

MORA AMOR: Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 2.703-20 and 3.795-808 and the Art of Anticlimax

Delay is an essential lesson of Ovid's erotodidaxis and is built into the structure of the *Ars Amatoria*. Throughout the *Ars* students, both male and female, are instructed to use delay to their advantage: to increase desire, to soothe fury, to become inured of physical blemishes, to prolong physical pleasure, etc. This paper examines the importance of *mora* in two key passages of the *Ars*, the (anti-)climactic sex scenes that close books 2 and 3, and proposes that the teasing use of delay and anticlimactic endings reveal elegy's inability to provide the reader erotic *telos* or consummation.

The obvious course charted for the *Ars Amatoria* should lead to the bedroom; as this paper will show, however, the route there is circuitous. By the time the faithful student nears the end of his tutelage, his mind is filled with countless lessons; the only thing remaining is to use his skills, find a lover, and lead her to bed. The exemplary student and his new mistress make their way to the bedroom for satisfaction—*Venerem seram* (2.701)—that has been delayed for nearly fifteen-hundred lines. With a turn to the dutiful student who has lasted this long, Ovid prepares the prize: *si modo duraris, praemia digna feres* (702). The reader's saintly patience, a fact played up by the inclusion of *seram* and *duraris*, should mean that our satisfaction will be all the more rewarding; the poet has teased us with delay, just as his students were to tease women with delay. But our hopes are met with more delay: rather than have the victorious lover race to the finish, he is advised *non est Veneris properanda voluptas / sed sensim tarda prolicienda mora* (718-19). Climax is promised, but met with further delay. Furthermore, the erotic activity in this scene is not intercourse, but rather foreplay, with an emphasis on gazing and murmuring (705, 721-24), and touching (706, 713, 719-20). Finally, the student is enjoined to keep pace with his lover, *ad metam properate simul*. He is to hurry to the finish line, side by side, with his

mistress. Unless, of course, there is no time for *mora*, in which case, the man should plow on ahead with no apparent thought to his companion's pleasure (731-2). *Mora* is a cruel mistress, for before the reader finds any true consummation, the book ends. Moreover, we must remember that the *meta* to which we were hastening is not just a finish line, but a turning post.

As book 3 looms, offering one final go around the track, it seems that the foreplay that left the reader hanging at the end of book 2 is preparatory for a climax, a *telos*, in the final book. Predictably, the reader is delayed once again, this time by an extended digression, the story of Cephalus and Procris (686-746). The outlandishly dilatory nature of the digression is underscored when the *praeceptor* returns to his lesson with a pointedly resumptive *sed repetamus opus* and the assumption that his reader is now waiting on pins and needles, *sollicite expectas* (747, 749). His next piece of advice again involves delay: a woman should come to dinner fashionably late (*sera veni*, 751), for *mora* is the greatest procuress, *maxima lena mora est* (752). After coyly claiming shame holds him back, our instructor provides an explicit sex scene unlike any other in Latin elegy. The sex presented here is, unlike the scene that concludes book 2, very clearly intercourse (793-94). Finally the student—and the poem—have achieved sexual climax after three full books of delay. But the climax becomes anticlimax as Ovid delivers one parting piece of advice to his female student: fake it and make sure you are not caught faking (797-801). As in the scene at the end of book 2, ideal and mutual gratification is suddenly supplanted by a reality in which one of the two partners is left unfulfilled. Delay after delay has kept the student from gratification, and the student is left unsatisfied, even after elegy has reached its *telos*.

It seems, then, that elegy is a tease. Inasmuch as elegy, as a genre, is capable of *telos*, it reaches its climax and leaves the reader wanting. The *Ars Amatoria* emphasizes the necessity of

delay and formalizes it in its very structure. The reader is strung along, endlessly awaiting climax, and is met with more foreplay, more teasing. If, in reading love poetry, the reader's expectation is to experience love, he will be disappointed, for elegy cannot reciprocate; it is not *real* love. By entering into a relationship with elegy, the reader will be left unfulfilled and sent around the track for one more lap after the poem has finished, crossed its *meta*.