

Subaltern Women, Sexual Violence, and Trauma in Ovid's *Amores*

In Roman love elegy the *amator*, a male citizen poet, engages in *militia amoris* to win over the *docta puella*, whom he entreats with verse rather than money and gifts. In several elegies, the Ovidian *amator* uses force against two low-status women: the *meretrix* Corinna and her *ancilla* Cypassis. While other elegists hint at sexual violence (Tibullus 1.6, 1.10; Propertius 2.5), Ovid actually dramatizes the victim's immediate emotional reaction: she falls silent and shows physical symptoms of suffering and fear, such as trembling, paleness, and silence.

Burgess and Holmstrom (1974) identified a two-phase reaction in rape trauma syndrome: an acute phase of upheaval and a second phase, in which a woman reorganizes her life. In its depiction of victims of violence, Ovid's *Amores* display two categories of reactions in the acute phase: expressive and controlled. The expressive reaction is characterized by violent emotions—fear, anger, anxiety, and behaviors such as sobbing, smiling, restlessness, and tenseness (e.g., 1.7). In the controlled reaction, feelings are masked by a calm, composed affect (e.g., 2.8). Scholars (Burgess and Holmstrom, Sheffield, Hopper and Lisak) have found that all reactions are driven by fear of physical violence and of the possibility that the assault would result in death. Victims of sexual violence thus commonly fall silent during and after their assault, as a means of defense. Ovid's depiction of rape trauma in subaltern women dramatizes these first-stage responses.

In poem 1.7, the *amator* reacts to having struck Corinna. As he describes her reaction and pretends self-reproach, he emboldens himself, justifying his actions against his low-status girlfriend. Scholars have studied the objectification and voyeurism in this poem, highlighting the *amator's* pleasure in subjugating Corinna (Greene, Cahoon, Richlin). But the poem dramatizes and highlights conflicting perspectives: while the lover aestheticizes her injured body, he also

details the traumatic after-effects of violence: tears, fear, trembling, pallor, and lifeless body. Corinna is speechless with fear (*pavido est lingua retenta metu*, 20). Ovid underscores the relationship between fear and silence: Corinna's tongue is trapped in the middle of the line by both a noun and an adjective describing fear on either end of the main clause (*pavidus* and *metus*).

In 2.7 and 2.8, the *amator* reveals his sexual encounters with Cypassis. In 2.7, he indignantly deploys his high social status to defend against Corinna's charges that he has had sex with her *ancilla*, but in 2.8 he reveals that he has indeed had such relations (on slave-rape in Ovid, see James 1997). He tells Cypassis that his status gives him a right to her body (a principle echoed at *Ars* 1.397), threatening her and demanding sex from her. Cypassis blushes (*vidi te totis erubuisse genis*, 16) and silently refuses, showing fear. The speeches of 2.7-8 revive Cypassis' memory of the prior rapes and thus revives her trauma, a fact the *amator* acknowledges in accusing her of feigning new fears (*quid renuis fingisque novos, ingrata, timores*, 23). Her blush shows her shame; her silence, fear.

As *meretrix* and *ancilla*, Corinna and Cypassis cannot have female citizen modesty. For them, sex is an occupational and status hazard. They are subalterns but also sophisticates—the *amator* specifically calls Cypassis *non rustica* (2.8.3)—not *pudicae*, and would not be expected to show shock and emotional trauma from sex. The *amator* relies upon this social assumption when he takes pleasure in sexual violence, and he regularly implies that they are sexually eager and expert (1.7.29-30, 35-42; 2.8.1-4, 9-14). But Corinna's silence in 1.7 and Cypassis' unspoken fears in 2.8 reveal their powerlessness, particularly against an elite man. Their traumatized silence allows the *amator* to maintain control over both them and the sexual narrative—but it also indicates their victimization. These women are not playing a game of love:

their physical reactions display the emotional trauma of sexual violence. In these poems, Ovid reveals that victims from all social classes experience trauma from rape and sexualized violence.

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