CHAPTER THREE

THE AMORES: THE INVENTION OF OVID

Barbara Weiden Boyd

Contemporary discussions of the *Amores* have tended to start from one of a number of premises or concerns, which may roughly be classed as of two general types: literary and historical. For convenience’s sake I shall use these two categories to provide a framework for the discussion that follows, although it will be readily apparent to my readers that the divisions thus implied are much tidier than what reality presents us with. My readers should also be acquainted with the critical perspective that would find even these categories misleading, since, as the argument goes, there can be no separation between the shape of poetic discourse and the political matrix in which it is modelled.¹ I shall return to this approach near the close of the chapter; meanwhile, I intend to look at how Ovid invents a poetic identity for himself in the *Amores*.

1. Literary Approaches

Under this heading I consider a variety of interrelated matters, chief among which are questions of literary influence, imitation, and parody; generic considerations (themes, motifs, topoi); Ovid’s style; and the structure and organization of the three books of *Amores*. Limitations of space suggest that the most efficient way to address all of these topics—as well as to suggest possible future directions—is to look carefully at one poem in the collection in which they all raise a particular concern or merit renewed consideration, and to use the insights thus gleaned to establish an interpretive context for other poems in the collection. I shall suggest in the following discussion that this poem, while not chosen entirely at random, does in many of its

¹ For the now-classic discussion, see Kennedy (1992).
particular features serve as a sort of window onto the *Amores* as a whole. Meanwhile, readers seeking an interpretation of the *Amores* that works from the general to the particular rather than the reverse are referred to McKeown’s invaluable edition with commentary of the *Amores* and his bibliography.

Even the numbering and possible division of the poem to which I shall now turn remain topics of lively discussion: Kenney’s *Amores* 2.9 and 2.9b are believed to be one elegy by many scholars, and are printed as such by McKeown. The inconclusiveness of the manuscript tradition and the character of the debate since Lucian Müller first proposed the division of 2.9 into two separate poems in 1856 are fully discussed by Damon, who proceeds to argue that a strong case for the division of 2.9 (as well as of 3.11) into two separate but paired elegies can be made by a comparison of these pairs with the uncontroversial pairs in the collection, 1.11–12, 2.7–8, and 2.13–14.

On the basis of her persuasive argument, I shall proceed to consider 2.9 and 2.9b as two separate but paired poems; it should be clear from the outset, however, that the consensus on this question, while growing, is not universal, and I can only hope that my discussion will help to support its plausibility.

The two poems may be summarized briefly as follows: in 2.9, the lover, addressing Cupid, asks the god why he will not leave the defeated lover alone. It is typical, after all, for love to abandon lovers once captured; why, then, does Cupid linger now (1–14)? After all, there are many men and women yet to be conquered by love; if Rome had been as sluggish as Cupid is now, it would never have gone on to conquer the world (15–18). Nature and custom both mandate that humans, animals, and even inanimate objects be allowed to retire once they have been worn out; the weary lover, too, deserves to be put out to pasture (19–24). With the opening of 2.9b, however, the lover does an abrupt about-face: the thought of living with-

---


3 Damon (1990) offers ample bibliography. On the relationship of 2.2 and 2.3, see also the cautious discussions of McKeown 3.28–29 and Booth (1991) 30–33; on the editor’s responsibility generally, see Heyworth (1995b).

4 The text referred to here is Kenney’s (1995); McKeown prints the pair as one continuous poem.