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Remedia Amoris 343–356

Latin text

Auferimur cultu; gemmis auroque teguntur
 omnia; pars minima est ipsa puella sui.
 Saepe ubi sit, quod ames, inter tam multa requiras; 345
 decipit hac oculos aegide dives Amor.
 Improvisus ades, deprendes tutus inermem:
 infelix vitiis excidet illa suis.
 Non tamen huic nimium praecepto credere tutum est:
 fallit enim multos forma sine arte decens. 350
 Tum quoque, compositis cum collinet ora venenis,
 ad dominae vultus, nec pudor obstat, eas.
 Pyxidas invenies et rerum mille colores,
 et fluere in tepidos oesypa lapsa sinus.
 Illa tuas redolent, Phineu, medicamina mensas: 355
 non semel hinc stomacho nausea facta meo est.

Translation

We are carried away by cultivation; everything is covered by
 precious stones and gold; the real girl is the smallest part of herself.
 Often you should enquire, ‘where is it’, that thing you love, amid so 345
 many things; with this shield does rich Amor deceive the eyes.
 Unexpected you must arrive, safe yourself you will catch her unarmed:
 the poor girl will be felled from her own imperfections.
 Although it is not safe to trust in this rule too much:
 in fact comely beauty without art trips up many men. 350

Then also, when she is smearing her face with composite concoctions,
 you should go to the face of your mistress, undaunted by a sense of shame.
 You will find jars and stuff in a thousand colours,
 and wool-grease that has slipped and dripped onto a warm bosom.
 Those substances, Phineus, reek of your table: 355
 not only once has this caused my stomach nausea.

Commentary

The *Remedia Amoris*, Ovid's last hurrah in erotodidactic elegy, is a somewhat nasty, cynical but nevertheless witty *riposte* to the *Ars Amatoria*. Here Ovid's antagonists are ungrateful, hurtful women (the *indignae puellae* of l.15) and his audience lovesick, thwarted males. As he instructed men in the *artes* of the *amator* in Books One and Two of the *Ars*, he now turns his skills as *praeceptor amoris* – or doctor (cf. above p. 21) – to cure them of the women they once sought. Henderson (1979: xx–xxii) provides a detailed analysis of the structure of the poem, which is thematically framed around a variety of techniques to rid oneself of *amor*. The passage herein is but one of numerous remedies.

ll.343–356 involve a clever strategy; surprising a *puella* amid the private rituals of *cultus* and *munditia* is not only an act designed to humiliate, but also one that reiterates the deceptive nature of women. Additionally, the reader of the *Medicamina* will recall Ovid's statement that very few women are born beautiful. This latter maxim, designed as a gentle prompt to women to employ the techniques required to make them beautiful, is now alluded to in order to suggest that feminine beauty is often an artifice that conceals a hideous reality.

The context of this extract is, therefore, a vital consideration when assessing Ovid's responses to *cultus* as well as cosmeceuticals and cosmetics. If one were to discuss it in isolation, it would present a decidedly distorted interpretation of the poet's attitude towards such matters. However, within the poem itself, it merely presents another avenue for curing lovesickness and as such it is not so much a diatribe against female adornment as a tainted version of AA 3.101–250,

particularly *ll.*209–234 and 237–246. In short: watching your *puella* apply beauty lotions is not conducive to passion; do so only if you wish to end your desires.

Within this context, Ovid treats *cultus* cynically in comparison to the *Medicamina* and *AA* 3.101–208, 235–236 and 247–250. In the age of Ovid, *cultus* is everywhere and it is seductive (*Rem.* *ll.*343–344). Of course, such a message is employed elsewhere but in a more subtle, complex way that disassociates female adornment and love of *cultus* from the anti-cosmetic tradition and balances endorsement of beautification with recognition of male anxiety concerning cosmetic ritual. Ovid's familiarity with the anti-cosmetic tradition and its association with deception – themes implied in *AA* Book Three – is evident in the *Remedia* in relation to the *puella* so enamoured of *cultus* that it is difficult for a man to catch a glimpse of the *real* woman (*ll.*345–346).

Ovid evokes the façade of the adorned female through the military imagery of the shield or *aegis* (*l.*346). The latter references the shield of Jupiter (*Aeneid* 8.354) and that of Minerva, with Medusa's head (*Aeneid* 8.435; *Met.* 2.754–755 and 6.78–79). From the sublime to the ridiculous, Ovid equates the powerful, authoritative *aegis* of the gods with the glittering jewellery of the *puella*. Similarly, like the soldier who arrives suddenly on the enemy, the lover must be *improvisus* ('unexpected'); on the military connotations of the adjective, cf. Henderson (1979: 85). If the lover proves to be sufficiently stealthy, he will catch the girl when she is defenceless; cf. *deprehendere* ('to catch') and *inermis* ('unarmed'). On being besieged, the unlucky girl will be 'felled' (*excidere*), which continues the martial motif. This representation of a hypothetical situation is typical of the Ovidian motif of the lover-as-soldier that characterizes, in particular, the *Amores* and the *Ars*; cf. Murgatroyd (1975); Drinkwater (2013).

The girl is 'felled' on being surprised during her toilette because her *vitia* ('imperfections') are revealed – she is devastated at being viewed in her uncultivated state. Ovid's scene at *ll.*351–357 evokes sensory images of sight, touch and smell and the *pyxides* and their revolting contents are highlighted at *ll.*353–357, matching and distorting imagery and sentiments from *AA* 3.209–234, particularly *ll.*211–212.

On this passage, Richlin (1995: 189–190) stresses the association between facial creams, poisons and magic potions, all of which are conveyed by the noun *venena*. Ovid uses the term, translated as 'concoctions', at *l.*351, thereby creating an image of the woman as seductress-poisoner-witch. The dangers

implicit in the term have already been observed by Ovid in *Am.* 1.14.44 where he describes Corinna's hair dye as *venena* (translated as 'poisons'); cf. above p. 95. He also employs the term at *Am.* 2.14.28 – *dira venena* ('ill-omened poisons') – to describe the mixture Corinna ingested to abort a foetus; the magical connotations are emphasized by the lines that follow, which reference Medea (as well as the story of Philomela and Procne, infamous from *Met.* 6.412–674).

In contrast to the *Medicamina*, then, the beauty products in the *Remedia* are ugly, dangerous, magical and ill-omened. This is further emphasized by the use of *medicamina* ('substances') at *Rem.* 1.355 to denote something toxic, something causing a nauseating reaction, which again alludes to witchcraft, forming as it does an uneasy intertextuality with the diatribe against magic in *Med.* 11.35–42 and the dismissal of the same in *Am.* 1.4.35–44. *medicamina*, used to denote a poison and a magical substance is used at *Met.* 7.262 (on Medea) but is mostly present in post-Augustan works; cf. Valerius Flaccus 8.17 (on the *condita medicamina* or 'hidden potions' in Medea's casket); Juvenal 6.595 (on *artes* and *medicamina* to instigate an abortion); Seneca *Controversies* 7.3.4 (as a poison and aligned with *venenum*); Tacitus *Annals* 12.67 (a deadly poison).

Ovid's *puella* has been transformed into a witch or, as above, a seductress-poisoner-witch. This is in line with interpretations of the witch as a powerful embodiment of feminine abjection, the antithesis of an elite body, and one akin to what Stratton (2014: 154) describes as a form of human 'creatureliness'. The woman at her toilette, in the very act of performing erotic magic on herself by means of potions, thereby embodies the uncanny. This is suggested by the reference to the Harpies, introduced as a metaphor of repellent olfactory hyperbole.

At 11.355–356, Ovid equates the smell of beauty products with the table of Phineus, the blind king of Salmydessos, who was harassed by Harpies that devoured his meals, befouled the leftovers and left a stench in their wake; cf. *Met.* 7.1–4. Ovid's immediate source is Virgil's description of the Harpies as birds with maiden-like faces at *Aeneid* 3.216–218 – beings symbolic of female 'creatureliness'. The association of Harpies with 'woman-bird' also taps into the Roman belief that witches were synonymous with metamorphosis and flight. Ovid references the belief at *Am.* 1.8.13–14 when he implies that Dipsas can

transform into a bird. Likewise, in an evocative scene from Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (3.21ff.), Pamphile takes out an ointment box (*arcula*) from her *pyxides*, smears an unguent (*unguedo*) over her naked body, then transforms into an owl (*bubo*).

Brunelle (2005: 152) puts the hyperbole into a sensible context: 'Unsurprisingly, lanolin does not really smell as bad as Ovid claims: Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* 29.36) vouches for its strong odour, but to compare it to Phineus's meals, befouled by the Harpies, and to claim that one's stomach has been repeatedly upset by the smell borders on the ridiculous.' Nevertheless, the exaggeration is a symptom of Ovid's use of satire in the *Remedia*, which provides a suitable means by which his didactic doctoring can be expressed.