

The History of Elegy and Ovid's Rustication Cure (*Remedia amoris* 169-98)

In the *Remedia amoris*, Ovid offers what purports to be real advice to the lovers who now wish to extricate themselves from their affairs. In his arch assumption of the identity of a medical doctor, prepared to dispense *medicina amoris* to his clients, Ovid looks back at the entire arc of elegy's history in Rome to its probable codification by Gallus, the poet whose identification of love as the one disease that not even skilled physicians can effectively treat resonates definitively in the poetry of his successors (on the close association between Gallus and *medicina amoris*, Tränkle 1960: 22-23; Ross 1975: 65-68 and 91; Knox 1986: 14-17; O'Hara 1993). In other words, Ovid positions himself to demythologize, both literally and figuratively, the very foundations of elegiac love. I argue in this talk, however, that even as he purports to undo the thrall of love, Ovid uses the rhetoric of *otium* to challenge the medical mastery he asserts (on *otium* in Roman thought, André 1966). Ovid's portrayal of *otium* as hostile to a cure, and vice versa, thus goes to the heart of what has recently been described as the "failure" of the *Remedia* (Conte 1989; Fulkerson 2004); Ovid's promises of recovery themselves betray the relentless human tendency to relapse into love.

My focus is on the passage in which Ovid, while recommending that his pupils stay busy, uses farming as an example of an activity that will keep them out of trouble—indeed, the activity *par excellence* for staying busy (*Rem. am.* 169-98). After all, what extra-urban activity could be better than farming, with its relentless schedule (and impeccable literary pedigree)? On the other hand, what could be less provocative, less likely to stir the flames of desire? The incongruity of Ovid's foray into the country lies in the first place in its generic "impurity," as it imports into elegy—or violates elegy's usual boundaries with—an explicit and assiduous emulation of themes and ideas not common to elegy, in which *otium* is generally so highly valued. In Ovid's rustic

escape, *otium* is explicitly banned (cf. *Rem. am.* 135-40); but can any poetry that purports to provide a cure for love by avoiding *otium* really succeed, at least if it is elegiac? In fact, Ovid himself soon demonstrates that it is impossible entirely to escape the lure of *otium*, even on the farm; and its lurking but persistent presence there insures that the proposed cure will eventually, and necessarily, self-destruct.

An examination of the dense intertextuality of this passage shows that the advice Ovid gives vividly rehearses the conflicts that lie at the heart of the farm's *secura quies*, and indeed of all of erotic elegy. While I concern myself primarily in this talk with Ovid's Virgilian intertextuality, I will suggest that Ovid uses specific references to Virgil as a form of "window reference" (Thomas 1986: 188): through the "window" provided by Virgil onto the literary past, Ovid reflects on and interrogates an entire literary tradition on the topic of *otium*, a tradition to which love's overwhelming power is so central. For all its therapeutic credentials, life on the farm is evidently unable to serve as an effective antidote for the inescapable and incurable disease of love.

Bibliography

- André, J.M. 1966. *L'otium dans la vie morale et intellectuelle romaine des origines à l'époque augustéenne*. Paris.
- Conte, G.B. 1989. "Love without Elegy: The *Remedia amoris* and the Logic of a Genre." *Poetics Today* 10: 441-69.
- Fulkerson, L. 2004. "Omnia vincit amor: Why the *Remedia* Fail." *CQ* 54: 211-23.
- Knox, P.E. 1986. *Ovid's Metamorphoses and the Traditions of Augustan Poetry*. Cambridge.

O'Hara, J.J. 1993. "Medicine for the Madness of Dido and Gallus: Tentative Suggestions on *Aeneid* 4." *Vergilius* 39: 12-24.

Ross, D.O. 1975. *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry: Gallus, Elegy and Rome*. Cambridge.

Thomas, R.F. 1986. "Virgil's *Georgics* and the Art of Reference." *HSCP* 90: 171-98.

Tränkle, H. 1960. *Die Sprachkunst des Properz und die Tradition der Lateinische Dichtersprach*.
Wiesbaden.