

Duplicitous simplicity in Ovid *Amores* 1

Ovid alone of the Latin elegists thematizes the concept of *simplicitas*, a term that can imply both old-fashioned honesty and rustic naiveté (Ferrero, 1979). This paper will investigate a particularly rich instance of the theme in the play between *Amores* 1.11 and 1.12 and will argue that these two poems encapsulate the ambiguous valuation of the term and in doing so, use an unprecedented opposition between simplicity and duplicity.

In *Amores* 1.11 Ovid characterizes the maid Nape as endowed with "simplicity not greater than [her] station" or, perhaps, "not extraordinary simplicity": *nec tibi simplicitas ordine maior adest* (1.11.10). The clause comes in a list of characteristics that should make Nape well-suited or well-disposed to the erotic errand the poet asks of her: the delivery of a tablets to her (and his!) *domina* requesting a rendezvous. The question is whether it is Nape's *simplicitas* or her lack thereof that makes her an appropriate handmaiden to the poet's project. The context implies the latter: the poet will go on to say that Nape has had a bit of erotic experience herself and will recognize the signs of Amor in him. Elsewhere in *Amores* 1, however, *nuda simplicitas* has been marked as one of the characteristics that qualifies the poet as a lover (1.3.14) and he has mourned his beloved's failure to remain *simplex* (1.10.13-14). Nonetheless, the poet of the *Amores* more consistently presents duplicity as a way of love, even in 1.3 where he professes his own *simplicitas* (Olstein, 1975). Nape's relative sophistication is what will allow her to deliver the poet's message. If she is faithful (*fida* [1.11.6]) to the poet she is surely in some sense less than faithful to her own mistress, a double agent of sorts.

In the final lines of 1.11 the handmaiden's fidelity is transferred to the tablets Nape will carry: *VENERI FIDAS SIBI NASO MINISTRAS / DEDICAT* (1.11.27-28). In the narratively connected poem that follows the tablets have returned with a "No" inscribed in them. The climax of the poet's complaints against his *tristes tabellae* is, ironically, their *duplicitas*: *Ergo ego vos rebus duplices pro nomine sensi./ auspicii numerus non erat ipse boni* (1.12.27-28). Nowhere else in Ovid's corpus does "duplicity" imply deceitfulness, but here it is clearly opposed to *simplicitas*. The identification of girl with tablets allows the full implications of Nape's lack of *simplicitas* to come to the fore.