

Metamorphosis of the Muse: Role Reversal of the Poet-Lover in *Amores* 1.1

Amores 1.1 is a problematic programmatic poem because it differs from the elegiac tradition. No *puella* is named nor does the poet-lover claim to be in love, and Ovid makes no claim that he cannot write epic poetry (McKeown 1989). In an effort to understand the poem, scholars compare *Amores* 1.1 to Propertius 2.1 (Neumann 1919) and 3.3 (Morgan 1977). Most recently, *Amores* 1.1 has been interpreted as a literary criticism of Prop. 1.1, in which *Amores* 1.1 is seen “to set out explicitly a literary programme which responds to an implicit programme in the first poem of Propertius’ *Monobiblos*” (Keith 1992). Although the general consensus remains that *Amores* 1.1 is a “flippant introduction to an essentially trivial collection” (Keith 1992), the poem can be interpreted to show that it is a vital poem to understanding the collection because Ovid has the *persona* of the poet-lover take on a reversal of roles from that in Propertius 3.3. The Ovidian poet-lover takes on the active role of the god rather than the passive role of the poet-lover, and the poet-lover, with the authority and power of a god, has the Muse at the end of the poem undergo a metamorphosis resulting in an Elegiac-Epic Muse. This Elegiac-Epic Muse is representative of the type of elegiac love poetry that the poet-lover will write as well as representative of the abilities of the poet himself, and also places control of the genre in the hands of Ovid rather than a patron god.

Within the Callimachean tradition, the poet takes on a passive role in the form of a *recusatio* concerning what type of poetry he will write instead of an active role. In Prop. 3.3, Propertius never speaks, and the action is controlled by first Apollo and then the Muse Calliope in defining the genre of poetry to be written. In *Amores* 1.1, however, the Ovidian poet-lover takes on the active speaking role of the god by questioning why Cupid has chosen to intervene in his writing of epic poetry (ll. 5-20). Through his interrogation of Cupid, the Ovidian poet-lover brings himself to the place where Cupid can transform him into a love poet without any persuasion or intervention needed by the deity. Unlike Apollo in Propertius 3.3, Cupid serves merely as the symbolic instrument to give the poet-lover the inspiration to write elegiac love poetry because the Ovidian poet-lover has already taken on the active role of the god to persuade himself to write elegiac poetry.

Because the poet-lover has taken on the role of a god, he is able to create the type of Muse he calls upon for his own type of elegiac poetry. In *Amores* 1.1, all commentators state that the Muse at the end of the poem (ll.29-30) is Erato, the muse of Elegiac Poetry (McKeown 1989, Keith 1992), unlike the Muse Calliope who transforms Propertius into an elegiac poet in Prop. 3.3 by giving him a drink from the waters of Philetas, which is his invocation of his Muse, although in a passive and non-vocalized manner. However, based on the natural sequence of events in the poem (the initial writing of Epic and the lack of invoking a new Muse) as well as the active role of the god taken on by the poet-lover, the Epic Muse present from when the poet-lover started to write epic at the beginning of *Amores* 1.1 is transformed into an Elegiac-Epic Muse when the poet-lover tells her to crown herself with myrtle. This metamorphosis of the Muse is a symbolic representation of the synthesis of the epic and elegiac love genres that Ovid achieves with his own work in the *Amores*.

Amores 1.1 is a pivotal first poem because Ovid has his poet-lover take on the non-conventional roles that his elegiac predecessors refrained from undertaking because of the constraints of elegiac poetry. Ovid, however, by assuming the role of a god and transforming his Muse to suit his poetry in *Amores* 1.1 shows that his elegiac poetry will be innovative as well as conforming to the genre. He places his elegiac work on the same level as epic and shows himself to be the type of poet that could easily progress through the genres of elegy, tragedy, and epic.