

The Lover's Journey: Relationship as Itinerary in the *Ars Amatoria*

The *Ars Amatoria* is a poem about place as much as any of Ovid's other poetry, with the exception of the *Fasti*. More than just a didactic handbook about finding love, the *Ars Amatoria* is about the journey that a prospective lover must take in order to find a lover. In this paper, I argue that Ovid uses topographical, metaphorical, and mythological space to represent the changing relationship status of the prospective lover (his reader) as they embark on their journey to find love.

Early in the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid catalogues the best places in Rome for a prospective lover to hunt for a girlfriend. The locations around the city mentioned here (AA 1.67-170) correspond to the three stages of finding a girlfriend as Ovid articulates them: looking, finding, and starting the relationship. In the section on looking for a girlfriend, Ovid quickly mentions six locations (the porticoes of Pompey, Octavia, and Livia, the temple of Palatine Apollo, the temples of Isis, and the law courts) and two events (the festival of Adonis and the Jewish Sabbath) where one might look for love (AA 1.67-88). After the catalogue, Ovid moves onto the theaters (AA 1.89-134), which he reveals are actually the best places to find a girlfriend. In addition to watching the women at the theater, whom he describes as being like ants and bees, an *excursus* on the Rape of the Sabine Women seems to replace the moment in which the aspiring lover makes contact with his potential girlfriend. The final stage of the relationship, in which the lover has identified his potential girlfriend and begins the process of wooing her, takes place in the Circus and the Forum (AA 1.135-170), where the intermingling of the sexes at races and gladiatorial combat allows for physical contact. Ovid repeats many of these locations in a similar catalogue aimed at women in Book 3 (AA 3.385-396). There, the poet genders the

city, but without mapping its locations onto any sort of relationship, presumably because he has already done so in Book 1.

Just as the reader/lover moves through the poem (and city) gaining knowledge about love, Ovid himself uses metaphors of sailing to mark his own progress through the work. As Roy Gibson has observed, metaphors of sailing are used as structural markers with Book 3 to denote a beginning of the introductory (AA 3.99-100) and advanced (AA 3.499-500) sections of the book.

And so, by using spatial movement as a marker of how much has been learned and how much has been taught, Ovid is able to physically move the reader through both the poem and the city of Rome. But as the poet reminds his reader at the beginning of Book 2, through the story of Daedalus and Icarus (AA 2.21-96), getting from one place to another is far from guaranteed, unless, of course, Ovid's instructions are followed exactly.

Bibliography

Gibson, R. K. (ed.) 2003. *Ovid: Ars Amatoria Book 3*. Cambridge.