# “A LOVER’S DISCOURSE”: BYLIS IN *METAMORPHOSES* 9*

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> Some people would never have been in love, had they never heard love talked about.
>
> François La Rochefoucauld, *Maxims*

> Character is not intrinsic, but literary, a compendium of all one has read.
>
> Linda Kauffman, *Special Delivery*

In *Metamorphoses* 9, Ovid gives us the story of Byblis, a young woman in love with her brother Caunus. Critical discussion of the tale has focused on the ethical aspects of incest,[1] the mixture of genres in the story,[2] and, more recently, the play of repetition and difference in the episode.[3] This paper argues that, in the Byblis episode, Ovid suggests that the process of “being in love” is a discursively constructed experience. Throughout the tale, Byblis is obsessed with the idea of language as the creator of reality; she speaks of her problematic love for her brother as a dilemma of names and

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1 See, e.g., Wilkinson 1955, Otis 1970, Galinsky 1975, Nagle 1983.

2 E.g., Tränkle 1963, Paratore 1970.

3 Janan 1991.



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words. In addition, Ovid exploits the pun implicit in Byblis's name[4] in order to highlight the close connection between being a lover and being a reader and writer. Byblis's monologues and amorous ploys consist wholly of literary tropes and conventions and are modeled upon Latin elegy. Her entire love affair is conducted as if Byblis has "read" all of Latin elegy as well as the *Heroides* and the *Ars Amatoria*.

In positing a link in the story of Byblis between "being in love" and reading, I draw upon Roland Barthes's claim in *A Lover's Discourse* that "no love is original" (1978.136). The premise of Barthes's work is that the discourse of love is a repository of cultural conventions. How we appear and what we do while "in love" are little more than enactments of a script that has been played out by many before us. In *A Lover's Discourse,* Barthes interweaves literary allusions and the first-person laments of an unnamed lover and demonstrates how the process of "being in love" is intimately associated with that of reading and writing. In the introduction to his work, Barthes himself calls a lover's discourse "a discourse whose occasion is indeed the memory of the sites (books, encounters) where such and such a thing has been read, spoken, heard" (1978.9).

But while *A Lover's Discourse* is useful in shedding light on the recycling of Latin elegy in the Ovidian tale, it cannot account for the gender dynamics of the story. Byblis's status as a *female* lover and reader (and writer) of elegy plays a primary role in her "erotic failure" and her ultimate destruction at the end of the tale. To address the question of gender in the tale, I turn to recent feminist criticism on elegy. Various scholars have contended that despite the appearance of egalitarian unions between men and women, the amatory relations depicted in elegy are asymmetrical.[5] The elegiac *puella* is a constructed and passive object of desire (both erotic and artistic) rather than an active subject, the written rather than the writer. I would argue that, in the tale of Byblis, Ovid makes explicit the gendered power relations of the genre by staging the intervention of a female desiring subject in the world of elegy. Byblis transgresses gender boundaries when she aligns herself with the male *amator* and suffers the consequences of her actions. Ovid suggests that although love is a textual construct, in the world of elegy, erotic experience exists within a gendered hierarchy.

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4 Scholars have noted that Byblis's name puns on the Greek word for book. See Ahl 1985.211 and Janan 1991.240.

5 See, e.g., Veyne 1988, Sharrock 1991, Wyke 1987 and 1994.111–15, Fredrick 1997, and Greene 1998.

## I. READERS AND LOVERS

When the text opens, Byblis is unaware of her romantic feelings for her brother. She recognizes her passion only through a dream (*Met.* 9.468–71). The manner in which Byblis comes to realize her feelings is patterned after the initial poems of Book 1 of the *Amores.*[6] In *Amores* 1.2, the narrator represents himself as tossing and turning and questioning why he is unable to sleep. He initially rejects the notion that love is the cause of his restlessness, since he has no beloved (5–6). But because his symptoms are the recognized indicators of love, he concludes that he is "in love": *sic erit; haeserunt tenues in corde sagittae, / et possessa ferus pectora versat Amor* ("thus it will be; slender arrows cling to my heart, and cruel Love torments the heart he has taken," 7–8).[7]

Like the narrator of the *Amores* poems, Byblis is established as a lover through the symptoms that she displays. Although the text portrays Byblis as unconscious of the implications of actions such as her careful grooming, her frequent visits to her brother, and her jealousy, the narrative sets her up to be read as a lover from the opening of the episode. We, as audience, are supposed to realize (as will Byblis in the lines that follow) that she is "in love" because she exhibits the symptoms associated with "being in love."

Moreover, the allusion to *Amores* 1.2 also underscores an important trait of a lover's discourse: the beloved is incidental to the experience of being in love. As Barthes notes, "it is my desire I desire, and the loved being is no more than its tool" (1978.31). Critics have long observed that this idea of being in love with love itself is prominent in the early *Amores* poems.[8] We see the same pattern of isolated and narcissistic fantasy in Byblis's case as

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6 Janan 1991 also comments on this and other allusions that are cited in my discussion below, but comes to very different conclusions about the intertextual links. She argues that the "literary incest" that occurs in the episode as Byblis replays some of Ovid's earlier works points to a larger concern on the poet's part about repetition and difference in his own art. Byblis serves as "the repository of Ovid's thoughts on his own belatedness in relation to all of his own literary 'fathers,' and on all the restrictions imposed by his entry into the most highly refined arena of language, poetry . . ." (252–53).

7 Cf. Kennedy 1993.65–66.

8 See for example, Cahoon 1985, Janan 1991.245–46, Keith 1992, Kennedy 1993.65–70, and Boyd 1997.147–51. Janan, Keith, and Kennedy contrast *Amores* 1.1, in which the speaker is compelled by Cupid to write elegy even though he has no beloved, with Propertius 1.1, which opens with the beloved's name.

we do in the portrayal of the *Amores* poet. Like the narrator of the *Amores* poems, who does not even mention the beloved's name until 1.5 because he is too self-involved, Byblis does not speak to her brother face to face about her feelings until she has exhausted every other possibility. Most of the episode consists of Byblis talking to herself about her passion and imagining a relationship with her brother. It is obvious from the way in which she conducts her love affair that Byblis does not love Caunus himself, but what Barthes calls "the Image-repertoire," the idea of the beloved rather than the beloved himself.[9]

When Byblis awakens and reflects on the meaning of her dream, she remains in the world of elegy. Her description of the implications of her dream is filled with elegiac tropes and allusions to erotic poetry. When she recalls the pleasures of her dream, she exclaims (*Met.* 9.485–86):

> ut meminisse iuvat! quamvis brevis illa voluptas,
> noxque fuit praeceps et coeptis invida nostris.
>
> How sweet it is to remember! Although that pleasure was brief,
> and the night was headlong and was envious of my joys.[10]

The phrase *nox praeceps* is a *topos* that Ovid himself employs in *Amores* 1.13.[11] In that poem, the speaker, in bed with his *puella,* objects to the passage of time and wants the dawn to stay away (3–10). By contrast, Byblis's short night of love is only a dream. The trope of the "rushing night" serves to underscore the constructed nature of Byblis's *coepta* and, more generally, her love affair as a whole. Although Byblis has not in fact spent the night with her beloved, she still employs the *topos* because that is what a lover who had spent the night in the arms of his *puella* would say.

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9 Cf. Barthes 1978.31: "I rejoice at the thought of such a great cause, which leaves far behind it the person whom I have made into its pretext . . . And if a day comes when I must bring myself to renounce the other, the violent mourning which then grips me is the mourning of the Image-repertoire itself: it was a beloved structure, and I weep for the loss of love, not of him or her."

10 I have used the following editions: for the *Metamorphoses*, Anderson 1977; for the *Ars Amatoria* and the *Amores*, Kenney 1961; for the *Heroides*, Bornecque 1991. All translations are my own.

11 See Barsby 1973.171–73 for other appearances of this motif.

In the course of the monologue in which she convinces herself to act on her feelings, we see how Byblis, like the lover in Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*, continues to play out a script comprised of literary references. She dispenses with the obstacles that would prevent her from having an incestuous relationship with her brother through her knowledge of literature. Byblis begins by invoking the gods as a moral check on her illicit thoughts: *di melius!* (*Met*. 9.497). But, in her next words, the very forces that she imagines as opposing incest are transformed into vehicles for her passion (*Met*. 9.497–99):

> di nempe suas habuere sorores.
> sic Saturnus Opem iunctam sibi sanguine duxit,
> Oceanus Tethyn, Iunonem rector Olympi.

> Surely the gods had their sisters.
> Saturn thus married Ops, joined by blood to him,
> Ocean married Tethys, the ruler of Olympus married
> Juno.

Her statement that the gods entered into incestuous unions and are thus models to be emulated draws upon an entire literary and mythic tradition that Ovid exploits in *Heroides* 4.[12] Phaedra tries to persuade her stepson Hippolytus that a relationship between them would not be a sin by saying that Jupiter set the standard for morality when he married Juno (*Her.* 4.133–34).[13]

The second objection that Byblis raises is a possible reluctance on Caunus's part (*Met*. 9.505–06). Byblis counters such thoughts by again turning to literature. She invokes the myth of the sons of Aeolus: *at non Aeolidae thalamos timuere sororum* ("the Aeolidae did not fear the chambers of their sisters," *Met*. 9.507). Although there are earlier treatments of the tale of the Aeolidae,[14] the myth is most fully developed in *Heroides* 11, a letter written by Canace to her brother/lover Macareus. Here Ovid self-consciously draws attention to the allusion to *Heroides* 11 and to Byblis's

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12 This mythic tradition begins with Hesiod's *Theogony*. See Haupt, Ehwald, and von Albrecht 1966 ad loc. for the reference to Hesiod and for other citations.

13 As noted by Bömer 1969-86 ad loc. and Janan 1991.246 n.18.

14 Homer tells the story of the Aeolidae in *Odyssey* 10.7–9, and Euripides treats the myth in his lost play *Aeolus*.

status as a reader. She follows her comment about the Aeolidae with the question *unde sed hos novi?* ("from where do I know these?" *Met.* 9.508).

In amorous discourse, lovers gain their sense of self from an endless series of identifications. Lovers "devour every amorous system" they come across and imagine the place that they would hold were they part of it. This feature of a lover's discourse illuminates the function of Byblis's allusions to the *Amores* lover, Macareus, and the gods. As Barthes observes, what lovers perceive are homologies: "I am to X what Y is to Z" (1978.129). With her *exempla,* Byblis plays Jupiter to Caunus's Juno, Macareus to his Canace.

But a significant difference (and one that Ovid exploits in this episode) between Byblis and figures such as Macareus and the *Amores* speaker is one of gender. If lovers gain their sense of self by identifying with those who occupy the same position in the amorous structure, why does Ovid have Byblis repeatedly ally herself with male characters?[15] I suggest that, in this episode, Ovid stages the difficulties that a female reader (and writer) of elegy encounters with a genre that focuses on a male poet-lover's rejection of public life and of writing epic for a life devoted to love and the writing of elegy. When trying to read (and write) herself into Latin elegy, a female narrating *ego* has "little precedent for exploring female erotic desire."[16] To be sure, much recent criticism on elegy has focused on the ways in which the genre interrogates and destabilizes Roman categories of gender.[17] Scholars have contended that elegy is not "an obstinately male genre," since the poet-narrator and his poetic practice take on feminine characteristics. But, as Maria Wyke has cogently argued, although elegy often depicts the male *amator* in the role of a faithful, submissive woman, the genre is more concerned with exploring male servitude than female sexual mastery: "Any political charge which this unorthodox erotic system may carry, whether it be oppositional or integrational, therefore rests on the delineation of male sexual submission rather than female sexual dominance. For the purposes of

15 Cf. Nagle 1983.310, who argues that these cases of male initiative voice Byblis's fantasy of Caunus's possible interest. While I agree that fantasy does play a large role in Byblis's story, I suggest that something more is going on with the cross-gender identification in the tale.

16 Keith 1997.296 makes this comment about potential difficulties for the poet Sulpicia. But I would argue that this question is also relevant for Ovid's construction of Byblis.

17 I list here only a small sampling of work: Gamel 1989, Gold 1993, Skinner 1997. See Wyke 1994 for a survey of recent scholarship on this question.

the elegiac discourse of love, the only thing that matters is that *ego* acquires some feminine attributes" (1994.119). Even if the *amator* "play[s] the Other,"[18] the identity and sexual self (no matter how fluidly represented) that are at stake are still those of the male poet-lover.

What possibilities exist for a female reader in this model beyond identifying with the role of the narrated and silenced object of desire (the part conventionally played by women in elegy)? In the case of Byblis, Ovid presents her as a "resisting reader"[19] who troubles the gendered relations of elegy by oscillating between reading positions.[20] At some moments (as seen above), Byblis tries to appropriate the role and discursive strategies of the male lover. This reversal of gender roles becomes even more apparent later in the episode as Byblis follows the advice given by the *praeceptor* of the *Ars Amatoria* to his male pupils. At other times, Byblis adopts a "feminine" subject position as she alludes to the *Heroides* and identifies herself with some of the most famous literary heroines of antiquity.

In addition to playing with the categories of masculine and feminine, Byblis also shifts between the roles of subject and object of desire. After repeatedly projecting herself into the active role played by male lovers, Byblis attempts to change her place in the amorous structure by repositioning herself as the beloved. Byblis imagines her reaction if Caunus were the one in love: *si tamen ipse mei captus prior esset amore, / forsitan illius possem indulgere furori* ("if, nevertheless, he himself had fallen in love with me first, I might perhaps have given in to his passion," *Met*. 9.511–12). Her hypothetical statement is more than a clever rhetorical move to justify her romantic pursuit of her brother. When Byblis envisions a scenario in which Caunus suffers from unrequited love for her, she alludes to an earlier variant of the Byblis-Caunus myth in which Caunus is in fact the one in love.[21] With her comment, Byblis "reads" an earlier version of her own story in an effort to reconfigure the dynamics of her relationship with Caunus. "Identification is not a psychological process; it is a pure structural operation: I am the one who has the same place I have" (Barthes 1978.129).

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18 The phrase is from the title of Zeitlin 1996.

19 The term is from the title of Fetterley 1978.

20 Scholars (e.g., Santirocco 1979, Lowe 1988, Hallett 1989) have argued that the poet Sulpicia negotiates the gendered conventions of elegy by using a similar strategy of adopting multiple subject positions. See Wyke 1994.114–15 for an overview of the scholarship.

21 See Otis 1970.415–16 for a brief summary of the different versions of the myth.

The play with gendered reading positions in the story is symptomatic of a larger pattern of transgressions that pervade the tale. It is certainly no coincidence that we are dealing with an incest story. The sexual and moral infraction involved in Byblis's incestuous passion for her brother is paralleled by her deliberate "misreading" of her elegiac models. Ultimately, however, the transgression of boundaries in this episode is not achieved without cost.[22] At the end of the tale, Byblis is silenced, "consumed by her own tears" (*Met*. 9.663).

## II. *SI LICEAT MUTATO NOMINE IUNGI*

Throughout the episode, Byblis believes that language has the power to construct reality. Names and familial titles play a central role in Byblis's drama. Consider the first three lines of the episode (*Met*. 9.453–55):

> Byblida cum Cauno, prolem est enixa gemellam.
> Byblis in exemplo est, ut ament concessa puellae,
> Byblis Apollinei correpta cupidine fratris.
>
> Byblis with Caunus, twin progeny she bore.
> Byblis is a warning that girls should not love what is forbidden,
> Byblis, overcome by passion for her brother, the grandson of Apollo.

Nagle interprets the repetition of Byblis's name as a means of alerting the reader that the focus of the tragedy is self-delusion.[23] While there is certainly a narcissistic aspect to the tale, the triple anaphora also serves to foreshadow the pivotal role of names in the story. As we shall see below, Byblis continually returns to the theme of names and familial titles as hindrances to be overcome and reiterates her desire to change her name.

In the course of her monologue, Byblis makes explicit the problematic status that naming occupies in the tale: *iam nomina sanguinis odit*

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22 This is also the case for many other tales in the *Metamorphoses*. The stories of Echo and Narcissus, Salmacis, Myrrha, and Philomela and Tereus are just a few examples of "punishment" exacted for the transgression of boundaries.

23 "As Byblis concentrates on herself (there are a great many first-person and reflexive pronouns and adjectives), so does the narrator" (Nagle 1983.306).

(“now she hates the name of blood,” *Met*. 9.466). The word *nomina* suggests that Byblis views the primary obstacle in her relationship with Caunus as a dilemma not just of blood and biological ties, but of naming itself. Having identified the problem as a difficulty on the level of language, Byblis attempts to change her name in the hopes that she might change reality (*Met*. 9.466–67):

> iam dominum appellat, iam nomina sanguinis odit:
> Byblida iam mavult quam se vocet ille sororem.
>
> Now she calls him master, now she hates the name of
> blood:
> she prefers that he call her Byblis rather than sister.

The juxtaposition of the terms *Byblida* and *sororem* at opposite ends of the line underscores the weight that Byblis accords to language and signifies the distance between the two terms in Byblis’s mind. Later in the episode, when Byblis writes a letter to Caunus telling him of her love, she begins by identifying herself as *soror,* but immediately erases the word (*Met*. 9.528). She assumes that in the removal or denial of the title “sister” she can change the way in which Caunus views her.

Byblis progresses from wanting to deny the title *soror* to eventually effacing her name altogether. In the letter that she writes to Caunus, Byblis says (after erasing *soror*) that she would prefer not to identify herself at all (*Met*. 9.531–34):

> pudet, a, pudet edere nomen.
> et si, quid cupiam, quaeris, sine nomine vellem
> posset agi mea causa meo nec cognita Byblis
> ante forem, quam spes votorum certa fuisset.
>
> I am ashamed to give my name.
> And if you ask what I want, I would wish my case to
> be pleaded without my name and that I would not be
> known
> as Byblis before my hopes were realized.

With her application of the word *pudet* to the phrase *edere nomen,* we see Byblis displace anxieties about her incestuous passion onto the process of

naming. She does not acknowledge to herself, nor does she tell Caunus, that her feelings constitute a sexual transgression. Instead, Byblis presents her problem as a dilemma of names and language: she is ashamed to give her name. Having characterized the primary obstacle as a linguistic one, once again Byblis's solution is to respond through a change in language.

In addition to discursively transforming herself through a change in name, Byblis also tries to refashion Caunus vis-à-vis language. As we see in line 466 quoted above, she calls her brother *dominum* rather than *fratrem* or *Caunum.*[24] The term *dominum* plays upon the elegiac trope of referring to one's mistress as a *domina.*[25] By designating Caunus with the amatory term *dominus,* Byblis tries to transform their relationship from a fraternal connection into an erotic one. More significantly, with the use of the elegiac word, she attempts to reposition the two of them within the world of erotic poetry. Code words such as *domina* (or variants of the term) conjure up the conventions and dynamics that are established in elegy. Caunus is set up as (and is treated by Byblis as) the coy *puella* who must be courted, won over, and appeased by the *amator*.

During her reflection on the meaning of her dream, Byblis returns with a renewed emphasis to the theme of the powers of names and familial titles. She wishes to be joined with her brother under a changed name: *si liceat mutato nomine iungi* ("if only it were permitted to be united with a changed name," *Met*. 9.487). The phrase *mutato nomine* explicitly articulates the connection that Byblis draws throughout the episode between the linguistic and the erotic levels. She endows language with the ability to alter her situation, believing that a change in name will remove the obstacles that prevent her from having a romantic relationship with her brother.

Byblis develops this notion of a strong link between the erotic and linguistic in the lines that follow her wish. When she imagines having a romantic relationship with Caunus, she portrays the union in familial terms (*Met*. 9.488–89):

> quam bene, Caune, tuo poteram nurus esse parenti!
> quam bene, Caune, meo poteras gener esse parenti!

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24 Among the elegists, the word *dominus* within an amatory context appears only in the Ovidian corpus: *Am*. 3.7.71; *Her*. 3.5–6, 3.52, 3.100, 3.127, 8.8, 15.145; *Ars* 1.314; *Met*. 9.466.

25 See Luck 1959, Lyne 1980, and Hallett 1984 for this *topos*.

> Caunus, how good a daughter-in-law I could be to your
> father!
> Caunus, how good a son-in-law you could be to my
> father!

The change from a fraternal to a romantic relationship is represented as a change in familial titles. Byblis imagines exchanging the problematic words *soror* and *frater* for the more desirable terms *nurus* and *gener*.

The words *nurus* and *gener* are striking not only because they reflect a move away from a brother-sister relationship, but also, as Ranucci notes (1976.61), because they overtly represent the hypothetical union between Byblis and Caunus as a marriage. Unlike Myrrha, who presents a possible joining with her father solely in physical and sexual terms,[26] Byblis envisions a connection that would be endorsed by divine and communal forces. In lines 488–89, the union between Byblis and Caunus is depicted in terms of its implications for larger familial structures. Byblis will not just be Caunus's lover, but also a good and dutiful daughter-in-law for his parents. In Byblis's fantasy, their relationship has shifted from an incestuous affair that would be condemned by the community into a legal, culturally sanctioned union that would be beneficial to the entire family.

## III. BYBLIS/*BUBLOS*

Having convinced herself to act on her feelings, Byblis resolves to write her brother a letter telling him of her passion. Her decision to write Caunus a letter rather than speak to him face to face has generated considerable critical discussion. Some scholars have asserted that the letter is an opportunity for Ovid to draw on his past achievement in the *Heroides*,[27] while others have noted the influence of the *Heroides* on Byblis's letter within the context of a larger discussion on genre.[28] Byblis's epistle is read as a return to elegy, evidence of a mixture of elegiac and epic moments. But I would argue that even beyond generic implications, it is appropriate for a character whose name means "book" and who has conducted her love affair

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26 Cf. *Met.*10.337–39: *ergo si filia magni / non essem Cinyrae, Cinyrae concumbere possem; / nunc, quia iam meus est, non meus est* ("if I were not the daughter of Cinyras, I could have slept with Cinyras. Now since he is mine, he is not mine").

27 See, e.g., Otis 1970.417 and Anderson 1972.449.

28 See, e.g., Tränkle 1963, Paratore 1970.

as if she has read Latin elegy to turn to writing. By having Byblis write a letter to her brother rather than speak to him face to face, Ovid actualizes the pun on Byblis and *bublos* and figures Byblis as both the writer of her own text and the text itself. The connection that Ovid explicitly draws here between the female body and text is a long-standing one. In her study of the representations of the female body in archaic and classical Greece, Page duBois investigates the link between women and writing tablets: "The woman is the *deltos*, the pubic triangle (like a delta) to be sowed/inscribed; she is the tablet to be folded up on itself, the papyrus that must be unfolded to be deciphered" (1988.130). As duBois notes, the metaphor of the female body as *deltos* (or *bublos*) is a gendered one. Men are the active writers, while women are the passive written: "[T]he tablet, as passive, receptive surface, is denied the power to generate new letters or words" (1988.131).

The analogy between the female body and text has particular implications for Latin elegy.[29] In elegy, there is a shift from the notion delineated by duBois of the female body as the receptacle of writing to the idea of the woman representing writing itself. As Maria Wyke (among others) has argued, through her features and her activities, the elegiac mistress is depicted as a *scripta puella*, a marker of the poet's Callimachean style of composition.[30] While the Propertian corpus more subtly presents the woman as the embodiment of poetic practice, in *Amores* 3.1, Ovid makes this image quite literal. The poem features a debate between Elegia and Tragedia in which each woman advocates her own mode of poetic production. Elegia is endowed with the conventional attributes of the elegiac mistress: elaborately styled and perfumed hair, a delicate dress, *forma decens* (7–10).[31] Through Byblis's letter, Ovid problematizes the gendered elegiac paradigm of the poet/lover who has discursive mastery over the beloved/artistic creation. By activating the pun on Byblis's name, Ovid calls to mind the status of woman as the embodiment of text in elegy, but troubles this image by having Byblis write her own text. The dichotomy writer/written established in elegy collapses, since Byblis plays both roles. As with her "misreadings" of elegy discussed earlier, Byblis once again appropriates

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29 See Gamel 1989.197 for a discussion of the way in which this metaphor plays out in the *Amores*.

30 See especially Wyke 1987. Other critics who treat this issue include McNamee 1993 and Fredrick 1997.

31 See Wyke 1990 for further discussion of this poem.

the position held by the male elegiac *ego* in the poems of Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid in order to position herself as an active agent of literary production.

Byblis's use of a letter as a vehicle to convey her passion is also in keeping with the system of literary allusions we have already traced in the episode. With her decision to reveal her feelings through a written text, Byblis follows the advice of the *praeceptor* of the *Ars Amatoria* who recommends that his male pupils test out the beloved's feelings through letters (1.455–58):[32]

> ergo eat et blandis peraretur littera verbis,
> exploretque animos, primaque temptet iter.
> littera Cydippen pomo perlata fefellit,
> insciaque est verbis capta puella suis.
>
> So let a letter go forth, traced with coaxing words,
> and test her feelings, and be the first to try the path.
> A letter, carried on an apple, deceived Cydippe
> and unknowingly the girl was trapped by her own words.

The use of the Acontius and Cydippe story as a model for the successful deployment of letters has implications for our reading of Byblis. With the example of Acontius's inscribed apple, the *magister amoris* suggests that a written message may function as an erotic trap, allowing the lover/writer to seduce and control the beloved/reader through a love letter; the purpose of writing is deception.[33] We shall see in our discussion of the contents of Byblis's letter that she not only adopts the counsel of the *magister amoris* by writing Caunus a letter but also the ideology that is implicit in the *magister*'s model of Acontius. Throughout the letter, Byblis tries to follow Acontius's lead in order to manipulate and trick her brother into returning her feelings; among other ploys, she threatens death if Caunus does not reciprocate her passion.

However, unlike Acontius, Byblis will ultimately prove to be ineffective in trapping Caunus. Acontius is able to bind Cydippe to him precisely

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32 As noted by Janan 1991.247.

33 For an excellent discussion of the Acontius and Cydippe myth, see Rosenmeyer 1996.

because he accurately anticipates his reader's reaction. He writes the oath on the apple in the first person so that, when Cydippe reads the message on the apple aloud, his words actually become her words.[34] But Byblis, far from ensnaring Caunus, cannot even induce him to read her *bublos* in its entirety. Byblis's "erotic failure" can be partly attributed to her "misreading" of the *Ars Amatoria*. Although the *magister amoris* does supply both his male and female readers with strategies for writing love letters, he makes an important distinction along gender lines. As Joseph Farrell observes, men are to use epistles to deceive the beloved (as evidenced by the example of Acontius). However, most of the *magister*'s comments about women's writing center not on matters of style, but on how to sneak their letters past the watchful eyes of others; for women, any deception involved in the use of letters is directed against guardians and husbands.[35] In addition, women's letters are envisioned as *replies* to romantic overtures from would-be lovers (cf. *Ars* 3.469–78); women are never advised to initiate a potential affair through letters. In fact, the only agency ascribed to women in the amatory game is self-cultivation. Whereas much of Books 1 and 2 of the *Ars Amatoria* is dedicated to what men should say and do to catch a woman and convince her that they are sincere in their passion, most of Book 3 is devoted to how women can make themselves look as attractive as possible (clothes, hairstyles, cosmetics, sexual positions, and so forth).[36] Byblis, of course, follows none of the advice directed towards women by the *magister*. Rather than expending her energies on the activity appropriate for women, external beautification, Byblis again plays the role of the male lover by confessing her passion in a letter.

While Byblis follows the prescriptives of the *Ars Amatoria* in her decision to write a letter, in the composition of it, she "reads" the *Heroides*. Barthes comments that lovers often try to associate themselves with other lovers who have come before them: "a long chain of equivalences links all lovers in the world."[37] This is precisely what Byblis attempts to do in the

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34 Cf. Rosenmeyer 1996.13–17 on Acontius's ability to control Cydippe.

35 Farrell 1998.311–17. Cf. *Ars* 3.619–30 for the *magister*'s strategies for eluding husbands/guardians and smuggling letters out of the house.

36 On the asymmetrical nature of the advice given to men and women by the *magister*, see Myerowitz 1985 and Downing 1990, who astutely comments "Men mechanize (and replace) their inner lives; women mechanize (and replace) their superficial, surface appearance" (237).

37 Barthes 1978.131: "Werther identifies himself with the madman, with the footman. As a reader, I can identify myself with Werther. Historically, thousands of subjects have done

course of her letter, as she identifies herself with the heroines of some of the most famous and most tragic love stories in antiquity. In writing to Caunus, Byblis imagines herself as Dido writing to Aeneas or Ariadne writing to Theseus.

Byblis's allusions to the *Heroides* are particularly apropos given her status as a reader—and a transgressive one at that—since these letters are themselves very deliberate "misreadings" of earlier works. Some of the recent criticism on the *Heroides* has focused on the ways in which the collection responds to and critiques canonical texts such as the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*.[38] In her study of *Heroides* 7, for instance, Marilynn Desmond presents Ovid's Dido as a resisting reader of *Aeneid* 4, one who questions and deconstructs the representation of epic deeds and values.[39] According to Desmond, through her reading of Virgil's Dido, the Ovidian Dido comments on the "politics of gender and empire" in the *Aeneid*. Byblis's use of the *Heroides* as a model is thus doubly referential: she, as a transgressive reader, reads the story of other women who are themselves resistant readers of other texts.

Ovid draws this connection between Byblis and these legendary heroines from the very beginning of her letter. The description of the way in which Byblis sits down to write alludes to *Heroides* 11. Both Byblis and Canace are depicted as holding a *ferrum* in one hand:

> *dextra tenet ferrum*, vacuam *tenet altera* ceram
> (*Met.* 9.522)
>
> *dextra tenet* calamum, strictum *tenet altera ferrum*
> (*Her*. 11.3)

The equation that Ovid draws between Canace's actual sword and Byblis's metaphorical sword, the stylus, foreshadows the final moments of the story

so, suffering, killing themselves, dressing, perfuming themselves as if they were Werther . . . reading a love story, it is scarcely adequate to say I project myself; I cling to the image of the lover, shut up with this image in the very enclosure of the book."

38 On this question, see, e.g., Kauffman 1986.19–23, Smith 1994, Knox 1995.18–25. Knox correctly, I think, emphasizes the fact that letter-writing heroines are not merely mythological figures, but literary characters.

39 Desmond 1994.34: "In Dido, Ovid mimics the responses of a female reader of Virgil's *Aeneid*; in the process, he not only dramatizes his own relationship to Virgil, but he also presents a gender-based model of reading Virgil's text and Virgil's Dido."

when Byblis collapses, mute and deaf. As I will argue later in this paper, Byblis is driven to destruction precisely because of her status as reader and writer. When Byblis finally realizes that her deployment of the conventions of erotic poetry is ineffectual in wooing Caunus, she is devastated. For Byblis, her pen will prove to be as deadly as Canace's drawn sword.

The phrasing of Byblis's salutation also brings in the other letter in the Ovidian corpus that treats incest, *Heroides* 4:[40]

> *quam, nisi tu dederis*, non est habitura *salutem*
> (*Met.* 9.530)
>
> *quam nisi tu dederis*, caritura est ipsa, *salutem*
> (*Her.* 4.1)

In addition to appropriating Phaedra's opening line, Byblis deploys some of the same arguments in favor of incest that the former makes in her letter to Hippolytus. Phaedra and Byblis both cite the example of the gods in their attempts to persuade themselves and their beloveds of the legitimacy of their passion. Like Phaedra, Byblis tries to convince Caunus to return her love by mentioning the convenience of their blood tie (cf. *Her*. 4.138–40): they could openly kiss and embrace in the name of familial affection and devotion (*Met*. 9.558–60).

Byblis's use of the phrase *fraterno sub nomine* in line 558 works on two levels. In addition to referencing Phaedra's claim about the ease with which relatives could conduct an illicit affair, the word *nomine* also plays with the emphasis on naming that pervades the episode. Once again Byblis speaks of an erotic connection with Caunus in terms of names, but offers a different spin on the significance of names and familial titles. Rather than rejecting the title *soror* in the hope that Caunus will view her in a different light, she now argues that familial titles will have the power to influence the way in which the outside world regards her relationship with Caunus. If she and Caunus were to disguise an incestuous affair under the rubric of "familial devotion," the rest of the world would also view their relationship in those terms.

Byblis moves from modeling her letter on other textual moments in the Ovidian corpus to a more general use of erotic *topoi*. After detailing her

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40 See Verducci 1985.191–97 for a discussion of the elements of Ovid's "incest canon."

physical symptoms, Byblis launches into a series of amorous tropes. She employs some of the clichés used in Latin elegy to designate *amor:* love is a wound, a disease, and a fire that courses through her veins (*Met*. 9.540–42). The text emphasizes Byblis's use of the tropes through the compressed quality of her description. In the span of a single sentence, Byblis deploys three different metaphors to describe her passion. She lists them in a sort of shorthand, quickly alluding to each of the tropes as if the images are so commonplace that they need not be developed or further explained.

Byblis ends her letter with one final attempt to manipulate Caunus into returning her love. She asks that he pity her (*Met*. 9.561) and states that if he rejects her love, he will be cited as the cause of her death: *neve merere meo subscribi causa sepulchro* ("do not let your name be inscribed on my tombstone as the cause of death," *Met*. 9.563). Byblis's references to death and funeral inscriptions constitute another elegiac *topos,*[41] allowing her to position herself and Caunus once more in the world of elegy. She envisions herself as akin to the lover of Propertius 2.13 who creates an elaborate and detailed scenario of his death: the ornate funeral procession, his beloved's kiss upon his cold lips, and the words inscribed on his tombstone.

Moreover, the mention of funeral inscriptions once more references the *Heroides*, since the trope repeatedly appears in the collection. By closing her letter with the image of a potential epitaph, Byblis replays the concluding lines of *Heroides* 2 and 7. But here, just as with her use of the metaphors describing her passion, Byblis alludes to the notion that Caunus's name will be listed as the cause of her death but gives us no other information. Unlike Dido and Phyllis, who write out the text that will appear on their sepulchres, or the Propertian or Tibullan lover, who paints a detailed picture of his funeral, down to particulars such as the exact wording of the tombstone,[42] Byblis does not feel the need to specify any further. The *Heroides* and the speakers of the Propertian and Tibullan poems have already provided the model for her. Byblis only has to tell Caunus that his name will appear on her epitaph and she can leave him to fill in the rest.

As Byblis concludes her letter, we are told that she is so expansive a writer that she must resort to using the margins of the tablets (*Met*. 9.564–65). Byblis's loquaciousness alludes to *Amores* 1.11, where the speaker advises his *puella* to respond to his letter with a missive of her own. He urges her to pack the page and to trace letters even in the margins (19–22):

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41 See Bömer 1969–86 ad loc. for appearances of this trope in elegy.

42 Cf. Prop. 2.13.35–36, 4.7.85–86; Tib. 1.3.54–56.

nec mora, perlectis rescribat multa iubeto:
odi, cum late splendida cera vacat.
comprimat ordinibus versus, oculosque moretur
margine in extremo littera rasa meos.

Don't delay, urge her, when she has read, to write back a lot;
I hate it when a fine page is mostly blank.
Let her press the lines close together and detain my eyes
with letters written on the outer margin.

Byblis follows the counsel of the speaker of *Amores* 1.11 in shaping the form of her own letter. Taking to heart his statement that he hates an empty page and prefers to receive love letters that extend into the margins, Byblis imagines herself as the beloved who is replying and fills the lines of her letter to Caunus to the point of writing on the edges of the tablets.

More significantly, Byblis's expansion points to her status as a transgressive writer.[43] In his treatment of this story, Garth Tissol argues (1997.46) that there is a close connection between the physical and the conceptual in this episode; by having Byblis spill over into the margins, Ovid suggests a link between the futility of her writing a letter of seduction and the physical lack of writing space. I agree with Tissol's reading of this moment and would push the association that he draws even further. I suggest that, through the trope of expansion, Ovid not only implies that Byblis is writing in vain, but also underscores the transgressive nature of her act. Byblis's incestuous passion for her brother violates the incest taboo and thus goes beyond the limits of behavior deemed "culturally acceptable." Ovid makes Byblis's crossing of sexual and ethical boundaries quite literal in this passage as she transgresses the physical limitations of the tablet.

As Byblis seals her letter, she returns once more to the realm of the *Heroides*. She moistens the signet used to seal the letter with her tears (*Met.* 9.566–67). The image of Byblis staining the wax with tears recalls the words of Canace and Briseis. The latter begins *Heroides* 3 by announcing that the stains that Achilles will see on the page are made by tears that have fallen

43 Cf. Janan 1991.249, who argues that Byblis's expansiveness (a trait that she shares with her creator), serves as a vehicle for Ovid to reflect on the poetic process. Expansion becomes one possible solution to a fear that all topics and tropes have been exhausted by one's predecessors.

from her eyes: *quascumque adspicies, lacrimae fecere lituras; / sed tamen et lacrimae pondera vocis habent* ("tears have made whatever blots you will see; but tears nonetheless have the weight of voice," *Her*. 3.3–4). Although Canace speaks of blood rather than tears, she also dwells on the traces of her body that appear on the letter (*Her*. 11.1–2).[44]

More than a clever rhetorical play, the heroines' references to their blood and tears point to an attempt to imbue their written communication with the force of bodily presence.[45] Briseis's tears and Canace's blood are marks that serve to express and actualize their grief. As Barthes notes, in amorous discourse, tears serve as authentic registers of emotions: "By weeping, I want to impress someone, to bring pressure to bear upon someone . . . tears are signs, not expressions. By my tears, I tell a story, I produce a myth of grief . . . by weeping, I give myself an emphatic interlocutor who receives the 'truest' of messages, that of my body, not that of my speech: 'Words, what are they? One tear will say more than all of them' " (1978.182). This notion of the efficacy of tears as a means of communication is played with and developed later in the Byblis episode. Hearing from the servant that Caunus has rejected her amorous overtures, Byblis reproaches herself for writing to her brother. She says that she should have spoken to him face to face and persuaded him through her tears and her bodily gestures (*Met*. 9.602–03).

The image of Byblis's tears staining the wax and her later statement that Caunus might have been persuaded if he had seen her weeping not only alludes to the *Heroides*, it also places Byblis within a larger tradition of epistolary discourse. In her study of epistolary fictions, Linda Kauffman identifies the presence of tears and other signs of the physical body as a trait of all amatory epistolary discourse.[46] She suggests that, in works ranging from the *Heroides* to *The Three Marias,* the letter-writing heroine tries to maintain the illusion that the beloved is present.[47] Tears play an integral role in this process for they allow the heroine to "transmit a part of herself, the

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44 Cf. Dido, who conflates the motif of blood and tears in her letter (*Her.* 7.185–86).

45 The transmission of physical traces of the body has led some scholars to argue that, in the *Heroides,* Ovid "writes like a woman." See, e.g., Kauffman 1986. For theoretical perspectives on the connection between women's bodies and writing (*écriture féminine*), see, e.g., Cixous 1980, Irigaray 1985, Gallop 1988, Grosz 1994.

46 The phrase "amatory epistolary discourse" is from Kauffman 1986.

47 "At other times, the heroine will purposely blur the distinction between speech and writing in order to nurture the illusion of the beloved's presence. The illusion of presence haunts every single heroine's discourse of desire" (Kauffman 1986.36).

corporeal, to the textual, implying that the body's message is truer than speech" (Kauffman 1986.36).

Sealing the letter with traces of her body, Byblis orders a servant to bring it to her brother. Byblis's response to the news of Caunus's rejection—her brother reads only a portion of the missive before he furiously hurls it at the servant (*Met*. 9.574–79)—reveals the extent to which she has internalized the philosophy espoused by the *magister* of the *Ars Amatoria*.[48] The *praeceptor* assures his pupil that he can win any girl whom he wants: any one can be had—all that is required is persistence and the appropriate strategy.[49]

Byblis takes to heart the *praeceptor*'s advice to persist at all costs. Although Caunus rejects her amorous overtures, Byblis refuses to abandon her efforts to woo him. When she hears about his angry reaction to her missive, Byblis attributes Caunus's response to a tactical error on her part. She lists all of the other methods that she ought to have tried. She ends her catalogue by reiterating the notion that all that was needed to convince Caunus was a better or, rather, a more comprehensive form of persuasion: *omnia fecissem, quorum si singula duram / flectere non poterant, potuissent omnia, mentem* ("I should have done everything; if individually none of these could change his stubborn mind, all of them together could have," *Met*. 9.608–09).

Refusing to acknowledge that her case is hopeless and thus give up her attempts to woo Caunus, Byblis justifies her pursuit of her brother by turning once more to the world of erotic poetry. She employs yet another literary trope in order to convince herself that Caunus will eventually be moved by her pleas. Byblis says that Caunus is sure to give in because (*Met*. 9.613–15):

> neque enim est de tigride natus
> nec rigidas silices solidumve in pectore ferrum
> aut adamanta gerit nec lac bibit ille leaenae.

> He is not born from a tigress
> nor does he have hard flint, solid iron, or adamant
> in his heart, nor was he suckled on lion's milk.

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48 Janan 1991.247 also notes the connection between Byblis's persistence and the counsel of the *magister amoris*.

49 Cf. *Ars* 1.269–74, 343, 469–78, 485–86.

The image of the inhuman or hard-hearted lover is a *topos* used by Ariadne in Catullus 64 and Dido in *Aeneid* 4.[50] After being betrayed and abandoned by their lovers, both heroines accuse the heroes of being the progeny of tigers, lionesses, and other monsters (cf. Cat. 64.154–57, *Aen.* 4.365–67). Byblis's efforts to imagine herself in the role of Dido or Ariadne through her use of the trope generate a certain sense of irony for the audience. Surely a reader must pause at Byblis's statement that Caunus is not born from a tiger and that he has not drunk the milk of a lioness. What is at issue in the episode is precisely Caunus's (and Byblis's) parentage. Byblis knows all too well that Caunus is not the offspring of tigers and lions.[51] Throughout the episode, Byblis laments the fact that Caunus is her brother and wishes that they had everything in common except their parents and grandparents. Thus it is jarring for Byblis, the heroine of an incest narrative in which the dilemma revolves around the identity of her parents and those of Caunus, to resort to a literary convention that addresses the issue of parentage. While in the cases of Dido and Ariadne, the *topos* of questioning the parentage of the lover works on a metaphoric level, Byblis's appropriation of the trope has an ironic resonance on the literal level.

Having persuaded herself of Caunus's eventual surrender, Byblis is relentless in her pursuit of her brother: "*vincetur! repetendus erit, nec taedia coepti / ulla mei capiam, dum spiritus iste manebit*" ("He will be overcome! He must be asked again, and I will not tire in my efforts, not while life remains" *Met.* 9.616–17). Her refusal to heed Caunus's wishes to be left alone underscores the extent to which he has become a depersonalized object in Byblis's Image-repertoire. Caunus's own words and desires are subordinated to the motives and actions attributed to him by Byblis. As Barthes points out, "the lover's discourse stifles the other, who finds no place for his own language beneath this massive utterance." Caunus is, in Barthes's words, "disfigured by his persistent silence, as in those terrible dreams in which a loved person shows up with the lower part of his face quite erased, without any mouth at all."[52] Byblis's treatment of Caunus as

50 Other appearances of the motif in Latin elegy include: Tib. 1.1.63–64; *Met.* 7.32–33, 8.120–125; *Her.* 7.37–38.

51 Anderson 1972 ad loc. also notes the incongruity of Byblis's statement ("Byblis knows all too well who was Caunus's mother, as do we").

52 Barthes 1978.165–66. Throughout *A Lover's Discourse,* Barthes deliberately refers to the beloved as "the loved object," rather than using the personal pronouns, "he" or "she." Barthes explains that he chose the phrase "loved object" because it both de-emphasizes

depersonalized object is in keeping with the discursive strategies employed by the male elegiac *ego*. Various critics have noted how elegy (and especially Ovidian elegy) works to turn the beloved into an object that the lover can then attempt to control.[53] Here Byblis once again takes her cue from the male poet-lover and treats her brother like the beloved of elegy who is manipulated by the narrator.

After Caunus flees their homeland to escape his sister's amorous advances, Byblis chases him nearly to the ends of the earth. Despair and exhaustion lead the girl to collapse, mute and deaf. Outside reality falls away, and all Byblis can do is weep. Eventually the nymphs, unable to break through her isolation, change Byblis into a fountain that bears her name (*Met*. 9.651–65). Byblis, once portrayed as an eloquent character who has all of Greek and Latin literature at her command, lies mute and unresponsive.

What are we to make of Byblis's transformation? I suggest that Byblis's collapse and subsequent metamorphosis are the result of her belief in language and, more specifically, her reliance on erotic poetry and literary tropes. As we have repeatedly seen throughout the episode, Byblis has internalized the lessons and conventions of erotic poetry. She tries to construct a romantic relationship with her brother by using elegy as her mold and positioning herself and Caunus as the players in a fictional elegiac love affair. But, by the end of the episode, Byblis is forced to abandon her romantic illusions about Caunus and the power of erotic poetry. Although she has alluded to and replayed all of the great love stories of antiquity and has employed every erotic *topos* imaginable, Byblis is unable to win over her brother. Once Byblis realizes that her arsenal of poetic allusions and tropes is ineffectual in making her brother fall in love with her, she is crushed. In her fate, Byblis is analogous to Emma Bovary, whose enslavement to her lover Rodolphe is the result of her internalization of the plots of romantic fiction.[54] Like Emma, who is driven to suicide because she would

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sexual difference and "indicates the depersonalization of the beloved" (Barthes 1985, quoted in Kauffman 1992.110).

53 See Churchill 1988.303–07, Gamel 1989 (especially 191–92), Kennedy 1993.70–77.

54 Compare Emma's reaction after she begins her affair with Rodolphe: "When she saw herself in the glass, she wondered at her face. Never had her eyes been so large, so black, of so profound a depth. Something subtle about her being transfigured her. She repeated 'I have a lover! a lover!' . . . Then she recalled the heroines of the books that she had read, and the lyric legion of these adulterous women began to sing in her memory with the voice of her sisters that charmed her. She became herself, as it were, an actual part of these imaginings, and realized the love-dream of her youth as she saw herself in this type of amorous women whom she had so envied" (Flaubert 1950.172).

rather die than not live her life as if it were a romance novel, Byblis, too, is shattered by the disjunction between the conventions of erotic poetry and the reality of her own situation.

Byblis's fate leaves us with the question of what Ovid suggests about elegy (and particularly his own elegiac works) by extravagantly presenting Byblis as a reader and writer of elegy and then depicting her devastation at the ineffectiveness of her amatory tactics. I would argue that, through the story of Byblis, Ovid portrays the failure of the elegiac model as a vehicle for amatory persuasion. This theme of the inefficacy of elegy is one that Ovid explores at other moments in the *Metamorphoses*.[55] Roxanne Gentilcore, for example, in her discussion of the Vertumnus and Pomona episode, comments on the function of the embedded narrative of Iphis and Anaxarete. In the inset tale, Iphis employs various elegiac *topoi*[56] in his attempts to woo Anaxarete and ultimately commits suicide when his strategies prove to be ineffectual. Gentilcore concludes that Iphis's fate (as well as that of Vertumnus, who unsuccessfully uses the tale of Iphis in his own seduction of Pomona), "represents the failure of elegiac poetry as both a model for how the lover may succeed in love and as a vehicle of persuasion" (1995.118).

In the case of Byblis, this issue of the "failure" of elegiac poetry is closely linked to Byblis's status as a female reader of elegy. Ovid uses Byblis's "erotic failure" and her subsequent devastation to expose the gendered power relations of elegy. As some scholars of Latin elegy have noted, the elegiac *puella* is depicted as an object (erotic and artistic) over which the male poet/lover exercises discursive control (see note 5 above). In the tale of Byblis, Ovid recasts the situation conventionally portrayed in elegy in order to present his readers with a scenario in which a *puella* enacts the role of *amator* by adopting the tactics traditionally used by the male elegiac poet/lover. Byblis's collapse at the end of the tale suggests that the appropriation of elegy's discursive strategies for a female subjectivity is

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55 Consider Polyphemus, who unsuccessfully deploys elegiac tropes as he follows the advice of the *praeceptor* of the *Ars Amatoria* in his pursuit of Galatea. See Farrell 1992.241 and 250 for further discussion. Critics have also noted that Apollo plays the role of elegiac *amator* in his dealings with Daphne. On this story, see Knox 1986.14–18 and Solodow 1988.

56 Iphis performs the role of the *exclusus amator* as he comes to Anaxarete's door as a suppliant (*Met*. 14.702), employs a go-between (*Met*. 14.703–04), writes love letters (*Met*. 14.707), cries (*Met*. 14.708–09), is pale (*Met*. 14.734), threatens suicide, and represents the beloved as hard-hearted.

highly problematic. Thus when a woman tries to inscribe herself in the world of elegy as a desiring subject, she is destroyed. Within this interpretation of the tale, Byblis's transformation into a fountain is particularly appropriate. Frederick Ahl notes that since papyrus grows in water (cf. Theophrastus *Enquiry into Plants* 4.8.3–4), Ovid's association of Byblis the woman and Byblis the spring "makes etymologizing sense" (1985.212). But in addition to providing an etymological and aetiological basis for the story, the metamorphosis of Byblis into water also returns us to the metaphor of the female body as text, since water is where the material of *bublos* arises. I have suggested above that, by having Byblis write a letter to Caunus, Ovid troubles the dichotomy writer/written established in elegy. Through her epistle, Byblis is both writer and text. But at the end of the tale, Byblis as fountain is literally reduced to being the origin of papyrus, the material on which elegy is written. Byblis is thus relegated to the role conventionally played by women in elegy, the embodiment of text, as she is physically transformed from the writer into *bublos*, the written.

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