Ovid, Death
and Transfiguration

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Contents

Intertextuality, Parody, and the Immortality of Poetry: Petronius and Ovid

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Ovid's claim to immortality is a recurrent theme in his poetry. In the last poem of the first book of the *Amores* (1.15), Ovid exploits the traditional features of the literary sphragis and contrasts his own way of life as a poet with that of his detractors, who are infected by envy (*livor edax*),[1] by offering a catalogue of poets who have achieved world-wide immortal fame.[2] Ovid's assertion of immortality is reaffirmed in the epilogue to the *Metamorphoses* (15.871–879), a sophisticated and elegant closure to the monumental epic poem which recounts stories of metamorphosis and transforms "the world of myth, by imparting plausibility to the fantastic or incredible, into a parable of the human condition."[3] It is worth quoting Ovid's passage (15.871–879):

> Iamque opus exegi, quod nec Iovis ira nec ignis
> nec poterit ferrum neque edax abolere vetustas.
> cum volet, illa dies, quae nil nisi corporis huius
> ius habet, incerti spatium mihi finiat aevi;
> parte tamen meliore mei super alta perennis
> astra ferar, nomenque erit indelebile nostrum;
> quaque patet domitis Romana potentia terris
> ore legar populi, perque omnia saecula fama
> (si quid habent veri vatum presagia) vivam.

> And now my work is done, which neither the wrath of Jove, nor fire, nor sword, nor the gnawing tooth of time shall ever be able to undo. When it will, let that day come which has no power save over this mortal frame, and end the span of my uncertain years. Still, in my better part I shall

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1 For the expression *livor edax* in *Rem.* 389 and Ovid's treatment of the motif of envy (also in *Trist.* 4.10.123 and *Pont.* 4.16.47), in the footsteps of Horace, see McKeown 1989, 389–390.

2 For a commentary on the elegy, see McKeown 1989, 387–421. A catalogue of contemporary Latin poets occurs later in Ov. *Pont.* 4.16; see now Leimmle 2021.

3 Kenney 2009, 145.

be borne immortal far beyond the lofty stars and I shall have an undying name. Wherever Rome's power extends over the conquered world, I shall be read in the mouth of the people, and, if the prophecies of bards have any truth, through all the ages shall I live in fame.[4]

The epilogue patently echoes Horace's closural poem *Odes* 3.30.[5] In addition to close verbal correspondences,[6] Horace and Ovid share the metaphor of architecture, the equation of the *monumenta* erected by Augustus to commemorate his political achievements with the *monumentum* of poetry, destined to ensure the posthumous, immortal fame of the poet. At the end of his long literary career, Ovid reasserts the eternal value of poetry and establishes himself as a "living presence," a textual entity whose survival and transformation in pure voice are enacted by his elegiac and epic work.[7] Ovid's last words in the *Metamorphoses* duplicate the sphragis of *Am.* 1.15[8] and point to the unity of his textual *corpus*.[9] More significantly, in the final *vivam* the poet celebrates his own apotheosis and predicts his own *post mortem* "metamorphosis" into a canonical elegiac text. As Hardie puts it, Ovid's living glory "is identical with the life-breath itself of the poet; the life is the text, and so, in terms of the Horatian model of poem as tomb, the poet's monument is his life, a tomb that contains the poet's presence in its full and eternal vitality."[10]

As is to be expected, Ovid's textual *corpus* is abundant in comments on fame and poetic immortality, especially in the elegies from exile. Hinds has called attention to the exile poetry's rewriting of the final prediction of immortality in the last book of the *Metamorphoses*, focusing on the inaugural elegy from exile, *Tr.* 1.1, as illustrative of the Ovidian meditation about time and his own fortune during relegation.[11] In *Tr.* 3.3.77–80 the elegist, *tenerorum lusor amorum*, rounds off his own epitaph by prophesying immortality for his erotic poems, which, even if a source of sorrow and pain, will be remembered over time and eventu-

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4   I cite the Latin text and English translation of the *Metamorphoses* from Miller 1984 (with some variations).

5   Hardie 2015, 617–622. On Horace and Ovid, see also Sharrock 2005, 58–59 (and in general on the connections between Horace's *Ars Poetica* and Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*); Tarrant 2007, 277–278. On the relationship between Ovid's erotodidactic and Horace, see Toohey 1996, 146–173.

6   Hardie 2015, 617. *Hoc opus exegi* recurs also in *Rem.* 811.

7   Hardie 2002, 94.

8   On Ovid's narrative of poetic immortality as central to the dominant plot of the *Amores*, see Boyd 1997, 165–202.

9   Korenjak 2004.

10   Hardie 2002, 96.

11   Hinds 1999. See also Kyriakidis 2013 (on Ovid's concern about the fate of his *Metamorphoses* and *Tr.* 1.7).

ally bring perennial fame to their author (*nomen et tempora longa*, "name and a long enduring life"). Again, reformulating words and themes of *Am.* 1.15[12] and the closing lines of *Met.* 15, Ovid links his fame to the eternal power of Rome in *Tr.* 3.7.49–52, a pathetic letter addressed to the female poet Perilla, a *scripta puella* who "represents the covert survival of Ovid's erotic program in defiance of Augustus."[13]

The transfiguration of Ovid into a canonical elegiac poet implies the separation of body and text. *Ore legar populi* (literally: "I shall be read in/by the mouth of the people," *Met.* 15.878): the poet transforms himself into an *auctor* and a poetic word through a figurative metamorphosis of his mortal body into an immortal textual body. As Farrell has noted, in the epilogue to the Ovidian epic we contemplate "an elevated afterlife as pure voice." By virtue of this transformation "both the author and his poem attain a more exalted state of disembodied immortality as voice and song, respectively."[14] Naturally, the reduction of the poet to pure abstraction, textual entity and elegiac voice, constitutes the first stage in the process of textual reception. Reading is central to the survival of Ovid as *auctor* and as text, as the model par excellence of love elegy. Yet the secret of poetic immortality is in his readers' continual refashioning and polymorphic manipulation of Ovid's elegiac (and epic) topics and language. In the hands of cultured readers, refined "readers-addressees" and "readers-interpreters" (to reformulate Conte's words),[15] Ovid is reworked, imitated and then immortalized as elegiac voice.

The reader-imitator responds to his text-exemplar by interpreting and replicating motifs, forms and stylistic features of the model. In entering into a virtual dialogue with his model, he deciphers (and questions) the message conveyed by the text, transmits the paradigms of the genre and, at the same time, reacts empathically to the system of values that are peculiar to the elegiac discourse. The ideal reader does not only recognize and reproduce the distinctive features of the didactic erotic elegy of the *Ars* and *Remedia* or the aetiological calendar of the *Fasti*. He also revitalizes and makes eternal the elegiac message. He consecrates his model as a canonical elegiac author. To resume the celebrated words of Ennius' epitaph, Ovid *volitat vivos per ora virum* ("flies, living, through the mouths of men") and engages his posthumous readers in propagating his

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12   Cf. also *Am.* 3.15.19–20.

13   Ingleheart 2012, 228 (for Perilla as a poetic construct which responds to other elegiac depictions of women). On poetic immortality in exile poems cf. also *Tr.* 1.6.35–36; 4.9.15–26; 4.10.121–131; 4.16.1–4; 5.14.5–6.

14   Farrell 1999, 139.

15   Conte 1994. See also Conte 1986.

words. The Ovidian reader is charged with transmitting an image of the poet as the personification of elegy.

Intertextuality is a keyword in this process of textual canonization. It is not my intention to readdress intertextuality in Roman poetry, a topic which has received due attention in the last decades.[16] Modern scholarship has also successfully concentrated on the intertextual nexus between Ovid's elegiacs and epic and their literary antecedents.[17] What I want to draw attention to here is the strict interrelationship between intertextuality and transformation or manipulation of the source-text. Re-read, dissected, manipulated and re-adapted to a different context, the text quoted or alluded to is constantly transformed and revitalized in varying forms and genres. In other terms, the text is transfigured by intertextuality.

The allusive art assumes the reader is an active interpreter of the cognitive process involved in reading.[18] Within a virtual dialogue between model, text and reader, regulated by poetic memory, the transformation of the source-text into new literary forms draws on the manipulation and exploitation of *topoi*, stereotyped expressions, and stylistic patterns peculiar to the genre of the imitated text. Reading becomes then an act of textual regeneration. As such, it is also an act of love. The poet preserves his memory through allusion as a form of love that relates the author and his reader-imitator. In dealing with later receptions of the *Ars*, Casali notes that the Ovidian book aspires to *teach* love and *be* loved at the same time.[19]

Parody is an integral part of the process of textual reconstruction and transformation. In the footsteps of Hutcheon[20] and Genette,[21] Lowell remarks that "parody is a convenient term for comic intertextuality, or the distortion of an earlier text, or source text, in a humorous fashion."[22] Within the play of parody, the poet-imitator exploits and ridicules motifs and style of the source-text, distorted and regenerated in different, humorous forms.[23] Relying on his readers' literary memory, the parodist stimulates recognition of the source-text and its deformed paradigms. The mechanisms of comic intertextuality transfigure the source-text, to be later received in revitalized, though distorted, forms. In individuating (and appreciating) the varying degrees of comic transgression, the

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16   Hinds 1998; Edmunds 2001.
17   Barchiesi 2001; see also Casali 2009.
18   Conte-Barchiesi 1989.
19   Casali 2005, 25.
20   Hutcheon 1985.
21   Genette 1997.
22   Lowell 2001.
23   Genette 1997, 88–89.

reader laughs at the parodic reversal of the model and finds pleasure in observing the potentialities of recreation of the intertext in satirical forms. Literary and poetic memory rests then on the deterioration of the original message of the source-text codified in easily recognizable paradigms yet susceptible to ironic inversion. Parody generates a new text, or, rather, a text manipulating the style and topic of the imitated model with humorous effect.[24]

Petronius' narrative may well be regarded as a limpid example of parodic intertextuality.[25] The *Satyrica* provide us with a sophisticated texture of literary allusions to multiple generic categories, manipulated and regenerated by destructive and inventive parody. Modern scholarship has long concentrated on the extraordinary vitality of the *arbiter elegantiae* in satirizing and refashioning the source-text, whose authoritative position is challenged by the very act of textual transgression. Scholars have also focused on the readers' engagement in the process of parodic intertextuality within the polyphonic narrative of the *Satyrica*. Parodic play assumes a competent, literate reader as its ideal recipient. Petronius' parody, to be effective, demands even higher literary sensitivity and competence from a cultured readership. Conte correctly points to Petronius' strategy of irony as an alternative reading that requires a higher degree of acculturation to transform itself into a powerful instrument of textual regeneration.[26]

Ovid's erotic elegy offers a unique richness of love themes to Petronius' elegant parody and his ironical construction of troubled sexual relationships between deluded lovers.[27] As a genre encompassing various forms and patterns, from erotodidactic to the elegy of lamentation, Ovid's versatile love elegy serves as a potent source for parody in the armory of the satirist Petronius.[28] This paper re-examines a significant case of parodic intertextuality in the Petronian novel based on a mélange of Ovidian texts, that is, the notorious episode of Encolpius-Polyaenus' impotence, which constitutes an important part of the surviving Crotonian section of the narrative (124.2–141). In particular, it focuses on the epistolary exchange between Circe, the libidinous mistress, and Polienus, the despairing, inept elegiac *miles* penalized by divine persecution with sexual enervation (129–130). It argues that Petronius' creation centers on the derisory manipulation of both the single and double *Heroides*. A fresh read-

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24   Genette 1997, 90.

25   For intertextuality in the Roman novel, see Morgan and Harrison 2008.

26   Conte 1997, 41–42.

27   On Ovid in Petronius, see Currie 1989; Baldwin 1992. See also Sullivan 1968, 189–190.

28   On parody in Petronius, see in general Connors 1998, 22–24. For parody of elegy, see Hallett 2003.

ing of the Petronian episode not only reveals an Ovidian literary substrate, a sophisticated system of allusions to the world of elegant, witty loves of the elegiac poet. It also allows for an appreciation of Petronius' light-hearted *jeu d'esprit*, his refined and veiled parodic play that rests on the deconstruction of the memorable figures of certain Ovidian lovers.

Ovid, the lover-poet, eager to be read, cited and loved, knows the rules of parodic intertextuality. He is conscious that his poetic immortality may depend on the ironic distortion of his textual body. Petronius cooperates with his model in perverting the paradigms of conventional love elegy. Most notably, his parody actively participates in perpetuating the perennial fame of Ovid's elegiac poetry. Intertextuality is a dominant feature of the episode of the licentious love of Circes and Encolpius-Polyaenus.[29] The Odyssean paradigm, parodied by the replacement of the name Encolpius with the pseudonym Polyaenus and the combination of erotic failure, sexual impotence, with the tragic destiny of a hero victimized by the god's wrath (much as Poseidon persecuted Odysseus, Priapus harasses Encolpius),[30] blends into a generic mix of intertextual references to Ovid's elegiac love.

Starting from the initial monologue of Circe's maid, in which echoes from Ovid's little handbook of cosmetics, the *Medicamina faciei femineae* (*Sat.* 126.2),[31] combine with allusions to the typical elegiac motif of *eros* as prostitution, a topic touched upon by both Propertius and Ovid,[32] Petronius' intertextual construction of his amorous heroes and his use of stock characters from erotic elegy is patently indebted to Ovidian elegiac discourse.[33] As Dimundo makes clear, the description of Circe's astonishing beauty, a traditional *laudatio vetustatis* which is rhetorically opened up by the speaker's usual admission of inability to duly celebrate the physical virtues of the female personage (126.14 *nulla vox est quae formam eius possit comprehendere ...*), reminds us of the representation of Diana in *Met.* 1.495–502.[34] Analogously, the image of the disappointed mistress, the libidinous *femme fatale* who takes on the role of the "goddess-sorceress" exacting revenge on the defiant male lovers, has been seen as the result of an intertextual contamination between the Homeric intertext and Ovid's *Fasti*.[35]

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29   For intertextuality in the Petronian episode, see Pacchieni 1976; Fedeli 1988; Conte 1997, 93–105; Dimundo 1998; 2007.

30   Conte 1997, 93–95. See also Rimmel 2002, 148. For parody of the *Odyssey* in Petronius, see McDermott 1983.

31   Dimundo 1998.

32   Ov. *Am.* 1.10.29–34; 42; Prop. 1.2.4.

33   Antoniadis 2013.

34   Dimundo 1998, 72–74.

35   Wesolowska 2014.

Again, if Chrysis acts as an Ovidian *praeceptrix amoris*, displaying knowl-edge of erotic *lusus* (one might be tempted to say that she has good familiar-ity with Ovid's didactic poetry),[36] the poem about sexual impotence, *Am.* 3.7, "Ovid's manly poem on his bedtime failure with Corinna,"[37] serves as signifi-cant source-text of Encolpius' lamentation against his *inermis* and silent male member.[38] Corinna's anxiety in Ovid's poem, a prelude to the revelation that the lover's sexual failure stems from Circe's magic philtres (*"Quid me ludis?" ait, "quis te, male sane, iubebat / invitum nostro ponere membra toro? / aut te traiectis Aeaea venefica lanis / devovet, aut alio lassus amore venis,"* "Why do you insult me? Are you out of your mind? Who asked you to come to bed if you are not in the mood? Either some practitioner of Circe's spells has been piercing a woollen figure of you and has you bewitched or you have come here exhausted from love-making elsewhere," *Am.* 3.7.77–80),[39] is paralleled by the Petronian mistress' disappointment with Polyaenus' sexual inability, a senti-ment of displeasure and anger manifested by a sequence of pathetic, incessant questions about her physical appearance (128.1–3).[40] Elaborating on the Ovid-ian failure of the lover-poet,[41] Petronius equates sexual impotence with the failure of the elegiac world and calls attention to the humiliation of the ele-giac *miles*, a weaponless and inadequate love soldier,[42] reversing the traditional paradigms of the genre in parodied and degraded terms.[43]

In the invective (in sotadean meters) against his penis (132.7), an epic par-ody in Vergilian terms that reminds us of Ovid hurling abuse at the *pars pessima nostri* in *Am.* 3.7.69–72,[44] Encolpius-Polyaenus appears as an "aspiring but alto-gether inadequate elegiac lover, both physically and literarily."[45] As has been observed, Polyaenus responds to Ovid, the lover poet of the *Amores*, "in the

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36   Dimundo 1998.

37   Rimell 2002, 118. For Ovid's poem and Petronius, see Pacchieni 1976; Dimundo 2007; important also Holzberg 2009; Hallett 2012; Bater 2016. For a metaliterary analysis of Ovid's elegy, see Sharrock 1995.

38   Fedeli 1989 (on the relationship between Encolpius' silent member and Dido's silence in Verg. *Aen.* 6.469–471).

39   English translation of Ovid's *Amores*: Showerman 1914. See Rimmell 2002, 148 for the asso-ciation of Circean magic with femaleness in elegy.

40   Courtney 2001, 194–196: "Circe's opening tricolon of indignant questions with anaphora of *numquid* is modelled on Ovid's opening with a tricolon and anaphora of *at*."

41   McMahon 1998, 189–192 on the self-deprecating tone of irony that characterizes Ovid's treatment of his own sexual failure in *Amores* 3.7.

42   Schmeling 1994–1995.

43   Dimundo 2007.

44   Bettini 1982.

45   Hallett 2012, 221.

realms of both phallic and literary performance, much as Ovid responds in that poem to Catullus 32 and 50, but as unsuccessfully in his competitive efforts."[46] In contrast to Ovid, Polyaenus is unable to recover from impotence; he is forced to confess his own powerlessness as elegiac lover and to endure thereby humiliation from the disappointed noble mistress. As much as Polyaenus' blameworthy penis does not speak and remains silent in painful pangs of guilt, in a sort of comical refashioning of Dido's scornful silent gaze at her mendacious lover, Petronius' hero-narrator admits to his inadequacy and inferiority to the Ovidian model of the elegiac *miles*.

But there is more. The sophisticated intertextual play between Ovid's world of love and Petronius' ironical account of Encolpius' *defaillance* becomes more evident in the epistolary exchange between the two frustrated lovers (through Chrysis' mediation, *Sat.* 129.3–130) and the *codicilli* in prosaic language that have illustrious antecedents in Greek romance, Plautus' comedy, and Latin love elegy.[47] As usual, Petronius' experimental prose draws on a multiplicity of literary models, amalgamated and regenerated in distorted forms. Yet Circe and Polyaenus' love correspondence appears to be specifically indebted to the Ovidian collection of love letters imagined as written by female heroines to their deceitful male lovers, the *Heroides*, and in particular the "double letters" (here in inverted order, with the female letter preceding the male reply). The initial lines of Circe's epistle reverse the classic lament of the abandoned woman in paradoxical terms (129.2):

> Cubiculum autem meum Chrysis intravit, codicillosque mihi dominae suae reddidit, in quibus haec erant scripta: "Circe Polyaeno salutem. Si libidinosa essem, quererer decepta; nunc etiam languori tuo gratias ago. In umbra voluptatis diutius lusi. Quid tamen agas quaero, et an tuis pedibus perveneris domum; negant enim medici sine nervis homines ambulare posse. Narrabo tibi, adulescens, paralysin cave. Numquam ego aegrum tam magno periculo vidi: medius fidius iam peristi. Quod si idem frigus genua manusque temptaverit tuas, licet ad tubicines mittas. Quid ergo est? Etiam si gravem iniuriam accepi, homini tamen misero non invideo medicinam. Si vis sanus esse, Gitonem roga. Recipies, inquam, nervos tuos, si triduo sine fratre dormieris. Nam quod ad me attinet, non timeo ne quis inveniatur cui minus placeam. Nec speculum mihi nec fama mentitur. Vale, si potes."

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46   Hallett 2012, 222.

47   Cf. Propertius 4.3; Ov. *Am.* 1.11 and 1.12.

Chrysis made her way into my room, and handed me a letter from her mistress, which read as follows: "Dear Polyaenus, if I were the randy sort, I would complain that you had let me down. But as things stand, I am thankful for your lack of urgency. For too long I have sported in pleasure's shadow. I am writing to enquire about your health, and to ask whether you were able to arrive home on your own two feet. Doctors say that people who lose their sexual powers are unable to walk. I warn you, young man: you may become a paralytic. No sick person I have ever set eyes on is in such grave danger. I swear that already you are as good as dead. If the same chill gets to your knees and hands, you can send for the funeral-pipers. So what must you do? Though you have mortally insulted me, when a man is down I do not begrudge him the remedy. If you wish to get better, you must beg Giton for a break. If you sleep for three days without him, you will recover your strength. As for myself, I have no fear of encountering any man who will find me less attractive than you do. After all, my mirror and my reputation do not lie. Keep fit, if you can."[48]

Queror and *decipio*, peculiar to the rhetorical language of lamentation and deceit, are the distinctive marks of the Ovidian texture of Petronius' passage. In the *Heroides* the heroine laments abandonment by her male lover. The female monologue (a written letter expecting no reply from the male) gives voice to physical and mental pain over the loss of love (in Catullan terms). The Ovidian female writer personifies love's deceit: Phyllis' pathetic reflection on her condition as abandoned woman (*sum decepta tuis et amans et femina verbis*, "I was deceived by your words—I, who loved and was a woman," *Her.* 2.65)[49] bears a universal message of sorrow and fear.[50] Petronius' parody substitutes abandonment and loneliness with the lover's sexual impotence as the basis for Circe's letter. The deceived female lover complains about her male lover's sexual failure. Breaking the rules of erotic love represents an unacceptable physical and moral violation. In some sense, Polyaenus' *paralysis*, the death of his penis, may symbolize the end of elegy, the annihilation of the characteristics of a sexual relationship, which are at the very heart of Ovid's notion of elegiac love.

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48   English translation of Petronius: Walsh 1997.
49   English translation of Ovid's *Heroides*: Showerman 1914.
50   On the Ovidian language of the *Heroides*, see in general Fulkerson 2005; also Landolfi 2000.

The opening words of Helen's reply to Paris in *Heroides* 17.1–4 (*Nunc oculos tua cum violarit epistula nostros, / non rescribendi gloria visa levis. / Ausus es hospitii temerati advena sacris / legitimam nuptae sollicitare fidem!* "Now that you letter has profaned my eyes, the glory of writing no reply has seemed to me but slight. A stranger, you have dared to violate the sacred pledge of hospitality, and tamper with the faith of a faithful wife") may help to clarify Petronius' intertextual parody. Helen vindicates herself as a virtuous and chaste woman (*proba et rustica*): her purity has been violated by Paris' words of seduction. Notably, Helen paradoxically blames her lover for writing a love letter and profaning her *legitima fides*. If she had not read his erotic words, Helen says, she would certainly have preserved her chastity. To Helen's eyes, writing about love is the first act of seduction and deceit. The Petronian character, Circe, is the opposite of Helen, the personification of purity violated by the power of erotic words. Circe, a not *libidinosa* noble woman, pretends not to feel cheated, ascribing this to her own absence of sexual appetite. Whereas Paris' outrageous letter has transformed Helen into a libidinous woman, Polyaenus' silent male member has not offended Circe's sense of rectitude. The disappointed mistress apparently holds no anger and resentment at her lover's sexual failure. Ironically, Polyaenus' impotence has put no pressure on Circe, who has amused herself long with what she terms "the shadow of pleasure" (*in umbra voluptatis diutius lusi*). Again, Circe's prolonged voluptuous pleasure contrasts with Helen's pleasure and joy at having preserved her reputation and fame for such a long time (*Her.* 17.17–18 *Fama tamen clara est, et adhuc sine crimine lusi, / et laudem de me nullus adulter habet*, "My good name is nevertheless clear, and thus far I lived without reproach, and no false lover makes his boast of me"),[51] an opposition which relies on the sophisticated manipulation of *ludo*, the verb crucial to the activity of the stereotyped elegiac lover. In other words, Circe, insulted and humiliated by her lover's sexual impotence, reworks and refashions the character of Helen, the Ovidian heroine insulted and humiliated by the *logos* of seduction. Yet both maintain a peculiarity of the elegiac *domina*: their beauty and attractiveness, a potentially life-long guarantee of future libertine loves and occasions for male jealousy (*Sat.* 129.4 *Nam quod ad me attinet, non timeo ne quis inveniatur cui minus placeam. Nec speculum mihi nec fama mentitur*, "As for myself, I have no fear of encountering any man who will find me less attractive than you do. After all, my mirror and my reputation do not lie"; *Her.* 17.167–174 *Fama quoque est oneri; nam quo constantius ore / laudamur vestro, iustius ille timet ... De facie metuit, vitae confidit, et illum / securum pro-*

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51   English translation of the *Heroides*: Showerman 1914.

bitas, forma timere facit, "My fame, too, is a burden to me; for, the more, you men persist in your praise of me, the more justly does he fear … My face makes him fearful, my life makes him sure; he feels secure in my virtue, my charms rouse his fear").[52]

Similarly, as much as Circe reformulates words and features of the Ovidian Helen satirizing the classic bipolarity *libido-pudicitia*, Encolpius-Polyaenus appears to be a parodic imitation and transfiguration of the inept elegiac lover, Paris, prone to accept any form of humiliation in order to obtain love. Forced to reply, in seductive and gratulatory terms, to Circe's complaint (*convicium*, 129.5),[53] Petronius' impotent hero (who has attentively read, *perlegit*, his lover's words)[54] apologizes for his behavior and offers words of reconciliation (130.1–2):

> Polyaenos Circae salutem. Fateor me, domina, saepe peccasse; nam et homo sum et adhuc iuvenis. Numquam tamen ante hunc diem usque ad mortem deliqui. Habes confitentem reum; quicquid iusseris, merui. Proditionem feci, hominem occidi, templum violavi; in haec facinora quaere supplicium. Sive occidere placet, ferro meo venio; sive verberibus contenta es, curro nudus ad dominam. Illud unum memento, non me, sed instrumenta peccasse. Paratus miles arma non habui. Quis hoc turbaverit nescio. Forsitan animus antecessit corporis moram, forsitan dum

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52 On this *topos* in the *Heroides*, see Dimundo 2007. For jealousy in love elegy, see Caston 2012.

53 *Ut intellexit Chrysis perlegisse me totum convicium:* "Solent," inquit, "haec fieri, et praecipue in hac civitate, in qua mulieres etiam lunam deducunt … Itaque huius quoque rei cura agetur. Rescribe modo blandius dominae, animumque eius candida humanitate restitue. Verum enim fatendum est. Ex qua hora iniuriam accepit, apud se non est." Libenter quidem parvi ancillae, verbaque codicillis talia imposui* ("When Chrysis saw that I had reached the end of this reproving letter, she said: 'Yours is a common state of affairs, and especially in this town, where women can even draw down the moon from the sky. So a remedy will be devised for your difficulty, as for the others. Merely reply to my mistress with some flattery; restore her spirits with ingenuous kindness. I have to say that she has not been herself since she was subjected to your affront.' I obeyed the maid with alacrity, and put pen to paper like this").

54 *Perlegere* occurs also in *Her.* 4.3 (Phaedra: *perlege, quodcumque est: quid epistula lecta nocebit,* "Read to the end, whatever is here contained—what shall reading of a letter harm?"); 5.1–2 (Oenone: *Perlegis? An coniunx prohibet nova? Perlege; non est / ista Mycenaea littera facta manu,* "Will you read my letter through? Or does your new wife forbid? Read—this is no letter writ by Mycenaean hand"); 20.3–4 (Acontius to Cydippe: *Perlege! Discedat sic corpore languor ab isto, / quod meus est ulla parte dolere dolor,* "Read to the end, and so may the languor leave that body of yours; that it feel pain in any part is pain to me").

omnia concupisco, voluptatem tempore consumpsi. Non invenio, quod feci. Paralysin tamen cavere iubes: tamquam iam maior fieri possit, quae abstulit mihi per quod etiam te habere potui. Summa tamen excusationis meae haec est: placebo tibi, si me culpam emendare permiseris.

Dear Circe, I confess, dear lady, my frequent faults, for after all I am human, and still in my youth. But never before this day has my wrongdoing incurred death. I admit my guilt to you, and deserve whatever punishment you impose. I am a traitor, a murderer, one who has profaned your shrine; devise a penalty for these crimes. If your verdict is to be execution, I shall come to you with my sword; if you are satisfied with a whipping, I shall hasten to my mistress unclothed. Only remember that the fault lay not in my person, but in my equipment. I myself was ready to campaign, but was bereft of arms. Who was responsible for this debacle, I do not know. Perhaps my body was dilatory, and my desire outstripped it. Perhaps my longing for complete fulfilment caused me to wait too long, and so exhausted the pleasure—I cannot account for what happened. You bid me beware of the onset of paralysis—as if the malady which robbed me of the possibility of possessing you could intensify! This is the burden of my apology. If you will allow me to expiate my guilt, I will render you satisfaction.

The female lament of the *Heroides* is totally reversed by Polyaenus' response to Circe's invective. The male letter turns out to be a conciliatory piece of writing, a reflection of the writer's *candida humanitas*. By writing, the male hero attempts erotic reconciliation and rehabilitates himself as a victim of his guilty male member. And also by writing, the deceived woman, furious at her lover's insulting behavior, returns to a state of serenity, as a prelude to future successful sexual activities.

Polyaenus, an inept elegiac *miles*, has fought his erotic battle without weapons. He admits he has deserved (*merui*) punishment. Again, reformulating a typical elegiac motif, he predicts (and envisages) his future corporal punishment. In contrast to the *decepta puella* of the *Heroides*, who foresees her death as the end of all suffering, Polyaenus interprets his heroic *mors* as a benefit, a form of redemption of the *facinus* committed by his failed member. Polyaenus' *excusatio* ends with the promise of future sexual intercourse. If pardoned, Polyaenus assures her that he will return to the world of love elegy.

In a similar way, Paris opens up his lascivious letter by confessing his love and asking kindness and benevolence from his female lover (*Her.* 16.11–14):

> Parce, precor, fasso, nec vultu cetera duro
>   Perlege, sed formae conveniente tuae.
> Iamdudum gratum est, quod epistula nostra recepta
>   Spem facit, hoc recipi me quoque posse modo.

> Spare me for confessing it, I beg you, and don't read the rest of this with a harsh expression, but rather one suited to your beauty. I've long been grateful; since the fact that you accepted my letter gave me hope that, by that token, you might also accept me.

Pleading guilty to love, the Ovidian elegiac *miles* seeks to seduce Helen by means of blandishment and flattering words. He constructs his letter as an exaggerated defense of dissolute and licentious love, legitimized by the laws of *eros*, at the same time showing great promise as a successful lover. Most significantly, he insists on his story as an *exemplum* of "true love," destined to be immortalized and replicated by generations of lovers.

Paris admits to his inability to overcome the fires of love and passion (*Her.* 16.10). Depicting himself as an inexpert young lover, he focuses on his own inability to resist love. Similarly, Encolpius-Polyaenus admits to his erotic failure: he portrays himself as an unskilled lover, unable to prevent the pitiable end of his love story. Both Paris and Polyaenus apologize for their failure as elegiac lovers.

The parodic reversal by Ovid of the paradigms of elegy is best illustrated in the final words of Helen, who urges her lover to "fight erotic battles" and return to the *militia amoris*, abandoning all pretense of being an epic soldier (*Her.* 17.253–256 *Apta magis Veneri, quam sunt tua corpora Marti: / bella gerant fortes, tu, Pari, semper ama! / Hectora, quem laudas, pro te pugnare iubeto; / militia est operis altera digna tuis*, "Your parts are better suited for Venus than for Mars. Be the waging of wars for the valiant: for you, Paris, ever to love. Bid Hector, whom you praise, go warring in your stead: 'tis the other campaigning befits your prowess"). Refashioning Ovid, Petronius ironically marks the end of elegy. His Encolpius-Polyaenus has completely failed in his attempt to act as a successful elegiac lover. The narrator of the *Satyrica*, the "hidden author," takes pleasure in celebrating the paradoxical "conclusion" of love elegy.

To sum up, Ovid, the lover-poet, has taught love, formulated and reestablished the canons of elegiac love, and, in particular, given voice to female lovers' lament. In the *Heroides*, love as physical and psychological illness, *erosnosos*, is crucial to the construction of the elegiac code. By reversing, manipulating and reworking the *persona* of the Ovidian elegiac lover, Petronius destabilizes and subverts the very nature of elegiac love. In the parodic re-visitation of

the Ovidian Helen in the character of a noble *femme fatale* Circe, we enter the realm of Petronian irony, intended to function as an instrument for the transformation of the source-text into degraded forms. If in the couple Paris-Helen Ovid memorializes the end of love as illness and reformulates the archetypical paradigms of love elegy as seduction and licentiousness, in the couple Polyaenus-Circe, Petronius celebrates the end of erotic elegy by commemorating the "death" of the male member. Petronius' literate reader certainly will catch on and enjoy the sense of literary intertextual parody. One might ask if Ovid, the pure "voice" of elegy, the poet eager to be read and loved, would have appreciated the sophisticated and elegant transformation by his parodist-imitator.

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