problem of the hero by both offering and denying the convention, giving us Aeneadae who can't stand the weather (13. 707), for example, and a Perseus who almost forgets to stay airborne when he sees the chained Andromeda (4. 677).<sup>34</sup> Likewise, Ovid's narrative of the Aeneas story is constantly getting side-tracked away from the right Virgilian path:<sup>35</sup> as the Aeneadae are driving their course between Scylla and Charybdis, what we actually hear about is not the manly prowess of the hero, but the transformation of Scylla, from the epic monster whom heroes after Odysseus must narrowly escape, into yet another Ovidian lovely girl, victimized by a god's sexual interest.<sup>36</sup> This teasing response is almost a form of coitus interruptus – to offer us masculine heroes, and then to retreat. Here, as elsewhere, we see Ovid's refusal to tie himself down and tell us what a man is, what a woman is, what a hero is.<sup>37</sup>

### Differences

But 'gender', as Irigaray (1985) reminds us, is not another word for 'woman'. Inevitably in this chapter, I have raised and succumbed to a fundamental problem in the current state of gendered study: it is very common to run 'Gender' and 'Sexuality' together, and to lump 'Women' into the same conceptual pile, but to do so elides some important differences. Why should women's issues, any more than anything else about women, men, life, and everything, be tied in with sexuality and segregated from mainstream HIStory? These tendencies arise because people still think of maleness as normative, and so 'Gender' means 'different Gender', which means 'Woman',

<sup>32</sup> Effeminate elegy, with its limping pentameter: see Harrison, ch. 5 in this volume.

<sup>33</sup> I am grateful to Philip Hardie for this formulation.

<sup>34</sup> See Nagle (1988c), also Keith (1999). <sup>35</sup> See Casali (1995) 63.

<sup>36</sup> Strictly speaking, Scylla is transformed *from* virgin *to* monster, but if we think of this in terms of the epic tradition it is the other way round. Ovid takes the story of the monster and turns it into a story of a lovely victim.

<sup>37</sup> I am grateful to Effie Spentzou here.

which – to complete the circle – means Sex (both sex-difference and erotic experience). Although I play along with this, I offer a tiny subversion of it by the inclusion of a small section on families and especially motherhood.

Very often in the Ovidian corpus, sexuality offers an alternative view of the world, most explicitly in the *Ars amatoria*, where sex is set up as an alternative to Augustan citizenship. Although the poem poses as denying that it teaches anything against the Augustan adultery laws, at almost every turn its presentation belies its protestation.<sup>38</sup> The didactic poem undermines marriage not so much because Ovid thinks adultery is a good thing, as in order to offer an alternative to Augustan social control. If in the *Ars amatoria* love seems to be an alternative to marriage, however, this is not true throughout the Ovidian corpus. Myth allows for a fudging of the realities of marriage and social control, and gives space for the exploration of a range of erotic loci, including married ones: for example, Baucis and Philemon, Pyramus and Thisbe, Ceyx and Alcyone, Cephalus and Procris, and even, albeit problematically, the exiled poet and his wife.

Myth allows space also for the examination of family matters rarely noticed elsewhere in ancient literature. I pick as an example a woman's account of the birth of her first child (*Met.* 9.275–323). Alcmena tells her pregnant granddaughter-in-law Iole (now married to Hercules' son Hyllas) about the birth of the great hero. She had been suffering for many days, but the birth was prevented by the malice of Juno. Lucina, goddess of birth, sat cross-legged on the altar with her fingers entwined. A clever servant-girl saw her there, rushed out to announce the birth (falsely) and so tricked the goddess into standing up, letting go, and allowing the birth to take place. Iole's reply likewise stresses the family. She tells the story of her sister Dryope's metamorphosis into a tree, including apparently unnecessary details about the woman's own mother and child. These stories constitute a foil to the epic masculinity of the greatest of heroes and offer an alternative view of the world.<sup>39</sup>

The driving force, the *uis*, of epic, inherently tends to occlude this 'feminized' viewpoint. Towards the end of the *Metamorphosis*, we see a gradual eliding of the female, the personal, the sexual, which culminates in the grand finale of the deification of Caesar and the projected deification of Augustus.<sup>40</sup> In all the ironic stress on the genetic significance of Caesar's fathering of Augustus (Octavian was adopted by his great-uncle in the Dictator's will), there is – there can be – no hint of the female role in procreation. Imperial ideology deletes woman. The one construction of femininity that does gain a place in the imperial patriarchal system is the conventional celebration of

<sup>38</sup> See Sharrock (1994b). <sup>39</sup> See Segal (1998).

<sup>40</sup> One of the last sexual stories in the poem, that of Vertumnus and Pomona, has been subject to a feminist reading by Gentilcore (1995).



woman as the chaste channel for patriarchal progression. It looks at first sight as though Ovid obsequiously supports such a construction, in the one mention of maternity in this last section of the poem, when he speaks of Augustus' *prolem sancta de coniuge natam* ('child born from his holy wife', *Met.* 15.836) – until we remember that Tiberius is not the son of Augustus but of Livia's former husband, from whom the young Octavian removed her when she was pregnant with Tiberius.<sup>41</sup> Ovid thus provocatively exposes the deceptive imperial appropriation of conventional values.

But where does this leave women? Does Ovid expose or collude with this deletion of the female by imperial ideology? The question returns us to the issues raised earlier about the subversive effect of Ovidian appropriation of the masculine order. Violence has been appropriated for love, force for persuasion, epic for elegy.<sup>42</sup> If the lover is (not) a soldier, and the poet is (not) a statesman, then who wins in the struggle for interpretative control? Or need we think of it as struggle?

If love in Ovid is painful, it is also creative, for *uis* always has two sides, as we see in the story of Flora, told by herself, in the *Fasti*. The goddess of flowers was raped by the west wind Zephyrus, but she is quick to say she does not complain of this, or of her husband, and to point out the lovely fertility that is the result of her rape.<sup>43</sup> The monochrome has become colourful. A quick whip through various transgressive stories from the *Metamorphoses*, including Adonis, reminds us of this aspect of Ovidian sexuality – that the creative and the violent are closely knit up in each other. I do not think we should deny the beauty of Ovidian *uis*, whatever anxieties it might (rightly) raise in us.

#### FURTHER READING

Roman sexuality is just starting to catch up with its ancient Greek counterpart: four recent books on masculinity are important (Gleason (1995), the later essays in Foxhall and Salmon (1998a) and (1998b), and most fully Williams (1999)), while the collection by Hallett and Skinner (1997) on *Roman Sexualities* is crucial. It contains essays by D. Fredrick and P. Gordon which are of particular interest for this topic. Edwards (1993) is a very useful contribution to the cultural construction of gender at Rome.

Very many works on Ovid have some bearing on the matter, but there is no full-scale treatment either of the corpus or of individual works. There have been some excellent articles in the journal *Helios*, sadly hard to get hold of in Britain. In 1990

<sup>41</sup> I am grateful to Philip Hardie here.

<sup>42</sup> On the interactions of epic and elegy as erotic and gendered see *Amores* 2.18–19.

<sup>43</sup> See Newlands (1995) 122–3, who shows how, as an intermediary between *matronae* and *meretrices*, Flora acts as a counterpart to the poet of the *Fasti*, erotic and respectable at once (or not).

a special issue was devoted to feminist and other similar readings of Ovid. Kennedy (1993) is concerned with Roman elegy generally, and has a great deal of value on Ovidian sexuality. On the *Amores*, Keith (1994) is a good general piece, while the relevant chapters of Greene (1998) give a good sense of the state of play on such matters. For the interaction of gender and sexuality with race and class, Henderson (1991), (1992) is excellent, if difficult. The *Ars amatoria* has been oddly lacking in explicitly gendered treatments. For an approach interested primarily in poetics, Allen (1992) has a lot that is valuable, as does Gibson (1995) on winning girlfriends and influencing them. The *Heroides* are becoming big business in gendered reading: there is already Farrell (1998) and Desmond (1993), and we are set to see more in future (e.g. Spentzou (forthcoming)). On the *Metamorphoses*, the best overview is probably Segal (1998), while there is a great deal of value in Wheeler (1999). For a more traditional reading, one might try Anderson (1995). There are also large numbers of treatments of individual passages. Alison Keith and Michaela Janan have each produced a number of important articles, while on the specific issue of rape and representation Richlin (1992) is central, and on gender-instability Nugent (1990). Newlands' book on the *Fasti* (1995) is not explicitly concerned with gender and sexuality, but it is written from a feminist standpoint that produces excellent gendered readings of the poem. Fantham (1983) is one of the few works on the *Fasti* explicitly addressing issues of sexuality. Gendered readings of the exile poetry often, rightly, link the late poems with the earlier elegiacs, especially the *Heroides*. Exemplary in this regard is Rosenmeyer (1997), while O'Gorman (1997) is a wide-reaching treatment of gendered matters in historicist poetics in the *Ars* and *Heroides* as well as in the exile poems.