

Of Dormice and Men: Women's Party Games at *Ars Amatoria* 3.749-69

Women are both hunters and prey in the erotic landscape of the *Ars Amatoria*. Depending on the choices they make their heavily constrained agency at *convivia* can net them a lover or catastrophe. This paper will treat the advice given women attending a party first through addressing the conventionality of the scene, then through its game theoretical implications.

As with other parts of Ovid's advice to women, the party section is obsessed with creating a clever amatory agent who can manipulate unwilling participants through exploitation of social codes. For example, the ugly are instructed to show up late so drink and night assist in cloaking their features, eat stylishly, and drink half as much as anyone else. Unlike other sections, though, 3.749-69 is particularly careful to warn women against category confusion if through acting naturally they scare their prey off, or become prey themselves. The paradigmatically beautiful drift from their paradigm status and lose their worth if they use their bodies without consideration of conventional behaviors. Paris would have thought his capture of Helen was stupid and would have hated her had she eaten with gusto (*Priamides Helenen avidae si spectet edentem,/ Oderit, et dicat 'stulta rapina mea est.'* 3.759-60) Whatever objective qualities a body in space has is enshrouded by layers of subjective cultural expectation; a face that otherwise could launch a thousand ships can't possibly do so with *garum* all over it.

Worse yet, deviating from expected behaviors runs the risk of an even more dangerous category confusion. Women who indulge in drink run the risk of being viewed as prostitutes (Gibson 2003), thereby opening themselves up to multiple rape (*concubitūs* 766) while awake and other disgusting but deserved (*digna* 766) horrors when asleep (765-69):

*Turpe iacens mulier multo madefacta Lyaeo:
Digna est concubitus quoslibet illa pati.*

*Nec somnis posita tutum succumbere mensa:
Per somnos fieri multa pudenda solent.*

A woman lying there, drenched in too much Lyaeian wine is a shameful thing.
It's fitting that she endure whatever beddings she gets.
And when the tables are put aside, it's not safe for sleeping
Many things that will bring shame are accustomed to occur during sleep.

The cagey female love-hunter must keep her wits about her lest she move from being an erotic game-player with agency and choice into being considered another object on the game board.

The advice Ovid gives accords with observations of game theoreticians to reveal that his systematic strategic thinking into the love game is deeper than heretofore considered (Myerowitz 1985, Volk 2006). Ovid's pupil reasons back from the dark *sphragis* of the party scene quoted above to select behaviors that maintain her ability to make the most possible moves and earn the best outcome. Showing up late allows her to maintain first mover status when she arrives, and the other players are starting handicapped. Dainty eating and sensible drinking are all part of a signaling game (Dodge 2012, de Mesquita 2010) that shows she isn't playing a one-and-done type game like a prostitute, but is open to a sequential game of continued romantic encounters as a proper paramour. This brief subsection of Book III of the *Ars Amatoria* restricts female actions from natural reactions in a broader world to the specific stylized movements suited to the amatory game world, diminishing threats to women's agency and person, and creating an ideal setting for his students to win in love.

Bibliography

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