This paper observes that the materiality of books—books of elegiac poetry, in particular—recurs as a theme in Book 3 of Ovid's *Amores*. Scholars have long observed the poetic and generic self-consciousness evident in Ovid's collection of love elegies (e.g., McKeown 1989 and Boyd 1997), beginning with *Amores* 1.1, when the speaker recounts his pivot away from epic composition, and continuing through the final couplets *Amores* 3.15, when the speaker augurs a shift to writing tragedy and bids elegy adieu (*corniger increpuit thyrso graviore Lyaeus / pulsanda est magnis area maior equis. / inbelles elegi, genialis Musa, valete* […], 17-19). This paper outlines how Ovid's attention to physical manifestations of the written word in *Amores* 3 offers another lens for observing the collection's poetic self-consciousness, both by offering evidence of differing anticipated reading communities for different poetic genres and by enabling a concrete interpretation of the speaker's ambitions of literary immortality.

In the first poem of *Amores* Book 3, the Ovidian speaker recounts an occasion when two feminine figures—Tragedy and Elegy—approached him in the woods and debated whether his next poetic venture would be a tragedy or a continuation of his elegiac output. The two debaters and the speaker in this literalized depiction of generic rivalry all use diction that betrays generic consciousness (Karakasis 2010), to say nothing of the fact that the couplets on the page function as a sort of spoiler of the debate's result. Moreover, in presenting her (winning) case, Elegy reminds the poet of her past service, relating how she has been affixed to doors, hidden in pockets, and even broken and submerged in water (53-58). Readers are invited to regard the poetry as inseparable from its physical forms (here evidently wax tablets),[1] and they are offered insight into

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[1] Or to oscillate rapidly between personification and non-personification (McKeown 1989: 30)

how different genres and book forms presume different reading contexts, an implication also apparent in *Amores* 2.1. Elegy presents herself as typically personal and private (e.g., *non verita a populo praetereunte legi*, 54; cf. the intimate readers of 2.1.5-10), while Tragedy presents herself as a greater work (*maius opus*, 24) who would presumably reach a greater audience (cf. the *theatra* deemed unsuitable to elegy in 2.1.4).

In *Amores* 3.8.6, the speaker bemoans that he cannot physically travel where his books can, underscoring a separation between the material poem and its author that is also outlined in the collection's opening epigram. While suggesting in *Amores* 3.12 that his beloved became famous through his books (*an nostris annotuit illa libellis?,* 7), he laments that, because of how well his poems have advertised her charms, she must be shared with many others (5-10). Beyond reading this as a straightforward complaint that his poetry has inspired the amatory attention of more rivals, one can also interpret this as an occasion when the speaker collapses his *puella*'s identity with that of his poetic book, just as the poetic books of certain elegiac predecessors were known by the names of the women said to inspire the poetry (e.g., Propertius' *Cynthia* and Mimnermus' *Nanno*). Thus, the many people with whom he shares "Corinna" are any readers who hold his (seemingly popular) poetic book.

A variation on this reading also appears in *Amores* 3.9, the elegy on the death of Tibullus, when Delia and Nemesis function as stand-ins for Tibullus' two poetic books. Earlier in this poem the speaker plainly states that "songs alone escape from greedy pyres" (*defugiunt avidos carmina sola rogos*, 28). In light of the references to book materiality elsewhere in the collection, I propose understanding this as a claim not just of the immortality of poetic creations but also of the potential durability of the physical objects that contain them—the wax tablets, papyri, and, in subsequent

generations, the parchment and codices that, when produced in sufficient quantities and/or protected by their owners, stand a good chance of outliving their initial creator.

In my closing remarks, I offer an overview of a work-in-progress, a book historical digital edition of Ovid's *Amores* Book 3 designed to acquaint modern readers with ways in which works composed thousands of years ago have reached the present day.

Works Cited

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