

Ovid in the Middle Ages: authority and poetry

Ovid in the Middle Ages is an *auctor* perpetually falling foul of authority. As *auctor* he is more than an author in the modern sense: he is ‘a man of gret auctorite’ (Chaucer’s phrase),¹ learned in moral philosophy, natural science and philosophy, as well as the unchallenged expert on love and the most important resource for students of classical mythology. Nonetheless, *carmen* continues to be coupled with *error* throughout his medieval reception; however culturally central he becomes, he is never fully restored from his Augustan exile, and remains an archpriest of transgression, whether sexual, political or theological. It is in this powerfully ambivalent role of the *auctor* at odds with *auctoritas*, just as much as (and indeed inseparable from) his expertise on mythology and sexuality, that he is most precious to the poets. This chapter will explore a selection of medieval readers and reinventors of Ovid to reconstruct some of the personal and more institutional agendas that the reading of his works could generate, in both secular and religious discourses.

A small, unassuming passage of seemingly-incidental description can serve as our jumping-off point. It is deployed by the twelfth-century poet Marie de France in the *lai* of ‘Guigemar’, the first in a collection of short French narratives purporting to be drawn from oral Breton tradition; it serves at once to signal Ovid’s presence in the *lai* and to dramatize his repudiation. A beautiful, noble lady is married to an aged, jealous lord who keeps her imprisoned in a tower by the sea; guarding her is the eunuch priest of a chapel evidently consecrated to Venus, and the walls of her heavily eroticized chamber are decorated with the goddess’s imagery:

Venus, la deuesse d’amur,
Fu tresbien [mise] en la peinture,
Les traiz mustrez e la nature
Cument hom deit amur tenir

¹ *The House of Fame* 2158, in Chaucer (1987).

E lëalment e bien servir;
 Le livre Ovide, ou il enseine
 Coment chascun s'amur estreine,
 En un fu ardant le gettout
 E tuz iceus escumengout
 Ki ja mais cel livre lirreient
 Ne sun enseignement fereient.²

Venus, the goddess of love, was finely depicted in the painting. The character and nature of love were shown there, how one should be faithful to love and serve it loyally and well. The book where Ovid teaches how everyone should take control of love she threw into a burning fire, and she excommunicated all who might ever read this book or follow its teaching.

It is not clear exactly what Ovid's offence is, or which book is being burned. His crime must be one of infidelity – the contrast with the preceding lines demands it – but its interpretation, and hence the meaning of the painting, remains contested. The key word is *estreine*: later in the *lai* it refers to the literal tightening of a belt which can only be undone by a true lover (572); Marie also uses it of a lovers' embrace ('Equitan' 207). Here it has been read negatively as the constraining of desire taught in the *Remedia amoris*: Venus would thus be recapitulating Cupid's fear that Ovid has turned traitor.³ Equally, though, the reference could be to the *Ars amatoria*'s instruction on how to master love, with its presupposition of sexual infidelity.⁴ If we consider the iconography, like the entire complex in which the lady is imprisoned, to be the husband's design, then the burning of the *Ars* serves to reinforce his control over his wife's body, suborning the goddess of love herself to serve his interest. The image can be claimed by other interests, however: they may express the lady's resistance to the erotic control exerted by her husband (*estreine* in the sense of 'grasp' or 'force').⁵ Fidelity is indeed to be the virtue that drives the *lai* – not, however, fidelity to a husband.

As the *lai* progresses it becomes clear that the lord's interpretation is going to lose out: hermeneutic control over the painting fails as radically as physical control over his wife. The hero Guigemar gains access to the tower, and in so doing, ensures that the destruction of one Ovidian text has paved the way for the entrance of another. Guigemar descends from the world of the *Metamorphoses*, a chaste hunter indifferent to the women who pursue him,

² 'Guigemar' 234–44, in Marie de France (1995). The collection is generally dated to the 1160s–1180s (*ibid.* pp. ii–viii).

³ So Marie de France (1995) 167; cf. Allen (1992) 168 n.29, Whalen (1996).

⁴ Braet (1978) 24. Hanning (1981) 44 sees 'the whole Ovidian system' of erotic calculation as the target.

⁵ Greimas (1992) s.v. *estraindre*, senses 1 and 2.

and mortally wounded by his own agency – part Hippolytus, part Actaeon, part Narcissus.⁶ His arrow kills a hind, but rebounds and strikes him in the thigh; the dying animal curses him to die unless he is cured by a woman who will suffer more for love of him, and he for her, than any before them. Eros is transformed from the *Metamorphoses*' agent of destruction to one of redemption: 'Guigemar', archly dewy-eyed, promotes pure, mutual, and adulterous passion as its sole moral and social value. Marie, no less than the jealous husband, is appropriating and revising both elegiac love and Ovidian mythology.

Yet *Guigemar*'s moral triumph of adulterous love is immediately answered by a tale of unbending severity ('Equitan'), in which adulterers are punished by death at the hands of a royal husband who incarnates the vengeful power of outraged authority. Moral and social values in the *Lais* have become contingent rather than absolute, driven by perspective and particular interest; its arts of love are answered by remedies, juxtaposing contrarities with little prospect of synthesis. Ovid for the Middle Ages stands as the single most important window into this imaginative world of secular contingency, power, passion, and the scope and limits of human art. If Ovid is an *auctor*, he is one who reveals *auctoritas* to be a power-source, exploited and contested, rather than the stable, central authority of Scripture, and Marie's ecphrasis reveals this at an intimately allusive level. Her playful, unpredictable anatomies of the relationships between personal desire, socially-inscribed authority and art rightly acknowledge Ovid as kindred spirit and competitor. The possessive husband's tower, with its effort at containing and controlling Ovid's book, is a prototype for all medieval efforts to appropriate him, deploying (and where necessary critiquing) the poems and their author to serve their own interests and neutralize competing ones. The husband's loss of command, his cuckolding mocked by an iconographic programme of his own devising, is equally instructive: no one reading, however strenuously enforced, manages to eliminate its rivals.

Ovid's books have a habit of surviving their burning. The supposed destruction of the *Metamorphoses* on their author's departure into exile is part of its myth of epic origins, and perhaps Marie's image recalls this.⁷ One medieval reconstruction of the composition of the *Fasti* has it that it too was destroyed at the same time, with the first six books reconstructed from memory in exile, and rededicated to Germanicus. Others claimed that Books 7 to 12 were suppressed by the patristic Church as idolatrous, or for blasphemously applying to Julius and Augustus Caesar prophecies which were

⁶ Spence (1996) 128–36.

⁷ Ov. *Trist.* 1.7.11–30; see Tarrant, in Martindale (1997) 61.

properly of Christ.⁸ A central, indispensable author for the Middle Ages, he remained an acutely combustible one.

Several constituencies could regard Ovid's books as fit for burning. Christine de Pizan (c. 1363–c. 1430) takes them as a threat to the dignity of women: for her, Ovid is the father of a tradition of clerical misogyny in love poetry whose chief modern son is Jean de Meun in the *Roman de la Rose*. Like Marie, she has him condemned by the gods of love themselves: Cupid in the *Epistre au Dieu d'amours* condemns *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris* alike.⁹ According to Christine's distinctively embroidered version of his life in her *Livre de la cité des dames*, Ovid was banished for his dissipation, promiscuity and corrupting influence, but recalled from exile by a powerful clique of young Roman men; failing to learn his lesson, he was eventually punished with castration, as though a prototype Abelard. Frustrated at his inability to indulge his vices any longer, he wrote the *Ars* and *Remedia* out of malice, to turn other men against women.¹⁰ Christine's detestation of Ovid does not make her unwilling to borrow from him; on the contrary, she does so repeatedly, and in a consciously revisionist spirit, appropriating mythological protagonists and narratives from the *Metamorphoses* for her own arguments.¹¹

Male clerical tradition has its own grounds for attack, not surprisingly encountered earlier and more often than the feminist critique. The twelfth-century theologian William of St Thierry neither deigns nor needs to name the *doctor artis amatoriae* who corrupted natural love rather than teaching it, and was eventually obliged to recant. William's treatise *De natura et dignitate amoris* is presented as a counterblast, an *Ars amatoria* for the Christian soul, thereby bearing reluctant witness to the twelfth-century explosion of interest in Ovid. Love, for William, is a natural force analogous to gravity, but one which nonetheless requires an art to teach it: the soul must now relearn what was originally natural to it in Paradise.¹² The scandal of Ovid here is that he stands so close to the proper function of the *magister Amoris*, yet subverts it utterly.

His poetic allure remains strong for his detractors: even the aptly-named *Antiovidianus*, an anonymous fourteenth-century Latin poem from Italy, casts itself into Ovid's own medium of elegiac couplets, and concedes, adapting his own words, that his Muse was more fertile than all other poets': *nam quod temptabas scribere versus erat* ('for whatever you tried to write, it came

⁸ Alton (1930) 123, Ghisalberti (1946) 41, Minnis and Scott (1991) 362.

⁹ *Epistre* 281–92, 365–78, in Fenster and Erler (1990).

¹⁰ 1.9.2, translated in Christine de Pizan (1999) 20–1.

¹¹ Brownlee, in Brownlee and Huot (1992) 234–61, Kellogg (1998), Wisman (1997).

¹² 1.1–3 in William of St Thierry (1953), translated in William of St Thierry (1981).

out verse').¹³ The poem is a stylish and energetic denunciation, representing everything Ovid wrote as pernicious and unfit for consumption, and culminating with a burning not of the books but of their author, in the fires of hell. Yet the *Antiovidianus* cannot deny the poetic gift on which, indeed, its own writing depends: poetic talent is here quite divorced from ethical or philosophical reliability. Indeed, there is a case for seeing the poem less as the denunciation it purports to be, more as a rhetorical challenge to a set of by-now-traditional pedagogic strategies that sought to make Ovid a respectable, upright citizen of the literary commonwealth. The poem's insistence, for example, that Ovid's *Remedia* is as poisonous as the original disease spread by the *Ars*, or that the *Heroides*, however they may praise Penelope's virtue, are themselves 'whorish poems' (*meretricia carmina*, 73), runs directly counter to the mainstream scholarly approach.

Like much of medieval Ovidian tradition, these strategies were formulated in the twelfth century, in this case by schoolmasters seeking to justify his presence in the curriculum. Conrad of Hirsau, writing in the first half of the century, faces the question squarely in his *Dialogus super auctores* between a master and a student. Why, the latter asks, should Christ's pupil 'submit his tractable imagination' to Ovid? Even if there is gold amid the dung, the treasure-seeker is polluted by the contact.¹⁴ If Conrad's master remains cautious in his response, the well-known tradition of *accessus ad auctores*, basic introductions to the study of an author, confidently justify Ovid's presence in the curriculum. Poetic texts generally belong under moral philosophy: ethics provides a set of implicit norms of behaviour, which poetry dramatizes. The *Heroides* in particular are kept under control by this approach, so that for all their domination by sexually-charged, passionate, female voices, they are controlled by a male moralist's invisible hand. Penelope, by being placed first, articulates a standard of conjugal love by which all the ensuing heroines can be measured. Accordingly, the *Heroides* map out an anatomy of love, with the chaste love of marriage set against species of foolish or criminal desire.¹⁵ This overly tidy schematization does provide some useful categories for poets, and it has been plausibly argued that the *Roman d'Eneas*, for one, constructs its large-scale contrasts between Dido and Lavine (Virgil's Lavinia, promoted to a starring role as Eneas' true lover) on such a basis.¹⁶ Indeed, Marie's *lais* show something of the same anatomizing instinct, juxtaposing incompatible models of love, but they also

¹³ *Antiovidianus* 382, in Burdach and Kienast (1929); cf. Ov. *Trist.* 4.10.26. Stroth in Albrecht and Zinn (1968) 567–80 traces the verse's medieval and modern reception.

¹⁴ Huygens (1970) 114.

¹⁵ Huygens (1970) 31. The Ovidian *accessus* are translated in Elliott (1980).

¹⁶ Nolan (1989).

suggest that the project of an anatomy of love held more imaginative appeal to poets than the rigid ethical framework that was supposed to contain it. The *Antiovidianus* gives the latter short shrift: Ovid's meretricious voice is less a moralist's than that of the *anus* (73–4) – the aged Dipsas of *Amores* 1.8, who had come to found a long line of such figures, from the twelfth-century comedy *Pamphilus* to Jean de Meun's *La Vieille* and beyond.¹⁷ For all the shocked disapproval deployed by the speaker of the *Amores*, her voice is dangerously close to his own.¹⁸

With the *Ars* or the *Amores*, it is harder to construct an ethical reading than for the *Heroides*, and the *accessus* are more inclined to present the *Ars* as a genuine how-to manual, proper amatory didactic, or as entertainment. If it still belongs under moral philosophy, it does so only because it considers *mores*, specifically the behaviour of young women, since if you know their ways, you know how to keep them. The potential for 'ethics' as a philosophical category to become separated from any didactic intention is clear from the bald statement of one introduction to the *Amores*: *Intentio eius est delectare. Ethicae supponitur* ('its intention is to entertain. It belongs under ethics').¹⁹

Exactly where the art of love belongs in clerical discourse is explored with quietly comic resourcefulness in a remarkable version of the *Ars* in French prose, complete with a commentary so straight-faced that it has been read quite straight by its editor and translator.²⁰ The *Art d'amours*, whose original version (first third of the thirteenth century) comprised only Books 1 and 2 of the *Ars*, is automatically marginal to academic culture by virtue of its vernacularity, but it lays claim to a genuine, Latinate scholarly authority with its careful mythological glossing. At the same time, it undermines that authority's foundations. Its unquestioned premise is that the art of love is perfectly proper for clerics to pursue, unlike such black arts as sorcery, divination or gambling. To refuse to love women is a sin, as surely as homosexuality or the mad, suicidal despair of the unskilful lover (*Accessus* 96–109). While aristocrats learn it by nature, and the common people by habitual practice – that is, foolishly and arrogantly imitating their betters – clerics have to turn to books (30–41). It is implied, then, that this is a book for clerics; the tradition of comic debates on the respective merits of knights and clergy as lovers (the latter generally victorious) lies in the background.²¹ The commentary is

¹⁷ *Pamphilus* is edited in Bate (1976) 61–89; a published translation is Garbaty (1967). Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun (1992) 12385–4719, translated in Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun (1983).

¹⁸ Myers (1996) confirms and develops the *Antiovidianus*' perception, in Tibullus and Propertius as well as Ovid.

¹⁹ Huygens (1970) 36. ²⁰ Ed. Roy (1974), trans. Blonquist (1987).

²¹ A famous example is the *Altercatio Phyllidis et Florae* (text and translation in Caverly (1980)). Haller (1968) reads the poem as 'Ovidian satire'.

inclined to represent love as the great social and discursive leveller. Its most striking feature is its frequent recourse to snatches of French verse which it claims to draw variously from aristocratic songs and popular proverbs, to parallel and reinforce Ovid's advice. By calling on voices from the other two estates, aristocratic and demotic, the commentary implicitly places Ovid's pragmatic, secular wisdom on the same level as popular proverb or dance-song. The commentary strips away his specifically textual, clerical authority, while seeming to reinforce it through formal commentary. As a vernacular offshoot from the scholarly tradition, the *Art d'amours* enjoys the revelation that Latin textual authority is by no means of a different order to the authority of vernacular verse: it revels in the self-exploding nature of Ovid's didactic posture in the *Ars*, and offers an inspired recreation of it on the margins of scholarly propriety.

The commonest way of rationalizing the place of the *Ars* in the canon, however, was to point out that Ovid himself paid dearly for it. The apparent retreat from ethically-slanted reading is essentially tactical, since that reading is about to stage a come-back in the form of an elaborate penitential narrative. The *Remedia amoris* is transformed into a genuine retraction of the *Ars*. Considering that Ovid begins the work by reassuring Cupid that it is no such thing (1–40), and we have seen more than one medieval writer clearly aware of this, the reading of the *Remedia* as properly remedial proved oddly persistent; as a narrative pattern, the structure of an offence and an attempt at restitution had a special imaginative hold. The structural pattern of sequel-as-refutation is visible, indeed, even within the *Art d'amours*: a second author added a version of Book 3 towards the end of the thirteenth century, and is more a rival and corrector than a disciple, most obviously in providing the book for women which his predecessor had denied them. The earlier commentator explicitly warns against allowing the book to fall into female hands (2327–51), when it offers details on the dangerous love-potions to which Ovid merely alludes (*Ars* 2.99–106). The continuation begins with an implicit rebuke to his predecessor by justifying the provision of the art to female readers (which, as Pierre Col points out in his defence of Jean de Meun, is at least feasible in the vernacular).²² In another respect, however, the levelling of hierarchies in Books 1 and 2 is distinctly resisted: Book 3 drops the quotations from songs, and prefers to cite proverbial wisdom within the learned matrix of Solomon or Boethius.

This principle of construction, in which texts and parts of texts seem to shift restlessly between continuity and a direct competition for interpretive command, is pervasive in medieval Ovidian works. An extreme case

²² Hicks (1977) 105.

is Andreas Capellanus' famous *De amore*, dating perhaps from the 1180s. Among its manuscript titles is *De arte amandi et de reprobatione amoris* ('the art of loving and the condemnation of love'), the modification of Ovid's terminology marking a stark internal opposition. A later alteration attempts to identify these two *amores* as different species, honourable and dishonourable ('honeste amandi . . . inhonesti amoris'), but this tidying-up misrepresents a text that resists all attempts to reduce it to a single argument.²³

Where the translators of the *Art d'amours* dispute the propriety of female readers, Andreas deploys male and female voices as part of the *De amore*'s internal warfare. He directs the work to a specific male reader, a friend suffering from love, but in Book 1, women's voices are used to articulate a rational resistance to male desire.²⁴ This book is dominated by a series of dialogues of attempted seduction played out between different social classes, in none of which is the man actually successful. Andreas later represents various noblewomen, including Marie, Countess of Champagne and Eleanor of Aquitaine, as sound judges of propriety in love (2. 7). But Book 3 drowns out these voices with an increasingly hysterical tirade against sexuality and, especially, against women. Sexual love is the creation of the devil, chastity that of God; no woman has ever sincerely loved either her husband or her lover, or indeed possessed a single virtue (3.38–39, 65–112). Violent contrariety has become the basic method of the text, in its internal stresses and its precise inversions of Ovid: in place of two books of arts for men and one for women, Andreas' first book mounts its resistance to the *Ars* in women's voices, but he demonizes them in his third. The lower-class interlocutor of dialogue D in Book 1 (*mulier plebeia*) offers a rebuke to her would-be seducer which stands as a programme for the whole work:

In tuis videris sermonibus tanquam cancer in ambulando retrogradus, quod nunc negare contendis quod statim audaci lingua . . . firmaveras. (1.188)

In your speeches you seem to have a backwards gait, like a crab, for you're now striving to deny what you were a moment ago affirming in rash terms.

The teaching and the condemnation of love are both subordinate to the dynamic driving the work, a far-from-edifying theatre of rhetorical and psychological extremes in which self-contradiction and retrograde motion are governing principles.

Subtler and more indefinite, the *Roman de la Rose* is probably the most influential of all the works inspired by this Ovidian art of construction by contrarities. Like the *Art d'amours* it is the work of two authors with different agendas at opposite ends of the thirteenth century, Guillaume de Lorris

²³ Andreas Capellanus (1982) 1–3. ²⁴ Calabrese (1997) 8–15.

and Jean de Meun. Guillaume explicitly represents his work as a new art of love from the outset (37–9), and his central mythological image is a reinvention of Ovid's Narcissus.²⁵ Before he enters the garden of love, the narrator-protagonist is an antitype of Narcissus: washing his face in a river (rather than a static, self-enclosed pool), he sees through the clear water to the gravel bed; no reflection interposes (103–23). At the heart of love's garden itself, however, he looks into the perilous fountain of Narcissus (1422–1619), at the bottom of which are two crystals which seem to be images of the eyes of either Narcissus or the lover, or of some fusion of the two into a single, self-enwrapped agent of erotic vision in which the Rose, and the whole universe of the garden, are reflected. It remains unclear from Guillaume's incomplete narrative what closure this might generate – whether Amant is doomed to become another Narcissus, absorbed into the original narrative, or whether the poem's goal is to recall him from it.

Jean de Meun constructs a lineage of love poets founded directly on *Amores* 3.9, naming only Guillaume and himself as the modern heirs of elegy's 'apostolic succession' (E. K. Rand's phrase), Tibullus, Gallus, Catullus and Ovid (10511–620).²⁶ The impression of smooth continuity is deceptive: his vast continuation, for all that it promises explanation (10607–8) and at least delivers narrative closure, divided critical opinion early and lastingly. The divisions run along familiar lines: while Christine de Pizan condemns it as amoral and misogynistic, its defenders claim it as the work of an ironic moralist, constituting a *Remedia amoris* rather than an *Ars amatoria*. Pierre Col, one of Christine's opponents in the debate, insists that Jean describes the storming of the castle of Jealousy so as to forewarn its defenders, and even offers anecdotal evidence that the cure could work.²⁷ As with Andreas Capellanus, Jean's argument cannot be reduced to singularity; he sets off against each other competing spokespersons, most of them with some genuine claim to authority or experience – among them the pragmatic, secular and elegiac know-how of Ami (7233–10010) and La Vieille (12389–4723), male and female adherents respectively of the *Ars amatoria*, between whom the advice of Ovid's three books is divided.²⁸ Each readily functions as *Remedia*, however; Ami quotes extensively from the competing voice of a jealous husband, mounting misogynist tirades from within the voice of amatory experience. Jean also develops his own mythological master-image from the *Metamorphoses*, a Pygmalion to counter Guillaume's Narcissus. The

²⁵ For fuller accounts see Harley (1986), Steinle (1989).

²⁶ Rand (1925) 9; see also Fleming in Brownlee and Huot (1992) 81–100.

²⁷ Hicks (1977) 105.

²⁸ Bouché (1977) helpfully tabulates Jean's direct borrowings from Ovid, which are concentrated in these speeches.

result is a ceaseless process of Ovidian and anti-Ovidian invention and exegesis which inexorably drew in early and more recent readers as participants.²⁹

The acutely unstable relationship between *Ars* and *Remedia* in medieval readings could be stabilized to a degree by appealing to a wider biographical context. That ‘the life of our poet . . . was bisected’ (Rand again) dominates medieval lives of Ovid, and shaped the way his whole output was read.³⁰ Biographical accounts tend to divide his career into those works which got him into trouble and those in which he tried and failed to extricate himself. This group of ‘remedial’ texts regularly expands to include the *Heroides* and *Remedia* as well as the elegies from exile. The *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses* too were sometimes regarded as efforts to recapture the cultural high ground after the *Ars* had outraged Roman public opinion in general, or Augustus in particular.³¹ The life of Ovid that prefaces the *De vetula* (a text discussed below) teases out a clear political line in which Ovid incurs Augustus’ wrath primarily because of the *Ars*, and attempts to win back his grace with the *Remedia*. The *Fasti*, written in exile, is dedicated to Germanicus in the hope that his mediation will earn forgiveness from Augustus, while the *Metamorphoses* honours Caesar’s ancestors with the same intent.³²

Even the *Amores*, more surprisingly, are touched by this approach: they generally circulated in manuscript as *Liber sine titulo* (‘book without a title’), and some speculated that Ovid left them untitled so as not to call casual attention to their erotic subject matter. One version has it that he was commanded by Augustus to produce a five-book epic on his war against Antony and Cleopatra, and disguised his failure to do so by leaving his new erotic work unnamed. As well as offering some sort of explanation for Ovid’s prefatory reference to a five-book poem that has become three, this suggestion draws attention to the recurring displacement of epic by elegy established from the outset (*Am.* 1.1, cf. 2.1), and in particular to 3.12.15–16, where ‘Caesar’s deeds’ constitute one of the epic themes to have been displaced by Corinna. One *accessus* dismisses such suggestions as ‘trivial and of no value’ (*frivole . . . et nulle*), but goes on to argue that Ovid left the work untitled when he was exiled, so as not to associate the poems too closely with the notorious *Ars* and earn them proscription.³³ If both the *Amores* and *Heroides*

²⁹ For Jean’s Pygmalion (20801–1218) see Poirion (1970), Cahoon (1986). On early reception and interpretation, see especially Huot (1993).

³⁰ Rand (1925) 8.

³¹ Huygens (1970) 31–6, *Vulgate Commentary*, *accessus* 98–103 in Coulson (1991), Alton (1930) 123.

³² Ed. Robathan (1968) 42.

³³ Ghisalberti (1946) 12; Huygens (1970) 36, where the aborted epic is a *Gigantomachia* (cf. *Ov. Am.* 2.1.11–22).

are placed after the *Ars* in Ovid's career, this one poem becomes a kind of literary original sin, from whose consequences everything else he wrote becomes a series of increasingly desperate (and consistently misfiring) defensive or corrective reactions.

This biographically-inspired reading generates a distinctly Christian narrative pattern of sin, punishment and a long effort to recover the state of grace that is Rome, but it lacks the proper Christian conclusion. One *accessus* to the *Fasti*, explaining the dedication to Germanicus as intended to help reconcile poet and *princeps*, comments: *Vtilitas huius libri nulla legitur fuisse, quia ab exilio numquam legitur rediisse* ('we read that this book was of no benefit at all, for, we read, he was never recalled from exile').³⁴ The most fantastical elaborations of the story thrive on tragic closure: the fourteenth-century Italian commentator Giovanni del Virgilio, having cited the standard opinion that Ovid died in exile, adds an alternative version in which he was eventually recalled to Rome, only to be suffocated by the crowds that had gathered to welcome him.³⁵ One last time, and in his moment of triumphant vindication as the most famous poet of his age, he is the victim of his own *ingenium*.³⁶

The proximity of Ovid to his Christian readers, and the spiritual gulf that separates them, are both dramatized in a powerful anecdote preserved and discussed in at least two thirteenth-century Latin versions.³⁷ It tells of two *clerici* who visit Ovid's tomb in Tomis, praise him as a model of eloquence, and ask each other what they consider his best and worst lines. A voice from the tomb answers their question, offering two verses from the *Heroides*: respectively, Helen's *Est virtus placitis abstinuisse bonis* ('there's virtue in refusing goods that please', *Her.* 17.98), and a version of Phaedra's dismissal of conventional morality, *Omne iuvans statuit Iupiter esse pium* ('Jupiter established that the good is whatever gives pleasure', cf. *Her.* 4.133).³⁸ So far, Ovid is being much more cooperative with his censorious readers than in the distant model for the anecdote, the story in Seneca's *Controuersiae* 2.2.12 that the three verses his friends would soonest see suppressed were exactly those Ovid would not part with. The gap separating the poet from his critical readers seems to have been eliminated: in fact, the disembodied voice

³⁴ Alton (1930) 123.

³⁵ Ghisalberti (1946) 41, translated in Minnis and Scott (1991) 363. On Giovanni see Ghisalberti (1933).

³⁶ See also Raphael Lyne's 'Love and exile after Ovid' in chapter 17 of this volume.

³⁷ Edited by Bischoff (1952) from Freiburg, University Library, MS. 380, and Wright (1842) 43–4, 225 from London, British Library, MS. Harley 219.

³⁸ Wright's version substitutes *licitis* for *placitis* ('even goods that are permitted'), further 'improving' the sentiment.

has become a species of Echo, capable only of reproducing the sentiments of its interlocutors.

The clerics are suitably impressed, and begin to pray for Ovid's soul, but the voice speaks again, and with a will of its own: *Nolo pater noster; carpe, viator, iter* ('I don't want "Our Father"; traveller, be on your way').³⁹ The Harley version explains that Ovid knew himself damned, and that prayer could not help him. The *nolo* has more force than that, however; it is a positive refusal, and the Freiburg version reacts angrily against it. It adds a coda insisting that Ovid was in fact saved: in his extreme old age, he was converted by St John of Patmos and became a great preacher, as befits one who by his own account had learned the local vernacular (the scribe quotes *Tristia* 5.12.58). Finally, as bishop of Tomis, he died for the faith and is known as St Naso. We must therefore believe that the voice from the tomb was counterfeited by the devil, envious at having lost Ovid, who had for so long been in his power.⁴⁰ The first sign of Ovidian resistance to Christian appropriation here generates an even more extravagant effort at claiming him. Its corollary, though, is that the voice from the tomb, speaking Ovid's own verses, must be demonic. The fantasy of a conversion at the end of his life is of only limited help: it leaves his authentic words pagan. At best, they are dim adumbrations of the truths a converted Ovid comes to perceive, at worst a set of dangerous errors. Ovid remains trapped as 'a poet between two worlds' and, unlike Fränkel's, not necessarily tending in the right direction.⁴¹

One way to carry him over the threshold was to invent the truly Christian poem he never wrote. The *De vetula* is the longest piece of medieval pseudo-Ovidiana, probably written in Paris in the mid-thirteenth century and often, though insecurely, attributed to Richard de Fournival.⁴² The poem comes complete with an elaborate prose *accessus* that offers a full and largely reliable biography before departing into fiction: it presents the *Vetula* as Ovid's long-lost final work, a poetic testament which he had placed in his tomb in the hope that it would be returned, with his bones, to Rome after the death of Augustus. A circumstantial account of its rediscovery follows, with the volume found in the tomb, undamaged by age. The hagiographic miracle of incorruption is here applied to the text: having become a disembodied, sepulchral voice in the *Nolo pater noster* story, Ovid's authentic body is now

³⁹ The line is not, of course, a quotation, but perhaps cf. the pseudo-Ovidian *Nux* 136 for *carpe uiator* in this metrical position.

⁴⁰ Wright (1842) 44; Bischoff (1952) 272–3.

⁴¹ Fränkel (1945) esp. 2–3, 21–3, 163. I am grateful to Philip Hardie for this point.

⁴² Robathan (1968) 1–5.

materialized as a book, that can be carried triumphantly back via Byzantium to the west.⁴³

The poem that follows stands as Ovid's true *Remedia amoris*: in exile, despairing of temporal hope, he recalls his past way of life and how he was converted from it – a comic narrative of sexual disgust in which he is tricked into sleeping with the old woman who was supposed to be his go-between. Ironically, this work which purports to be the final corrective to Ovid's literary and sexual misdeeds was itself subject to censorship; several manuscripts omit these two books of elegiac comedy, two of them explaining: *propter multa quae intersunt scurrilia* ('because of the many scurrilous things contained there').⁴⁴ In Book 3 'Ovid' reveals the true remedy for secular despair, *lux doctrine*, the light of learning and of specifically Christian doctrine (3.1–18): he reveals his knowledge of Christ, the Virgin, and the future resurrection of the dead – significantly outdoing Virgil's fourth *Eclogue* – and denies that the polytheism of the *Metamorphoses* was any more than pandering to public opinion (3.611–796).⁴⁵

The fact that the recollections of Ovid's elegiac misdeeds were themselves subject to censorship reveals again the limitations of conversion to redeem Ovid's canonic works, and underlines a distinct tendency towards backsliding. It seems that the most strenuous efforts to convert him reveal the fragility of the enterprise; and Dante (1265–1321), who places Statius in purgatory as a secret Christian who dared not confess his faith (*Purg.* 21), does not offer Ovid the same lifeline.⁴⁶ The question of what Ovid can offer to a Christian epic repeatedly nags at the *Commedia*, nonetheless, and Dante's answer seems at first glance discouraging. Initially, his presence is muted, even inert, primarily because too many of his possible roles seem to have been annexed by Virgil, whom Dante claims from the outset as his master and *autore* (*Inf.* 1.85). Virgil so incarnates the poetic calling that Homer, Horace, Ovid and Lucan pay honour to him with a single voice (*Inf.* 4.79–93); when Dante names his poem as *la mia comedia*, it is in the context of Virgil's allusion to his own epic, *l'alta mia tragedia* (*Inf.* 2.1.2, 20.113). Even when the punishments of hell first take on a literally metamorphic character, in the wood of the suicides in Canto 13, the primary model remains Virgilian (the transformed Polydorus in *Aen.* 3.19–48). Finally, if Ovid (as well as

⁴³ The twin metamorphoses of Ovid's poetic self into 'eternal voice and perishable book' are explored by Farrell in Hardie, Barchiesi, Hinds (1999) 127–41. Thanks are again due to Philip Hardie for this reference.

⁴⁴ Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, MS. Delta 3.11; Jesus College, Cambridge, MS. Q.G.22, both fifteenth-century (Robathan (1968) 30).

⁴⁵ Cf. Conrad of Hirsau (Huygens (1970) 115), who infers from *Met.* 1.32 that Ovid was a closet monotheist, unwilling publicly to acknowledge the true God either from blindness or fear. See Wright, in Hardie, Barchiesi, Hinds (1999) 71.

⁴⁶ The *Commedia* is cited from Dante (1970–75).

Lucan and Virgil) is addressed in Canto 25, it is to be silenced. Dante's audacious exchange of form and matter between the thieves has no reason to envy the poet of the *Metamorphoses* (25.94–102).⁴⁷

Ovid, then, should be a poet of infernal mutation who can be safely left behind as 'a curator of the fallen world in all its hideous permutations'.⁴⁸ Politically, too, Dante's imperial loyalties make Ovid, the Augustan exile, a distant second-best compared with the poet of Aeneas' Roman destiny who 'lived at Rome under the good Augustus' (*Inf.* 1.71). Yet numerous modern studies have concurred that he fails to be left behind, even (indeed especially) in *Paradiso* where Virgil's guidance has been superseded. He becomes a crucial poetic model precisely because of the disordered, transgressive power of the Ovidian imagination.⁴⁹ If, in the *Purgatorio*, Dante ranges himself on the side of the Muses against the challenge of the Pierides, and neutralizes the threat of Arachne by incorporating her into an ordered, moralized ecphrasis (*Purg.* 1.7–12, 12.43–5), at the start of *Paradiso* he assimilates himself to another Ovidian challenger, Marsyas (*Par.* 1.13–21). To serve as a vessel for the divine poetic power of Apollo, Dante must invite the flaying of Marsyas; his position as mortal poet setting out to describe heaven is by its nature transgressive. This, moreover, is only the first of a string of mythological revisions drawn from the *Metamorphoses* by which Dante moulds himself in the course of the *Paradiso*. In a sense, this confirms a secret Ovidian quality that has always been there, since, where Virgil's more abstract functions revolve around reason, Dante's narratorial *persona* has always been driven by desire – albeit the rarefied love of Beatrice rather than the elegiac posture.⁵⁰ In political terms, too, Dante's posture begins to move towards Ovid's, as in canto 17 of *Paradiso* his exile from Florence is predicted, while the political hope invested in the Roman empire wanes.

These mixed signals suggest that Ovid has a real role, and one less limited than the official programme of the *Commedia* cares to acknowledge; there is real force in Curtius' passing observation that Dante's work more closely resembles the *Metamorphoses* than any other epic in the sheer size of its cast,⁵¹ as well as its construction as a *perpetuum carmen* built from small narrative units. In that sense, the *Commedia* is certainly more Ovidian than Virgilian. Even so, the exploitation of Ovid requires caution and indirection, for, unlike the scholarly *accessus*, the *Paradiso* is not primarily

⁴⁷ On this much-discussed passage see in particular Ginsberg (1991), Sowell (1991) 35–49, Barkan (1986) 156–8.

⁴⁸ Hawkins, in Sowell (1991) 21.

⁴⁹ E.g. Kleiner (1994) 130–6; Hawkins, in Sowell (1991) 25–31; Brownlee (1986).

⁵⁰ The hypothesis that Ovid directly influenced the troubadours was proposed by Schrötter (1908); a more recent contribution is Cahoon (1989).

⁵¹ Curtius (1990) 365.

attempting to bring Ovid under control, but to exploit his status as the master of transgression, exile and marginality as Dante designs his own perilous itinerary.

Dante's *Commedia* has raised two issues to which I will devote the rest of this chapter. The first is the possibility that, with appropriate interpretive safeguards, the Christian devotional imagination may be able to benefit from the pagan fables of the *Metamorphoses* – a possibility which was most confidently realized in the practice of allegoresis. This rather abstract appropriation of Ovid as fabulist to serve the interests of the Christian interpretive community stands at the opposite extreme from a second, much more personal, appropriation also visible in the *Commedia*: the partial reinvention of an author's own poetic *persona* out of Ovid's authorial self-projection. Often, as in Dante, the relationship between Ovid and Virgil becomes part of the process of creating a poetic stance; in fact, this relationship turns out to be at least as problematic as that between Ovid and Christ.

The practice of allegorical reading has traditionally been the most notorious strand of medieval exegesis. Rather than convert the poet, after the manner of the *Vetula*, allegory converts the text by means of a consciously transformatory reading method. In the tenth century Theodulf of Orléans somewhat grudgingly concedes that for all their many vanities (*frivola multa*), the fables of the poets can be read by the philosophical reader as integuments – poetic veils to conceal esoteric truth from unworthy eyes.⁵² For some interpreters, indeed, the allegories were placed there by the poet: we have already met the argument that Ovid was a closet monotheist whose poetic machinery of pagan gods conceals his real beliefs. Arnoul of Orléans, the twelfth-century pioneer among Ovid commentators of allegorical interpretation, holds to this view: philosophy acts as a master discourse held in common by pagan and Christian readers, and a source of *rapprochement* between them.⁵³

If this approach sometimes credits Ovid with the didactic intention behind the philosophical sense, elsewhere there is a marked theoretical orientation towards reader-response rather than intentionalism. The two great 'moralized Ovids' of the fourteenth century aim to serve the interests of two species of Christian reader: the vast, anonymous *Ovide moralisé* (in French octosyllabic couplets) fosters a species of devotional meditation; Pierre Bersuire's Latin prose *Ovidius moralizatus* is for the use of preachers seeking *exempla*, narrative illustrations.⁵⁴ Bersuire and the *Ovide* have in common the emphasis on the commentator's *ingenium*, rather than the

⁵² Godman (1985) 168–70. ⁵³ On Arnoul see Ghisalberti (1939).

⁵⁴ Bersuire (1962); de Boer, de Boer and Van 'T Sant (1915–38).

poet's: they open up the text to multiple (but not competing) readings. Otherwise they differ radically, for all the long tradition of confusing them. Bersuire offers brief summaries of the narratives and throws out suggestions for Christian allegories as options for the preacher; his allegories are designed to end in a *sententia* which is usually scriptural.⁵⁵ Ovid's Latin, not quoted verbatim, is rendered subordinate and almost invisible before the Latin of the Vulgate.

The *Ovide moralisé*, by contrast, very rarely quotes scripture after its Prologue. What it wants from the Bible is a master narrative, rather than master texts – a narrative of sin and redemption which centres, obsessively, on the Incarnation of Christ as the ultimate metamorphosis. This core repertory of sacred storytelling is reimagined time and again in the prism of different pagan fables. Ultimately, the project of the *Ovide* is one that plays as fast and loose with the Bible as with Ovid: it seeks to invest the single, central narrative of Christian history with the mythographic richness that the pagan *fabulae* possess in such enviable profusion, and to turn that narrative into the ultimate vernacular romance. For the *Ovide* is more than a translation and commentary on the *Metamorphoses*: it is a vernacular *summa* of an entire tradition – not just a French *Ovidius maior*, but an *Ovidius maximus*.⁵⁶ It incorporates earlier French adaptations, including the *Philomena* sometimes attributed to Chrétien de Troyes (6.2183–3840). Its expanded account of the Trojan War brings in material from the *Heroides*, and more unlikely sources: when Paris has made his judgement in favour of Venus (11.1473–2400), she provides him with commandments of love which précis the *Ars amatoria*, and the whole scene seems to be modelled on Amant's homage to the god of love in Guillaume de Lorris' *Roman de la Rose*.

One unexpected result of this creation of an Ovidian and post-Ovidian museum, under Christian curatorship, is that the commentary provides a safe, circumscribed space in which the earlier, secular tradition of Ovid in French can continue to thrive. One reason this is possible is the fact that the narratives themselves are not regarded as intrinsically didactic. As Demats and others have pointed out, the commentary guards the moralizing function jealously to itself.⁵⁷ In fact the 'fables' lose all authority, by being shown to deviate as much from historical as from moral truth: frequently, the commentary begins by reconstructing a demythologized 'original' history which poetic *ingenium* has falsified. Meanwhile the *ingenium* of the commentator draws us back towards another true history, the spiritual history of fall and redemption played out in the macrocosm and in the individual soul.

⁵⁵ Hexter (1989), Reynolds (1990) 89–90.

⁵⁶ See Copeland (1991) 116–9. ⁵⁷ Demats (1973) 107, 113; Copeland (1992) 124–6.

The process of re-imagining is itself consciously metamorphic: there is a marked tendency for the commentary to change the moral polarity, so to speak, of the actors. Where Orpheus detests heterosexual love and chooses the love of young boys – a preference which can be expected to call forth moral condemnation – one of the allegorical readings makes him Christ, who loves the innocent and is disgusted at the ‘female’ weakness of sinners (10.556–77). This lurking misogyny is often a part of the process of transformation: in particular, female victims of divine rape are regularly transformed into figures of sin, often specifically sexual lust.⁵⁸ The *Ovide*’s running concern to expose what lies beneath a specious appearance makes it deeply suspicious of a beautiful, innocent-seeming heroine such as Callisto, even when the actual narrative has been wholly sympathetic to her; the moral allegory makes of her a hypocrite whose chastity was merely for show (2.1365–819). Yet the process can also work in reverse: Myrrha’s incestuous love for her father can make her a type of the Virgin Mary (10.3478–795). The traditional critique of its ‘forced’ allegories is beside the point: the *Ovide* exuberantly foregrounds the work of its own *ingenium* by creating the most drastic incongruities between pagan and Christian narratives, as well as locating their structural congruences. Meanwhile, in the space between these two ‘true’ histories – the secular history from which popular and poetic traditions have departed, and the sacred narrative to which the commentary directs them – the Ovidian fable paradoxically retains its disruptive and playful force, precisely because it no longer bears the weight of any didactic programme. If the apparatus of the *Ovide moralisé* looks initially like a straitjacket, there is a case for seeing it as a liberator.⁵⁹

Certainly as a translation the *Ovide* seems to have given the *Metamorphoses* a new lease of life in the vernacular. Machaut and his contemporaries and successors turned to it regularly as a narrative source, but without imitating its hermeneutics.⁶⁰ In England, it may have been known to the two great Ovidians of the reign of Richard II, Gower (d. 1408) and Chaucer (d. 1400).⁶¹ Again, neither shows much sympathy with its commentary. Gower’s approach to the integumental tradition is distinctly secular and philosophical in slant, while Chaucer’s orbit is even more eccentric to the moralizing project.

John Gower’s credentials as an Ovidian are formidable; his ten-thousand-line Latin satire, the *Vox clamantis*, is in unrhymed elegiac couplets – according to Rigg, the first substantial Anglo-Latin poem in that medium for a century – and its first book, in particular, is suffused with quotations that

⁵⁸ E.g. Io and Syrinx (1.3830–4150), Callisto (2.1695–2006), Proserpine (5.2947–3028), and even Procne and Philomena (6.3719–840).

⁵⁹ For the opposing view see Allen (1992) 56. ⁶⁰ Blumenfeld-Kosinski (1997) 136–70.

⁶¹ Gower: Mainzer (1972). Chaucer: Meech (1931), Minnis (1979); cf. Cooper, in Martindale (1988) 74–5.

span the entire range of Ovid's work.⁶² In the English verse of his *Confessio Amantis* the influence is narrative and structural. A tale collection framed by the dialogue of a lover with his confessor, the *Confessio*'s most important narrative source is the *Metamorphoses*. There is also a profound structural congruence between the two poems, beyond the general principle that they create an integrated, articulate whole out of fragmented narrative materials. Gower's Prologue centres on a meditation on the declining world, represented through the sequence of metals familiar from Book 1 of the *Metamorphoses*, and given an apocalyptic edge by being fused with its biblical analogue in Daniel 4. In a sense, Gower's Prologue fuses books 1 and 15 of Ovid's epic by presenting a world of restless flux, but one whose trajectory is inevitably for the worse. The remainder of the poem, with a combination of confessional dialogue, narrative and commentary, explores the psychological dimension, in particular, of this state of disorder and decay, and seeks out remedies in both self and society. One end result is a new philosophical statement, placed near the end of the poem and structurally analogous with Pythagoras' speech in *Metamorphoses* 15.⁶³ Gower, however, has substituted Aristotle for Pythagoras, and the change has major implications. Where Pythagoras revels in the exhilaration of flux, and Gower's Prologue laments it, Aristotle creates an ordered, scientific system. The philosophical framing with which the *Confessio* seeks to work towards its closure is only partly generated out of Ovidian resources; it is also an anti-Ovidian move in the poem. The stories adapted from the *Metamorphoses*, unvarnished and often bleak accounts of sexual obsession and violence, constitute a demonic world within Gower's poem, whose challenge to its rationalist leanings must be accommodated as well as resisted. Gower's *Metamorphoses* are contained and to a degree deployed by more stable discourses, but work to destabilize them in turn.

In the poem's closure, the result is a near-total inversion of Ovid's: Gower has substituted a secure Aristotelian system for the Pythagorean celebration of metamorphosis, but cannot generate the same certainty in the political sphere. The *Confessio*, like the *Metamorphoses*, ends with praise of a prince, just as each has a philosopher who advises a prince: Gower's Aristotle appears as the tutor of Alexander (where Ovid's Pythagoras teaches Numa), and Richard II stands in the place of Caesar as the recipient of a closing panegyric. Ovid's ending is a perilous juxtaposition: the apotheosis of Rome,

⁶² Rigg (1993) 287. The *Vox* is edited by Macaulay in Gower (1899–1902) IV; translation by Stockton, Gower (1962), whose notes, incorporating Macaulay's, identify most of the Ovidian allusions.

⁶³ Harbert, in Martindale (1988) 87; Bennett (1986) 416–17. Somewhat analogous is Simpson (1995) 141–4, comparing the opening moves of the *Confessio* and the *Amores*; see further Simpson (1999).

with its promise of perpetual endurance, is left to fend for itself alongside Pythagorean scepticism of any such claim.⁶⁴ Gower's ending is no less so, for there are two different conclusions (and introductions), dating from only a couple of years apart, in the earlier of which Richard II is both dedicatee and object of praise, in the other simply absent.⁶⁵

If Gower works at a considerable remove from the mainstream of 'philosophical' Ovids, Chaucer engages with it only at the level of parody, if at all. *The Book of the Duchess*, among his early dream visions, moves away from the whole didactic premise of the moralizing tradition, for which Chaucer presents himself as ill-equipped in any case. Driven by insomnia to reach for a 'romance' in which he reads, and retells, the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone (Ov. *Met.* 11.410–748), his first response is one of literalistic scepticism, doubting the existence of Morpheus: 'For I ne knew never god but oon' (237). His second response is a personal identification with the narrative, praying 'in my game' (238) to the god of sleep for his own sake. This personalizing rather than moralizing is of a piece with his version of the Alcyone story, which is driven by a 'pittee' and 'routhe' which 'I that made this book' orchestrates (96–7). This intensely affective mode of reading is sustained throughout; Chaucer has abandoned the didactic proposition of literature altogether, in favour of the cultivation of aestheticized, melancholic memory, 'sorwful ymagynacioun' (14). Immediately after his mock-prayer he falls asleep, the book as his pillow – a fictive Morpheus turns out to have real power – and in the dream which follows, there is only one, abortive attempt at didacticism. His interlocutor, the grieving knight in black, assures him that 'nought all the remedies of Ovyde' could banish his sorrow (568); Chaucer nonetheless tries out the remedy of patience, with a stock of examples against suicide including several from the *Heroides*, but without making any impact (714–44). If Chaucer's pity for Alcyone becomes part of a larger programme, it is still sorrow and sympathy that drive the text, articulated through an allegorical knight who stands in for a real patron – the widower John of Gaunt.⁶⁶ The burden of Ovidian allusion here has become thoroughly subjective, an integument of passion rather than of doctrine.

The harmony of shared pity that governs the *Book of the Duchess* is altogether absent from one of Chaucer's later Ovidian projects, and its fictive patron much less tractable. The *Legend of Good Women*, edgy and

⁶⁴ Barkan (1986) 84–8.

⁶⁵ The motives behind the revisions are disputed: e.g. Nicholson (1988), Simpson (1995) 293–4, Stow (1993).

⁶⁶ See Hanning (1986) 122–41, Hardman (1994).

abrasive, returns us to a world of authority violently appropriated by a tyrannical god of love.⁶⁷ Chaucer's role in the *Duchess* was one of sympathetic audience; here he is personally under threat, and the *persona* he develops runs closely parallel with Ovid's as he encounters an intractable monarchical power, and must bend his pen accordingly. It is a fittingly ironic inversion that a Chaucerian *Remedia amoris*, rather than an *Ars amatoria*, should be the cause of his problems: Cupid chooses to read Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* as a heretical attack on love's power, a *dissuasio* based on the supposed infidelity of women.⁶⁸ The penance is an inspired parody of the moralizing tradition: on the orders of Cupid and his queen, Alcestis, Chaucer borrows the Christian narrative form of hagiography, and converts it for the use of amatory paganism. (The title by which Chaucer refers to the work in the catalogue of the *Man of Law's Prologue* makes the parody clearer: 'the Seintes Legende of Cupide', *Canterbury Tales* 2.61.) The work will be a new *Heroides*, founded on the passive suffering of haplessly virtuous heroines. It is also a new *Ars amatoria* of a distinctly chastened kind, a 'craft of fyn lovyng' (F.544) based on matrimonial fidelity and self-sacrifice, as embodied by Alcestis herself.

Indeed, the *Legend* seems to reinvent Ovid's elegiac corpus in its entirety. Cupid stipulates that the first heroine should be Cleopatra, without giving any reason, and I suspect a covert allusion here. We have already encountered the suggestion that Ovid's failure to produce an epic of Augustus' war against Antony and Cleopatra was one of his literary sins, disguised by leaving the *Amores* untitled; most of the 'Legend of Cleopatra' is in martial mode and gives as much space to Antony's world of military honour as to the fate of the queen. Chaucer seems to be making good Ovid's omission, as though to repair the damage done by the *Amores*, but at the same time to underscore the parallel between his outraged Cupid and Ovid's irate Augustus. His portrait of a wilful, arbitrary kingship literally places love and majesty on a single throne; but, as Ovid says of Jupiter's abduction of Europa, 'sovereignty (*maiestas*) and love do not suit well together, nor remain long in one abode' (Ov. *Met.* 2. 846–7; cf. Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale* 764–6). It is perhaps no coincidence that one of the most subtly wrought and covert classical allusions in all Chaucer's work is to the rape of Europa, in the Prologue to the *Legend* (F.112–114). Ovid has provided the model for an oblique but penetrating account of the strained relationships that can obtain between poets and princes, weaving its way secretively through the sexual politics that more evidently dominate the *Legend*.

⁶⁷ Kiser (1983), Simpson (1998).

⁶⁸ *Troilus* and its source in Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* are themselves profoundly shaped by the pattern of *Ars* and *Remedia*; see Nolan (1992) 119–246.

Chaucer's partial recreation of his poetic *persona* on the basis of the disgraced Ovid, desperately writing his way back to grace while covertly recording his continuing recusancy, forms part of a long tradition. Ovid's self-presentation as exile seems, indeed, to be the earliest aspect of his work to capture medieval imaginations. Peter Godman traces it as a *leitmotif* in the Latin poets at the Carolingian court – in particular, in Modoin of Autun (nicknamed Naso in this poetic circle) and Theodulf of Orléans, the latter exiled under Charlemagne's successor Pippin.⁶⁹ Hildebert of Lavardin, writing in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, cunningly fuses Ovid's voice with Boethius to mount a scathing attack on his own personal sub-Augustus, while rising above secular disappointment. The abuses of tyrants are part of the inconstancy of created things, a sign of the rule of fortune, permitted by providence. Ostensibly correcting Ovid's complaint by offering a philosophical *remedium*, he also gets to participate in that complaint.⁷⁰ Especially rich is the work of Hildebert's contemporary Baudri, abbot of Bourgueil.⁷¹ Much of his poetic *persona* is founded on Ovidian *nequitia*, and the kinship is pressed home with a pair of 'new' *Tristia*, a pair of letters along the lines of the double *Heroides*, between Ovid at Tomis and a Roman friend, Florus. Baudri's project here is to make explicit the bitter animosity which Ovid's own epistles are careful to disguise. These are private letters in which the correspondents can mount a robust apologia, can speak openly of *iniustam duri Cesaris iram* ('the *unjust* wrath of implacable Caesar', my italics), can insist that Ovid's poetry was never the real reason for his exile, a private act of vengeance founded on misinformation. He can even confess that the high-flown panegyrics were merely tactical, flattering in hopes of a recall.⁷² Baudri gives us a sophisticated reading of the subtext of Ovid's poems from exile, and a robust self-defence under colour of Ovidian imitation.⁷³

Florus lets slip that the false suspicion which incurred Augustus' wrath was that of adultery with his wife, a popular explanation for the *error* that compounded the *carmen*. One of the more bizarre, fourteenth-century elaborations of the story has it that Ovid was observed climbing up to Livia's bedroom by none other than Virgil, who sabotaged his ladder. Ovid broke his leg on the way down, and hated his fellow poet from then on; this is why, when he praises his contemporaries, he snubs Virgil with a mere *Vergilium tantum uidi* ('Virgil I only saw', Ov. *Trist.* 4.10.51).⁷⁴

With or without active sabotage, Virgil always seems to stand as the centre to which the medieval Ovid is marginal. Modoin of Autun's *Egloga* begins

⁶⁹ Godman (1987) 93–148. ⁷⁰ 'Nuper eram locuples', poem 22 in Hildebert (1969).

⁷¹ Here I am much indebted to Bond (1989), (1995).

⁷² Baudri (1979) 97.13, 98.111–12. ⁷³ Bond (1995) 42–69. ⁷⁴ Ghisalberti (1946) 50.

with a dialogue between an old established court poet and an ambitious newcomer, in which the *senex* cites Ovid as a warning of what happens to poets who are insane (*demens*) enough to incur Caesar's wrath. The *puer* responds with a catalogue of poets whose verse brought them prosperity; at the head of the list is Virgil, who came to Rome after losing his estates and regained them by his poetry.⁷⁵ This fiction of a smooth course to prosperity on the sails of a linear poetic career is the perfect antitype to the characteristic Ovidian course of reversal, severance and marginalization. This distance from an 'official', central Rome, identified (far too simply, of course) with Virgil and Caesar, is part of what makes Ovid uniquely intimate with medieval poets. It seems that Ovid is required even to make sense of Virgilian narrative, as in the well-known case of the twelfth-century *Roman d'Eneas*.⁷⁶ One of the founders of the new wave of *roman antiques* that revolutionized heroic narrative, the *Eneas* is consciously revisionist: it thinks of the process of empire-building in terms of dynastic marriages, and its public narrative must be articulated as much in erotic as in martial terms. Accordingly, Ovid's elegiac versions of epic become an indispensable hermeneutic ally in interpreting the *Aeneid*. This process can cut both ways: Baudri of Bourgueil, as well as his new *Tristia*, wrote a new pair of letters for Paris and Helen, by no means 'exact imitations' of Ovid, but a systematic reopening of negotiations between Ovid and Virgil.⁷⁷ Writing in hexameters, he places his epistles chronologically earlier than the *Heroides*, as though to forestall Ovid's black comedy, and seeks to restore Helen, in particular, to a genuinely tragic dignity. Persuaded into the elopement only by a fatalistic belief in oracles, she becomes a counter-Aeneas, an unwilling exile driven by fate and the gods towards a war which she can foresee. *Virgilio grauitas*, *Ouidii leuitas* are the qualities Baudri praises in fellow-poet Godfrey of Rheims (99.8); they are working out their differences in his own work too.

The process of renegotiation and competition between the poets is still ongoing in Chaucer, where Dido takes Helen's place as chief locus of conflict, both in the *Legend of Good Women* and the earlier *House of Fame*.⁷⁸ Venus' temple in Book 1 of the *House of Fame* rather resembles the lady's chamber in Marie de France's 'Guigemar', in that it presents an iconographic programme whose interpretation runs out of control. As mother and patroness of Aeneas, Venus presides over Chaucer's epitome of the *Aeneid*, which he sees depicted on the temple walls. The retelling is famously taken

⁷⁵ Godman (1985) 24.60–75.

⁷⁶ Ed. Salverda de Grave (1925–29); trans. Yunck (1974). On Virgil and Ovid in the *Eneas* see Baswell (1995) 168–219, Blumenfeld-Kosinski (1997) 15–51, Nolan (1992) 75–118.

⁷⁷ Poems 7 and 8 in Hilbert's edition. The quoted phrase is from Fyler (1979) 19; the Virgilian strand is discussed by Albrecht (1982), and Bond (1995) 62.

⁷⁸ See Baswell (1995) 220–69 and Dronke (1986).

over, however, by Dido, and by Venus' other role as goddess of love. In this guise it is Ovid not Virgil who is 'Venus clerk' (1487). The 'Epistle of Ovyde' temporarily supplants the 'Eneydos' (378–9) as Chaucer launches into a catalogue of betrayed Ovidian heroines. Within a temple full of 'ymages | Of gold' (121), Chaucer has conjured the moral: 'Hy[t] is not al gold that glareth' (272). Ovid provides a model for an authorial rebellion in which Chaucer can claim emancipation even from Ovid himself: in the speech of Dido which dominates his miniature *Aeneid*, 'Non other auctour alegge I' (314). The return to Virgil's official Aeneas is a brief and perfunctory gesture of obedience. In the *Legend of Good Women*, meanwhile, where the demand for authorial loyalty and obedience is pressingly explicit, Chaucer likes to cite multiple sources for his narratives, perhaps as part of his covert resistance. Ovid's authority repeatedly offsets or supplements someone else's – Livy in 'Lucrece', Guido delle Colonne, the prose historian of Troy, in 'Hypsipyle and Medea'. In the 'Legend of Dido', the Virgilian public narrative is again modified and increasingly supplanted by Ovid's female-dominated alternative, to the extent that the legend ends with an extract of her letter to Aeneas, added as though an afterthought when her death has already been narrated. A tale that began with a Dantesque offering of 'glorye and honour' to 'Virgil Mantoan' (924) ends with a direction to 'rede Ovyde' (1367).

Ovid is the ideal guide in reclaiming, questioning and revising the cultural authority of the ancients, precisely because he is himself already engaged in the effort of reclamation and problematization. His perspective on Virgil and on Augustus' Rome is already retrospective, as well as being generically and, in the end, geographically displaced. As such he becomes the model for all future efforts to recapture, reinvent or pick apart the central authority of Rome, as well as providing the most troubling of cautionary tales. His sheer variousness, as well as the varied personal and institutional interests that impelled his medieval readers, ensured that no single Ovid dominated critical or poetic traditions. His authorship constituted a locus where discursive authority could be explored, asserted and disputed; the result was a rich and complex network of readings, claims, counter-appropriations, repudiations and retractions, in which Ovid's works never ceased to thrive.

FURTHER READING

There has never been an Ovidian equivalent of Comparetti's *Vergil in the Middle Ages*, and as Elliott (1978) says, 'a comprehensive survey of Ovid's influence will probably never be written' (3). There are numerous general studies on a smaller scale, mostly older: Rand (1925) is witty and immensely readable; there are great riches in Wilkinson (1955) 366–98, and Robathan's survey in Binns (1973) 191–209 is thorough. Essential supplements, though not in English, are Battaglia (1959) and

Munari (1960). A wealth of material *ad indicem* for medieval Latin poetry can be found in Raby (1934), Curtius (1990) and Dronke (1968).

The best starting point for a wide-ranging sampler of modern critical approaches is an Ovidian issue of *Mediaevalia* 13 (1989 [for 1987]), a number of whose articles are cited in my notes. Studies of the reception of particular texts include Stapleton (1996) on the *Amores*, Allen (1992) on the *Ars* and *Remedia*, and for the *Metamorphoses* the highly influential Barkan (1986), and several essays in Hardie, Barchiesi, Hinds (1999). Individual mythic protagonists have also attracted attention, including Narcissus (Knoespel (1985)) and Apollo and Daphne (Barnard (1987)).

Academic and pedagogic traditions have attracted much attention in recent years, though few commentaries have been published. Alton (1960–61) and McGregor (1978) offer accessible introductions. Hexter (1986) is a seminal study of commentaries on the *Ars*, *Ex Ponto* and *Heroides*. Coulson has studied, and edited in part, the thirteenth-century ‘Vulgate’ commentary on the *Metamorphoses* (1991), while McKinley (1996) compares commentaries on *Met.* 10. Viarre (1966) studies Ovid’s role as natural philosopher in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Amongst a good deal of minor pseudo-Ovidiana, Lebek (1978) is worth singling out, a clever piece of clerical satire appended to *Met.* 1’s Deucalion and Pyrrha. F. W. Lenz edited many pseudo-Ovidian pieces, to which references are collected in Albrecht and Zinn (1968) 546–66; see also Dronke (1976) and Lehmann (1927).

Ovid’s impact on vernacular poetry makes itself felt across Europe; the present chapter’s neglect of Germany (where Albrecht von Halberstadt produced the first vernacular *Metamorphoses*) can be made good by Stackmann (1966), and of Spain by Schevill (1913); see in particular Juan Ruiz (1999), and Parker (1991). For French translations of Ovid, Lucas (1970) is a useful summary; in Italy, my account of Dante needs to be supplemented by Boccaccio (Hollander (1977), Brownlee (1989)) and Petrarch’s *Trionfi* and *Rime* (Monti (1990), Sturm-Maddox (1985), Hardie (1999b)).

For Chaucer and Gower, Minnis (1991) is a superb study of poetic *auctoritas* and its lapses. Fyler (1979) offers a rather general but interesting study of the long-observed affinity between Chaucer and Ovid; Calabrese (1994) is also valuable. For Gower, Simpson (1995) and (1999) are indispensable, a significant advance from such earlier studies as Hiscoe (1985) and Harbert (1988). Simpson also offers challenging accounts of medieval Virgilian and Ovidian models of poetics; further ramifications of their relationship are traced by Baswell (1995) and Desmond (1994).

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