OVID'S NEW MUSE: *AMORES* 1.1

Amores 1.1, as usually understood, ends in a way that seems a little flat: after an amusing account of how falling in love made him turn from epic to elegy, the poet concludes by ponderously invoking an elegiac muse.[1] In this note I will argue that the ending is more entertaining, and more significant: the muse invoked in the last couplet, who is to inspire the poems to come, is none other than Corinna herself.[2]

Readers have always enjoyed the first part of the poem, with its mock *recusatio*, its inventive joke about metre,[3] and its indignant complaint to Cupid. The poet presents himself as a would-be epic poet, wanting only to be left alone with his manly pursuits. Cupid, he says, should mind his own business, but instead he keeps messing up the poet's hexameters and turning them into elegiac couplets (lines 5–18). On top of that our poet has no one to love, whether male or female, and thus nothing to write elegy about (lines 19–20). All this changes with a single arrow from Cupid (lines 21–4), and our poet is well and truly smitten: *me miserum, certas habuit puer ille sagittas* (line 25).

Scholars are divided on what exactly follows from that. The poet says that he is on fire, and that Love reigns in his empty heart: *uror et in vacuo pectore regnat Amor* (line 26). Some readers take *pectus vacuum* literally: although the poet is now a lover, his heart is still empty, so he must not be in love with anyone in particular.[4] On this view we have an amusing paradox: like St Augustine and millions of teenagers since, our poet is in love with love.[5] And indeed, on this reading, the poet is less interested in love itself than with its consequences for his career as a poet. Having been converted from epic to elegy, all our poet wants is help from an appropriate muse (lines 27–30).

But Wilfried Stroh, followed by John Barsby and John Moles, argued that the poet's *pectus vacuum* is merely his '*hitherto* empty heart'.[6] This seems to me clearly right: when a poet has been shot by Cupid's arrow, and is now miserable and aflame, we

[1] For the witty combination of a personified with a non-personified muse in the last couplet, see J.C. McKeown, *Ovid: Amores. Volume II: A Commentary on Book One*, ARCA 22 (Leeds, 1989), ad loc.

[2] For recent discussions see A.M. Keith, '*Amores* 1.1: Propertius and the Ovidian Programme', in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* VI (Brussels, 1992), 327–44; E. Greene, *The Erotics of Domination: Male Desire and the Mistress in Latin Love Poetry* (Baltimore, 1998), 68–73; W.-L. Liebermann, 'Liebe und Dichtung: was hat Amor/Cupido mit der Poesie zu schaffen? – Ovid, *Amores* I, 1', *Mnemosyne* 53 (2000), 672–89; G. Bretzigheimer, *Ovids Amores: Poetik in der Erotik*, Classica Monacensia 22 (Tübingen, 2001), 12–18; G. Tsomis, 'Properz, 1, 1 und Ovid, Amores 1, 1', *Athenaeum* 97 (2009), 477–88.

[3] McKeown (n. 1), ad loc. observes that there is no known precedent for the conceit about stealing a foot from the writer of hexameters to create an elegiac couplet.

[4] So McKeown (n. 1), ad loc.; J.T. Davis, '*Risit Amor:* Aspects of Literary Burlesque in Ovid's "Amores"', *ANRW* 2.31.4 (1981), 2460–506, at 2468–9. Davis argues that a *pectus vacuum* cannot mean a '*once* empty heart', because that would conflict with the statement in lines 19–20 about the lack of *materia*. But that statement is in the poet's complaint to Cupid *before* getting shot.

[5] See R.O.A.M. Lyne, *The Latin Love Poets: From Catullus to Horace* (Oxford, 1980), 260; B.W. Boyd, *Ovid's Literary Loves: Influence and Innovation in the* Amores (Ann Arbor, 1997), 148–9. For Augustine, see *Conf.* 3.1.

[6] W. Stroh, *Die römische Liebeselegie als werbende Dichtung* (Amsterdam, 1971), 146 n. 23; J.A. Barsby, *Ovid: Amores Book 1* (Oxford, 1973), 42; J. Moles, 'The dramatic coherence of Ovid, *Amores* 1.1 and 1.2', *CQ* 41 (1991), 551–4, at 553 n. 9.

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infer quite naturally that his 'empty heart' is a heart that is empty *no longer*.[7] As Moles points out, this interpretation is supported by a parallel phrase in the next poem, in which the poet says again that he has been shot by Cupid and that, therefore, love now burns in his 'occupied heart'.[8] In both passages, as Stroh pointed out, *vacuus* alludes to the technical vocabulary of the law of property: love has taken possession of a place that was once, but is no longer, available for occupation.[9]

This understanding of *pectus vacuum* has important consequences. All the poet *tells* us, to be sure, is that he has fallen in love and thus has changed his poetic project. But if he is indeed in love with a particular person – if his heart is not *really* empty any more – then the poet who lacked *materia* in lines 19–20 now has someone to write his poetry about. He concentrates, as we have seen, on the consequences of this for his poetry (lines 27–30). But his readers want to know the personal details: who has he fallen for, what's she (or he) like and, indeed, what *about* that question of sexual orientation?

If we approach the final couplet with these questions in mind, we see that it provides some answers: we may not learn many details about this new lover, but we now know that she is female, and that she is the poet's new inspiration. The poet is still fixated on the metrical implications of falling in love, and he thus concludes with his ponderous joke about the eleven feet with which his new muse will be celebrated. But this does not mean that we are supposed to forget about the girl. Propertius made Cynthia the starting point for his first book of elegies, and Ovid does much the same thing. Corinna is not in fact absent from *Amores* 1.1: she is the premise of the entire poem, and emerges in the final couplet as its addressee.

Ever since the Renaissance we have taken for granted that a poet might think of his mistress as his muse.[10] The Roman elegists thought along the same lines, but they were apparently more careful with their metaphors.[11] Catullus and Propertius spoke of their mistresses (real or imaginary) as 'goddesses', who sometimes provided inspiration.[12] Moreover, as Maria Wyke and Alison Keith have shown, Ovid and Propertius explore at length the associations of their mistresses with their poems.[13]

[7] A parallel text (or at least an illustration) is provided by a country-and-western singer named Irvin Newton, who may be seen on YouTube singing an original song called 'You filled my empty heart'.

[8] Ov. *Am*. 1.2.7–8: *haeserunt tenues in corde sagittae | et possessa ferus pectora versat Amor*.

[9] See McKeown (n. 1), on 1.2.8.

[10] D. Hoffman, 'Muse', in A. Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (edd.), *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, 1993), 802–3. See also the reservations of Joseph Brodsky, 'The poet, the loved one and the Muse', *TLS* (26 October 1990), 1150 and 1160, cited by P. Murray, 'The Muses: creativity personified?', in E. Stafford and J. Herrin (edd.), *Personification in the Greek World: From Antiquity to Byzantium* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2005), 147–59, at 150 n. 8. I have been unable to find a detailed consideration of this conception of the poetic muse in western literature, though see M. Jacoby, 'The Muse as Symbol of Literary Creativity', in J.P. Strelka (ed.), *Anagogic Qualities of Literature* (University Park, PA, 1971), 36–50.

[11] I can find no evidence to support the confident reference to 'Roman elegy, with its beloved as Muse and poetry', in A. Sharrock, 'An A-musing Tale: Gender, Genre, and Ovid's Battles with Inspiration in the *Metamorphoses*', in E. Spentzou and D. Fowler (edd.), *Cultivating the Muse: Struggles for Power and Inspiration in Classical Literature* (Oxford, 2002), 207–27, at 210. But if we substitute 'inspiration' for 'Muse' we are on firm ground.

[12] Note esp. Prop. 2.1.4: *ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit*. See G. Lieberg, *Puella Divina: die Gestalt der göttlichen Geliebten bei Catull im Zusammenhang der antiken Dichtung* (Amsterdam, 1962); J. Martos Fernández, 'Amada divina', in R. Moreno Soldevila (ed.), *Diccionario de motivos amatorios en la literatura latina (Siglos III a. C. – II d. C.)* (Huelva, 2011), 32.

[13] M. Wyke, *The Roman Mistress: Ancient and Modern Representations* (Oxford, 2002); A.M. Keith, '*Corpus Eroticum*: Elegiac Poetics and Elegiac *Puellae* in Ovid's *Amores*', *CW* 88 (1994), 27–40.

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But the Roman poets never come out and say that their lovers are their muses.[14] Rather, they seem to play with that idea, inviting their readers to infer that their lovers, as poetic inspirations, are *like* the Muses of Pieria and Mt Helicon. Thus Propertius (like Tibullus and Gallus) chooses for his mistress a name associated with Apollo, and hints repeatedly at her similarity to a Muse, but he never actually calls her that.[15]

Like his predecessors, Ovid sometimes compares his mistress to a goddess, though in some cases he is not thinking of Muses in particular.[16] Like Propertius, he can identify Corinna as his only source of inspiration (*ingenium movit sola Corinna meum*, *Am.* 3.12.16).[17] His choice of the name Corinna probably points, like Catullus' Lesbia, in the same direction: Antipater of Thessalonica wrote an epigram exalting nine female poets of Greece as mortal analogues of the 'real' Muses.[18] And it has been observed that, when we first properly 'meet' Corinna herself in *Amores* 1.5, their physical relations are presented as an encounter with divine inspiration.[19]

But the move at the end of *Amores* 1.1 is bolder still. The poet posits the existence of a new muse, particularly associated with elegiac couplets. But she is not a tenth Muse, but something intriguingly analogous: she is his poetic inspiration, and the girl he has fallen in love with.[20]

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[14] On the Muses in Latin poetry see H. Karamalengou, '*Musa* ou *Musae?* Poétique ou poétiques chez les poètes Augustéens?', *REL* 81 (2003), 133–56.

[15] See esp. G. Lieberg, 'Die Muse des Properz und seine Dichterweihe', *Philologus* 107 (1963), 116–29, 263–70; see also S.J. Heyworth, *Cynthia: A Companion to the Text of Propertius* (Oxford, 2008), 5–6. For names of mistresses see J.G. Randall, 'Mistresses' pseudonyms in Latin elegy', *LCM* 4 (1979), 27–35; S. Laigneau, *La femme et l'amour chez Catulle et les élégiaques augustéens*, Collection Latomus 249 (Brussels, 1999), 81–92.

[16] For comparison to an unspecified goddess see *Am.* 1.7.32, 2.11.46 and perhaps 2.18.17. At *Am.* 3.2.60 the comparison is to Venus and at *Am.* 3.3.12 the point is explicitly about physical beauty.

[17] Also *Tr.* 4.10.59–60: *moverat ingenium totam cantata per urbem | nomine non vero dicta Corinna mihi*. Cf. J.C. McKeown, *Ovid: Amores. Volume I: Text and Prolegomena* (Liverpool, 1987), 104.

[18] *Anth. Pal.* 9.26 = A.S.F. Gow and D.L. Page, *The Greek Anthology: The Garland of Philip and Some Contemporary Epigrams*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1968), 1.24–5.

[19] W.S.M. Nicoll, 'Ovid, Amores I 5', *Mnemosyne* 30 (1977), 40–8; T.D. Papanghelis, 'About the hour of noon: Ovid, "Amores" 1,5', *Mnemosyne* 42 (1989), 54–61.

[20] The referee for this paper, to whom I am grateful for other corrections and insights as well, observes that line 29 (*cingere litorea flaventia tempora myrto*) alludes to language used by Virgil in his address to Octavian at *G.* 1.24–8 (*cingens materna tempora myrto*, line 28). Corinna, as Ovid's new muse, has displaced the *princeps* himself.

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