Centering Cypassis: An Enslaved Reading of Ovid *Amores* 2.7–8

In *Amores* 2.7–8, Ovid recounts a harrowing series of events: Cypassis, Corinna's enslaved hairdresser, listens in silence as the *amator* insists to her angry *domina* that he would never be sexually interested in a dirty (*sordida*, 2.7.20) and contemptible (*contemptae,* 2.7.20) slave. In 2.8, Cypassis finds herself alone with the *amator*, who reminds her that he has raped her in the past and intends to do so again. One of the major questions of the diptych is how Corinna found out about their 'affair' in the first place. In this paper, I offer a new reading of *Amores* 2.7–8 from the premise that Cypassis voluntarily told Corinna in the hopes that her *domina* would protect her from the *amator*.

Amores 2.7–8 has garnered considerable scholarly attention for its artistry as a diptych (e.g., Davis 1977), its use of legal language (e.g., Watson 1983), and its depiction of violence against women. Following James' (1997) examination of the poems, which uses a gendered lens to reveal that the *amator*'s "seduction" (Davis 1977, 99; Watson 1983, 101) of Cypassis is rape, recent discussions of *Amores* 2.7–8 have focused on the *amator*'s violence against both Corinna and Cypassis (De Boer 2010; Wise 2020). While these discussions shed much light on the ways in which Ovid reveals that female suffering underpins the elegiac world, they consider Corinna and Cypassis together as subaltern women without thoroughly examining Corinna's role as enslaver. On the other hand, Fitzergald explores Cypassis' enslaved status, but fails to consider her vulnerability to sexual abuse, finding "a complicity" between her and the *amator* in 2.8 (2000, 63). My own examination of the diptych considers *Amores* 2.7–8 through Cypassis's status as both female and enslaved to offer an interpretation from the perspective of Cypassis, rather than Corinna-and-Cypassis.

My reading of *Amores* 2.7–8 begins from the premise that, after being raped by her mistress' client multiple times (*quotiens,* 2.8.27; *quot*, 2.8.28), Cypassis asks Corinna to protect her from the *amator.* Corinna could perhaps have kept him away from Cypassis, as Phronesium in

Plautus' *Truculentus* and Thais in Terence's *Eunuchus* provide examples from New Comedy of *meretrices* managing clients' access to their households and to certain of their slaves (or freeborn women believed to be enslaved). Working from James' (2003) discussion of the financial necessities that shape the elegiac *domina*'s choices, the reasons behind Corinna's next steps become clear. For Corinna *qua* sex laborer, there is no reason to demand exclusivity from the *amator* except to prevent him from spending his money on someone else. Cypassis poses no threat, since as her enslaver Corinna could seize her belongings at any time. On the other hand, the career advice passed on from older sex laborers to the *domina* includes instructions to extract payments from clients by pretending to be angry (Prop. 4.5.31-32; *Am*. 1.8.79-80), and the *amator* himself finds the *domina*'s anger arousing (Prop. 3.8, 4.8; *Ars* 2.445-59). Therefore, it financially benefits Corinna and sexually benefits the *amator* that she angrily (*iratos... ocellos*, 2.8.15) accuses him of 'cheating.' This reading explains why, after the patently insincere arguments of 2.7 (Martyn 1981, 2446; Mills 1978, 303), Corinna still allows the *amator* to be alone with Cypassis in 2.8: Permitting him to assault her hairdresser again offers her future opportunities for financial gain. Cypassis' role in *Amores* 2.7–8 parallels that of enslaved onlookers in erotic Roman frescoes, which demonstrate the ways in which free Romans viewed their slaves' sexual lives in "instrumental terms" (Green 2015, 143) and "relied on slaves to assist, establish, and observe slave owners' status performances and sexual relations" (Green 2015, 146). Both Corinna and the *amator* thus emerge as complicit in the rape of an enslaved woman, who is forced to become part of the elegiac game through violence.

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