

Caitlin Hines
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Advisor: Dr. Sharon James
Readers: Dr. Jim O'Hara
Dr. Alison Keith

Puella, Meretrix, Matrona?

The Lexicon of Fertility and the Confusion of Women's Social

Classes in Ovid's Love Poetry

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Chapter One: Introduction, Method and Backgrounds

1. Method and Approach: Intertextuality/Intratextuality

Stephen Hinds has demonstrated, through analysis of the deeply intertextual relationship between Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Tristia* 1, that Ovid's works communicate with each other, containing references both explicit and structural that resonate between the texts, often on an extremely subtle level.¹ In similar fashion, Carole Newland's intratextual reading of the *Fasti* reveals the extent to which such resonances can exist also within a single Ovidian text.² Reading within and between the *Amores* and the *Ars amatoria* requires an integration of these two approaches—intertext and intratext—because, although they are distinct works, the elegiac speaker indicates that the two texts are narrated by a single persona. If we accept that the *praeceptor* is an older, if not necessarily wiser, version of the *amator*, we can enrich our reading of both texts as an articulation of the experiences and attitudes of a single elegiac poet-lover.

2. Medical Background: Greek theories on the female body

The relationship that Ovid establishes between the female body and the earth is highly reminiscent of early Greek ideas about women, the earth, and female desire.³ Parallels between the female body and the earth exist as far back as Hesiod's version of the creation myth, in which the first woman Pandora—a beautiful, evil thing—is molded from earth (*Works and Days*, 61).

¹ Hinds (1985).

² Newlands (2000).

³ See Carson (1990) for a thorough discussion of Greek thought about the female body and its relationship with the earth. Greeks saw women as essentially irrational, emotional, wet, sexually voracious, and either immature or over-ripe, but never at a sexual prime. Male anxieties about the female procreative capacity manifested themselves in assignations of pollution and dirtiness, as well as in strict control over the female body.

Indeed, Athenian fathers handed over their daughters to their new husbands “for the plowing of legitimate children,” according to the betrothal formula. These ideas exist also in Greek tragedy: see, for example, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannos*, in which Oedipus is described as a fellow-sower (*homosporos*, 460) who has plowed the same furrow (*aulax*, 1210) as his own father. The connection in the Greek imagination is clear: the female body, sprung originally from the earth itself, possesses an analogous procreative capacity that renders a fertile woman just like productive earth.

Ovid’s approach to the female body through a lexicon of fertility makes use of primarily Greek ideas because, although women are not unconnected to the earth in Latin literature,⁴ the direct parallel between woman and earth is not a defining characteristic of Roman thought about women. Lucretius does discuss the generative power of *terra mater*, suggesting that the earth’s widespread fruitfulness is the result of multiple wombs (*uteri*, 5.808), lactation (5.811-15), and eventual post-menopausal weakness (5.826-7); however, as Nugent argues, the earth here “is figured as a human female body which passes through stages from youthful fertility to barrenness in old age.”⁵ Where Lucretius characterizes the earth through the stages of female biological development, Ovid uses the fertility of the earth to describe female desire and the growth of the sexual elegiac relationship. Thus, while Lucretius and Ovid appropriate the same Greek link between woman and earth, their metaphors are reversed.⁶

⁴ Chapter Three of Keith’s *Engendering Rome* (2000) explores the relationship between women and the earth in Latin epic, in which the female body is often assimilated into the earth, to be once again dominated and possessed by men.

⁵ Nugent (1994), 183-5.

⁶ See Brown (1987), 240-241 for further instances of the agricultural/sexual metaphor in Greek and Latin literature. Further details on agricultural sexual vocabulary in the Latin tradition can be found in Adams (1982): see 24 for agricultural implements as sexual body parts, 26-28 for botanical metaphors, and 84 for agricultural euphemisms for female genitalia.

3. Legal Background: The Julian Laws

In 18 B.C., Augustus introduced the *Lex Julia de maritandis ordinibus* in an effort to regulate marriage and reproduction within the elite citizen classes. These measures, designed to increase the population of elite Romans,⁷ pressured unmarried citizens to find suitable partners and produce legitimate offspring. Those who did so were rewarded with tax breaks and priority consideration for office, while the unmarried (*caelibes*) and childless (*orbi*) were denied the right to certain offices and inheritances.⁸ Male citizens who married women of an unacceptable social class remained *caelibes* under the law.⁹ Divorcees and widows were compelled to remarry quickly or forfeit the rights that they had gained from their former marriage.¹⁰ A year later, in 17 B.C., the *Lex Julia de adulteriis* made adultery a public crime and subjected accused adulterers to severe punishment.¹¹

Any Roman citizen male between the ages of 25 and 60 who was unable to contract a legitimate marriage was deemed *incapax*, a label that barred him from inheriting his family estate and participating fully in Roman politics.¹² As a natural result of these measures, elite Roman women of marriageable age became an economic commodity in high demand. A legitimate and fertile wife became the only pathway to property and power for aristocratic men. Accordingly, citizen daughters had to be protected and their purity preserved for their most important civic function: the production of legitimate offspring.

⁷ See Csillag (1976), 55-58, 82. Factors contributing to a dwindling population of elite citizens (particularly citizen girls of marriageable age) included malnutrition, famine, poor public hygiene, and epidemics. See also Propertius 2.7, in which the poet characterizes an earlier version of marriage legislation—which would have separated him from his *puella* Cynthia—as designed for the breeding of soldiers: *unde mihi Parthis natos praeberere triumphis / nullus de nostro sanguine miles erit* (13-14).

⁸ Csillag, 77, 82-85, 170, 173; see also Raditsa (1980), 322.

⁹ Csillag, 85; Raditsa, 326.

¹⁰ Csillag, 87-88.

¹¹ Csillag, 178ff and Raditsa, 310-315. Only women of the citizen classes could be prosecuted for adultery. Other women, such as prostitutes, belonged by law to a classification of females with whom *stuprum non committitur*.

¹² Csillag, 85-86; Raditsa, 323.

These measures intensified the social divide between citizen and non-citizen women: as Raditsa believes, the law “seems to have been designed to function by creating all sorts of invidious distinctions.”¹³ For all non-citizen Roman women, a great portion of the Roman population, their reproductive capacity was rendered legally incompetent. Women of the *meretrix* class in particular, who helped to protect unmarried citizen women by absorbing the excess sexual energy of citizen males, were legally classified as illegitimate mothers. Under Augustus’ measures, the womb of a *meretrix* was essentially a fruitless vessel. Although the law did not forbid intermarriage between classes (except for males of the senatorial order¹⁴), any citizen male wishing to marry or produce offspring with a non-citizen woman would be forced to sacrifice his claims to full political and economic status.¹⁵ Children born of non-citizen women were deemed illegitimate and denied the benefits accorded to citizen children, regardless of the father’s social status.¹⁶ With the *Lex Julia*, Augustus simultaneously elevated and cheapened the social value of the fertile female body.

It was in this social climate that Ovid penned his genre-defying collection of love elegies, the *Amores*, followed by his controversial guidebook to getting a girlfriend, the *Ars amatoria*. The material in Ovid’s love poetry is often provocative and shocking, and Augustus’ displeasure with the *Ars* in particular may have played a role in the poet’s exile from Rome.¹⁷ The ambiguity of the social class of Ovid’s female characters and intended audience appears to have been the

¹³ Raditsa, 289. Here Raditsa is disagreeing with an earlier interpretation by M. Humbert, who argued that these laws were meant to affect society as a whole without any class motive. “Humbert...implies that the laws attempted to promote a social atmosphere where fecundity was a matter of public concern and ostensible honor.” Raditsa points out that Humbert makes this claim without addressing the restriction on marriage between free men and prostitutes, a critical feature of the law’s divisive effects as it relates to this paper.

¹⁴ Csillag, 96-97, 100-101.

¹⁵ Csillag, 102.

¹⁶ There is some doubt whether the legislation completely nullified marriages in violation of Augustus’ class restrictions or simply denied them the privileges of legitimately married citizens. In either case, the children of such unions were certainly discriminated against under the Julian laws. See Raditsa, 281 and Csillag, 102, 116.

¹⁷ The *Ars amatoria* is generally believed to be the poem that Ovid refers to when he blames his exile to Tomis on *carmen et error* at *Tristia* 2.207. For a nuanced discussion of the relationship between Ovid and Augustus and the problem of Ovid’s exile as censorship, see O’Gorman (2006).

factor that most angered Augustus. Since the social reforms of the *princeps* were concerned with reestablishing and enforcing morality specifically among the upper classes, the numerous disclaimers within the *Ars* that insist upon a purely non-citizen female audience¹⁸ would appear to exclude the material from the jurisdiction of the Julian laws. The class of Ovid's female characters and addressees, however, was ambiguous enough for Augustus—or any potential reader—to interpret the detailed instructions for conducting illicit affairs in the *Ars amatoria* as encouragement for adulterous behavior among real women of the aristocratic class.

The social status of women in the *Amores* and the *Ars* has continued to cause confusion and disagreement among scholars. While the elegiac *puella* is unquestionably a member of the *meretrix* class¹⁹ and so unbound by the Julian restrictions on adultery, the distinction between classes is often confused by the application of the language of apparently legitimate marriage (*conubium*, *vir*) to elegiac relationships.²⁰ Miller argues that Ovid's instructions expand to include all Roman women and believes that the audience is intended to “see the *matrona* behind the *meretrix*.”²¹ Gibson suggests that a more nuanced confusion of classes (in contrast to Miller's clear dichotomy of *meretrix* and *matrona*) contributes to a humorous interpretation of traditional female stereotypes that is meant specifically for a male audience.²² Whatever class of women may have composed Ovid's intended audience, the very difficulty of pinpointing their social status is an essential characteristic of the text. I will argue that a crucial feature of the ambiguity of

¹⁸ At 1.31-2, he warns those women who wear the clothing of citizens (*tenues vittae, instita longa*) to go far away (*este procul*). At 2.599-600, he insists that none of his material is in violation of the law because no citizen women are present: *en iterum testor nihil hic nisi lege remissum / luditur in nostris instita nulla iocis*. At 3.57-8, he instructs only those *puellae* to approach him *quas pudor et leges et sua iura sinunt*.

¹⁹ James (2003), 35-37.

²⁰ Often in love poetry in which a third party is involved, the *amator* will refer to his rival as a *vir*. In *Amores* 1.4, for example, the *amator* laments the arrival of *vir tuus* at the same feast that he and his *puella* attend. Although the word *vir* can legally denote a husband, here the *vir* is most likely a man who has drawn up a contract for the *puella*'s exclusive time and attention. The appearance of this vocabulary is not grounds to conclude that poem 1.4 describes an adulterous and illegal love affair.

²¹ Quoted in Gibson (1998), 296.

²² Gibson, 310-11.

female social class in Ovid's love poetry has not yet been addressed: the striking and paradoxical application of a lexicon of fertility to non-citizen women.

Of all the metaphors for pursuit that the *amator* and *praeceptor* employ, the metaphor of elegiac "fertility" seems most incongruous with the actual goals of the elegiac relationship. It is deeply ironic for the purely recreational sexual relationship between *amator* and *puella* to be described in terms of fruitfulness and reproduction, especially since impregnation poses perhaps the greatest threat to the continuity of such an affair. This language, however, is surprisingly pervasive in Ovid's love poetry. He consistently deploys a lexicon of fertility, growth, and production in his texts as he describes elegiac relationships involving women belonging to the non-citizen *meretrix* class.

Since the Julian laws emphasized fertility as a desirable quality only in elite women, it seems illogical that such a vocabulary should be applied consistently to a class of women for whom successful fertility was dangerous both personally and professionally. Indeed, the habitual characterization of non-citizen female desire as a thing to be nourished, ripened, and harvested becomes an integral part of the framework for the *praeceptor*'s instructions on the pursuit of a female beloved in the *Ars amatoria*. The presence of a fertility lexicon in poetry aimed specifically at women of the *meretrix* class is especially remarkable in light of the stratifying effects that the Julian laws had upon the relative social value of female fertility.

4. Literary Background: the Georgics

Before a fuller analysis of the lexicon of fertility that is embedded within both the *Amores* and the *Ars amatoria*, the relationship between Ovid's love poetry and Vergil's *Georgics*

merits brief consideration. Eleanor Winsor Leach has already established the connection between these texts by highlighting the presence of georgic imagery, metaphor and didactic style in the *Ars amatoria*. Through identification of thematic similarities and parallel passages, Leach demonstrates that Ovid draws generously upon the *Georgics* to develop metaphors involving husbandry, agriculture, and hunting, so that the behavior and instincts of elegiac *puellae* are shown to be similar to that of pastoral animals and farmlands.²³ In addition, elements of the *praeceptor*'s advice are derived directly from Vergil's instructions about the care of arable land and animal husbandry. The *praeceptor* applies, for example, the assertion in the *Georgics* that all lands cannot support every crop (*nec uero terrae ferre omnes omnia possunt*, 2.109) to his advice on snaring a desirable woman (*nec tellus eadem parit omnia*, *Ars* 1.757). In a comic perversion of Vergil's text, the different types of soil become varied approaches that an *amator* can employ to attract a female lover, while the women themselves become the fruits of the earth that are produced from such efforts.

Such deliberate adaptation of Vergil's instructions for successful agriculture and husbandry into metaphors for the human sexual chase upend Vergil's (and, by extension, Augustus') carefully structured social regulations for the restraint of wild, natural passions. By both restricting legitimate marriage and procreation to members of the elite citizen class and introducing severe consequences for adultery, Augustus attempted to accomplish what the *praeceptor* of the *Ars* so often demonstrates to be impossible: to harness and restrain human passion. That the *praeceptor* encourages purely recreational unions through the framework of georgic didactic,

²³ Leach (1964).

urging on impulsive passions where his source orders careful control²⁴ seems significant to Ovid's overall approach to the female body and the (mis)management of human emotions.

The most salient objection to Augustan legislation that appears to arise from Ovid's love poetry is the impossibility of the *princeps*' invasive effort to bind the sexuality of his citizens to the reins of arbitrary social delineations. The development of a conspicuous relationship to earlier poetry that complements the Augustan program of control over passion, the uncontrollable and illogical passions of the *amator* and *praeceptor*, and the deliberately confused social status of his female characters all interact as features of Ovid's reaction to the Julian laws on marriage, procreation, and adultery.

²⁴ See *Georgics* 3.129-37, in which farmers keep their female breeding animals underfed, thirsty, and overtired so that they can more easily manage their sexual frenzy and prevent the animals from ruining their fertility with excessive sexuality.

Chapter Two: the *Amores*

1. Terms and Distribution

The lexicon of fertility in the *Amores* is plentiful and unmistakable. Various words for earth and soil (*ager*, *humus*, *terra*, *solum*) occur thirty-one times. Vocabulary for fruit, seeds, and plants (*frux*, *herba*, *pomum*, *semen*, *uva*, *vitis*) appears thirty-eight times. The poetry is also rich with adjectives denoting productivity (*fecundus*, *ferax*, *fertilis*, *sterilis*, *pomiferus*, *baciferus*, *uber*). What makes the application of this lexicon of fertility so striking and profound, however, is that this language appears in overwhelming abundance only in the second half of the *Amores*.

Frequency of Fertility Vocabulary in the *Amores*

	Before 2.13		After 2.13 ²⁵		Total
	#	line citations	#	line citations	
<i>ager</i>	3	1.10.5, 1.10.56, 2.9.19	6	2.16.8, 2.16.33, 3.6.99, 3.10.11, 3.10.17, 3.10.33	9
<i>fecundus</i>	1	2.11.29	2	3.10.37, 3.12.41	3
<i>ferax</i>	0		3	2.16.7 (x2), 3.10.17	3
<i>fertilis</i>	0		3	2.16.6, 3.5.30, 3.10.37	3
<i>frux</i>	0		4	3.8.39, 3.8.53, 3.10.35, 3.10.39	4
<i>herba</i>	1	1.14.39	9	2.16.6, 2.16.9, 3.5.9, 3.5.17, 3.5.30, 2.7.28, 3.7.31, 3.10.10, 3.13.14	10
<i>humus</i>	1	1.8.18	10	2.16.10, 3.5.16, 3.5.22, 3.5.30, 3.6.96, 3.8.36, 3.8.42, 3.10.14, 3.10.32, 3.11.10	11
<i>pomum</i>	2	1.10.56, 2.2.43	4	2.14.24, 3.7.34, 3.7.52, 3.8.40	6
<i>semen</i>	0		6	3.1.59, 3.4.10, 3.6.16, 3.10.11,	6

²⁵ This column includes the contents of poem 2.13 in its totals.

				3.10.33, 3.12.35	
<i>solum</i>	0		2	2.16.6, 3.6.16	2
<i>sterilis</i>	0		1	3.7.31	1
<i>terra</i> ²⁶	1	2.6.50	8	2.16.7, 2.16.15, 2.16.18, 3.2.48, 3.9.41, 3.9.53, 3.10.8, 3.10.20	9
<i>uva</i>	2	1.10.55, 1.15.11	3	2.14.23, 2.16.7, 3.7.33	5
<i>vitis</i>	2	1.3.11, 1.10.55	5	2.14.23, 2.16.33, 2.16.41 (x2), 3.7.33	7
Total	13		66		79

The above chart records the frequency of several key words in the fertility lexicon as they appear in the *Amores* before and after the abortion poems. Although the divide at poem 2.13 is not absolute, the imbalanced proportion of occurrence for this vocabulary of fertility is unmistakable. The frequency of almost all of these words at least doubles following the abortion poems, while *humus* increases by a factor of ten. Forms of *ferax*, *fertilis*, *frux*, *semen*, and *solum* are particularly noteworthy in their complete absence from the first half of the collection.

2. Fertility Language before *Amores* 2.13

The *amator* makes rich use of metaphor in his elegies, often employing martial, triumphal, and epic vocabulary to communicate his impression of the torturous process of being in love and pursuing an amorous relationship with an elegiac *puella*. In poems 1.9, 2.9, and 2.12 in

²⁶ There are actually twenty occurrences of *terra* in the *Amores* (eight before poem 2.13 and twelve after), but in this chart I have counted only the forms of *terra* that refer specifically to the earth as soil with productive capabilities, rather than to earth in a territorial sense (i.e. *Gangetide terra*, 1.2.47 or *non fuit in terris vocum simulantior ales*, 2.6.23) or in the sense of ground not meant for productivity (*spectabat terram*; *terram spectare decebat*, 2.5.43). The same has been done for *humus*.

particular, love is characterized as war and the triumph that follows, while lovers are like soldiers on campaign and *puellae* are the prizes to be won.²⁷ The elegiac *puella* in each of these metaphors acts as the passive recipient of the *amator*'s actions. Such metaphors, along with similar images of lovers hunting *puellae* like quarry, will later become programmatic parts of the *praeceptor*'s didactic poetry, but the aspect of the *praeceptor*'s instruction that is missing entirely from the first half of the *Amores* is the idea of love as an object to be fertilized, nourished, and grown.

There is very little fertility language in the first half of the *Amores*, and what little there is appears in a context removed from actual productivity. The single occurrence of *humus*²⁸ as earth before the abortion poems, in poem 1.8 (the *amator*'s condemnation of the wicked *lena*), appears in the context of one of the *lena*'s spells: she splits (*findit*) the earth with her song (18). Since this particular feat of magic is performed after the *lena* has apparently worked her evil will on the weather and caused the stars to drip blood, we may reasonably presume that this form of *humus* has little to do with fertility.

In poem 1.10, the *amator* asserts that one should pluck grapes that are hanging from full vines, and let the generous field of the mythological Alcinous offer its fruits: *carpite de plenīs pendentes vitibus uvas / praebeat Alcinoi poma benignus ager* (55-6). Although the vehicles in this metaphor are highly suggestive of the fertility language that will appear later in the *Amores*, and even look forward to similar advice that the *praeceptor* will give in the *Ars amatoria*, the tenor of this metaphor is far removed from actual fertility. In this poem, the *amator* is bemoaning

²⁷ In his first programmatic poem, 1.2, the *amator* presents himself as the captor of Cupid, who enjoys his own triumph. By the middle of the second book, the roles have shifted so that the *amator* himself is the triumphant warrior and the *puella* is the captive prize.

²⁸ The word *humus* also appears at 2.4.11 (*sive aliqua est oculos in humum deiecta modestos / uror*), but for the purposes of this paper I do not include appearances in contexts completely removed from any potential connotation of fertility (see note 25). I consider words like *humus* and *terra* part of the fertility lexicon only where they represent earth and soil, rather than the ground upon which one walks or looks.

the *puella*'s tendency to beg constantly for gifts from her lover. Thus, in this context, the *pendentes uvas* represent rich gifts and physical wealth, while the *plenaes vites* and *benignus ager* stand in for the pockets of wealthy men.

3. The Abortion Poems: 2.13-14

The appearance of *uva* and *vitis* in 1.10 should be noted, however, in light of their next paired occurrence in the *Amores*: a gruesome metaphor in poem 2.14 that creates an unmistakable association between the female body and fertile earth: *quid plenam fraudas vitem crescentibus uvis / pomaque crudeli vellis acerba manu* (2.14.23-4). These lines, which refer to the pregnancy that Corinna has aborted at great risk to her own health and life, associate her unborn child with growing fruit and Corinna's body with the fertile earth that should sustain it. To remove the unborn child from the womb is to pluck grapes prematurely from the vine, and to tear away unripe fruit with a cruel hand.²⁹ Fruit and vine here represent the actual product of successful human fertilization, the human crop that eventually results from the spilling of a man's seed into the female vessel, despite the *amator* or *praeceptor*'s desire for the sterility of his female sexual receptacle.

The poems about Corinna's dangerous abortion (2.13 and 2.14), notable for their disturbing and very un-elegiac subject matter, mark a turning point in this collection of elegies. De Boer has already identified these poems as the point at which the juxtaposition of vulnerable female

²⁹ There may be an embedded reference here to Tibullus 1.1., in which the elegiac speaker rejects luxury and wealth, longing instead for a simple agricultural life where he can sow crops with an easy hand: *ipse seram teneras mature tempore vites / rusticus et facile grandia poma manu*, 7-8. The exact parallel in metrical position between *crudeli manu* and *facile manu*, as well as the repetition of vocabulary (*vitis*, *poma*) and the juxtaposition of words with temporal force (*mature tempore* and *acerba*, which has the connotation here of "unripe") might each suggest that Ovid had Tibullus' programmatic poem in mind when he composed these lines. Such a connection would be interesting and disturbing, but is perhaps the topic of another study.

bodies (*puella* versus slave women) comes to a sudden halt.³⁰ I propose that these poems act simultaneously as a trigger for the *amator*'s (and, later, the *praeceptor*'s) preoccupation with issues of fertility and reproduction. It is only after these poems that imagery of arable land and fertile landscapes begins to appear in concentrated abundance.

In poems 2.13 and 2.14, the *amator* manages to make Corinna's pregnancy and abortion about himself, his anger, and his self-righteous shock, instead of about the woman who experienced them.³¹ He offers no poetic space for Corinna's suffering or pain and leaves her on what may be her deathbed (*in dubio vitae*, 2.13.2) while he labors to illustrate how destructive and harrowing the event has been for him. The *amator* claims initially that his *ira* has been overtaken by *metus* (2.13.4), but the remainder of poem 2.13 is more of an exercise in elaborate prayer than an expression of sincere anxiety for Corinna's safety. He devotes a far greater proportion of poetic space to the various gods whom he might supplicate than to expressing fear for the woman on whose behalf he is supplicating, and when he finally addresses Corinna in the final lines of 2.13 it is to give her warning rather than comfort (*si tamen in tanto fas est monuisse timore / hac tibi sit pugna dimicuisse satis*, 27-8).

Lines 15-16 are especially telling, as the *amator* stages a bait-and-switch that makes him appear even more callous: *huc adhibe vultus et in una parce duobus: / nam vitam dominae tu dabis, illa mihi*. The phrase *in una duobus* seems at first to refer to the pregnancy: two lives, mother and child, living in a single body. The final word of line 16 alters the sentiment of the prayer completely, however, since the *amator*'s primary concern is for himself (*mihi*) rather than for the child that he has conceived with Corinna or for the dying *puella* herself.³² Indeed, his

³⁰ De Boer (2010), 79.

³¹ Gamel (1987), 187.

³² Gamel, 188. "Attention to Corinna once again is deflected away to the *amator*'s needs." See also 192.

alarm for Corinna stems from selfish motives, since she is the one who “gives him life.”³³ This reversal of expectations from literal nourishment (a mother whose body sustains the life of her unborn child) to metaphorical life-giving (a lovesick man who “needs” his *domina* in order to survive) is blunt and troubling. The *amator*’s failure to distinguish here between literal and metaphorical means of nourishment marks the beginning of his problematic relationship with ideas of fertility throughout the remainder of his love poetry.

In poem 2.14, the *amator* is preoccupied with censuring Corinna (and other women who abort their pregnancies) through a series of epic and mythological exempla. As usual, however, his chosen examples turn out to be inappropriate, for he selects Venus and Thetis as models for women who did well not to abort their legendary children. This comparison between immortal goddesses and the *meretrix* Corinna is complicated by the greatest difference between them: not mortality, but social class. Venus and Thetis had no reason to terminate their pregnancies, because they were valued members of their own society whose children had the birthright to property, power, and rule. These exempla can have no force when applied to a woman at the lowest ranks of social privilege whose offspring, had it been carried to term, could never have become an Aeneas or an Achilles—it could not have been even a Roman citizen.

The poem ends with a set of generalizations about women who attempt to abort their children:

at tenerae faciunt, sed non impune, puellae:
 saepe, suos utero quae necat, ipsa petit;
 ipsa perit ferturque rogo resoluta capillos,
 et clamant ‘merito’ qui modo cumque vident.
Amores 2.14.37-40

The *amator* places universal blame on the tender girls who undertake abortions and asserts that those who die from the attempt deserve this punishment. What he does not enumerate is that this

³³ Gamel, 188-89.

class of *tenerae*, of women who feel forced to attack their own bodies to terminate a natural biological process, must be composed almost entirely of non-citizen women. Of course, there are possible circumstances wherein a citizen daughter, pregnant before marriage, might feel forced to make such a choice in order to protect her own reputation and suitability for marriage. Such situations would hardly be publicized by herself or her family, however; women whose deaths could be publically condemned (*clamant merito*) would have to be of the non-citizen class.

The appearance of *tenerae* as a social category in this poem—a category defined not by social class but by the undertaking of a particular action—looks forward to the deliberate confusion of *meretrix* and *matrona* in the *Ars amatoria*. In elegy, the desired *puella* is often described as *dura* rather than *tenera*. Often, the epithet *dura* is displaced onto those around her, such as her *custos* or the door that blocks entrance to her chambers. Applying an epithet that is most appropriate for citizen girls to a class of women who perform abortions has a jarring effect, because citizen women—whose bodies are valued for their fertility—should never have to abort a pregnancy. What is it about the body of a *meretrix*, then, besides the letter of the law, that renders her reproductive capacity inherently inferior? The application of the adjective *tenera* highlights the intrinsic *lack* of difference between different classes of female bodies—all women are fertile, and all women are vulnerable.

4. Fertility Language after *Amores* 2.14

Following the abortion poems, *humus* as a word connoting soil and productive earth appears often, and it is often paired with adjectives of fertility. In poem 2.16, grassy turf casts shade upon the damp earth (*gramineus madidam caespes obumbrat humum*, 10); in 3.5 the phrases *teneram humum* (16) and *viridi humo* (22) give us an image of earth that is tender and green and thus productive, and in line 30 *humus* is paired with *herbae fertilioris*.³⁴ In poem 3.6, when the *amator* designs insults for the river that separates him from his *puella*, he describes the *humus* as *arens*—a description that will stand in contrast to the *madida humus* of poem 2.16. In poem 3.10, *humus* appears twice in the context of Saturn's golden age (36, 42), in close proximity to other words of fertility (*fruges, poma, terras*) and in nostalgic reference to a time when men did not engage in agricultural activities. In 3.10 the *vetus* and *dura humus* is torn up and broken by curved plows (14, 32) and so being prepared for sowing. This steady repetition of the word *humus* in conjunction with adjectives and contexts of fecundity acts as a constant renewal of the theme of fertility over the course of the second half of the *Amores*.

The suggestive double meaning inherent to the word *semen* renders instances of this word particularly significant. It first appears in poem 3.1, as the *amator* imagines Elegy and Tragedy personified in a struggle for his poetic attention. As Elegy makes her case, she says to the *amator*: *prima tuae movi felicia semina mentis; / munus habes, quod te iam petit ista, meum* (3.1.59-60). Although *semina mentis* in its immediate context does not refer to biological fertilization, the phrase itself is derived from a metaphor of fertility as inspiration.³⁵ That Elegy herself provided the seeds of insight that grew into the poetry with which the *amator* successfully gained

³⁴ It is possible and even probable that this particular poem was not written by Ovid. If it was penned by an imitator, it is worth noting that this separate author found the fertility imagery in Ovid's other poetry striking enough to include as an integral part of his imitation.

³⁵ See Gamel, 197 for a brief discussion of agricultural metaphors for poetic inspiration and production in the *Amores*.

the attention of his *puella* draws an important link between fertility and amorous relationships achieved through poetry.³⁶ Indeed, the assertion in line 60 that a woman now pursues the *amator* looks forward to the *Ars*, in which ideas of fertility are entangled with those of pursuit and capture. The pairing of these seeds of the mind with the adjective *felicia* stresses their relationship with actual fertilization, since, in addition to its connotations of happiness and success, this word can also denote fertility and fruitfulness.

The next form of *semen* occurs in poem 3.4, in which the *amator* accuses the *vir* of his *puella* of ruining their affair by making his girlfriend too readily available. The ability to conduct an affair without fear of capture, he argues, makes it less exciting: *ipsa potestas / semina nequitiae languidiora facit* (9-10). The *amator* defines this affair as a wickedness that springs forth from seeds and ought to be nourished by the close attention and guardianship of the *vir*. In the context of a sexual affair, the *semina* clearly operate on two levels, as both metaphorical origin and biological issue of illicit intercourse. There is a definite connection here between fertility metaphor and sexual reality: just as, according to the *amator*'s argument, the mental motivation for conducting an affair loses its strength when there is no risk involved, so concurrently the physical excitement must be lessened. In both poems 3.1 and 3.4, then, elegiac love affairs find their origins in *semina* of ambiguous connotation. Such relationships are nourished by both seeds (of inspiration and of wickedness) and by semen (the tangible product of satisfied male desire).

Semina appears next in poem 3.6. The *amator* wishes that he could fly over the river that is obstructing his journey home to his *puella*, and one of the instruments of flight he mentions is Ceres' chariot. The seeds appear as part of a descriptive modifier for this vehicle: *de quo Cerealia primum / semina venerunt in rude missa solum* (15-16). Since there is no *puella* in sight and

³⁶ That Elegy provides the *semina* for the *amator*'s poetry is especially interesting in light of the argument that this personification of Elegy is closely identified with Corinna herself. See Keith (1994), 29-33.

the seeds are limited in meaning by the adjective *Cerealia*, there is no evidence to argue that this line acts as some sort of veiled reference to elegiac intercourse. It does, however, renew the thematic importance of sowing, reaping, and fertile earth in these elegies. The *amator*'s expressed goal in this poem is to traverse the impassable river in order to reach his *puella*; the vehicle through which he imagines accomplishing this goal is one which has scattered seeds in order to fertilize uncultivated land. Although the connection between the earth and the female body is not articulated in this poem, it has already been established in previous elegies. Any discussion of scattering seeds over land, especially after the abortion poems, must resonate on some level with conceptions of the *puella*'s fertility. The same argument can be applied to the next two appearances of *semina*, which, although they occur in literal fertility contexts (*prima Ceres docuit turgescere semen in agris*, 3.10.11; *seminaque in latos ierant aequaliter agros*, 3.10.33), on an intratextual level intimate, at least in part, the fertilization of the female body.

The final appearance of *semina*, in poem 3.12, is embedded in the *amator*'s argument about the doubtful truth of mythological subject matter. Among the dubious myths he names are the *Thebana semina, dentes* (35). Although this phrase appears as one in a long catalogue of mythological subject matter, the appearance of the word *semina* is important especially because it is unnecessary: its appositive *dentes* would have been enough on its own to invoke the story of Kadmos and the Sparti. The inclusion of *semina* emphasizes the part of the myth in which the teeth were sown into the ground with the eventual outcome of producing offspring. The connection between earth and womb in this story is unmistakable.³⁷

In the deliberate arrangement of the elegies in the *Amores*, ideas of fruitfulness and productivity become so profuse that they are difficult to escape after Corinna has had her abor-

³⁷ Although Ovid does not mention this aspect of the myth, the offspring produced from these sown teeth are warriors. Propertius's refusal in poem 2.7 to breed soldiers for the empire might spring to mind here (see note 6).

tion. This pattern, most evident in forms of *humus* and *semen*, holds true for an impressively wide range of fertility vocabulary. Indeed, conspicuous imagery of fertile nature begins to appear in the *Amores* just after poems 2.13 and 2.14. Before analyzing this fertility lexicon further, however, it is necessary to consider poem 2.15.

Following the gruesome and troubling imagery in poems 2.13 and 2.14, the contents of poem 2.15 are quite unsettling. In this elegy, the *amator* engages in a sexual fantasy about an unnamed *puella* through the vehicle of a ring that he intends to give to her as a gift. Inevitably, the ring becomes a stand-in for the enactment of the *amator*'s own desires upon the woman's naked body. Immediately juxtaposed, then, are two poems that highlight the female body as a vulnerable object: the first emphasizes in violent fashion the dangers inherent to a fertile female body, while the second attempts to restore this body to its true elegiac station as an object of male pleasure.

There is, notably, no fertility language in poem 2.15. The *amator*, in a manner reminiscent of his earlier (Book One) attitude towards women, fixates on the physical perfection of a female object and its potential for providing pleasure.³⁸ He reveals no awareness of or concern for the potential consequences that the previous poems have just dramatized. In this way, he contrasts the two functions of sexual desire—reproductive and recreational—that, according to the Augustan laws, belong to women only in accordance with their social class. That both of these women, one representing fertility and the other desire, are non-citizen prostitutes, however, raises doubt about the legitimacy of a system that divides women into classes of sexual function.

The connection between these women's experiences is rendered all the more salient by the prox-

³⁸ cf. poem 1.5, in which Corinna is an entirely passive object of admiration and male pleasure. She stands naked before the *amator*, who proceeds to admire her perfection through a catalog of body parts: *quos umeros, quales vidi tetigique lacertos! / forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi! / quam castigato planus sub pectore venter! / quantum et uale latus! quam iuvenale femur* (1.5.19-22). Corinna has neither face nor voice in this poem.

imity of these elegies. Following the disturbing account of a *meretrix*'s near-death by attempted abortion, it is impossible to read the *amator*'s fetishization of the female body in poem 2.15 without imagining the possibility that this unnamed woman might also be affected by an unwelcome pregnancy. The juxtaposition of these two situations is unsettling, and in its very inappropriateness emphasizes that the separation between women used for pleasure and women designed for pregnancy cannot be so cleanly delineated.

Following poem 2.15, fertility language begins to occur in unmistakable patterns. In poem 2.16, we are given a passage positively bursting with fertility imagery:

et viret in tenero **fertilis** herba **solo**
terra ferax Cereris multoque **feracior uvis**,
 dat quoque baciferam Pallada rarus **ager**
 perque resurgentes rivis labentibus **herbas**
 gramineus madidam caespes obumbrat **humum**
 (2.16.6-10)

The words in bold font are those that were tracked in the chart above, but nearly every word in this passage is related to the fertility, growth and productivity of the earth. What makes this vocabulary even more arresting is that it is unnecessary to the point of this particular poem: this is an elegy of separation, in which the lover laments that he cannot be near his *puella*. The passage describing the fertile land of Sulmo at the beginning of the elegy is only tangential to the *amator*'s dilemma, and as the poem continues he reveals that he has no shortage of other subjects to cover. The location of this passage at just over fifty lines beyond the second abortion poem seems deliberate. Although it is not likely that one would quickly forget the events and imagery of poems 2.13 and 2.14, at this point Corinna's abortion must be fresh at the forefront of the reader's mind. Furthermore, the appearance of grapes in line 7 solidifies this connection, since the *uva* has so recently been compared to an unborn fetus that has been plucked too soon from its life-source.

A further abundance of fertility language crops up in poem 3.10, the *amator*'s appeal to Ceres. On the surface, the profusion of such vocabulary in this poem can be attributed to the fact that its addressee is the goddess of grain and harvest. Indeed, if this poem were taken in isolation, such language might be understood literally. A wealth of agricultural language is employed to describe Ceres' relationship with the earth and the harvest:

prima Ceres docuit turgescere semen in agris
 falce coloratas subsecuitque comas
 prima iugis tauros supponere colla coegit
 et veterem curvo dente revellit humum
 (3.10.11-14)

The *amator*'s invocation of the planting of seeds, the threshing of wheat, the yoking of bulls and the plowing of land blends naturally with the rhetorical purpose of this poem. Superficially, it is an appeal to the goddess of fertility not to spoil the sexual pleasures of men by demanding chastity from her female worshippers.³⁹ But the recent memory of Corinna's abortion binds every seed, field, and wheat stalk in this poem to the events of poems 2.13 and 2.14. The possible double meaning of the word *semen* is highlighted by its association with *agris*. The *ager* (which is ubiquitously representative of the female body in the *Ars*) can stand here for the fertilized womb in which the *amator*'s own seed (*semen*) was planted. The act of tearing up (*revellit*) the earth recalls the tearing (*convellere*, 5, and *vellis*, 24) of the child from the womb in *Amores* 2.14. That the grain is cut down by a scythe, *falce*, could intensify the resonance of the violent and dangerous manner in which Corinna's abortion was carried out. If, therefore, we read carefully within and between the poems in the *Amores*, even such innocent passages as a petition to Ceres can

³⁹ The female lover alluded to in this poem is *not* a citizen wife, but a *meretrix*. It should be noted that non-citizen women were invited to participate in certain civic fertility rituals (as in Propertius 4.8 and *Amores* 3.13), but the fertility at issue during these rites was exclusively agricultural.

reveal disturbing echoes of the *amator/praeceptor*'s preoccupation with human fertility both realized and ruined.

As the *amator* moves into the *Ars amatoria* and becomes instead the *praeceptor amoris*, the vocabulary of fertility becomes a ubiquitous framework through which he perceives the process of pursuing love. He seems to have so deeply internalized his anxiety about fertilization implanted and destroyed that he has established it as an integral part of his instruction. While fertility and growth operate, on the surface, as useful metaphors for the process of pursuing a lover, the phantom of Corinna's aborted fetus resonates powerfully on the intratextual and intertextual levels.

Chapter Three: the *Ars amatoria*

1. Fertility language and the female body

Throughout the *Ars*, the *praeceptor* makes liberal use of metaphor as an instructional tool for communicating to his male narratees the intricate nature of the sport that is elegiac pursuit. He often defines the elegiac relationship as like that of hunter and game, victor and vanquished, or predator and prey. Each of these metaphors contains a clear subject-object relationship, but the metaphor of female sexual desire as requiring the attention and nourishment of the male pursuer is less straightforward. Consider the first instance of fertility language in the *Ars*:

Gargara quot segetes, quot habet Methymna racemos,
 aequare quot pisces fronde teguntur aves,
 quot caleum stellas, tot habet tua Roma puellas
 (*Ars amatoria*, 1.57-59)

The *praeceptor* describes here the great number of available *puellae* in Rome from whom his students can presumably choose. In this set of analogies, women are first identified as grain fields and clusters of grapes, and then associated with animals and stars. Each analogy makes its own kind of sense: these are objects to be sought out, gazed upon, and enjoyed by an unidentified subject. But the relationship between farmer and crop, unlike that between hunter and prey or star and star-gazer, is reciprocal rather than one-sided: the harvester must first devote careful attention and nourishment to the plant before he can reap its rewards. Already the presence of fertility language does not quite fit with the *praeceptor*'s explicitly articulated elegiac program of pursuit and capture. It is, nevertheless, an appropriate metaphor: the model of reciprocation better fits elegiac courtship than does stabbing or netting.

The *praeceptor* next instructs his students in the art of locating these apparent abundances of women. The fertility metaphor here is unmistakable: *haec loca sunt voto fertiliora tuo*

(1.90). For the *praeceptor*, the theater is an especially fertile place for new love to be developed. In this metaphor, the location of the relationship's inception is the earth, the soil, or the womb; the man, as initiator, takes the role of planter or harvester; and the woman, as target of pursuit, becomes the object that must be grown. This particular method of characterizing meeting places—assigning relative values of fecundity based upon the quantity of sexually available women—becomes particularly disturbing in light of the narrative that follows. The rape of the Sabine women (101-130), as the *praeceptor* explicitly acknowledges, occurred in just such a “fertile” place.

The Sabine women were stolen and raped precisely for their fertility. They represented for Roman men the possibility for continuing their bloodlines and increasing their population, and so their greatest value was invested in the potential productivity of their wombs. Their fertility was taken and used forcibly, and each Sabine woman was expected to deliver children for the man that had kidnapped her, raped her, and separated her from her family. The didactic failure of this particular exemplum notwithstanding, the description of the theater as *fertiliora* highlights the inappropriate nature of the ongoing fertility metaphor. The women being sought after in the *Ars amatoria* are valued not for procreation, but for the enjoyment of recreational sex. Indeed, fertility is the very opposite of the *meretrix*'s social function, which is to absorb excess male sexual energy for the protection of sexually mature but unavailable citizen women.⁴⁰

The association between the female body and products of the earth is deeply embedded within the logic of the *praeceptor*'s instructions. When advising his female students to beware the damaging effects of age on their beauty, he compares them to flowers: *carpite florem / qui nisi carptus erit turpiter ipse cadet* (3.79-80). The female body here is valued for the same phys-

⁴⁰ cf. Horace's *Satires* 1.2.32-35, in which Cato praises a young man exiting a brothel for relieving his sexual energy there rather than touching other men's wives.

ical qualities that make blossoms attractive, and is threatened by the course of aging that causes flowers to wither. Not only do flowers left unpicked fall, but they fall shamefully. The ironies here are patent: an unplucked flower should logically conjure up the image of a virginal citizen daughter, not a *meretrix* who makes her living through sexual relationships. The *praeceptor*'s logic here is focalized entirely through the male sexual perspective and is infused with manipulative rhetoric—if the petals are about to droop, she had better take advantage of her waning physical attractiveness and have sex with her male pursuer straightaway.⁴¹ It is a calculating argument that exploits the connection between fertility and the female body that is implanted in the internal logic of the didaxis.

For the purposes of the *praeceptor*'s instructions, the relationship between woman and earth expands beyond physical biology to embrace the nature of the female mind. Concluding his lessons in book one, he qualifies his directions by asserting that the diversity of female personalities requires the development of varied approaches: *sunt diversa puellis / pectora mille animos excipe mille modis* (1.755-6). He elaborates on this claim with a fertility metaphor that again marks woman as crop-bearing earth: *nec tellus eadem parit omnia vitibus illa / convenit haec oleis hic bene farra virent* (1.757-8). Women are apparently suited to different styles of pursuit in the same way that various soil types are most compatible with grape vines, olive trees, or grain. In this case *tellus* is parallel, not to the female body and its productive capacity, but to *pectora* and *animos* in line 756. The *puella*'s thoughts and emotions are to be manipulated through careful stratagems in order to produce the desired effect—presumably, her compliance with his sexual advances and the satisfaction of his desires. Even though the ultimate goal of such devices is pleasure derived from the female body, the analogy directly invokes the female

⁴¹ See James, 182-3, for the experienced *puella*'s awareness of the time restrictions on her physical desirability.

psyche. The range of the fertility metaphor has thus extended to encompass the mental and emotional state of the targeted *puella*, rendering her subject, body and mind, to the schema of woman as fertile earth.

The *praeceptor*'s use of fertility imagery is not limited, however, to the realm of the female. In the third book, he uses ripening fruits to characterize the swiftly closing time window for elegiac love: *quae fugiunt, celeri carpite poma manu* (3.576). The symbolism of the *poma* in this analogy depends upon the preceding line, in which the *praeceptor* has just concluded his instructions for female students regarding the difference between old and young male lovers. The love of an older man, he asserts, is more dependable (*certior hic amor est*), while a younger man's love is *brevis* and *fecundior* (3.575). The meaning of *brevis* is relatively clear here: young men love more quickly and efficiently, because their passion burns more brightly. Indeed, the inexperienced male lover is earlier compared to a crop that must be protected by high hedges: *cingenda est altis saepibus ista seges* (3.562). From the perspective of book three, in which the *praeceptor*'s students are female and the object of pursuit is male, this line strengthens the metaphorical connection between the elegiac relationship itself and the product of fertility. This instance does not, however, weaken the powerful connection between woman and earth, if we keep in mind that much of the *praeceptor*'s instruction in book three is a rhetorical deception in which he molds his female readers into the ideal objects of pursuit for his male students, rather than offering them any practical advice for pursuit themselves.⁴²

Fecundior is a far more mystifying adjective in this context. Metaphorically, it might signify that a young man's love is richer, fuller or more exciting. Taken literally, this adjective ac-

⁴² See Downing for an analysis of the *praeceptor*'s agenda of sculpting his female audience into perfect models of his art, rather than providing them, as he pretends, with the tools to stand on equal ground for the game of pursuit.

tually makes logical sense: young men are more fertile than old men. To take this phrase literally, however, is to be forced to misconstrue the nature of the elegiac relationship, because male sexual potency is not desirable but dangerous for *puellae*. The *poma* in the following line cannot symbolize the actual fruits of a sexual relationship, but must refer rather to some obscure quality of male desirability that is lost, like female beauty, with age. In this way, the elegiac relationship is characterized as having the potential to ripen—and equally, to rot.

In relation to this model of maturation and decomposition, the *praeceptor* consistently conceives of love as an entity that ages. Love that is unchallenged by the exciting threat of a rival, he warns, will grow old (*amor senescit*, 3.594). In isolation, this phrase draws a simple parallel between the tendency of love to grow stale and the natural aging process that affects all living things. It is impossible, however, to read this precept without recalling the application of the verb *senescere* earlier in the same book: *adde quod et partus faciunt breviora iuventae / tempora: continua messe senescit ager* (3.81-2). This is one of the rare occasions in which Ovid's elegiac texts refer explicitly to actual human reproduction. The advice in line 81 is a predictable recommendation to the elegiac female to avoid impregnation because the processes of pregnancy and birth spoil her physical attractiveness for potential male lovers. The clarifying metaphor that follows draws an explicit connection between the female body and the earth. The woman is a field, and the fetus that grows within her is a crop. The connection between aging land and aging love, straightforward in 3.594, is complicated by these earlier lines that link aging land to the reproductive female body.

This slippage in the perimeter of the *praeceptor*'s fertility metaphor—in which his references to fertility, even unconnected to the female body, must inevitably conjure up images of the female womb—is especially salient in terms of the language of planting and sowing crops.

When advising his male students never to ask a woman's age, he frames the difference between younger and older women in terms of the fertility of a field: *utilis o iuvenes aut haec aut senior aetas / iste feret segetes, iste serendus ager* (2.667-8). The first adjective, *utilis*, contains a range of possible meanings: the *praeceptor* could find women of any age to be useful, profitable, productive, serviceable, or beneficial. Each of these definitions appears to refer to the purely physical benefits that an *amator* might reap from his relationship with a *puella*, but the evidently sexual connotation of this word is troubled by the content of next line.

The younger woman, according to the *praeceptor*, will bear crops, while the older woman is a field that must be sown. Although *segetes* cannot possibly refer to the fruits of actual human reproduction, and the *ager* cannot represent the female womb, these are the images that are evoked most immediately from the fertility metaphor, if only because of the potent connection that the *praeceptor* has already drawn between crop-bearing earth and the female body. The crop that the younger woman produces must stand in for her contribution to the sexual relationship, which, ironically, is the opposite of fruit-bearing—her primary sexual function is to provide an empty vessel for male seed, to be an object of male sexual pleasure. The crop she bears is therefore the excitement and fulfillment of male desire, in terms of which female sterility is far more desirable than fertility. The analogy of older woman to sown field, just as in the case of older male lovers above, is rendered more logical with literal application: older women are more likely than younger women to be infertile, so that the male lover's seed can be sown without issue. Metaphorically, however, these parallels make very little sense, because a male elegiac lover would never actively desire his *puella* to be primed, like fertile, sown earth, for child-bearing.⁴³

⁴³ For further discussion of the paradox of older women as more fertile seedbeds for their lovers, and on Ovid's use of the "Saat-Ernte-Metaphorik" see Janka (1997), 464-5.

The elegiac relationship is thus defined throughout the *Ars amatoria* as a growing, ripening, aging entity to be treated with careful attention as though it were a living product. Once the *praeceptor* associates such fertility imagery with actual reproduction, however, it is impossible to dissociate, even where no explicit connection exists in the text, the language of fertility from the prospect of human reproduction. The slippage between metaphorical boundaries—love as fertile earth, the *puella* as fertile earth, the *puella* as productive receptacle, the *puella* as bearing children—makes ambiguous the *praeceptor*'s attitude towards the female role in the elegiac relationship and renders passages dealing with fertility imagery paradoxical. It is clear that the connections between the sexual relationship, fertility, and child-bearing are deeply embedded within the structure of the *praeceptor*'s personal conception of the *puella*.

2. The abortion poems in the *Ars*

Disquieting implications arise, in light of the events of poems 2.13 and 2.14, from the *praeceptor*'s scheme for characterizing the elegiac relationship. The definition of courtship in the *Ars* in terms of productivity and harvest is a striking response to the episode of aborted fertility in the *Amores*. The echoes of Corinna's abortion, tainting even the most seemingly innocent and literal depictions of agricultural procedures in the *Amores*, leave the figurative references to fertility in the *Ars amatoria* charged with meaning. Moreover, each text's treatment of fertility involves the appropriation and disposal of the female procreative capacity, conducted at the whim of the male elegiac lover. It is tempting to conclude that the ironic and disturbing implications of male control over female fertility in the *Amores* and the *Ars amatoria*, whether metaphorical or literal, produce a barbed commentary on the fertility program of the *princeps* himself.

Corinna's abortion must color our understanding of all future occurrences of fertility language in Ovid's love poetry. It represents a dangerous termination of the process of growth for which the *amator* himself planted the seed. Fecundity has been destroyed and fertilization has been aborted in order to ensure the continued survival of the potential for elegiac relationship (a pregnant *puella*, as mentioned above, cannot be the object of elegiac pursuit). In this way, the standing metaphor for elegiac love as a product to be planted, nurtured and grown is an inversion of the requirements of physical biology. Since elegiac "fertility" would be destroyed by biological impregnation, the product of actual fertilization must be sacrificed in order to preserve it. As the *amator* continues to compose poetry following this experience, his discomfort is made manifest by tensions between metaphorical references to fertility and the specter of the terminated pregnancy.

None of the fertility imagery that pervades the *Amores* and the *Ars amatoria* can be fully understood without reference to *Amores* 2.13 and 2.14. After Corinna's abortion, every subsequent mention of a fertile field or a planted seed is embedded with an echo of the aborted child, an echo made all the more disturbing by the text's surface disregard for its existence. Never once following Corinna's abortion, as the *amator* begins to deploy with increasing regularity the language of fertility, does he remark upon the irony of his language choices. For a poet so keenly aware of the divisions between genres, who rejects in his programmatic poem (*Amores* 1.1) epic subject matter and meter, and who stages a poetic battle between personifications of Elegy and Tragedy (*Amores* 3.1), the *amator* seems suspiciously unaware of the extent to which agricultural and pastoral imagery has begun to bleed into his elegiac poetry.

Chapter Four: Meditations on the Implications Thereof

1. Ovid's Use of the Fertility Lexicon as Unique among Elegists

Ovid is not the only elegist to deploy fertility language, but his method of framing fertility as metaphor for elegiac love is unique. Tibullus, with his self-conscious imitation of Vergil's pastoral poetry and his plentiful treatment of idyllic rural settings, employs an extensive lexicon of fertility. Whenever Tibullus refers to the planting of crops (for example, *ipse seram teneras mature tempore vites / rusticus et facile grandia poma manu*, 1.1.7-8), his references are literal. Such lines do have thematic resonance in terms of fecundity, abundance, and prosperity, but never in terms of the female body or the elegiac relationship. In Tibullus, the speaker's concern with fertility is rooted in a straightforward nostalgia for the pastoral; Ovid's *amator/praeceptor*, on the other hand, never daydreaming (as in Tibullus) about a restful bucolic life, uses fertility language most often as metaphor in a purely urban context. To address fertility *qua* fertility, as Tibullus does, is not in itself an expression of political defiance.

It is only in Ovid that the categories of agricultural fertility, human reproduction, and elegiac courtship are integrated. The *amator* and *praeceptor*, through consistent application of fertility metaphor to non-citizen women who cannot bear legitimate children, effect a confusion of social categories and undermine the distinct political separation that divides women into classes according to their sexual function.

2. *The Female Non-Experience: Why does Corinna disappear?*⁴⁴

The *Amores* and the *Ars amatoria* are focalized through the perspective of a self-centered and callous elegiac *persona* who works to transform courtship into a game, a chase, and a hunt where women are at great disadvantage. Although the *amator* professes real affection for the women whom he pursues, he constantly undercuts these claims with episodes of deceit, abuse, and infidelity. Yet for all of the passages that might elicit, with reason, accusations of misogyny, cruelty, and abusiveness (these accusations being aimed, of course, at the poetic *persona*, not the historic author), one of the most unsettling aspect of the *amator/praeceptor*'s texts is the absence of commentary on Corinna's fate. This woman, who has been the object of the *amator*'s infatuation for half of the *Amores*, praised as the height of physical perfection, and a participant in a lengthy and dramatic affair, suddenly and disturbingly disappears. The last glimpse we are given of Corinna⁴⁵ is of a very ill woman, near death from dangerous wounds received during an attempted abortion. The *amator*'s last words on the possibly dying Corinna are a suggestion that, although she has been saved for now by his imprecations, she actually deserves punishment.

Although the *amator* never articulates the effect of the abortion on his relationship with Corinna, it is evident that their affair comes to an end at some point afterwards. She is not mentioned in his poetry again until 2.19.9, when the *amator* reflects that Corinna recognized (*viderat*) his inclination for loving only those things which cause him pain. Corinna's name does not appear again in Book Two. In the first poem of Book Three, the personified Elegy claims responsibility for Corinna having learned (*didicit*) to avoid detection by her *custos* (3.1.49). In 3.7, a poem that generalizes about all the types of women that the *amator* finds himself capable of

⁴⁴ Gamel (1987), 190-93 addresses this issue during a female reading of the abortion poems. This section builds upon the questions that Gamel has raised.

⁴⁵ Excepting references in the past tense, discussed below.

loving, he remembers (*memini*) the sexual demands that Corinna used to make (*exigere*, 25). Finally, in 3.12, the *amator* asserts that in his past, despite his best efforts at writing epic poetry, only Corinna inspired (*movit*) his talent (16). Since each of these verbs is in either the perfect or pluperfect tenses, it seems clear that Corinna is no longer a part of the *amator*'s life, and yet the numerous appearances of her name serve as constant reminders of her absence. Therefore, although the *amator* moves on to pursue new women, we as readers are not permitted to forget Corinna.

The abrupt change in tone between the violent abortion poems and the ring fetish poem is startling enough before it becomes evident that Corinna is no longer the *amator*'s love object. In fact, since the *amator* does not specify otherwise, it is possible for a reader to begin poem 2.15 with the assumption that this woman is, in fact, Corinna. The physical perfection of this woman's body and the *amator*'s insistent desire to imagine her bathing, however, plant seeds of doubt about the identity of this woman. If we are to assume a linear narrative trajectory, then the *amator* seems to be fantasizing about a woman whose body was terribly damaged by the destruction of his own child. It seems certain that Corinna would have been out of commission for an extended period of time following the abortion; does the *amator* engage in this fantasy about Corinna in order that he might seek pleasure from her body without having to face the scars of her trauma? Or has he simply moved on, without regret or comment, to a fresh, undamaged *puella*?

If the latter is the case, then the *amator* treats the body of the *meretrix* as a disposable and replaceable object. The *puella*'s experience in Ovid's love poetry is already defined by physical abuse, deception, and intimidation; the *amator*'s selfish attitude about Corinna's abortion is no surprise. But that Corinna's disappearance occurs abruptly after a violent episode of physical

danger, and that this absence merits no comment from the *amator*, emphasizes the extent to which her personal experiences have been drained of meaning. For the *amator*, no matter how painful or distressing an experience his *puella* may undergo, the woman does not exist as an independent entity.⁴⁶ The *puella* exists only as an object and receptacle of the *amator*'s actions and manufactured emotions. Her body is not her own.

3. Political Implications

What point, then, does the *amator* make when he speaks to an entire class of women who are capable of such self-inflicted violence? This text provokes the question: why, if abortions are so dangerous and violent and terrible, do women still take the risk? The suggested answer to this question that the *amator* provides in line 7 (*scilicet ut careat rugarum crimine venter*), while unsatisfying, highlights the vulnerable position of the *meretrix*. Physical perfection is a condition required of *meretrices* by their male lovers; if fear of a ruined body is truly motivation for performing an abortion, then the decision to abort is prompted by fear of the disapproving male gaze. *Puellae* are compelled towards self-destruction in order to preserve the body form idealized by their male customers. They cannot make the decision for themselves: both unwanted pregnancy and its termination are the results of a profession that has been forced upon them by a social structure that esteems a small group of women at the expense of the lower classes.

Poems 2.13 and 2.14 draw pointed attention to the dilemma of the non-citizen woman whose body is disobediently fertile. The pregnancy occurs against Corinna's own wishes and exists in violation of Augustan terms for acceptable procreation. The unborn child of Corinna

⁴⁶ See Gamel, 188-89 for a discussion of the lengths to which the *amator* goes to disguise the independence of Corinna's action. He works to maintain a relationship in which Corinna is entirely dependent upon him.

and the *amator* would be illegitimate, because the womb of a prostitute was deemed incapable of producing legitimate citizen offspring. Nevertheless, as these poems so gruesomely emphasize, the biology of the human body cannot be bound by legislated class divisions. Corinna's suffering stresses her identity not as a *meretrix* or non-citizen or low-class member of society, but as a woman who is dealing with an experience that is exclusive to women. This elegiac pregnancy challenges the principle of the *Lex Julia* that assigns value to women's bodies according to arbitrary social standards.

Corinna's decision to abort the child, although the *amator* never articulates her reasoning, may perhaps be traced to the social pressures placed upon her by her station in life. The offspring of *meretrices* were denied equal social status, inheritance rights, and access to public office. Pregnancy itself endangered the career of a *meretrix*, rendering her incapable of conducting her business for a lengthy period of time and altering irrevocably a body that was expected to be flawless.⁴⁷ Let us allow ourselves to imagine Corinna as a young woman belonging to a different social class, lucky enough to have been born to a father of senatorial rank, or even just the daughter of an *eques*. Her parents would have seen her legitimately married to a man of respectable rank, and pregnancy would be a situation to be prayed for and celebrated. The unborn child would have been carefully cared for until its birth, and in bearing a healthy child Corinna would have fulfilled her most important civic function as a citizen woman.

In her exploration of the issue of the female body in Latin love poetry, Erika Zimmerman Damer has identified a trend in Roman literature in which social distinctions for Roman women are broken down to make a rhetorical point.⁴⁸ Damer argues that Cicero, in his depiction of

⁴⁷ Indeed, in many cases the appeal of a *meretrix* seems to be concentrated entirely in her body. See *Amores* 1.5 and 2.15, in which the perfect beauty of the elegiac *puella* is highly praised, but the woman herself has no face.

⁴⁸ An interesting side note: Watson (2007) makes the argument that Juvenal, in Satire 6, intentionally collapses the distinctions between *matrona* and *meretrix*. In accordance with Watson's observations that the sixth satire contains

Clodia in *Pro Caelio*, “deliberately blurs status distinctions” and casts the citizen Clodia as a *meretrix* in an attempt to prove Caelius’ innocence.⁴⁹ In *Bellum Catilinae*, Sallust uses a sexually-promiscuous Sempronia as a “gendered symbol for moral decay.”⁵⁰ In the Augustan period, Damer continues, the violated female body comes to be representative of the moral corruption of the city, as in Livy’s depictions of Lavinia and Verginia.⁵¹

Ovid, it seems, makes use of both of these strategies in his approach to the fertile female body. In addition to deliberately confusing social distinctions between elite and low-class women, Ovid includes poems 2.13 and 2.14 as a gruesome dramatization of the violated female body. With the abortion poems, Ovid emphasizes that a woman belonging to the lowest female class is vulnerable to the physical danger presented by the desires of her male pursuers. The dangers of Corinna’s experience were rooted in social pressures applied by male-determined conventions—she likely felt pressured to terminate her pregnancy in order to preserve her sexual appeal and vitality. Although her physical violation was self-selected, her decision seems to have been forced by the behavioral prescriptions and expectations set out for her social class. Such a bodily violation would have been absolutely unnecessary had Corinna been an elite citizen woman rather than a *meretrix*.

The abortion poems and the subsequent abundance of fertility language in the *Amores* and the *Ars* are integral parts of the structure of Ovid’s love poetry. Ovid showcases the violated female body as a trigger for an outpouring of fertility language that renders ambiguous the social distinctions between different legal classes of women. In doing so, he makes us question the legitimacy of class divisions that bestow value upon certain women’s bodies at the expense of oth-

strong resonances of elegy, it is tempting to consider the possibility that Juvenal’s class-confusion is a conscious imitation of the Ovidian techniques that we have observed here.

⁴⁹ Damer (2010), 39.

⁵⁰ Damer, 40.

⁵¹ Damer, 42.

ers. Corinna's pregnancy serves to highlight the fact that all women, regardless of social class, share the biological condition of potential fertility.

This is not to say that Ovid intended through this poetry to lobby for rapid social change for women of the lowest classes. The fertility language in this text, as much as it throws into sharp relief the complex situation of the female body under Roman law, does not provide any evidence to conclude that the *Amores* and the *Ars* have any social or legal agenda. But what is evident is that these texts take a conspicuous and subversive approach to the relationship between the female body, fertility, and the earth.

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