

Ille ego: (Mis)Reading Ovid's Elegiac Persona

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1. The Author

Plato, *Respublica*. 3.392c9-394c8 (e.g., λέγεις . . . αὐτοῦ τοῦ ποιητοῦ, 393a6, on the proem of the *Iliad*) and Aristotle, *Poetics* 1448a20-24 and 1460a5-11

on autobiographical reading as being the standard in antiquity, cf. Clay 1998

*... turpi carmine factus
arguor obsceni doctor adulterii* Ovid, *Tristia* 2.211f.

"Ovid's a rake, as half his verses show him." Lord Byron, *Don Juan* 1.42

2. Enter the Persona

a) Defying autobiographical reading

*nam castum esse debet pium poetam
ipsum, uersiculos nihil necesse est.* Catullus 16.5f.

*crede mihi, distant mores a carmine nostro,
(uita uerecunda est, Musa iocosa mea)
magnaue pars mendax operum est et ficta meorum:
plus sibi permisit compositore suo.* Ovid, *Tristia* 2.353-356

cf. also Martial 1.4.8 and 11.15.13; Pliny, *Epistulae* 4.15.5; and Apuleius, *Apologia* 11

"We ought to impute the thoughts and attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic *speaker*, and if to the author at all, only by a biographical act of inference." Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946: 470

b) The Invention of the Persona

on the concept of the literary persona, cf. Elliott 1982 and (with a special focus on antiquity) Clay 1998; on the Latin word *persona* and its uses in Roman culture, cf. Fuhrmann 1982 and Dubielzig 1998

praeceptum et doctoris et discipuli personam requirit.

Servius, *Prooemium ad Georgica* 129.10f. Thilo

Nam tum ex tua persona enumerare possis ... tum vero personam aut rem aliquam inducere et enumerationem ei totam attribuere. Cicero, *de Inventione*

1.99

Holzberg 2001: 2 on the current *communis opinio* concerning elegiac speakers: "[to speak of 'subjective' elegy no longer makes sense] da man im Gegensatz zur älteren Forschung den 'ich' sagenden *poeta/amator* in den Elegien des Propertius, Tibullus und Ovid nicht mehr mit der realen Person des Dichters gleichsetzt, und das mit Recht Denn die Person des *poeta/amator* ... ist ein Konstrukt."

3. Re-enter the (Implied) Author

a) Unreliable/Fallible Personae

nec tu rapta time, ne nos fera bella sequantur,

concitet et uires Graecia magna suas.

tot prius abductis ecqua est repetita per arma?

crede mihi, uanos res habet ista metus. Ovid, *Heroides* 16.341-344

on the unreliability of the speakers in the *Heroides*, cf. Spoth 1992, esp. 156-170; generally on the phenomenon of "'secret communion' between author and reader" at the expense of an unreliable narrator/speaker, cf. Booth 1961: 300-309

b) Persona vs. Author in Ovid

in the *Amores*:

"... welch großen Spaß der Autor der Sammlung offenbar daran hat, seine elegische *persona* als Maulhelden vorzuführen ..." Holzberg 2001: 118f.

(on the *Amores*; cf. also 115, 125, 126, and 127)

"Admittedly by indirection, these three [poems, i.e., *Amores* 1.1, 2.1, and 3.1] add up to an implicit *recusatio* of poetry that trivializes human

suffering, teaches insensitivity and infidelity, and perverts the nobler goals of poetry. Taken together, the three poems become a kind of burlesque of their stated intentions in order, ultimately, to form *a rejection on Ovid's part of his own persona, the poet-lover.*" (Cahoon 1985: 38, italics mine; cf. also Cahoon 1988)

for criticism specifically of Cahoon and her method, cf. Martin 1994: 15 and Boyd 1997: 140 ("an oddly moralistic view of the *Amores*, distinguishing between the deceptive and self-deceptive *poeta-amator*, on the one hand, and an ethical poet Ovid, on the other, whose reductive aim ... is to indict the genre and the persona even as he uses them")

in the *Ars amatoria*:

"In the *Ars amatoria* ... Ovid exploits the dramatic fiction of a voice and vision not his own to record, through the speaker's departures from rhetorical control, the ambiguous interaction of design and compulsion in human behavior." Verducci 1980: 39

"... in ... much of the *Ars* Ovid's concern seems to be with characterizing the writer of the poem as a narrator definitely distinct from himself, a narrator who seems to be intent on deceiving the reader." Wright 1984: 1

cf. also Newlands 1995 (on the *Fasti*) and Williams 1996 (on the *Ibis*)

c) The Invention of the Implied Author

Definition of the implied author according to O'Neill 1994: "a narrative agent to be seen as identical neither with any narrator nor with the real author (66) ... a notional norm of *authority* within the text itself, against which narratorial deviations can be gauged (67)."

generally on the notion of the implied author, cf. Booth 1961: 67-77 and 151 and O'Neill 1994: 66-71

d) Interpretive Aporia

"[W]henver an impersonal author asks us to infer subtle differences between his narrator's norms and his own, we are likely to have trouble." Booth 1961: 321

"[U]ltimately every text has as many implied authors as it has real readers." O'Neill 1994: 73

4. The "Poet"

a) Poetic Self-consciousness

"self-conscious poem" = poem that presents itself explicitly as poetry and whose speaker is identified as its poet

I develop the concept of poetic self-consciousness in detail in Volk (forthcoming), Ch. 1.

b) Relationship Poet-Persona in Ovid's Elegies

"poet" = intra-textual character (not identical with the actual author) who is either explicitly presented as, or can otherwise be inferred to be, the artistic creator of the text in question

Heroides: poet ↔ persona (see 3 a))

Ars amatoria (similarly: *Fasti*, *Ibis*): poet = persona

Amores: relationship unclear ...

- The lover is a poet (elegiac convention) ... but most of the poems do not show poetic self-consciousness.
- Are the poems we are reading the ones the poet talks about in, e.g., 2.1?
- What is the relationship of the programmatic poems to the ones concerned solely with the speaker's love affairs?
in favor of an actual split between the "poeta-persona" and the "amator-persona":
Gauly 1990 and Boyd 1997
- What about the status of the *Amores* as a collection?
- Whose joke is it?

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