

Bloody Love: *Sanguinolenta* in Ovid's Elegiac Poetry

In this paper, I argue that Ovid uses *sanguinolenta* (“full of blood”) exclusively in his elegiac poetry to illustrate the metaphorical and literal destruction that love can bring. The poet uses the word in popular myths of unhappy love and in his teachings as the *praeceptor amoris* not only to depict violence more vividly, but also to show that love, when not reciprocated or carried out in accordance with Ovid's precepts, can be a bloody, disastrous affair.

Of the 34 occurrences of *sanguinolenta* in our extant Latin corpus—19 of which are found in poetry—Ovid uses the adjective 15 times (McKeown, 1989). Although Ovid uses this word more than any other extant poet, it never appears in his longest work, the *Metamorphoses*, even though the work is riddled with violent, bloody scenes. Recent scholars working on violence in Ovid have primarily focused on his *Metamorphoses*, while the few who have mentioned the word *sanguinolenta* simply note its metrical position and rarity or focus on one specific work (Knox, 2014; Littlewood, 2006). However, many of Ovid's uses of the adjective (*Ars. am.* 1.336; *Her.* 3.50, 6.46, 7.70, 14.60; *Fast.* 2.832, 3.640; *Ib.* 4, 382) directly link the adjectives with lovers—all of these spurned, with the exception of Lucretia—and the bloody consequences of suicide, murder, and curses. Other examples (*Am.* 1.12.12; *Ars. am.* 1.414) illustrate the possible violence that arises when one ignores Ovid's precepts. What can we learn from the appearance of this “violent” word in Ovid's elegiac poetry?

To address this question, I draw examples from Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, *Heroides*, and *Ibis*. In *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid describes the dangers of consorting with greedy girlfriends. Just as the Allia was stained with blood (*sanguinolenta*, 1.414) after the Gallic sack of Rome in 390 BCE, a man's life will also become stained with blood—metaphorically speaking—if he neglects Ovid's

advice as the *praeceptor amoris* against meeting and courting women on days of *nefas*. Ovid describes the insatiability of women and their ability to destroy (*auferet*, 419; *carpat* 420; *perdis*, 434) a person's wealth. The violence of the Battle of Allia is comparable to the violent destruction that a woman can bring upon a man's wealth.

Women and love are also connected to violence in the sixth letter of Ovid's *Heroides*. Ovid, unlike other authors, portrays Hypsipyle as legally married to Jason. Hypsipyle, in response to Jason's betrayal of their marriage, curses him and his new wife Medea. Her marriage has been bloodstained (*sanguinolenta*, 46) by the Furies and she claims that she has been led into a deceitful marriage (*fraudata coniugio*, 163), and she will have her revenge. This curse, I argue, will be fulfilled in the image of Medea's bloody hands in *Ars. am.* 1.336 after her infanticides. Hypsipyle and Medea, therefore, are both victims of abandonment and depict the violence that can result from women deceived in love.

In Ovid's *Ibis*, a curse poem, the poet represents himself as the wounded lover and Rome as the elegiac *puella*. The poet claims that his *Ars Amatoria* has harmed him while his other works were not stained with blood (*sanguinolenta*, 4). Rejected by his *puella* because of his *carmina*, Ovid's life, like those in his poetry, becomes bloody—in this sense, with pain and regret. Like Hypsipyle, Ovid becomes a victim through his abandonment and an agent of violence by performing a curse. In his curse, Ovid refers to the blood-filled stables (*sanguinolenta*, 382) of Diomedes. The violence of horses eating human flesh is one that the poet wishes on the object of his curse.

Ovid used *sanguinolenta* more than any other author, but this word does more than intensify pathos or create a more vivid scene. While there is plenty of gore and death in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* there is violence in his elegiac poetry as well—and it is just as bloody. In his *Ars*

Amatoria, *Heroides*, and *Ibis*, we can see the metaphorical and physical violence that love brings: Ovid portrays a world where betrayed and unrequited love has serious, blood-filled repercussions, and Ovid himself is both a victim of his own game and an instigator of similar violence.

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