STAT VETUS… SILVA: BURLESQUE AND PARODY
IN OVID *AMORES* 3.1 AND PERSIUS *SATIRE* 5.132-53[*]

The sophisticated, self-conscious love poetry of Ovid hardly seems the most obvious place to look for traces of the influence of folk-tales or significant story patterns. *Amores* 3.1, however, is, on any interpretation, a special case among Ovidian elegies, and setting it in a wider, if unexpected, context, does, I think, produce some illuminating results.

I. Recent work done on story patterns[1] allows us to identify the three following categories of tale (here presented in *descending* order of generality and *ascending* order of relevance to Ovid's poem):

(1) *Heroic quests symbolising a mortal conquest of death.*

The hero sallies forth on an adventure in order, by defeating some distant adversary representing Death, to bring back an initially lacking object or person. At an early stage of this quest, the hero encounters a helper figure (often ambivalent) who, after the application of force or persuasion, aids him in various ways to reach the goal of his quest[2]. This category is almost too frequent to require exemplification, but the tenth and eleventh labours of Heracles, involving the cattle of Geryon and the apples of the Hesperides, are good instances.

(2) *Stories of Life Choice.*

These feature the hero at an early stage of his life (life considered as a quest or journey: *Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita…*)[3] and may be regarded as a sub-group of the preceding category. The youthful hero encounters figures equivalent to the ambivalent helper of (1), who set before him alternative models of life or career from which he makes a choice for good or ill. One immediately thinks of Heracles at the Crossroads, the Judgement of Paris, or Christ's temptation in the Wilderness at the hands of Satan as examples of this category[4]. The ambivalent helpers who tempt may also be

[1] See in particular my articles in "CQ" 38, 1988, 277 and (on the Judgement of Paris) "CQ" 53, 2003, 32ff, and "Prometheus" 28, 2002, 1ff. The importance of Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* is stressed throughout these articles.

[2] On the helper figure see in particular my 1988 article, p. 278f.

[3] On the relevance of the opening canto of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, with its picture of the poet encountering his helper figure (Vergil) in a dark wood, see my remarks in *Theocritus' Seventh Idyll and the folk-tale*, in L.M. Pino Campos - G. Santana Henríquez (eds.), *Homenaje al Profesor Juan Antonio López Férez* (Madrid 2013), pp. 228-9.

[4] For further discussion of these examples see my "CQ 2003" article, pp. 33ff.

regarded as 'testers' of the hero.

   (3) *The poet's Choice of Life*.

Finally and most specifically comes this category, treatable as a version of (2), 'the poet as hero'[5]. At an early stage of his life, the poet encounters figures, again equivalent to the ambivalent helpers of (1), who aid him in reaching his true goal, his vocation as poet. Hesiod and Archilochus, to cite examples from archaic Greece who actually existed[6], Simichidas in Theocritus *Idyll* 7, to cite a fictitious Hellenistic adaptation of the theme[7], all belong here.

Merely to set out the three relevant categories in this way is to draw attention to the large-scale similarities between them. But there are also smaller and more specific links of detail, and of these I give three instances which are of particular relevance:

   (i) *The locale of the hero's encounter with the helper figure*.

This is often represented as some kind of *wilderness*, which can be exemplified by *forest* or *mountain*[8]. Thus, (a) in Arthurian legend, both Launcelot and Gawain encounter helper figures within a wood[9]; (b) Christ and Macbeth make their momentous choices for future life as the result of meeting ambivalent helpers in a landscape of wilderness, while Paris has a comparable experience on Mt Ida[10]; and (c) a poet like Hesiod similarly encounters his helper figures on Mt. Helicon. Archilochus meets up with his in a stony, barren landscape, and, in what is surely the apotheosis of this theme, Dante, at the start of his *Divine Comedy*, encounters Vergil near both wood and mountain[11].

   (ii) *The identity of the helper figures*.

These are often both *female* and *plural*, though this fact emerges least clearly from (1) *heroic quests* pure and simple. Even here, however, we can point to the role of the Nymphs in Heracles' search for the apples of the Hesperides, that of the Graeae in Perseus' quest for Medusa's head, or the folk-tale sequence ('Old, older, oldest') whereby the hero is sent on to three successively more aged and wiser female figures[12]. More obviously, in (2)

---

   [5] See my remarks in "Prometheus" 29, 2003, 64.

   [6] See my 2003 article (n. 5), p. 42f.

   [7] See the article cited in n. 3, p. 225ff.

   [8] See my article *Landscape and Life style: Wilderness and Epiphany in ancient literature*, forthcoming.

   [9] See "BICS" 49, 2006, 109 for the wood as locale for such encounters.

   [10] See the article cited in n. 8.

   [11] See my remarks in the article cited in n. 8.

   [12] See my "CQ" 2003 article, nn. 19 and 30 respectively, and (on 'Old, Older, Oldest' specifically) "Prometheus" 29, 2003, p. 58 n. 11.

stories of life choice, the varieties of career on offer are sometimes embodied in, or symbolised by, the relevant female helper figures. Thus, Heracles at the Crossroads finds two ladies representing Pleasure and Virtue; and Athena, Hera and Aphrodite subserve a similar function in the story of the Judgement of Paris. Even when this type of allegory is not operating, the hero may still be confronted by a plurality of females, as in the instance of Macbeth and the three sisters. In (3) *the poet's choice of life*, the females in question are most often, of course, Muses (Hesiod, Archilochus)[13].

(iii) *Initial questioning of the hero by the helper figure*.

It is remarkable just how regular a feature of the relevant encounters this turns out to be. A possible explanation was hit upon by Carl Jung in his illuminating essay on *The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales*[14], where he observed that the little old man who often functions as helper figure in folk-tales "asks questions like who? why? whence? for the purpose of inducing self-reflection and mobilising the moral forces". Whatever one may think of the motivation supplied by Jung, the ubiquity of the questioning process cannot be denied. It crops up in two of the three categories identified above. So in (1) *heroic quests*, Aristaeus, at *Georgic* 4.445f., is asked by Proteus[15] *quis te… nostras/ iussit adire domos/ quidve hinc petis?* or the disguised Venus[16] says to Aeneas and Acestes at *Aen*. 1.369f. *vos qui tandem?/ quibus aut venistis ab oris,/ quove tenetis iter?* And in stories of (3) *the poet's choice of life*[17] we find, for instance, Lycidas asking Simichidas at Theocritus *Id*. 7.21ff. where he is going at mid-day[18]. A comparable questioning seems to have occurred within the tradition of Archilochus' encounter with the Muses: according to the inscription which is our source for this, these female figures *asked* him (ἐπερώτησαν) if he was taking his cow to be sold[19]. On a sublimer level, *ma tu perché ritorni a tanta noia?/ Perché non sali il dilettoso monte/, ch'è principio e cagion di tutta gioia?* asks Vergil of Dante *(Inferno* 1.76-8)[20].

---

[13] On all this see the last article cited in the previous note.

[14] For full citation see *Prometheus* 29, 2003, p. 63 n. 34.

[15] For Proteus as helper figure see the article cited in the previous note.

[16] For Venus as helper figure see the article cited in n. 8.

[17] See my "CQ" 2003 article, p. 42.

[18] For Lycidas as descendent of the folk-tale's helper figure see the article cited in n. 3, p. 226ff.

[19] T4 (*Mnesiepis Inscriptio*) E1 col. ii.32 in Tarditi's edition of the testimonia to Archilochus. Cf. "Prometheus" 30, 2004, 182f.

[20] On Vergil as 'helper figure' within the *Divine Comedy* see my remarks in the article cited in n. 3, p. 228f.

II.   It must be said that Ovid *Am*. 3.1 appears, at first blush, to be eminently susceptible to analysis in terms of the categories thus established. The elegy opens with a gravity that marks it as unusual within its particular genre: *stat vetus et multos incaedus silva per annos;/ credibilest illi numen inesse loco*. We have, then, the wood idiomatic in numinous encounters with helper figures (a 'selva oscura' indeed[21]: compare *ego dum spatior tectus nemoralibus umbris* at v. 5 and in v. 1 note the implications of *incaedus*). We also have a 'cave' (v. 3: *fons sacer in medio speluncaque pumice pendens*) and, although this fact was not mentioned above, caves too are very much in place as part of the landscape of poetic encounters of the type we are now analysing[22]. It will come as no surprise, then, that we encounter at vv. 7ff. the two female personifications of the relevant genres, Elegy and Tragedy, who are so much at home in the landscape thus established. Heracles at the Crossroads supplies the closest parallel for the hero's encounter with two female personifications of this sort deriving from the folk-tale figure of the helper. Nor is it in any way unexpected that the first words of the first figure to speak should fall into the form of a bracing question (v. 15f.): *ecquis erit… tibi finis amandi/ o argumenti lente poeta tui?* We considered above Jung's suggestive remarks on the propriety of such interrogation for "inducing self-reflection and mobilising the moral forces", and numerous parallels could be cited[23]. Finally, encounters that involve a life choice, be they more general or be they specifically poetic, ought to be datable to an 'early stage' of the hero's existence: Heracles encounters Virtue and Pleasure when he is passing ἐκ παίδων εἰς ἥβην or *cum primum pubesceret* and Archilochus' adventure occurs when he is ἔτι νεώτερος[24]. It is perfectly in keeping with this that Tragedy should upbraid Ovid (v. 28) for having wasted his *prima… iuventa*.

So far, therefore, the case for placing Ovid *Am*. 3.1 within the group of tales with which this article began must seem very strong. But, of course, the situation is more complex and diverse than I have hitherto allowed. What is probably the most important missing element must now be addressed. I mean the influence upon Ovid's poem of Propertius 3.3. It has long been recognised[25] that the latter work is the source for several details and motifs

---

[21] See the article cited in n. 3, and on the idiomatic *darkness* of the wood in which numinous beings are encountered cf. the article cited in n. 9, p. 109.

[22] See C.W. Müller, "Rh. Mus." 128, 1985, 105 n. 16. Cf. Y. Ustinova, *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind* (Oxford 2009), p. 172ff.

[23] See my remarks in "Mnemosyne" 56, 2004, 680, and "Prometheus" 34, 2008, 28.

[24] Xenophon *Mem*. 2.1.21 = Prodicus B2 DK ~ Cicero *de off*. 1.118; line 22 of the inscription cited n. 19; and cf. my "CQ" 2003 article, p. 42f.

[25] See in particular the remarks of P.H. Schrijvers in *Miscellanea Tragica in honorem J.C. Kamerbeek* (Amsterdam 1976), 405ff.

in the former, and it could be indeed argued that Ovid derived most of the significant and supposedly idiomatic feature which I have just catalogued from Propertius 3.3 (with perhaps a little help from the same poet's thematically related 3.1) and no other source.

Here, then, are the relevant examples of overlap: the setting, as made clear at the start, in a wood (*stat vetus… silva* ~ 3.3.13 *speculans ex arbore Phoebus* cf. 3.1.2 *in vestrum quaeso me sinite ire nemus*) with the appended cave (*speluncaque pumice pendens* ~ 3.3. 27f. *hic erat affixis viridis spelunca lapillis/ pendebantque cavis tympana pumicibus* cf. 3.1.5 *quo pariter carmen tenuastis in antro?*). The bracing questions from the poetically significant helper figure, personified Tragedy or Apollo (*ecquis erit… tibi finis amandi…?* ~ 3. 3.15f. *quid tibi cum tali… est flumine?* etc.)[26]. Note also the idiomatic tone of the adjective addressed to the poet: *poeta lente argumenti tui* ~ 3.3.15 *demens*. This too goes back to folk-tale prototypes: I have recently cited νήπιός εἰς and ὦ δύστηνε from *Odyssey* 4.371 and 10.281 respectively, which are addressed to heroes by the relevant helper figures and the tone of the latter of which has been characterised as displaying "compassionate but somewhat contemptuous expostulation". Since Phoebus' intervention in Propertius ultimately derives from the Prologue to Callimachus' *Aetia*, it will be relevant to consider the tone of the same divinity's ὠγαθέ at fr. 1.24 Pf., a mode of address which a recent monograph[27] has shown to be associated with the speaker's "position of dominance".

In previous poems within the *Amores*, Ovid had already shown a keen sense of poetic self-consciousness, as manifested in the contrast between his own present genre and that of epic (see in particular *Am*. 1.1.1ff. and 2.18). A composition placed at the start[28] of the final book of a three – book collection corresponds as closely as is arithmetically possible with Propertius' device (in 3.1) of a poem stationed at the commencement of the second half of a four-book collection.

But Propertius' contrast of genres evokes epic. Looming behind both Ovid and Propertius is, of course, the figure of Vergil, and primarily – but by no means exclusively – the opening of his sixth *eclogue*. The relevance of

---

[26] Of course there are other details of correspondence which are not directly relevant to the present enquiry, e.g. the image of the poetic spring (*fons sacer in medio* ~ 3. *Bellerophontei quo fluit umor equi* cf. *ib*. 5 *fontibus* ~ 3.1.3 *puro de fonte*).

[27] E. Dickey, *Greek Forms of Address from Herodotus to Lucian* (Oxford 1996), 139 and 277, exemplifying from Menander and Plato. On the 'compassionate' but 'contemptuous' tone of the helper figure's address in *Od*. 4.391 and 10. 281 see my remarks in "Prometheus" 34, 2008, 28 n. 6.

[28] Though, given that the present three book collection represents a second edition of an original four book collection , we need to be cautious here.

this latter, with its picture, deriving from the Prologue to Callimachus' *Aetia*, of Apollo warning the poet off *reges et proelia,* is obvious, as McKeown's introduction to the elegy in his commentary shows. But in fact the entirety of Vergil's poetic output must be taken into account here. For near the start of the second half of the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics*, and the *Aeneid*, Vergil marks a significant break. In the case of the first two, he 'places' the poem in question viz-à-viz the genre of epic. In *ecl*. 6.3ff., as we have just reminded ourselves, Apollo is made to contrast the kings and battles characteristic of epic with the world of pastoral. And at *Georg*. 3.10ff. Vergil anticipates the writing of an epic poem on the achievements of Augustus while clearly implying the superiority of epic to didactic as a genre. When he came to compose the start of *Aen*. 7, Vergil could no longer resort to quite the same device, for he was by then actually writing an epic. But we still encounter, at vv. 41ff., something similar, with the statement that the remaining half of the *Aeneid* itself is a greater achievement and the implication that its subject matter (closely akin to 'kings and battles') is more obviously 'epic': *dicam horrida bella,/ dicam acies actosque animis in funera reges/ Tyrrhenamque manum totamque sub arma coactam/ Hesperiam. maior rerum mihi nascitur ordo,/ maius opus moveo*. The concluding phrase here was obviously in Ovid's mind when he signed off *Am*. 3.1 with the announcement *a tergo grandius urguet opus.*

Nevertheless, Apollo's epiphany[29] at the start of *eclogue* 6 has decisively coloured in particular Propertius 3.1 and 3.3, and, since Vergil himself was influenced by the start of the Prologue to Callimachus' *Aetia*, it will be worth while emphasising one further point about this before moving on to the relevance of those Propertian elegies. The two greatest Hellenistic poets, Callimachus and Theocritus, each contrived, within the compass of his greatest composition, to introduce a self-conscious statement about his place in poetry. For Theocritus, this was Simichidas' meeting with Lycidas in *Id*. 7. Now I have shown elsewhere[30] that this encounter displays distinct vestiges of that folk-tale pattern of hero aided in his quest by helper figure with which this article began. One wonders, therefore, if Apollo's role regarding his favourite poets should be interpreted likewise: is he to be taken as a helper figure for Callimachus and Vergil, like Lycidas for Simichidas/ Theocritus? The relevant Callimachean and Vergilian passages do not initially seem to encourage this approach[31]. But consider the Propertian deriva-

---

[29] For the relevance of the primeval notion of divine epiphany to the folk-tale pattern of the helper figure who appears and aids the hero see my remarks in "SCO" 48, 2002, 63f.

[30] See the article cited in n. 3, p. 226ff.

[31] But note the stress laid by each poet on the *early stage* within his career at which Apollo manifested himself. Callimachus fr. 1.21ff. Pf. dates the event by implication to his

tive at 3.3.13 ff. There Apollo suddenly and abruptly[32] appears to the poet *within a wood* (v. 13 *cum me Castalia speculans ex arbore Phoebus*) and he addresses to him questions which are very like those traditionally posed to the hero by a helper figure ("who? why? whither?") and whose purpose Jung interpreted as "inducing self-reflection and mobilising the moral forces": *quid tibi cum tali, demens, est flumine? quis te/ carminis heroi tangere iussit opus?* (v. 15f.) *cur tua praescriptos evecta est pagina gyros?* (v. 21). One might argue that Propertius is here closer to the folk-tale prototype of the divine helper figure than either Callimachus or Vergil. And then, of course, Apollo is regularly associated with the Muses (they, or at least Calliope, as their representative figure, feature later in Propertius' poem, at vv. 37ff.) and the Muses fulfil the function of helper figures in the story of Archilochus and his initiation as poet, and similarly with Hesiod in the *Theogony*[33]. Note too that the entire contents of Propertius 3.3 are identified as a *dream or vision* by the opening phrase *visus eram,* and that the encounters of Hesiod and Archilochus with their helper figures are likewise described in language suggestive of dream or vision, to say nothing of Ennius[34].

Nevertheless, it cannot be concluded that *all* the details of Ovid's poetic dilemma derive merely from a more logical and realistic rearrangement of those found in Propertius 3.3. What is in many ways the most striking aspect of the Ovidian treatment, female personification of Elegy and Tragedy, has no direct counterpart there. The ultimate inspiration for the encounter with two strongly contrasting female personifications must be Heracles' confron-

---

earliest school days, as soon as he was learning to write, Vergil *ecl*. 6.1f. to a time soon after his first poetic efforts (*prima… Thalia*). Given the notion considered above of *life as a journey*, such passages would correspond to the idea of the helper figure encountering the hero at an early stage of his quest.

[32] The *suddenness* of Apollo's appearance may seem characteristic of Propertius, with his predilection for abrupt shifts of content and tone (contrast the rationality and clarity of treatment in *Am*. 3.1). But helper figures deriving from folk-tale do have a habit of sudden appearance and disappearance (a habit related to their associations [see n. 29] with divine epiphany). Compare, for instance, Venus in *Aen*. 1.314ff. where the wood that forms her background also materialises – as in the Propertian passage – very unexpectedly. See further "Prometheus" 34, 2008, 30 and cf. Propp (above, n. 1) p. 30: "the narrator or singer and the audience are interested only in the action and nothing more. They have no interest in the surroundings of the action. Forest, river, sea, steppes, city wall etc. are mentioned only when the hero jumps over or crosses them".

[33] See my "CQ" 2003 article, p. 42. Muses represent the closest thing to Ovid's personified Elegy and Tragedy, and there were Muses of Tragedy and Comedy (cf. Nisbet and Hubbard on Horace *Odes* 1.24.3), though not of Elegy, whose personification here (and at *Am*. 3.9) seems an Ovidian invention.

[34] See the article cited in the previous note p. 43 n. 58 and my remarks in the article cited in n. 29, p. 61f. and n. 46.

tation by Virtue and Pleasure at the Crossroads, and if Ovid could go beyond Propertius 3.3 for that central detail, he could go beyond his elegiac source for other aspects too. For instance, it is likely that Ovid is also glancing at the analogous story of the Judgement of Paris, with Tragedy reminiscent of both Hera and Athena (she is like a queen: vv. 13, 40, 63; she is interested in *facta virorum*, v. 25) and Elegy reminiscent of Aphrodite (vv. 34, 44, 49ff.).

I have not yet said anything about what many would regard as the poem's most distinctive feature, its characteristic Ovidian wit. Of most relevance here is not so much the individual strokes of humour – which require little in the way of comment – but rather the undermining of the very basis of the story pattern which Ovid is exploiting. A choice of life, a decision about the type of existence the hero is to lead, stands, as we have seen, at the very heart and core of the pattern. Heracles and Christ made the right choice[35]. The choice of life, if wrongly made, becomes a choice of death, as Macbeth learned too late, and serious consequences can flow from a rash decision such as finally brought Paris to ruin[36].

Ovid does not, in fact, trivialise these issues: he gives Tragedy her due, and the whole poem ends with a statement of poetic intent (*a tergo grandius urguet opus*) which echoes Tragedy's own words at v. 24 (*incipe maius opus*). But it is precisely this giving of both genres their due which constitutes the undermining referred to above. Ineradicably rooted in the notion of the hero's choice of life is an element of tragedy in the non-generic sense. Even individuals like Heracles who make the 'right' choice are opting in the short term for toils and trouble, and Paris eventually discovers that to win one goddess as helper is to convert two others to enmity. What sets Ovid's treatment apart, and justifies our talk of burlesque and parody, is the devastating ingenuity with which – and this actually does reflect choices about poetry really made by Ovid in his own life[37] – he manages to satisfy both parties and send them away happy. The circle is squared, the seemingly impossible goal of appeasing one helper figure without offending the other is

[35] As did St Catherine of Siena: see "Prometheus" 30, 2004, 1ff.

[36] See my "CQ" 2003 article, p. 37f.

[37] Though, as McKeown points out, there is no need to associate *Am*. 3.1 specifically with Ovid's *Medea*. To raise issues of choice and responsibility may seem a crass mishandling of this supremely witty poem, but, by definition, the circle of stories from which it takes its inspiration deal with precisely such issues, and Ovid does claim, near the beginning of the elegy that he was already pondering (v. 6 *mea quod quaero Musa moveret opus*) when the two female figures appeared. One may therefore treat these figures in terms of 'externalisation' of choice, a process which can be paralleled from analogous (but more serious) stories such as the Judgement of Solomon: see my "CQ" 2003 article, p. 35 and n. 21.

achieved. The debonair and pliant poet who is Ovid's elegiac *persona* finally does satisfy both women.

Ovid is not the only author to have applied burlesque and parody to the story patterns identified at the start of this article. Aristophanes, as I have shown elsewhere[38], often exploits the idea of a heroic journey to a distant locale which culminates in a triumph over death and the bringing back of some desired (and desirable) person. He even employs scenes which are the equivalent of encounters between hero and helper figure. But not even he assays the sort of undercutting of the notion of a life choice achieved in Ovid *Am*. 3.1. Perhaps the closest parallel for this sort of undercutting occurs in a composition which is in all other respects so dissimilar that one may confidently assert that the two works can never have been brought together before. But in Snorri Sturluson's *Gylfaginning* from the *Prose Edda*, we do encounter burlesque and parody of the pattern of a journey to the Under– or Otherworld (complete with helper figure) in which the anticipated worsting of Death by the questing god Thor is entirely undercut and thwarted[39]. There, however, the consequent comic effect takes the form of the hero's humiliation. Ovid, by contrast, contrives to come off triumphantly.

This turning on its head of the pattern's central purpose is inevitably lacking in what is otherwise a close and appropriate parallel to Ovid's poem, a work of art which, like its Ovidian counterpart, derives much of its force from burlesque and parody[40] of the venerable Choice of Heracles[41]. I am referring to Sir Joshua Reynold's portrait of the famous Shakespearean actor David Garrick torn between the conflicting female personifications of Comedy and Tragedy. I say 'torn between', but, in fact, as has been pointed out[42], Garrick is shown succumbing to the lures of Comedy both in his amused

---

[38] See "SIFC" 2, 2004, 28ff.

[39] See my remarks in "CQ" 38, 1988, 281f. and cf. the article cited in n. 9, p. 120.

[40] Similar phraseology is used by e.g. J.T. Davis, *Risit Amor: Aspects of Literary Burlesque in Ovid's Amores*, in *ANRW* II.31.4 (1981), 2460ff.

[41] The painting (now in a private collection) is no. 708 in D. Mannings' *Complete Catalogue* of Reynold's works (Yale 2000, vol. i, 209f.: colour plate [vol. ii] 42). Its indebtedness to the Choice of Heracles was pointed out during Reynold's own lifetime by Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England* (1771), vol. 5 (edd. Hillers and Deghlian, Oxford 1937, p. 61). For more recent demonstration and discussion of the indebtedness see e.g. Edgar Wind, *England und die Antike*: *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg 1930-1931* (1932) 176ff. and "Journal of the Warburg Institute" 2, 1938, 183f. = *Hume and the Heroic Portrait*: *Studies in eighteenth century imagery* (Oxford 1986), 35ff., and M. Postle, *Sir Joshua Reynolds*: *the subject pictures* (Cambridge 1995), 21ff. Cf. R. Wendorf, *Sir Joshua Reynolds*: *the painter in society* (London 1996), 147ff. and 240f. and for further bibliography Mannings as cited, p. 209.

[42] Postle as cited in previous note, p. 29.

facial expression (which reflects that of the relevant Muse) and his bodily gesture and stance – he is spreading his palms apologetically but helplessly towards the hectoring virago who represents Tragedy. It might be said that, in contrast to Ovid's poem, the painter's own career plays no part, but a critic has recently observed[43] that "Garrick's dilemma (which must also be read as a triumph) is also Reynold's as well", with reference to the artist's wavering between the heroic and the more intimate mode of portraiture.

Ovid's dilemma too "must also be read as a triumph", and an art critic has recently argued[44] that *Am*. 3.1, should be included among the sources of Reynold's witty portrait. But Ovid's triumph is greater than the English painter's, since he does, as seen above, contrive to displease neither of his female figures. The sheer resilience and flexibility of the theme of life choice as it passes like a red thread throughout the ages and through different hands, could not be more eloquently displayed....

III.   … except, perhaps, for Persius *Satire* 5.143 f. :
                    quo, deinde, insane, ruis, quo?
          quid tibi vis?

In these lines, *Luxuria*, following hard on the heels of *Avaritia*, begins her railing tirade addressed to the reader. Commentators note the echo in v. 143 of Horace *Epode* 7.1 and other passages[45], but none of them, not even Kissel's massive tome[46], cites the opening of Apollo's admonition to his poet at Propertius 3.3.15f.

          quid tibi cum tali, demens, est flumine? quis te
            carminis heroi tangere iussit opus?

---

[43] Postle as cited in n. 41, p. 25f., following E.J. Kenney, *Letter to the Editor*, "Apollo" 133, 1991, 66, who stresses (cf. n. 9 above) the sylvan background of the painting, the 'brandishing' gesture of Tragedy with her long locks of hair (cf. Ov. *Am*. 3.1.7 and 12) and Comedy's smile (cf. *limis subrisit ocellis* at v. 33) and *vestis tenuissima* (v. 9).

[44] Postle as cited above, pp. 30ff. It is interesting to recall that Reynold's contemporary and rival Thomas Gainsborough later began a depiction of Shakespeare in the company of the Comic and Tragic Muses, but abandoned and painted over it : see Postle, "Apollo" 134, 1991, 374ff. The portrait thus superimposed was of Johann Christian Fischer (see S. Sloman, *Gainsborough in Bath* (Yale 2002), 103), a musician who later married one of the painter's daughters, and there is a sadly ironical reflection here of the hero's choice between two females, since the father had presumed Fischer was interested in his other daughter, and disapproved of the actual marriage, while the daughter who did become Fischer's wife gradually sank into madness (see Sloman as cited, p. 105).

[45] In particular Prop. 4.1. 71 *quo ruis*, *imprudens*, *vage*, *dicere fata*, *Properti*?, which is significant in relation to the same poet's 3.3.15, both occurring suddenly and abruptly in a context of *recusatio* (see Hutchinson *ad loc*.; C. Macleod, "PLLS" 1, 1976, 145 = *Collected Essays* 206 etc.),

[46] Walter Kissel (Heidelberg 1990), 710.

The context of the two passages seems totally diverse, and this has doubtless impeded detection of the similarity of expression. But, surprising as it may seem, a comparable pattern underlies each. It has been accepted, since Otto Jahn's edition of Persius[47], that the successive interventions of Luxury and Avarice ultimately derive, like Ovid's *Am.* 3.1, from the story of Heracles' encounter with *Arete* and *Kakia*. And we have seen above, that Propertius 3.3.15f. exhibits two features that are highly idiomatic in encounters between folk-tale's hero and helper: the latter addresses to the former a number of bracing questions, and directly apostrophises him with an epithet conveying perhaps compassion and certainly contempt. Precisely these two features are present in Persius' passage: the questioning is plain to see and extends as far as v. 150, while his (or, rather, *Avaritia*'s) use of the disparaging word *insanus* is directly equivalent to *demens* in Propertius. At this point we may aptly cite a further parallel from a further Roman adaptation of the story pattern in question. Silius Italicus *Punica* 15.18ff. was later to adapt it by picturing Scipio Africanus as confronted by the two antithetical female personifications *Voluptas* and *Virtus*. And in the speech of the former (vv. 33ff.) we are confronted yet again with the succession of bracing questions and (at v. 33) the disparaging epithet hurled at the head of the hero addressed[48]: *quis furor hic, non digne puer, consumere bello/ florem aevi? Cannaene tibi graviorque palude/ Maeonius Stygia lacus excessere Padusque?/ quem tandem ad finem bellando fata lacesses?/ tunc etiam tentare paras Atlantica regna/ Sidoniasque domos?* The episode as a whole shows how a more serious but less inspired poet than either Ovid or Persius could still give some degree of fresh life to the tradition.

We have also seen above the relevance to Propertius 3.3.15ff. of the epiphany of Apollo at the start of Callimachus' *Aetia*. In its basic and original form, the motif of the encounter with two female personifications was already by Callimachus' time in danger of seeming excessively familiar. By his adaptation, which introduced the theme of Apollo's intervention near the start of a poet's career, a device revived by Roman authors in the first century B.C., Callimachus gave new life to the pattern. Was it possible similarly to avoid predictability while returning to the prototype of the two personifications? Ovid and Persius give a resoundingly positive answer to that

---

[47] Leipzig (1843), 202.

[48] This stylistic point is not taken up by E. Heck in his otherwise far-ranging article on the passage, *Scipio am Scheidewege*, "WS" 4, 1970, 156-88, with bibliography in p. 159 n. 8 (and p. 160 n. 16 on Ov. *Am.* 3.1) which explores its elements of tradition and (Roman) originality and its detailed but indirect derivation from Prodicus' tale as preserved by Xenophon, together with the influences exerted by Cicero's *de off.* 1.118 and *de rep.* 1.1.

question. The former, in *Am*. 3.1, ingeniously overturns[49] what would seem to be an essential prerequisite of the pattern by having himself gain the best of both worlds and enjoy the benefits of both his females, Tragedy and Elegy. Persius, in comparable manner, though with far greater – and characteristic – economy, sets on its head what one would have supposed a stable and ineluctable component of the story pattern. For centuries, the underlying logic of this was its opposition between two antithetical qualities embodied in human form: vice against virtue, wisdom against folly, duty against pleasure. Through the device of introducing the by no means antithetical Avarice and Luxury, and thus defying this apparently immutable requirement, Persius likewise gives new life to an old formula. Yet he simultaneously preserves (while subtly undermining) the basic notion of an encounter near the start of the hero's career, by picturing Avarice's initial intervention as occurring , if not at an early point in his life, at least near the start of his waking day, while he is still snoring beneath the bed clothes.

St John's College, Oxford   MALCOLM DAVIES

ABSTRACT. The article shows how the relevant passages of Ovid and Persius make use of a widespread pattern, deriving from folk-tale, in which the young hero's encounter with significant female figures between whom he must choose determines his future life. Ovid, with characteristic humour, subverts this pattern and evades the choice.
KEY WORDS. Ambivalence, helper figure, allegory, life choice.

---

[49] A further great (but very different) work of literature similarly undermines the logic of a comparable folk-tale motif by this expedient of declining to make a choice: Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* (*Nathan the Wise*). Its titular hero, asked by Saladin to say which is the best of the world's three great religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) is best, declines any decision and instead relates the parable (derived from Boccaccio's *Decameron*: see A. Spinette's article s.v. 'Boccaccio' in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 2, 549 ff. and Aarne-Thompson, *The Types of the Folk-Tale* J 462.31: "father leaves sons three jewels") of the father who, unable to choose which of his sons should receive his ring as a sign of favour, fashions two more rings for them instead. On the parable see e.g. H. Politzer, "German Quarterly" 31, 1958, 161 ff. = *G.E. Lessing* (Wege der Forschung 211, 1968), 343 ff.; and F.J. Lamport, *Lessing and the Drama* (Oxford 1981), 198 f., 213, 217 f., the latter pointing out the similarities with the dilemma in Lessing's own life, when he was pressed by Goeze to declare his views regarding the truth of Christianity.