The Mole on the Face. Erotic Rhetoric in Ovid’s *Amores*

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Abstract: The paper examines the role of formal rhetoric in Ovid’s *Amores*. It points out that while in modern aesthetics the experience of art is dissociated from the experience of love and sex, the ancients had developed an erotic aesthetics that associated the two. Recalling the metaphor that describes a text as a body and the ancient view according to which rhetoric could make a text appealing just like cosmetics could a real body, it argues that Ovid uses formal rhetoric to inspire in his readers desire for his text. The appearance of *voluptas* in the epigram to *Amores* 1 confirms this view. It also suggests that the eroticization of Ovid’s text resonates within the contemporary political situation in Rome, where sex had become a matter of politics.

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There is no doubt, according to Richard Tarrant, “that Ovid’s poetry displays the techniques of formal rhetoric, and in particular the use of formally structured arguments as an instrument of persuasion, more often and more openly than that of any other Latin poet.”¹ At a time when classicists still wrote biographies of ancient authors, the openly rhetorical character of Ovid’s poetry was easily explained as a function of the rhetorical education Ovid had received in his youth. After all, Seneca the Elder reports in a well-known and vivid account that Ovid had studied with some of the most famous rhetoricians of his time, and refers in particular to his predilection for suasoriae. But today, I think this explanation is no longer persuasive, not just because classicists in general have ceased to believe that the events of a poet’s life can explain what he writes in his works. More specifically, and more importantly, Seneca the Elder’s account of Ovid’s rhetorical education actually contradicts the explanation for which it once served as evidence in at least two ways. Just after having mentioned Ovid’s training with the rhetoricians, Seneca singles out one aspect of the rhetorical design of Ovid’s poetry, namely his choice of words (Suasoriae 2.2). In this discussion, first of all, Seneca does not suggest that when Ovid started to compose poetry he simply continued to write in the same highly and overtly rhetorical way that he used to use when he still composed rhetorical school exercises. In fact, Seneca says exactly the opposite, namely that in his school exercises Ovid restrained his display of rhetoric, and started to use rhetoric more

¹ Tarrant (1995), 63.
licentiously only when he had turned to the composition of poetry. And secondly, and more importantly, Seneca discourages the assumption that the overt display of rhetoric in Ovid’s poetry is a somewhat mechanical consequence of his earlier rhetorical training, as if in his youth Ovid had been so immersed in rhetoric that he could not help but display it in the works he wrote as an adult. In fact, Seneca suggests again the opposite, citing an incident that he believes serves as evidence that Ovid was well aware of the extent to which he used rhetoric, and that he did so consciously. Seneca reports that some of Ovid’s friends once criticized his overt display of rhetoric. In his response Ovid suggested that they write down those of his verses they would most want him to remove from his poetry because they are too rhetorical, under the condition that in return they grant him to write down those that he would most want to retain. Noting that both Ovid and his friends wrote down the same two conspicuously rhetorical verses, one from the *Ars Amatoria* and one from the *Amores*, Seneca observes: “it is clear from this that the great man lacked not the judgment but the will to restrain the license of his poetry.” And he adds how Ovid justifies this rhetorical license: “he used sometimes to say that a face is the more beautiful for some mole.”

Seneca’s account does not so much suggest that the open display of rhetoric in the poetry Ovid wrote as an adult resulted from the education he had received in his youth; it instead suggests that it is used knowingly and on purpose. And in fact, the mole to which

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2 The full passage runs as follows (Suasoriae 2.2): *verbis minime licenter usus est nisi in carminibus, in quibus non ignoravit vitia sua sed amavit, manifestum potest esse, quod rogatus aliquando ab amicis suis ut tolleret tres versus, invicem petit ut ipse tres exciperet in quos nihil illis liceret. aequa lex visa est; scripserunt illi quos tolli vellent secreto, hic quos tutos esse vellet; in utrisque codicillis idem versus erant, ex quibus primum suisse narrabat Albinovanus Pedo, qui inter arbitros fuit:*

*semibovemque virum semivirumque bovem (= Ars Amatoria 2.24)*

*secundum:*

*et gelidum Borean egelidumque Notum (= Amores 2.11.10)*

*ex quo adparet summí ingenii viro non iudicium defuisse ad compescendam licentiam carminum suorum sed animum. aiebat enim dejectiorem faciem esse in qua aliquis naevos esset.*
Ovid referred is a sizeable one, for while Ovid’s choice of words is not everywhere as rhetorical as in the two verses he and his friends had singled out, his poetry displays other features of rhetoric, for instance the use of formally structured arguments as a means of persuasion, very regularly. But what is the purpose of this rhetoric? I think this question is particular suggestive and necessary in the case of the Amores. The reason for this is not that the ancients would have believed, like some of Ovid’s Romantic critics, that rhetoric in general has no place in love poetry, as if it hindered the poet’s sincere expression of his feelings and desires. The ancients did not share this Romantic notion: on the contrary, there is a long ancient tradition that associates the use of rhetoric with erotic discourse. In Greece, the goddess Peitho is often associated with Aphrodite (e.g. Aesch. Hic. 1038-42); so-called erotikoi logoi, such as Lysias’ speech in Plato’s Phaedrus or ps.-Demosthenes 61 seem to represent a well established genre in the early practice of rhetoric; and in the Phaedrus Plato juxtaposes, oddly for us but much less oddly for an ancient audience, a discussion of rhetoric with a discussion of love. In Rome, in turn, no writer was more receptive to this tradition than Ovid. In the Fasti, he explains that it was the need to articulate erotic desire that first prompted the development of formal rhetoric (Fasti 4.107-12).3 And in the Ars Amatoria, he admonishes the young men of Rome to study rhetoric, not just because rhetoric helps them woo a jury at the bar, but also because it helps them woo a girl (Ars Amatoria 1.459-62).4

But while, against the background of this tradition, it is hardly surprising that Ovid uses rhetoric in the Amores, it is surprising that he displays his use of rhetoric openly. For

3 prima feros habitus homini detraxit: ab illa | venerunt cultus mundaque cura sui. | primus amans carmen vigilatum nocte negata | dicitur ad clausas concinnisse fores, | eloquiumque fuit duram exorare puellam | proque sua causa quisque disertus erat.

4 disce bonas artes, moneo, Romana iuventus. | non tantum trepidos ut tueare reos | quam populus iudexque gravis lectusque senatus, | tam dabit eloquio victa puella manus.
this open display breaks the rules for the use of rhetoric in erotic discourse that he himself had laid out in the *Ars Amatoria*. In the passage just cited, Ovid continues by saying that while it is advisable to use rhetoric in erotic discourse, one should avoid the open display of one’s rhetoric. To be persuasive in erotic discourse, rhetoric must be well concealed by what the ancient rhetoricians called *dissimulatio artis* (*Ars Amatoria* 463-6): “But hide your powers, and don’t display your rhetorical skill; let your pleading avoid heavy words. Who, save an idiot, would recite declamations to his sweetheart?”

But to generations of his readers, from Seneca the Elder down to Richard Tarrant, Ovid in the *Amores* behaves just like that idiot. As always in Ovid, it is hard to define precisely when he breaks, and when he abides by, the rules of stylistic *decorum*; and the ancient rhetoricians knew well that it may be hard to distinguish in general terms between the open display of rhetoric on the one hand and its concealment through *dissimulatio* on the other. But even so, there can be no doubt that in the *Amores*, Ovid produces one suasoria after another, and composes many verses as openly rhetorical as the one that already his friends had, according to Seneca the Elder, highlighted. It must be asked, then, why Ovid disobeys in the *Amores* his own precepts from the *Ars Amatoria* and displays openly, instead of concealing, the use of rhetoric in his erotic discourse. In other words, it must be asked what the purpose is of the mole of openly displayed rhetoric that is so conspicuously visible on the face of the *Amores*. This is the question that I seek to answer in this paper.

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5 *sed lateant vires, nec sis in fronte disertus; effugiant voces verba molesta tuae. quis, nisi mentis inops, tenerae declamat puellae? saepe valens odii littera causa fuit.*
Given that Ovid had studied the composition of *suasoriae* with some of Rome’s foremost rhetoricians, one could expect him to employ the techniques of persuasive rhetoric with great success. Yet what one notices first about Ovid’s use of persuasive rhetoric in the *Amores*, is the frequency with which he fails. This is programmatically apparent already in *Amores* 1.1 where for the first time Ovid is given a chance to put to good use what he had learned in school. Ovid had set out to compose an epic poem; however, Cupid appears and snatches away the last foot from every second hexameter (*Amores* 1.1.1-4). Ovid responds by delivering a long and carefully argued speech, which takes up the bulk of the poem and in which he seeks to persuade Cupid not to interfere with the course he wants his poetry to take. Yet Ovid’s speech has no effect: Cupid still shoots his arrow into the poet’s heart, and from now on Ovid writes love poetry instead of epic poetry (*Amores* 1.1.21-24).

The failure of Ovid’s persuasive rhetoric in *Amores* 1.1 casts a long dark shadow over his use of persuasive rhetoric in the rest of the work. Again and again, Ovid seeks to direct a situation or to overcome an obstacle with a carefully argued speech; but with a disturbing regularity, his rhetorical efforts fail to achieve their effect. In 1.6, Ovid seeks to persuade the doorkeeper of his mistress to let him into her house—yet at the end of the poem, the door is still closed. In 1.4, Ovid seeks to persuade his mistress to desert her husband and spend the night with him—but at the end of the poem, she stays with the

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6 *Arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam | edere, materia conveniente modis. | par erat inferior versus; risisse Cupido | dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.*

7 *questus eram, pharetra cum protinus ille soluta | legit in exitium spicula facta meum | lunavitque genu sinuosum fortiter arcum | ‘quod’que ‘canas, vates, accipe’ dixit ‘opus.’*
husband. In 1.13, Ovid seeks to persuade the sun not to rise so that he can spend more time with his mistress—yet at the end of the poem, the sun still rises. In 2.2, Ovid seeks to persuade Corinna’s doorkeeper to let him into her house—yet at the beginning of 2.3, the doorkeeper still guards the door. In 2.11, Ovid seeks to persuade Corinna not to embark on a sea voyage—yet half way through the poem, Ovid notices that his words were spoken in vain. In 3.16, Ovid seeks to persuade a mountain torrent to hold its stream so that he can cross and reach his mistress—yet at the end of the poem, the torrent has increased.

Why do all these *suasoriae* fail, elaborate though they are? According to what Ovid learned in the school of the rhetoricians, there is a simple reason for this: they fail to persuade not despite their open display of rhetoric, but because of it. Ancient rhetoricians recognized two types of speeches whose purpose was persuasive. The first of these are forensic speeches whose purpose is to persuade a judge; and the second, closely related to the first, are deliberative speeches whose purpose it is to persuade a body responsible for political decision-making. In both these genres, the ancient rhetoricians discouraged the open display of rhetoric, because here rhetoric is more effective if it is concealed. As far as forensic discourse is concerned, Quintilian argues that a judge perceives the speaker’s rhetorical craft as a threat to his integrity; hence the old orators developed the trick of concealing one’s eloquence (*Institutio Oratoria* 4.1.9). And while in general more license was permitted in deliberative speeches, at least in Rome many believed what Antonius argues in Cicero’s *de oratore*, that before the Roman people those speakers are

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8 *est enim naturalis favor pro laborantibus, et iudex religious libentissime patronum audit quem iustitiae suae minime timet. Inde illa veterum circa occultandam eloquentiam simulatio.*
most persuasive who conceal their art (2.153). The advice Ovid gives in the *Ars Amatoria* to young men who want to woo a girl is a variation on these two precepts: just as openly displayed rhetoric alienates judges and the Roman people, so it will alienate girls. And so it alienates, as the *Amores* suggest, doorkeepers, rivers, Ovid’s mistress, and the sun.

But just as the ancient rhetoricians provide a reason why Ovid’s openly displayed rhetoric of persuasion fails, they explain for what purpose such rhetoric could be used. While discouraging it in forensic and deliberative speeches, the rhetoricians emphatically encouraged it in the third type of speech they recognized, namely in the epideictic speech. Quintilian explains (*Institutio Oratoria* 8.3.11-2) that in epideictic speeches the speaker does not intend to persuade or to win a case, but pursues two different purposes: first, he tries to procure the pleasure (*voluptas*) of the audience; and secondly, he tries to procure praise and glory. This second purpose is again two-fold. On the one hand, Quintilian certainly refers to the praise and glory of the subject, either an individual or an event, about which the speech is composed. But on the other hand, Quintilian adds that the speaker’s reputation too is enhanced, because the success of the speech is attributed to his skill and art. Epideictic discourse procures the fame not just of its subject, but also of its speaker.

As is to be expected, actual Roman rhetoric did not always match these rules. There are epideictic passages in almost all extant forensic speeches. Moreover, the rhetoricians

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9 *semper ego existimavi probabiliorem huic populo oratorem fore, qui primum quam minimam artificii alicuius, deinde nullam Graecarum rerum significationem daret.*

10 *namque illud genus ostentationi compositum solam petit audientium voluptatem, ideoque omnes dicendi artes aperit ornatumque orationis exponit, ut quod non insidietur nec ad victoriam sed ad solum finem laudis et gloriae tendat... compositione elaboratum velut institor quidam eloquentiae intuendum et paene pertractandum dabit: nam eventus ad ipsum, non ad causam reftur.*
taught that the open display of rhetoric, to the extent that it arouses the audience’s passion, can indirectly function as a means of persuasion. And lastly, even though the ancient rhetoricians tried, it is hard to define in general terms what can count as the open display of rhetoric as opposed to its concealment—to some extent this depends, like all use of rhetoric, on the audience and their rhetorical training: for instance, well-trained audiences will appreciate an author’s concealed use of rhetoric as much as an untrained audience will appreciate its open display. But notwithstanding this, Ovid’s *Amores* are written for exactly those purposes that the ancient rhetoricians identified for epideictic discourse. Of course Ovid could not expect to persuade the sun not to rise or a river not to flow. But he could expect to provide pleasure to the audience, and he could seek to procure his own fame as well as the fame of Corinna. And he explains that these are the purposes of the *Amores* at key moments in the work.

First, the *Amores* is written to procure his own fame. In the last poem of book 1, Ovid is pressed by an allegorical figure of *Livor* to explain why instead of pursuing a career in the military or as a lawyer, he decided to compose poetry (*Amores* 1.15.1-8).\(^\text{11}\) In his response, Ovid explains that the career as a poet allows him to achieve what a career as a soldier or a lawyer would not: namely his eternal and ubiquitous fame. In fact, the sharp distinction that Ovid draws between himself and his career as a poet on the one hand and lawyers on the other, may partly reflect the distinction between epideictic and forensic discourse: lawyers prostitute, as Ovid puts it, their voice in the *forum* in order to

\(^\text{11}\) *Quid mihi, Livor edax, ignavos obicis annos | ingeniique vocas carmen inertis opus, | non me more partum, dum strenua sustinet actas, | praemia militiae pulverulenta sequi | nec me verbosas leges ediscere nec me | ingrato vocem prostituisse foro? | mortale est, quod quaeris, opus; mihi fama perennis | quae et urbs, in toto semper ut orbe canar.*
persuade judges and juries, but Ovid writes in the epideictic genre which allows him to procure his fame.

Secondly, the *Amores* are written to procure the fame of Corinna, its main subject, for as Ovid points out in 1.3, the first poem addressed to Corinna, her own name will join his whenever and wherever it is mentioned (*Amores* 1.3.25-6).\(^\text{12}\)

And thirdly, the *Amores* are written to procure the pleasure (*voluptas*) of the audience, as Ovid suggests in the epigram that precedes the *Amores* (*Amores* epigram).\(^\text{13}\)

Having explained that for an alleged second edition he had reduced the number of the *Amores*’ books from five to three, he declares that he has done so because since his readers will not derive any pleasure (*voluptas*) from the work anyway, three books will be a lighter punishment for them than five. It is true of course that Ovid here says that his readers will *not* derive pleasure from reading his poetry. But it is also true that this statement is a joke made under false pretenses. If Ovid had really considered his *Amores* no pleasure but a pain, and if he really wanted to lighten that pain for his readers, he would have reduced the number of the *Amores*’ books, not from five to three, but from five to zero. In other words, rather than declaring that reading the *Amores* is a painful experience, Ovid suggests that just as any other epideictic discourse inspires *voluptas*, so will his *Amores*.

In sum, the open display of rhetoric and of formally structured arguments as an instrument of persuasion in the *Amores* is not intended to persuade: only a fool could believe that Ovid truly expected to convince the sun not to rise or a river not to flow. Instead, Ovid’s discourse is epideictic, and shares three purposes of epideictic discourse:

\[\text{\textsuperscript{12}}\] *nos quoque per totum pariter cantabimur orbem | iunctaque semper erunt nomina nostra tuis.*

\[\text{\textsuperscript{13}}\] *Qui modo Nasonis fueramus quinque libelli, | tres sumus; hoc illi praetulit auctor opus. | ut iam nulla tibi nos sit legisse voluptas, | at levior demptis poena duobus erit.*
it seeks to please the audience, it seeks to enhance the glory of the speaker, and it seeks to praise the discourse’s subject.

II. Lector Amator

So far, I have made a largely formal argument that pointed out the proximity of the Amores to what the ancient rhetoricians called the epideictic genre. At least one aspect of this argument is in need of further explanation—namely the point that the Amores is written for the sake of pleasure. What kind of pleasure is it that Ovid promises his readers? The reason why caution is necessary here is that our modern concept of the pleasure provided by art is indebted to a Romantic aesthetics which, following Kant’s maxim that the contemplation of art produces “satisfaction without any interest”, sought to separate the experience of art from the moral and political, but also the sexual and sensual concerns and interests that drive us elsewhere in our lives. Hence the notion that a poem is composed ‘only for pleasure’: this is a pleasure that affects no other aspects of our lives. Yet as many students of the Western history of aesthetics have shown, the idea that poetry is composed for pleasure only, but does not engage either sexual and sensual or moral and political concerns, is not frequently found in antiquity (if at all). In the following two sections, I want to show how the voluptas Ovid promises in the Amores affects both these concerns. I will begin with our sexual and sensual interests.

For this purpose, it is first necessary to examine what meaning the word voluptas has elsewhere in the work, and to contrast its meaning with the idea of art that is
composed for mere pleasure that developed from the Romantic notion of the disinterested experience of art. The philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer exemplifies this notion, because Arthur Schopenhauer was one of the few Romantic students of aesthetics to take seriously sexuality and sensual desire. But he studies sexuality only to construct, in the words of Alexander Nehamas, “a great wall” between sexual attractiveness and sensual appeal on the one hand, and the experience of art on the other. For Schopenhauer, our daily lives are driven by sexual and sensual desires; but the beauty of a work of art will help us transcend these ordinary desires for a higher good: when we view art, “all at once the peace, always sought but always escaping us on the former path of the desires, comes to us of its own accord, and it is well with us.” According to Schopenhauer, this peace that the experience of art affords, is not to be tainted by the sexual desires that we escape in it.

But while Romantic aesthetics dissociated the experience of art from our sexual desires and interests, Ovid in the *Amores* associates the experience of art with sexuality. In addition to the epigram where *voluptas* is used to refer to our experience with Ovid’s poetry, the word occurs four more times in the *Amores*. And each time, it refers to the pleasures associated with sexual intercourse. In 1.4, Ovid uses the word to refer to the pleasure derived from a quickie (47-8). In 1.10, *voluptas* refers to sex offered for sale (35-6). In 2.10, it refers to the pleasure the lover’s loins experience during intercourse (25-6). And in 3.4, *voluptas* is used to describe the pleasure afforded by secret sex (31-2). If elsewhere in the *Amores* the word *voluptas* is exclusively used for the pleasures experienced during sexual intercourse, could it be that the way we experience Ovid’s poem can be likened to sexual and sensual desire?
To modern readers familiar with Romantic aesthetics this idea is likely to be unsettling. But it would have caused little surprise for an audience in ancient Rome, where it was common to describe the experience of art in terms derived from the realm of sexual desire. In the concluding poem of Epistles 1, Horace anticipates that his book will prostitute itself like the whores in the area around the statue of Vertumnus and the temple of Janus (20.1-2).\textsuperscript{14} Juvenal comments that Statius’ Thebaid inspires \textit{libido} in its audience as if it were an object of sexual desire (7.82-6).\textsuperscript{15} In Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses}, Apollo’s desire for Daphne becomes desire for a book when Daphne turns into \textit{liber}, i.e., bark, but also a book (1.548-53).\textsuperscript{16} At the beginning of Lucretius’ \textit{De rerum natura}, living beings are captured by the charm (\textit{lepos}) of Venus; but that same charm also captures readers of Lucretius’ poem (1.24-8).\textsuperscript{17} In fact, so strong is the erotic pull that emanates from art in antiquity that even professional philologists could experience it. In his life of the grammarian Lucius Crassicius Pansa, who became famous for a highly learned commentary on Cinna’s \textit{Zmyrna}, Suetonius records an epigram according to which Cinna’s poem has exposed her most intimate parts to Pansa so thoroughly that it asked to marry its lover-student (\textit{De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus} 18.2 = \textit{FLP} 306).\textsuperscript{18}

Moreover, there are three reasons why it would have been particularly inviting for Roman readers to approach Ovid’s \textit{Amores} like an object of sexual desire. First of all, in some of the examples just mentioned, readers experience erotic desire for a poem that is

\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{14} Vertumnum Ianumque, liber, spectare videris, | scilicet ut prostes Sosiorum punice mundus.
\textsuperscript{15} curritur ad vocem iucundam et carmen amicae | Thebaidos, laetam cum fecit Statius urbem | promisitque diem: tanta dulcedine captos | adficit ille animos tantaque libidine volgi | auditur.
\textsuperscript{16} vix prece finita torpor gravis occupat artus; | mollia cinguntur tenui praecordia libro; | in frondem crines, in ramos bracchia crescent; | pes modo tam velox pigris radicibus haeret;
\textsuperscript{17} inde ferae, pecudes persultant pabula laeta | et rapidos tranant amnis: ita capta lepore | te sequitur cupidé quo quamque inducere pergis... | quo magis aeternum da dictis, diva, leporem.
\textsuperscript{18} uni Crassicio se credere Zmyrna probavit: | desinite, indocti, coniugio hanc petere. | soli Crassicio se dixit nubere velle, | intima cui soli nota sua extiterint.
\end{verbatim}
either represented as female (in the case of Statius’ *Thebaid*), or whose main character is a woman with whom the poem is equalized (in the case of Cinna’s *Zmyrna*). The same identification between the book and its female main character is made in Propertius I, which begins with the words *Cynthia prima* and would thus be cited in ancient library catalogues as ‘the first book of Cynthia’ (1.1.1).\(^{19}\) Unlike his predecessor, Ovid in the *Amores* does not identify the book with its female main character. But his elegies emerge as female nonetheless when at the beginning of book III an allegorical woman representing elegy approaches him and asks him to choose her over an allegory of tragedy.

Secondly, ancient rhetoricians habitually described texts as bodies, referring to the parts of sentences as *membra*, explaining that a speech must begin from its head, or seeking to dissect it in accordance with the joints of its limbs. Moreover, just as the appeal of actual bodies can be increased through the application of cosmetics, so can the appeal of the body of a text be increased, namely through the application of openly displayed rhetoric; and the ancient rhetoricians described the tools used for this purpose in metaphors derived from the language of cosmetics.\(^ {20}\) Cicero, for instance, refers in various passages to the *fucus* (make-up) that may be added to a speech, to the *pigmenta* with which it is colored, and to the *calamistri* (curling irons) that can be applied to it.\(^ {21}\) Ovid applied these tools of rhetorical cosmetics to his *Amores* too; and just as real *calamistri* serve to enhance the appeal of a human body, so do the rhetorical *calamistri* enhance the appeal of the metaphorical body of his poem.

\(^ {19}\) *Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis.*
\(^ {20}\) *fucus* (make-up): e.g. *Brutus* 162; *pigmenta* (color): e.g. *Brutus* 298; *calamistri* (curling irons): e.g. *Brutus* 262.
\(^ {21}\) *fucus* (make-up): e.g. *Brutus* 162; *pigmenta* (color): e.g. *Brutus* 298; *calamistri* (curling irons): e.g. *Brutus* 262.
Lastly, in the introductory epigram that prefaces the *Amores* Ovid seeks to increase his readers’ desire for his text in a way that imitates how elsewhere in the work he suggests the desire for a girl is increased. Ovid’s assertion at the beginning of the epigram that he has reduced the number of the *Amores*’ books from five to three is normally taken as a straightforward description of the poem’s editorial history. This it may well be; though it is important to remember that other than that statement, we possess no independent evidence whatsoever to confirm the existence of that alleged first edition. But while it is only a possibility that Ovid’s claim to have reduced the number of the *Amores*’ books represents the poem’s actual editorial history, it is by the *Amores*’ own standards a plausible suggestion that Ovid’s alleged withholding of two books increases our desire for his text. For, as he says in 3.4 with respect to his desire for a girl protected by a guard, desire is the greater for something that is withheld (25-6). Ovid restricts our access to his poetry just as the guard restricts his access to the girl, and thereby our desire for his withheld text grows just as Ovid’s desire for the guarded girl.

In sum, the *voluptas* that Ovid’s *Amores* inspires in us is not the disinterested pleasure of the Romantics. Instead, Ovid suggests that the *Amores* matter for our lives just like our sexual desires, and that we ought to pursue his text just as we pursue our desire for a human body. This idea of the experience of art in erotic terms is well-paralleled in contemporary Roman culture; and it is facilitated by the fact that the ancient rhetoricians regularly likened texts to bodies, so that the former can be adorned and desired just as the latter.

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22 *quicquid servatur, cupimus magis, ipsaque furem | cura vocat; pauci, quod sinit alter, amant.*
III. Lector Iudex

However pleasant is the mole of openly displayed rhetoric that is visible on the face of the *Amores*, the ancient rhetoricians recognized too that its effects may quickly start to cloy. In Cicero’s *de oratore*, the discussion of this problem is appropriately assigned to Crassus, who throughout the conversation had been much more willing and ready to accept open display of rhetoric than his interlocutor Antonius. In book 3 of the dialogue, Crassus faces the implications of this position. He explains that rhetorical ornamentation is not a matter of style only but penetrates the entire body of a speech, and then confronts the fact that rhetorical ornamentation stirs feelings of satiety almost at the same time as it is a source of appeal (3.98-9). Using again metaphors derived from the sphere of cosmetics, Crassus suggests that just like intense and penetratingly sweet perfumes become cloying to those who are exposed to them, so does an excessive display of the appeals of rhetoric become cloying to an audience.23

To understand this paradox, it is first necessary to recognize that the metaphor that likens the open display of rhetoric to a mole on a face is appropriate only up to a point. It is true that the open display of rhetoric in a poem is ambiguous like a mole on a face; but unlike the mole, which is a product of nature, the open display of rhetoric in a poem is a product of the poet’s artful design. And while nobody can be held responsible for the presence of a mole on their faces, a poet can be held responsible and blamed for the open display of rhetoric.

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23 *difficile enim dictu est, quaenam causa sit cur ea, quae maxime sensus nostros impellunt voluptate et specie prima acerrime commovent, ab ipsis celerrime fastidio quodam et satietate abalienemur... licet hoc videre in reliquis sensibus—unguentis minus diu nos delectari summa et acerrima suavitate conditis quam his moderatis.*
display of rhetoric in his poetry. In fact, in the Amores Ovid shows how easy it is to assign such blame. To be sure, he does not assign blame to others for the open display of rhetoric; his one attack against rhetoric, which is provoked by the eloquence of the procuress Dipsa in 1.8, is targeted at the deceptive power of Dipsa’s words and not at her excessive display of rhetoric (19-20). But he does blame Corinna for what the excessive use of rhetoric was regularly likened to, namely the excessive use of cosmetics. Just as rhetoricians apply metaphorical calamistri to their discourses, so has Corinna applied real calamistri to her hair; and in 1.14, when as a consequence Corinna has lost all her hair, Ovid accuses her of having committed a crime and calls her guilty of her actions (27-44).

If Ovid judges Corinna for her excessive use of real calamistri in her hair, can we likewise judge Ovid for the excessive use of metaphorical calamistri in his poetry? According to Cicero, we can; indeed, according to Cicero, we are much more likely to pass judgment for the overuse of rhetoric than for the overuse of cosmetic tools. For as he explains continuing in the passage already cited, to overdo one’s hairdo only offends the senses; but the excessive use of rhetoric also offends our intellect and hence provokes a critical judgment (3.100).

Ancient literary critics would not have been surprised by the fact that at the same time as they are lovers of a text, they are also its judges. The reason for this is not only that in antiquity rhetoric was, in the words of David Wellbery, a “theory of verbal

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24 haec sibi proposuit thalamos temerare pudicos; | nec tamen eloquio lingua nocente caret.
25 clamabam ’sceles et istos, scelus, urere crines. | sponte decent: capiti, fērea, parce tuo... | facta manu culpaeque tua dispendia sentis; | ipsa dabas capiti mixta venena tuo.
26 atque eo citius in oratoris aut in poetae cincinnis ad fuco offendiditur, quod sensus in nimia voluptate natura, non mente satiantur; in scriptis et in dictis non aurium solum, sed animi iudicio etiam magis infucata vitia noscuntur.
action”, used to procure an effect by agents who can be held responsible and judged for their actions. More importantly, ancient critics saw themselves habitually as judges of the texts they studied. According to Varro, *iudicium* (judgment) is the task in which a literary critic’s engagement with a text culminates (Diomedes, *Grammatici Latini* (ed. Keil), 1.426.21-3). The procedure of the *krisis poematon* (the judgment of poems) was revered among the Greeks and taken over early by the Romans—already the second century BCE critic Volcacius Sedigitus includes in his scholarly poem *De poetis* a passage in which he passes judgment on the Roman comic poets, ranking them in a top ten list (Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 15.24 = FLP 93). In other words, the ancient literary critics were critics in the original sense of the word *kritikos*—they are judges of texts.

When critics refer to themselves as judges, they of course use a metaphor derived from forensic practice and the sphere of moral and legal responsibility negotiated at courts. But as ancient metaphors ought to, this metaphor abides by the rules of *decorum* that required that the field to which a metaphor is applied, be not too far removed from the field from which it is drawn. For to the ancient critics and the poets they judged, the judgment of texts took place in ways reminiscent of the procedures at forensic courts, and they remained aware of the fact that the judgment of literary texts is a pattern that draws its metaphors from actual legal discourse. The prologue to Callimachus’ *Aitia*, the Greek text that exerted most influence on Roman poets, exemplifies this proximity. At the

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27 *grammaticae officia, ut adserit Varro, constant in partibus quattuor, lectione enarratione emendatione iudicio... iudicium est quo omnem orationem recte vel minus quam recte pronuntiataam specialiter iudicamus, vel aestimatio qua poema ceteraque scripta perpendimus.*

28 *multos incertos certare hanc rem vidimus | palmam poetae comico cui deferant. | eum meo iudicio erorem dissolvam tibi, | ut contra siquis sentiat nil sentiat. | Caecilio palmam Statio do †comico†, | Plautus secundus facile exuperat ceteros, | dein Naevius, qui fervet, pretio in tertiost. | si erit quod quartro detur, dabitur Licinio, | post insequi Licinium facio Atilium. | in sexto consequetur hos Terentius, | Turpilius septimum, Trabea octavum optinet, | nono loco esse facile facio Lusciu. | antiquitatis causa decimum addo Ennium.*
beginning of the prologue, Callimachus finds himself accused by the Telchines for writing poetry like a child even though he is an old man, and in the rest of the prologue he defends himself against the Telchines’ charges. Of course, Callimachus’ case is not actually negotiated at a court, and to some extent, for instance in its extensive use of metaphors, Callimachus’ response to the Telchines bears little similarity to actual defense speeches. But in at least three ways it resembles actual defense speeches very closely. First of all, Callimachus attacks the character of his opponents, describing them (famously) as the proverbially malicious Telchines rather than referring to them by their real names. Secondly, in addition to this forensic ethopoeia, Callimachus questions the validity of the standards by which the Telchines judge him as if it was a discussion involving the applicability of a law at court (fr. 1.17-8 Pf.). Thirdly, and most impressively, in the prologue to the *Aitia* Callimachus uses the ancient theory of rhetorical *status*, nascent at that time, as if he were a professional forensic speech writer. Hermagoras, the rhetorician normally credited with the systematization of this theory, was not yet born when Callimachus composed the *Aitia*. But two centuries earlier, Lysias had already identified in his speech against Eratosthenes what would become the two most important *status* in later rhetorical theory (12.34): namely the *status coniecturalis* whereby the defendant claimed that he is not responsible for the act of which he is accused, and the *status iuridicalis*, whereby the defendant claimed that he did what he is accused of having done, but that he did so justly. In the prologue to the *Aitia*, Callimachus employs both those *status* jointly. First of all, he admits to having committed that of which the Telchines accuse him, namely the composition of slender,

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29 ... αὖθι δὲ τέχνῃ κρίνετε, μὴ σχοίνῳ Περσίδι τὴν σοφίην.

30 δεῖ γάρ, ὃ ἄνδρες δικασταί, Ἑρατοσθένην δυοῖν βάτερον ἀποδείξατε, ἢ ὡς οὐκ ἀπήγαγεν αὐτὸν (= *status coniecturalis*), ἢ ὡς δικαίως τοῦτ’ ἐπραξεν (= *status iuridicalis*).
child-like poetry. But arguing according to the *status iuridicalis*, he claims that the composition of such a poem is not to be faulted, because as the poems of Mimnermus and perhaps another poet show, slender poetry is good (fr. 1.9-12). And secondly, arguing according to the *status coniecturalis*, Callimachus suggests that responsibility for the slenderness of his poetry does not, or at least not entirely, lie with him. For he took up writing in the way the Telchines dislike, not out of his own motivation, but upon the request of the god Apollo who approached him when he first put a writing tablet on his knees (fr. 1.21-4). Apollo is responsible for the slenderness of Callimachus’ poetry at least as much as Callimachus himself.

Roman judges of literary texts were no less aware of the legal source of the metaphor that described their professional activity. First, Virgil’s third *Eclogue* presents a singing contest between two shepherds, which is to be judged by a third shepherd, Palaemon. Palaemon resembles an actual judge in two ways. First of all, before their contest, the two shepherds deposit wagers before their judge, just as the parties in Roman civil law cases would do under the legis actiones that preceded the formulary process invented by the praetors. And secondly, in his verdict at the end of the dispute, Palaemon refers to the dispute of the two shepherds as a *lis*, which is the technical term in Roman legal language for a civil law case (108-11). Moreover, despite or probably because of the way his role resembles the role of actual judges, Virgil’s fictional Palaemon became the model for a real grammarian and literary critic, namely his namesake, the first century

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31 δεῦν γλυκύϲ άλλα καθέλκει | ... πολύ τήν μακρήν άμυνα Θεσμοφόρο[ς] | τοῦ δὲ δυοίν Μίμνερμοϲ  ὅτι γλυκόϲ, αἱ κατὰ λεπτόν | .....] ή μεγάλη δ' οὐκ ἐδίδαξε γυνή.
32 καὶ γάρ ὅτε πρώτιϲτον ἐμοῖϲ ἐπὶ δέλτον ἔθηκα | γούναϲιν, Ἀ[πό]λλων ἐπευν ὦ μοι Λύκιοϲ | "....."] αὸδε, τὸ μὲν θύοϲ ὅτι πάχιϲτον | θρέψαι, τῇ[...] Μοῦϲαν δ' ἡγαθε λεπταλέν.
33 *non nostrum inter vos tantas componere lites: | et vitula to dignus et hic, et quisquis amores | at metuet dulcis aut experietur amaros. | claudite iam rivos, pueri; sat prata biberunt.*
CE grammarian Quintus Remmius Palaemon. In his life of Palaemon, Suetonius records how Palaemon boasted that when Virgil named Palaemon the judge who appears in the *Eclogue*, he foresaw that once there would be a Palaemon who would act as the judge of all poets and their poems (*De grammaticis et rhetoribus* 23.4). And lastly, when Horace in the *Ars Poetica* discusses how a critic (*iudex*) judges an author’s correct use of metrical patterns, he speaks of the author’s *culpa* and requires that sounds be produced according to a law (*legitimos*) (263-74).

For readers of Ovid’s *Amores*, the legal dimension of the ancient judgment of literary texts is relevant in two ways. First of all, throughout the *Amores*, but particular in the accusations of infidelity that Ovid and his mistress exchange in books II and III, Ovid takes up the legal and moral discourse associated with an actual law, namely Augustus’ marriage legislation. Despite the supposedly private nature of these allegations, they are presented in a language reminiscent of the legal and moral concerns of that legislation. At the beginning of 2.4, Ovid find himself in a situation where he is forced to defend his *mores* against accusations of infidelity (1-2). At the beginning of 2.7, Ovid appears as a *reus* in a similar case (1-2). In 2.19, the possibility is discussed that husband acts as his wife’s pimp (57-8). And in 3.11 and 3.14, Corinna appears as the target of moral reform because of her infidelity to Ovid. For instance, in 3.11, Ovid attacks her criminal way of

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34 *arrogantia fuit tanta ut ... iactaret nomen suum in Bucolicis non temere positum sed praesagiente Vergilio fore quandoque omnium poetarum ac poenatum Vergilio Palaemon iudicem.*

35 *non quivis videt immodulata poemata iudex | et data Romanis venia est indigna poetis. | idcircone vager scribamque licenter? an omnis | visuros peccata putem mea, turus et intra | spem veniae cautus? vitavi denique culpam: | non laudem merui. vos exemplaria Graeca | nocturna versate manu, versat e diurna. | at vestri proavi Plautinos et numeros et | laudavere sales, nimium patienter utrumque, | ne dicam stulte, mirati, si modo ego et vos | scimus inurbanum lepido seponere dicto | legitimumque sonum digitis callemus et aure.*

36 *Non ego mendosos ausi defendere mores | falsaque pro vitiis arma movere meis.*

37 *Ergo sufficiam reus in nova crimina semper? | ut vincam, totiens dimicuisse piget.*

38 *quid mihi cum facili, quid cum lenone marito? | corrumpit vitio gaudia nostro suo.*
life (37-8); and in 3.14 he asks her to conceal her infidelity so that he does not have to appear as her censor (3-4). But Ovid imposes the terms of this legal discourse not just on his relation with the mistress he loves, but also on his readers’ relation with the text they love. In the epigram that precedes the Amores (see above) Ovid refers to himself as the auctor of his work. In fact, a paradox highlights Ovid’s use of auctor: while it was known in antiquity that the word is derived from augere, ‘to increase’ (Schol. Bern. Verg. Georg. 1.27), Ovid has in the present instance reduced, and not increased, the size of his work (though it is worth noting that he also slightly increased it, namely by prefacing it with the epigram). But more important than the relatively sparsely attested connection of the word auctor with the verb augere is the much more common connection the word shares in Rome with the sphere of legal and moral responsibility. In Latin, an auctor is first of all an owner who in a contract-bound transaction sells an item in his possession to a contract-partner. This could apply too to the sale of objects that, like Ovid’s Amores, inspire sexual voluptas—Plautus’ Curculio contains as discussion about whether a pimp is the auctor of his prostitutes (494-8). At the beginning of the Amores, Ovid does not sell the attractions of the human body, but he does sell the attractions of a poem that provokes desire like a human body. Indeed, if according to Horace in Epistles 1.20 a book can prostitute itself, it can also have a pimp. When Ovid acts as the pimp of his poetry, this is in fact a way to evade Augustus’ marriage legislation at the same time as he engages it—for prostitution and prostitutes were exempt from Augustus’ law.

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39 nequitiam fugio, fugientem forma reducit; aversor morum crimina, corpus amo.
40 nec te nostra iubet fieri censura pudicam, | sed tamen, ut temptes dissimulare, rogat.
41 auctor ab augendo dictus.
42 ... CU. egon ab lenone quicquam | mancupio accipiam, quibu’ sui nihil est nisi una lingua | qui abiurant si quid creditum est? alienos mancupatis, | alienos manu emittitis alienisque imperatis, | nec vobis auctor ullus est nec vosmet estis ulli.
Secondly, at the same time as the epigram to the *Amores* takes up the ancient procedure of judging texts, it also jokingly undercuts it. Normally, it is the task of the judging reader to pass a verdict on a text and its author. Readers like Palaemon or Volcaciis Sedigitus could elevate authors by assigning them a place at the top of their canonical lists, or they could punish them by assigning them a place at the bottom or, worse, by leaving them off the lists. But in the joke that Ovid makes in the epigram of the *Amores*, he himself appears as the judge who assigns a *poena* to his readers.

To sum up: at the same time as Ovid’s open display of rhetoric inspires *voluptas* for his text, it also provokes our critical judgment. This judgment is not aesthetic in the modern sense; that is, it is not a judgment that values Ovid’s poetry in terms that are distinct from contemporary moral and political concerns; instead, moral issues negotiated at the time the poem was composed are relevant too for the judgment of Ovid’s poetry.

Conclusion

This paper examined the function of Ovid’s open display of rhetoric in the *Amores*. In the first section, I argued that to the extent that the *Amores* display rhetoric openly, the work belongs to what the ancient rhetoricians identified as the epideictic genre. The poem shares that genre’s three purposes: it seeks to please the audience, and to praise and glorify its subject as well as its author. Since ancient rhetoric, far from being merely a formal system of figures and tropes, was a means by which speakers sought through the mastery of language to affect their audience, I have then proceeded to consider the effect
of Ovid’s open display of rhetoric on his audience. Two metaphors describe this effect. Firstly, Ovid’s readers desire his work like lovers desire human bodies. And secondly, Ovid’s readers judge his work and his poetry like judges at court pass a verdict on a defendant. Through these two metaphors, Ovid’s *Amores* engages both our sexual and sensual desires, as well as our political and moral concerns. Thank you very much.