Ovid’s Make-Up World: The Kosmos of Ars Amatoria

As Philip Hardie has famously observed (1986: 33-50), Vergil’s Georgics strive for a totalizing vision of the world by juxtaposing the celestial cosmos with an equally grand vision of the Roman state (2.458-3.48). Ovid’s Ars Amatoria, I will argue, responds to the Georgics with an equally ambitious claim to represent totality. But Ovid expressly spans not only the cosmos of nature and state, but also the other valences of the Greek concept kosmos (“world,” but also “ornament,” “make-up,” and equipment” cf. Vlastos 2005: 3), namely cosmetic art and, in fact, the ars amatoria itself. This will suggest a new way to understand the unity of a poem that, as Rimell (2006: 71) observes, tends to be analyzed overwhelmingly in pieces.

My paper will analyze instantiations of kosmos that are symmetrically ordered across the poem’s three books. By “instantiation of kosmos” I mean passages that contain not only constituent parts of the concept such as “cosmos” or “ornament,” but that rather suggest kosmos both physically and aesthetically. For example, early in book 1 Ovid evokes Augustus’ staging of the naval battle of Salamis (cf. Hollis 1977: 63), a spectacle (belli navalis imagine, 171) that brought spectators from the whole world to Rome (ingens orbis in urbe fuit, 174). These spectators are in turn spectated as potential objects of love (Quis non invenit turba, quod amaret, in illa?, 175). Ovid abruptly interrupts his seduction lesson with the fulsome vision (ecce, 177) of a triumph in which Caesar prepares “to add what is lacking to the conquered world” (parat Caesar domito quod defuit orbi addere, 177-8), the trope of imperium sine fine familiar from Vergil and Propertius.

Ovid’s triad of spectacles (imagine...invenit...ecce) envisions the cosmos of urbis orbisque as an invented image of kosmos. This becomes clearer when Ovid reasserts this theme at the end of book 2 with a brief but crucial allusion to the shield of Achilles (2.741). The shield
was interpreted by Hellenistic scholiasts of Homer as a *kosmou mimēma*, or imagining of the cosmos (Hardie 1985). Both Hardie (1985: 16-7) and Wheeler (1995) provide evidence that Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* signals awareness of this interpretation of the shield. Book 3 resumes the language of armament (*Arma dedi…arma supersunt*, 3.1), emphasizing the shield as cosmic image with a portrayal of female *kosmēsis* that is again poised between a look backward and forward. The art Ovid preaches already ushered in a Roman Golden Age echoing Sabine rape narrative (1.101-34): the Roman women of old emerged from rude simplicity to gildedness (*Simplicitas rudis ante fuit; nunc aurea Roma est*, 3.113) and so should Ovid’s *puella*.

Furthermore, to follow the Roman cosm[et]ic institution would eternalize the present state of youthful beauty (*arte perennat amor*, 3.42). Thus the pattern of book 1 is reasserted and the attainment of Roman *kosmos* is fashioned before a public gaze.

I will show how Ovid responded to Vergilian cosmopoiesis with his own cosm[et]ic vision. This will shed light on the way Ovid’s *kosmos* is a mirror through which the poet sees himself and his *ars*, which unfolds as itself a *kosmos* of cosmetic, political, and cosmic commentary, adding to scholarly understanding of the dialogue between the *Georgics* and *Ars*, which has been left mostly unexplored since Leach (1964)

Bibliography


Leach, E. W. 1964. “Georgic Imagery in the *Ars amatoria*.” In *Transactions and Proceedings of*
