

Non Est Fera: Hunting in Ovid's Ars Amatoria

Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* encourages a critical readership by its contradictory hunting imagery. The instructor shows the tension between hunting and love (e.g. 2.193-195) at the same time as he seems to equate hunting with love (e.g. 1.45-46). I argue that the failure of the text's romantic instruction and hunting imagery, culminating in the myth of Cephalus and Procris, is commentary on the nature of knowledge. His instructions fail, but Ovid succeeds in opening a discussion about imagery. Ovid is using conventional didactic imagery to point out its instability, especially when it is combined with another genre. Didactic poets need to establish authority more than other poets to teach their readers, but they are not infallible. The author may use many metaphors to express some scientific proof, but the reader cannot blindly accept them. A pupil must not be seduced by a text, even when it is about love.

Miller 1993, Tarrant 1995, Watson 2007, and James 2008 have all argued that Ovid is a failed teacher. But despite the failings of the persona, Kennedy 2000 argues that the reader is seduced by the text and so the text succeeds. The reader is compelled to have faith not in the lessons themselves, but in the idea of didacticism and the illusion of it. The poem is, according to Blodgett 1973, only an illusion, like all art and life itself. I agree that Ovid is concerned with the illusions and fictions of poetry, but his poetry is more than a deceptive game. Ovid's use of hunting provides a means to unite the three books of the *Ars Amatoria* and trains the reader to be critical of symbols and not to be accepting of illusions. An analysis of Ovid's hunting imagery throughout the *Ars Amatoria* ultimately reveals that when we try to hunt for something, we have no idea about what we might capture. The 'truth' can change unexpectedly, and our guides and the tracks can mislead.

Didactic poetry and elegiac poetry in general use hunting in different ways. The *Ars Amatoria* intends to combine the genres and the uses of hunting—seduction is a hunt, so historical hunting tips can help the lover. Ovid’s specific uses of hunting support the speaker’s lessons at first but then undercut them. The final mythological excursus of the entire work, the myth of the hunters Cephalus and Procris (3.685-746), puts emphasis on hunting and its problems. In this myth, the jealous Procris spies on her husband Cephalus and is killed by him in ignorance. In the privileged last place, this mythological *exemplum* combines various themes of his work, including treatment of women and adultery, and exposes hunting’s unsuitability for the female audience. However, the male lover is also left bereft in the myth, in opposition to the speaker’s previous confidence in the success of the hunter-lover (e.g. 1.270-271). Ovid offers no alternatives to traditional imagery and merely probes the theoretical questions of what imagery is and what it can accomplish. I argue that Ovid undercuts his own instructor’s ability and he trains his readers to question a poet’s authority because knowledge, like a desired lover, is elusive.

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