

OVID'S POETICS OF ILLUSION

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

A DUPLICITOUS POET

Ovid delights to present himself as the poet of the Augustan here and now, the celebrant of the worldly and sensual abundance of post-Actian Rome: *Ars* 3.121–2 *ego me nunc denique natum | gratulor: haec aetas moribus apta meis* ‘I count myself lucky to have been born now; this age suits my character.’ But this most immediate of poets is also the most slippery of writers. To live in the present is firmly to relegate to the past the ‘unpolished simplicity’ of a former age, *Ars* 3.113 *simplicitas rudis ante fuit. cultus adest* (127): fully present is a quality central to Ovid’s conception of both a lifestyle and a poetics, *cultus*, ‘adornment’, ‘refinement’, ‘elegance’, the opposite of the lack of polish and sophistication denoted by *rudis*.¹

The absence of *simplicitas* implies also the presence of a duplicity. The noun *duplicitas* is not attested in Latin before the Church Fathers, but the adjective *duplex* is used by Ovid at strategic moments. The *duplex imago* of Janus (*Fasti* 1.231), the two-faced god who presides over Ovid’s late poem on the Roman religious calendar, has recently been read as an emblem of the generic, ideological and hermeneutic duplicities that pervade the *Fasti*.² Within the dramatic world of the *Amores* the writing-tablets used to communicate with Corinna in 1.11–12 double for the poet’s own elegies. When they return to Ovid bearing a negative reply he accuses them of duplicity, 1.12.27 *ergo ego uos rebus duplices pro nomine sensi* ‘so I’ve found you double in reality, in keeping with your name’.³ This line needs to be read twice to make sense, for is not a pair of writing-tablets already in

¹ Despite Watson (1982) the wider meanings of *cultus* should not be excluded in this passage. In general on Ovidian *cultus*: Ramage (1973) 87–100; Rosati (1983) 84.

² Barchiesi (1991) 14–17; Hardie (1991) 62–4; Fowler (2000) 192 n. 37.

³ Fitzgerald (2000) 59–62 shows how the bearer of the tablets, the slave-girl Nape, is herself a stand-in for both the poet and his tablets, roles for which she is well equipped by her freedom from undue *simplicitas* (1.11.10, if the text is correct). Ovid’s claim of *simplicitas* for himself at *Am.* 1.3.14 is disingenuous: see pp. 38–9.

physical reality (*rebus*) ‘double’? The point emerges only from a linguistic doubling, since it is in Greek, not Latin, that names for ‘writing-tablet’ literally mean ‘folded’ or ‘double’ (πτύξ, πτυχή, δίπτυχα).⁴ There is a doubling of the senses of *duplex* (both ‘double’ and ‘treacherous’); there is also a folding over of language into reality, as what seemed to be just a word, a name, turns into reality – but only after a prior shift from a literal to a figurative sense of *duplex*, for, as we have seen, in the literal sense the tablets always were, really, ‘twofold’. This line not only makes the point about the generic trickiness and deceptiveness of love elegy, the *fallax opus* (Propertius 4.1.135), but exemplifies a constant Ovidian fascination with the uncertain interface between words and things (see ch. 7).

The *lena* ‘bawd’ of *Amores* 1.8 who teaches the poet’s girlfriend how to deceive her lover in her own pecuniary self-interest is fully a match for Ovid in her erotodidactic expertise and delight in deception.⁵ This demonised double of the elegiac poet has a ‘double pupil’ (15 *pupula duplex*) that gives her the power of the evil eye, but which hints at other kinds of duplicity and seeing double. Were Ovid to look the *lena* in the eye he would, according to ancient belief, see his own miniature reflection in her pupil – in this case presumably a double reflection. The apple of this *lena*’s eye (23 *mea lux*, literally ‘my light’ is the endearment with which she opens her address) is the poet’s girlfriend or *puella*, whose pseudonym Corinna is cognate with the Greek κόρη meaning ‘girl’ but also ‘pupil (of the eye)’ (because of the little image reflected in the pupil of the person at whom we look). Similarly the Latin *pupula* literally means ‘little girl’, and secondarily ‘pupil’. Thus by another doubling *pupula duplex* could be translated ‘deceiving girl’, which is what the *lena*’s instruction will turn the girl into.⁶ *duplex* recurs a few lines later as an unparalleled and suspiciously otiose epithet for the double doors behind which the poet hides to eavesdrop on the *lena*’s instructions to the girl (22). Doors like writing-tablets can be ‘deceitful’ pieces of wood. They shelter the duplicity of the *lena* at the same time as they afford the poet cover for his own crafty unmasking of her duplicity. These are the doors through which readers eavesdrop on literary texts, and through which we would cross from our own reality to enter into the presence of fictional characters. In comedy,

⁴ Henderson (1991) 78.

⁵ On the *lena* as *alter ego* of the elegist see Myers (1996); on *Am.* 1.8 see Gross (1996) 205 ‘The bawd intends . . . to replace [Ovid] as master in the domain of eros. The bawd’s last precept involves the transformation of the young woman into a *persona* like herself.’

⁶ On ‘little-girl pupils’ see Bettini (1999) 216–17; on the physiology and folklore see McDaniel (1918).

with which *Amores* 1.8 has strong affinities,⁷ the eavesdropping character doubles the role of actor with the role of audience, providing a bridge between onstage and offstage. In love elegy the traditional role of the door is as the barrier between the lover and the object of his desire; in Ovid the locked door becomes a figure for the increasingly attenuated, but ultimately impermeable, screen between the worlds outside and inside the text (see pp. 143–8).⁸

The duplicity which is the subject of this book is one which equivocates between absence and presence and which delights in conjuring up illusions of presence. These illusions are experienced both by characters within the texts, and by readers of the texts, often in the form of the illusion that the reader is drawn into the text or that the text materialises itself in the world of the reader. The equivocation between absence and presence haunts the Ovidian *corpus* to a degree that makes of it a recognisably Ovidian response to language and literature, as well as to the extratextual worlds of history and the self. At the same time this Ovidian quality should be understood as an intensification and thematisation of a dialectic between absence and presence that can be traced in many other areas both textual and non-textual. This Introduction sets the scene for the chapters that follow by sketching out a map, historical, cultural, and critico-theoretical.

LITERARY AND RHETORICAL PRESENCE.

ILLUSIONS AND FICTIONS

At its most general a tension between absence and presence marks all writing, and indeed language in general. Words fixed on the page stand in for the immediate but transient presence of the spoken word. Words, spoken as well as written, conjure up for the reader the illusion of a real or fictitious world. Words communicate to the reader the presence of an absent or dead author.

Recent theory and criticism have made much of these aspects of language and writing, but they are already strongly registered in ancient poetics and rhetoric. The uses of language to overcome the loss of presence are already familiar to an oral culture. At the beginning of the Greco-Roman poetic tradition Homer invokes the Muses as authorities

⁷ McKeown (1989) 198–9.

⁸ For a Derridan reading of the door in the *paraclausithyron* as the ‘threshold of writing’, the figure for ‘the inability of language of desire when it tries to represent the crossing into the realm of the presence’ see Pucci (1978) (quote at 67) (a reference I owe to John Henderson).

for the Catalogue of Ships at *Iliad* 2.484–7, ‘for you are goddesses, and you are present, and you know all things, but we hear only a report and do not know anything’. The Muses are the guarantors of verbal traditions because they are always present to see everything that happens. ‘You know (ἴστε), we hear’: the Greek verb for knowing (οἶδα) is a perfect form of the root meaning ‘see’ (ἑῖδ-), a more immediate sense than hearing. The Muses, present always and everywhere, are called on to be present to the poet at the moment of composition; Muses and poet are in turn conduits of real presence to the reader, transforming memory of the past into an experience of being present at the time.⁹

Ovid alludes to this Homeric invocation to the Muses twice in the *Metamorphoses*. At the beginning of book 12 he prefaces his own narrative of the Trojan War with a description of the House of *Fama*, who is, among other things, the personification of the Greco-Roman epic tradition, and a Muse figure for a disenchanted and cynical age. As an embodiment of voices she is an aetiology of the origin of the written in the spoken word, and of the origin of literary epic in the oral performances of Homer. *Fama*’s body is not seen, an absent presence in her own House, but the description opens, and closes, by emphasising her perfect vision of everything that happens in the world (12.41–2; cf. 62–3):

unde quod *est* usquam, quamuis regionibus *absit*,
inspicitur . . .

From her House she views everything everywhere, however distant in space.

The mediated presence of words is troped as the immediate presence of events to vision (see further pp. 236–8).

Ovid defers an invocation of the Muses themselves until almost the end of his epic narrative at *Metamorphoses* 15.622–3:

pandite nunc, Musae, praesentia numina uatum,
(scitis enim, nec uos fallit spatiosa uetustas) . . .

Now, Muses, the bards’ present divinities, reveal to me (for you know, and the vast reach of time does not escape you/does not mislead you) . . .

The Homeric finite verb ‘you (Muses) are present’ becomes the participle *praesentia*, making of the Muses a special case of *praesentes diui*, gods who vouchsafe their presence to help mankind (see pp. 8–9, 33–4).¹⁰

⁹ On the Homeric evocation of presence see Ford (1992) 49–56 ‘The purpose of poetry: vividness’; 72–9 on the Muses in *Iliad* 2 and the attempt to bridge the gap between seeing and saying.

¹⁰ The particular phrase *praesentia numina* occurs in the opening prayer of the *Georgics* 1.10.

The invocation introduces a story about the epiphany of the god Aesculapius to save Rome from plague, a god made doubly present, firstly in his metamorphic appearance in serpent form at Epidaurus, where his coming is hailed with the ritual cry (677) *en, deus est, deus est!* 'see the god is here, the god is here!'; and secondly in the physical journey of the serpent-god from Greece to Rome, in answer to the Roman envoys' request to the Delphic oracle to grant them a god, 646–7 *qui praesens funera gentis | finiat Ausoniae* 'to put an end to the deaths among the Italian people by his presence'. The Roman embassy has the result aimed at by a kletic (invoking) prayer, a prayer that summons the helping presence of the god to travel to the worshipper from another geographical location. This narrative seems a little over-eager to assure the presence of the god, perhaps impelled by a desire to forestall the awkward question of how truly present an anthropomorphic being can be in bestial form, a question that hangs over many of the metamorphosed forms in the poem.

The power of words to conjure up presence was valued highly by ancient orators as well as poets, partly because of the hold of this power over the emotions of an audience, a potent route to persuasiveness. The key term is *enargeia*, 'vividness' (Latin *evidentia, illustratio*)¹¹ defined by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*On Lysias* 7) as 'a power that brings what is said before the senses', so that the audience 'consort with the characters brought on by the orator as if they were present'. *Enargeia* effects the illusion of sight: Cicero defines vivid (*illustris*) language as 'a part of a speech which almost brings something before our eyes' (*quae rem constituat paene ante oculos*, *Part. or.* 20). The term for such mental visual representations and for the psychological faculty responsible for them is *phantasia*, literally 'appearance'. Quintilian describes the working of *phantasiai*, or in Latin *uisiones*, as follows (*Inst. or.* 6.2.29): *per quas imagines rerum absentium ita repraesentantur animo ut eas cernere oculis ac praesentes habere uideamur* 'by them images of things absent are represented to the mind, so that we seem to see them with our eyes and have them in our presence'; he adds that the orator who masters them will be very effective in arousing emotion.¹² *Enargeia* is also important for the historian, enabling him to visualise vivid scenes of action, and to create a coherent view of the totality of a historical process and to convey it vividly to the reader.¹³ Lucian *De historia conscribenda* 49 compares the ideal historian's superhuman gaze to that of

¹¹ In general on *phantasia* and *enargeia* see Manieri (1998); Zanker (1981). On *enargeia* and the emotions see Webb (1997) 117–21. *Enargeia* and oratory: Vasaly (1993) 89–104.

¹² On Ovidian *phantasia* see Tissol (1997) 61–88. ¹³ *Enargeia* and the historian: Walker (1993).

Zeus looking out over the world, the view shared by the omniscient epic poet and by Ovid's *Fama*.

Ovid is an obsessive visualiser, whether of the dazzling beauty of his girlfriend, imaginary works of art, personified abstractions, or, in exile, of the sights of Rome for which he yearns. The phrase *ante oculos* occurs thirty-six times in his works.¹⁴ Also frequent in the exile poetry is the *topos* of mental vision,¹⁵ seeing with the eyes of the mind, a practice that Ovid shares with another fugitive from the court of a tyrant, the philosopher Pythagoras at *Metamorphoses* 15.62–4.

Pythagoras, like the personification of *Fama*, has the ability to see things far removed. *Fama* has the power to create visual illusion; she also has the power to induce belief in fictions. One of the subsidiary personifications in her House is *Credulitas* (*Met.* 12.59). Credulity's literary function emerges explicitly in a key passage on 'poetic licence' at *Amores* 3.12.41–4, where the elegist complains that he now has to share his girlfriend with his readers, since they have swallowed his poems about her with a simple-minded literalism:

exit in immensum fecunda licentia uatum
obligat historica nec sua uerba fide:
et mea debuerat falso laudata uideri
femina; credulitas nunc mihi uestra nocet.

The fertile licence of poets has boundless scope and their words are not bound by historical truth. My praises of my woman should also have been taken as false; as it is your credulity is my undoing.

Here Ovid directly confronts fictionality and poetic authority, issues that have been at the centre of much recent Ovidian criticism.¹⁶ The emphasis of this book is on presence and illusion rather than on fictionality and authority, but these two areas are inextricably connected. In ancient literary criticism vividness, *enargeia*, is closely associated with persuasiveness or plausibility, *pithanotēs*, *fides*.¹⁷ The poet works on the reader to persuade him or her not only that something is true, but also that something is (really) there, before the reader's very eyes.

To put it another way, while much recent criticism has been concerned with the epistemological moment of Ovidian poetics, this book focuses more on the ontological moment. The close connection between the

¹⁴ *ante oculos*: see Galasso on *Pont.* 2.4.7–8.

¹⁵ Nagle (1980) 91–8; Kenney on *Her.* 16.101; Williams (1991) 171 n. 12.

¹⁶ Feeney (1991) 225–32; Myers (1994) 18–21; Wheeler (1999) ch. 7.

¹⁷ See Manieri (1998) index s.vv. *peithō*, *pithanōtes*.

epistemological and ontological emerges from *Amores* 3.12: through uncritical belief, Ovid claims, in the fiction of his elegiac *puella* she has stepped out of the pages of his *Amores* to become a real person, really 'there', the common property of all and sundry, to be 'had, possessed' in the flesh by whoever wishes (6 *habenda*, as well as *credenda*). Through Ovid's books his girlfriend has both 'become known' (7 *innotuit*) and 'stepped forward' in physical presence (the literal meaning of 8 *prostitit*, 'prostituted herself'). The interdependence of the two moments, of believing and being, may also be illustrated from the last line of the *Metamorphoses* (15.879): *siquid habent ueri uatum praesagia, uiuam* 'If the seers' prophecies contain any truth (a matter of belief), I shall live (as a real presence).'

BEYOND THE TEXTUAL: ART, POLITICS, RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY

One of the standard exercises of the visualising powers of the word in ancient poetry and rhetoric was *ekphrasis*, the description of a landscape, a scene, or a work of art. In recent discussion particular attention has been directed to this last, the description of a work of art.¹⁸ The verbal artist's power to call up before the eyes of his audience or readership a vivid vision has its analogue in the visual arts in the challenge to a painter or sculptor so successfully to imitate reality as to elide the boundary between art and nature through the illusion of an immediate presence. *ars adeo latet arte sua* 'so much is art hidden by its own art' (*Met.* 10.252), as Ovid comments on the skill of his own fictional master-sculptor, Pygmalion. Chapters 5 and 6 examine various aspects of Ovid's dealings with the illusionist aesthetic that prevailed in ancient art criticism.

Augustus used public art in order to stamp the presence of himself and of his régime on all parts of Rome and the empire. Triumphal processions paraded before the eyes of the Roman people illusionistic images of conquered cities and countries in remote parts of the world. The emperor's likeness was reproduced in a multiplicity of portraits; within the limits of a low-technology culture Augustus disseminated his presence throughout the city and the empire.¹⁹ 'Aggressive and uncompromising, this intruder inserted himself into every corner of Roman life and consciousness, transforming it in the process. Not a street corner could be passed, not a meal served, not a sexual act entered upon, without

¹⁸ There is now a large bibliography: for a good way in see Fowler (2000) ch. 3 'Narrate and describe: the problem of ekphrasis'.

¹⁹ On the empire-wide distribution of portraits of Augustus see Walker and Burnett (1981) 25–7; Ando (2000) 228–39.

reminders of his presence.²⁰ In *Ex Ponto* 2.8 Ovid, writing from the edge of the empire, dramatises the reach of the emperor's person as he gazes on miniature portraits of the imperial family and experiences the viewer's elision of person and image as the portraits are transformed into living reality (see pp. 318–22).

At this point the political and the religious cannot be kept apart, for the emperor's presence is revealed as an epiphany of the divine. For a poet who notoriously said 'it is expedient that the gods should exist, and, since it is expedient, let us believe they exist' (*Ars* 1.637), Ovid has a surprising fascination for the possibility of the irruption of the divine into the quotidian, the manifestation of a *praesens deus*.²¹ At the beginning of his career the powerful divine presences are those of the god of love and the *diuina puella*. The *Metamorphoses* frequently exploits the shift and unpredictable power of gods to make themselves present in the human world. One of that poem's favourite devices is the 'split divinity', the god who is both a feature of the non-human world and an anthropomorphic being: the river-god who is also his river, Aurora who is both a beautiful young woman and the blushing sky of early morning, Bacchus whose intoxicating presence is revealed in a cup of wine.²² The split divinity is embodied linguistically in metonyms of the kind *Ceres* 'bread', *Bacchus* 'wine'. In the story of the daughters of Anius in *Metamorphoses* 13 the use of such metonymy in the description of a banquet (639 *munera cum liquido capiunt Cerealia Baccho* 'they take the gifts of Ceres with flowing Bacchus') acts as a kind of trigger for Anius' fantastic story at the dinner table about his daughters who were granted by Bacchus the gift of turning whatever they touched into corn ('Ceres'), wine ('Bacchus'), and olive oil ('Minerva'). Pursued by Agamemnon for their exceptional utility as provisioners of the Greek fleet, the daughters of Anius find that Bacchus is indeed a *praesens deus* when he answers their prayer for help and grants them escape through transformation into birds. The difficulty of defining the ontological status of a split divinity is highlighted in another typically Ovidian linguistic feature, the pointed use of pronouns or pronominal adjectives. At *Metamorphoses* 12.614 Achilles is cremated: *armarat deus idem, idemque cremarat* 'the same god had armed, the same god had burned him'. The doubling of the word 'same' draws attention to the fact that

²⁰ Wallace-Hadrill (1987) 223.

²¹ For a full discussion of the usage of *praesens deus* of Augustus and other gods see Brink on Hor. *Ep.* 2.1.15–17. See also Clausen on Virg. *Ecl.* 1.41.

²² 'Split divinity': the term is Fränkel's (1945) 88; see also Bernbeck (1967) 112–13; Solodow (1988) 94–6; Feeney (1991) 233–5.

Volcanus = the anthropomorphic divine smith is *not* exactly the same as *Volcanus* = fire. The first *idem* is elided with the second, tending to merge into identity, but they remain two distinct verbal items. Ovid's uses of the pronoun *ipse* 'he himself' and of the reflexive pronoun *se* 'him-, herself' often turn out to be sites for the dissolution of selfhood (see pp. 233–5, 238, 278 n. 40).

In the exile poetry the power of a *praesens deus*, and in particular of the imperial god-man, to save becomes an obsessive focus of attention. The poet's need for the emperor's saving presence has, as the other side of the coin, an awareness that the presence of the emperor may be reducible to mere images and shows. In exile Ovid summons up the full spectacle of imperial power as consolation and potential source of salvation, but also reveals that the reality may be no more than the spectacle.

The theory of *phantasiai* is a technical philosophical topic. Ovid is no philosopher, but the absent presences of his poetry are variously indebted to philosophical models. Lucretius uses the Epicurean doctrine of *simulacra*, 'images', for striking lessons in the vanity of images and representations. *simulacra* in this sense (Greek *eidōla*) are material films of atoms that stream off the surfaces of physical bodies, detached from, but with the potential to create the illusion of, the real substance and presence of those bodies. In the next section I discuss the powerful use made of this by Lucretius in his invective against the emptiness of sexual desire, and Ovid's response thereto. One of Ovid's best-known fables, the story of Narcissus, may be read as a sustained narrativisation of the Lucretian doctrine of *simulacra* (see pp. 150–63). Lucretius forges a close connection between the futility of desire and the insubstantiality of dreams and ghosts. The attack on love at the end of book four of *De rerum natura* is a pendant to the attacks at the end of book three on the fear of death, the result of false beliefs in an afterlife, and on the mourner's delusion of the continuing existence of the dead person. The connection between the effects of grief and of erotic desire in conjuring presence is very strong in Ovid (see pp. 62–5); his most powerfully drawn example of the grieving lover is Alcyone, to whom appears in the disguise of her husband the god of dreams, Morpheus, an embodiment of the close alliance between poetry and dreams (see pp. 89, 133–4, 277–8).²³

Lucretius both exposes the unreality of false appearances, and practises a vivid visualisation of the true nature of things, making philosophical

²³ For an attempt to connect the confusion between true and false in Morpheus' dream-visions (and other Ovidian delusions) and Sceptical discussions of misperception see Perry (1990) 38–54.

reality present through the flight of the mind on which the text of the *De rerum natura* transports us in the company of the pioneering adventurer Epicurus (1.62–79). Epicurus' eyes of the mind have a preSocratic and Platonic pedigree;²⁴ they are also the eyes with which Ovid's Pythagoras travels through the universe (*Met.* 15.62–4). Pythagoras has the power to transport himself through time as well as space, through his successive metempsychoses. The continued presence of Pythagoras' soul through a succession of different bodies becomes a figure for the posthumous survival of Ovid's own poetic soul in the body of his text (see p. 95), a textual presence that looks back to Ennius' assertion of the presence of the Homeric poems in his own epic *Annales* through the fiction, conveyed in a dream, that the soul of Homer himself had been reincarnated in the body of Ennius. This Pythagorean figure for an intertextual presence had an enduring afterlife. Francis Meres famously claimed in 1598 that 'As the soule of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras: so the sweete wittie soule of Ovid lives in mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare.'²⁵ Dryden gave a new life to the Speech of Pythagoras by translating it into English, and elsewhere used the Speech's images of translation, transfusion and succession to figure the workings of literary tradition.²⁶

DESIRED PRESENCES

καὶ οὐχ ὥς τις εἶπεν αἱ ποιητικαὶ φαντασίαι διὰ τὴν ἐνάργειαν [ἐνέργειαν *codd.*] ἐγρηγορότων ἐνύπνια εἰσιν, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον αἱ τῶν ἐρώντων, διαλεγόμενων ὡς πρὸς παρόντας, ἀσπαζομένων, ἐγκαλούντων. ἡ γὰρ ὄψις ἔοικε τὰς μὲν ἄλλας φαντασίας ἐφ' ὑγροῖς ζωγραφεῖν, ταχὺ μαραινομένης καὶ ἀπολειπούσας τὴν διανοίαν· αἱ δὲ τῶν ἐρωμένων εἰκόνες ὑπ' αὐτῆς οἷον ἐν ἐγκαύμασι γραφόμεναι διὰ πυρὸς εἰδῶλα ταῖς μνήμαις ἐναπολείπουσι κινούμενα καὶ ζῶντα καὶ φθεγγόμενα καὶ παραμένοντα τὸν ἄλλον χρόνον. ὁ μὲν γὰρ Ῥωμαῖος Κάτων ἔλεγε τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ ἐρώντος ἐνδιατᾶσθαι τῇ τοῦ ἐρωμένου ... (Plutarch *Amatorius* 759C)

It is not, as someone said, the imaginings (*phantasiai*) of poets that are waking dreams, because of their vividness, but rather the imaginings of lovers, who converse with persons as if present, and greet and rebuke them. For vision as

²⁴ See Galasso on *Pont.* 2.4.7–8.

²⁵ Meres (1973) 281; see Bate (1993) 2–3; for a critical reexamination of Meres' statement see Martindale (2000).

²⁶ J. Winn 'Past and present in Dryden's *Fables*' (paper delivered at a Bristol conference on Dryden, 9 July 2000).

it were paints other *phantasiai* on wet plaster, so that they swiftly fade and slip from the mind. But the images of lovers are painted by vision with fire, as in encaustic pictures, and they deposit in the memory images that move and have life and speak, and stay there for all time. Just so the Roman Cato²⁷ said that the soul of the lover dwells in the soul of the beloved.

Desire may well be the master-term for an understanding of Ovid's poetics of illusion, and a mildly polemical aim of this book is to reclaim Ovid as one of the great writers of desire in the western tradition. Illusions of presence are fuelled by the desire of the lover, the desire of the mourner, and, in double measure, the desire of the mourning lover, as well as by the desire which works of art and texts stimulate in their viewers and readers. The absent presences of desire had been memorably formulated by two of Ovid's greatest poetic predecessors, Lucretius and Virgil, the latter turning Lucretian satire back into tragic pathos. I have already touched on Lucretius' dealings with the idols of desire. The jeremiad on the illusions of the lover at the end of *De rerum natura* 4 is made the matter of Ovid's tragi-comic fable of Narcissus (see pp. 150–63). Lucretius points the paradoxes of erotic absent presence at 4.1061–2 *nam si abest quod ames, praesto simulacra tamen sunt | illius et nomen dulce obuersatur ad auris* 'for if the object of your love is absent, yet images of it are present, and the sweet name sounds in your ears',²⁸ where ocular and verbal representations conjure up the absent beloved. Lucretius scoffs at *spes erotica* at 1086–90:

namque in eo *spes* est, unde est ardoris origo,
restingui quoque posse ab eodem corpore flammam.
quod fieri contra totum natura repugnat;
unaque *res* haec est, cuius quam plurima habemus,
tam magis ardescit dira cuppedine pectus.

For the hope is that the fire can be put out by the same body that is the source of the burning. Nature protests that entirely the opposite is the case: this is the one thing, the more of which we have, the more our breasts burn with terrible desire.

The assonant and proverbial²⁹ contrast between *spes* and *res* is given epigrammatic expression in Leander's words at *Heroides* 18.178 *et res non*

²⁷ An odd thing, apparently, for the stern Cato the Elder to say: Boyancé (1955) suggests a confusion with Q. Lutatius Catulus, an early exponent of Latin epigram in the Alexandrian manner.

²⁸ For the verbal opposition of absence and presence in a context of non-erotic desire cf. Lucr. 3.957 *quia semper aues quod abest, praesentia temnis* 'because you always long for what is absent, you spurn things present'. The assonance of *aues* . . . *abest* roots desire in absence.

²⁹ See Otto (1962) no. 1525; Häussler (1968) 48, 116, 286. Cf., without the assonance, *Met.* 3.417 (Narcissus) *spem sine corpore amat* 'his hope of love is for something without a body'.

semper, spes mihi semper adest ‘the object of my love is not always with me, but hope is always with me’ (on this poem see pp. 138–42).

Virgil’s Dido suffers the delusions of the Lucretian lover. Visual and verbal memories of Aeneas press on her with an almost physical presence, *Aen.* 4.4–5 *haerent infixi pectore uultus | uerbaque* ‘his face and words stick fixed in her heart’.³⁰ Absence is no barrier to eye or ear, 83 *illum absens absentem audit uidetque* ‘absent she hears and sees him absent’, an inversion of the idiomatic polyptoton *praesens praesentem*³¹ that Ovid applies to the *topos* of the *praesens deus* at *Tristia* 5.2.45 *alloquor en absens absentia numina supplex* ‘see, an absent suppliant I address an absent god’ (see pp. 301–2). Dido’s love turns to a hatred which, in one of the many inversions of revenge that structure the story after Aeneas’ departure, she will inflict as an absent presence on her erstwhile lover, *Aen.* 4.384–6 *sequar atris ignibus absens | et . . . | omnibus umbra locis adero* ‘absent I shall pursue you with black flames and I shall be present everywhere as a shadow’. In *Heroides* 7 Ovid’s Dido will recall her erotic haunting by Aeneas, displacing the Virgilian gemination of *absens absentem* on to the fetishised name, 25–6 *Aeneas oculis uigilantis semper inhaeret, | Aenean animo noxque quiesque refert* ‘Aeneas is always fixed in my waking eyes, Aeneas is brought back to mind in the dead of night’,³² and anticipates her own *post-mortem* haunting of Aeneas (69–70). The same erotic disease is a mark of the tyrannical lack of self-control congenital to the younger Tarquin, besotted with his memories of the vision of Lucretia, *Fasti* 2.769–70, 777–8:

carpitur attonitos absentis imagine sensus
 ille. recordanti plura magisque placent.

 . . . quamuis aberat placitae praesentia formae,
 quem dederat praesens forma, manebat amor.³³

The picture of the absent girl preys on his stunned senses, and in memory he finds more, and more intense, charms. . . . Although the presence of her pleasing

³⁰ The physicality of Virgil’s language goes further than the model at Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.453–8; for later examples of the *topos* see Hunter ad loc.

³¹ Wills (1996) 231.

³² Wills (1996) 231 n. 21. On repeated names in Ovid see pp. 251–5.

³³ The deictics of his remembering, *sic . . . sic . . . sic . . . , hos . . . haec . . . hic . . . hic . . .* echo other Virgilian passages of memory, desirous or otherwise: Andromache’s perception of Ascanius as *Astyanactis imago*, *Aen.* 3.490 (*sic* x 3), imitating *Od.* 4.149–50; the Trojans’ marvelling relief that the Greeks are no longer on the Trojan shore, *Aen.* 2.29–30 (*hic* x 4); converted into grief-stricken memory at *Met.* 11.712–13; see p. 275). 778 *manebat* may activate a Varroian etymology, *Ling. lat.* 6.49 *memoria . . . a manendo ut manimoria potest esse dicta* ‘“memory” can be named from “remaining”, as “mani-moria”’.

beauty was absent, the love provoked by the presence of her beauty stayed with him.

Virgilian intertexts will be met frequently in the chapters that follow, and it will be no surprise that in the areas with which this book is concerned Virgil is as ubiquitous as in other aspects of the Ovidian *corpus*. But Ovidian absent presences cluster particularly densely around reworkings of Virgil's great narrative of unsatisfied desire, the Dido and Aeneas story in *Aeneid* 1 and 4 (see pp. 44–5, 94–5, 183–6, 260–6, 269). Seen through Ovidian lenses this part of the poem comes into high relief for its passages of illusion and *phantasia*, and for a stagey quality given formal expression through generic allusion to dramatic models. The Prologue to the 'tragedy' of Dido is spoken by a goddess in disguise, Venus, who cheats her son of his desire for her unmediated personal presence. The shows of illusion, and possible delusion, continue for Aeneas with the ecphrasis of the scenes of the Trojan War in the Carthaginian temple of Juno, works of art that construct for him a mental stage on to which steps Dido, a regal presence veiled in a cloud of imagery, both visual and verbal, and an intertextuality as dense as the mist in which Venus has concealed her son for safe passage into the presence of Dido. Venus then moves into action in her central role of goddess of desire, stage-managing an erotic illusionism in which it is now her son Cupid who impersonates a mortal, Ascanius. Dido enters an erotic limbo populated by vivid memories, fond imaginings, and bad dreams, from which she can escape only by converting herself into a hellish Fury who will return again and again to haunt Aeneas and the future course of Roman history. This looming presence at the heart of the myth of Rome seems largely to be a Virgilian invention; the outburst in *Aeneid* 4 of the monstrous *Fama*, a setpiece of personification unique in the poem, represents the poet's semi-credulous and half-guilty awareness of his own powers as a maker of fictions that have designs on the world of history. The phantasmic quality of *Aeneid* 1 and 4 spills over into the framed books 2 and 3, contributing to the unsettling parallelism between the Dido and Aeneas narrative and Aeneas' own flashback narrative: highpoints in this record of a *recherche de temps perdu* include Aeneas' dream of Hector in *Aeneid* 2, a passage repeatedly imitated by Ovid, and the imitation Troy encountered in book 3 at Buthrotum, a place of uncertain reality, of images constructed by grief and memory (see pp. 87–8).

In the *Remedia amoris* the doctor Ovid speaks, from personal experience, of the contagious nature of the tokens of desire: writing, images, places.

These sticky reminders of the presence of the beloved must be firmly removed or destroyed (717–34):

scripta caue relegas blandae seruata puellae:
 constantis animos scripta relecta mouent.
 omnia pone feros (pones inuitus) in ignes
 et dic ‘ardoris sit rogus iste mei.’
 Thestias absentem succendit stipite natum:
 tu timide flammae perfida uerba dabis?
 si potes, et ceras remoue: quid imagine muta
 carperis? hoc periit Laodamia modo.
 et loca saepe nocent; fugito loca conscia uestri
 concubitus: causas illa doloris habent.
 ‘hic fuit, hic cubuit, thalamo dormiuimus illo;
 hic mihi lasciua gaudia nocte dedit.’
 admonitu refricatur amor uulnusque nouatum
 scinditur: infirmis culpa pusilla nocet.
 ut, paene extinctum cinerem si sulphure tangas,
 uiuet et e minimo maximus ignis erit,
 sic, nisi uitaris quidquid renouabit amorem,
 flamma redardescet, quae modo nulla fuit.

Avoid keeping and rereading your charming girl’s letters; rereading letters undermines resolution. Put them all into the fierce flames (you will do it reluctantly) and say ‘Let my passion blaze on this pyre.’ Althaea burned her absent son with the log; do you shrink from putting the faithless words on the fire? If you can bring yourself, remove her portraits. Why let a mute image prey on you? That was how Laodamia perished. Places, too, are often harmful; avoid the places that remember where you slept together, for they cause grief. ‘This is where she was, this is where she lay; this is where I enjoyed her in nights of love.’ Remembering rubs love sore again, and opens the wound afresh; when you’re weak even a little slip causes injury. Just as if you were to touch sulphur to embers almost dead, they will come alive and the smallest fire will turn into a bonfire, so, unless you shun things that renew love, the flame which a moment ago was dead will blaze up again.

This passage is a catalogue of stories and themes of absent presence developed by Ovid at greater length elsewhere. The girl’s writings have a magical power to conjure up her person, and must be destroyed as ruthlessly as Althaea burned the talismanic log coeval with the life of her son Meleager, a story told in *Metamorphoses* 8, and used in the exile poetry as an image of the vital presence of Ovid in his own writings (see pp. 242–5). *Heroides* 13, the letter of Laodamia to Protesilaus, tends to an identification of epistolary presence with the illusory presence of

her absent husband in his waxen image (see pp. 132–7). As often, Ovid suggests a parallel between the illusionist potencies of the visual and the textual. The associative power of places is an important element in the story of Alcyone's grief for her husband Ceyx (see pp. 275–6).

De te fabula narratur: this passage shows as clearly as any how the 'second world' of literature and art, of another, mythical, time and place, the world of Ovid's poetic artifice, inhabits and is inhabited by the here-and-now reality of you, the reader, whose most vital interests doctor Ovid has at heart in the *Remedia*. The power of the poet to invade your most personal spaces is illusionistically represented by the word *hic* 'here' at line 727, marking a sudden and unannounced shift of voice from the general precepts of the teacher to the direct speech of you the pupil uttered here, in this very place where you were with your girl. But the concerned teacher of the *Remedia* has at best an uncertain control over the presences of poetry and myth, and over the ways in which they force themselves into your present. Reading Ovid's *scripta* may be as dangerous as reading the *scripta* of your ex-girlfriend, burning them the only way to get them out of your head and out of your life.

LITERARY HISTORY

Homer's invocation to the Muses in the Catalogue of Ships builds a poetics of presence into the Greco-Roman literary tradition at its point of origin, but with reference to a source of authenticity and immediacy that always lies beyond any originating human verbal construct (above pp. 3–4). Ovid's obsessive drive to realise a maximum of immediate presence in his poetry, at the same time as he self-consciously unmasks the reality effects, is Ovidian both in its constancy and in its deconstructing self-consciousness, but Ovid is always aware of his place within literary history, and indeed makes it his business to inscribe various versions, explicit and implicit, of that self-positioning within his own poetry.³⁴ This section surveys various other parts of the literary tradition which Ovid builds into his own poetics of illusion.

An illusionist poetics of presence is closer to the surface in certain kinds of ancient literature and at certain periods of literary history. Illusion and reality are most powerfully collapsed into one another on the dramatic stage, and dramatic scripts are often metatheatrically self-conscious of

³⁴ Tarrant (2002). In general on the partial narratives told by Roman poets about their place within literary history see Hinds (1998) ch. 3 'Diachrony: literary history and its narratives'.

this fact. Ovid quite often alludes to the stage, and he was also famed in antiquity as the author of a tragedy, the *Medea*, now lost. The dream-god and Ovidian *alter ego* Morpheus is a skilled manipulator of narratives and visual images, but he is also a consummate actor (*Met.* 11.635–6), whose impersonation of Ceyx is so realistic that Alcyone believes it is her husband himself.³⁵ In chapter 5 (pp. 165–72) I discuss Ovid's elaboration of a Dionysiac poetics in the narratives of characters on the Theban 'stage' of *Metamorphoses* 3–4. The many stories for which Ovid draws on dramatic models include the revenge tragedy of Tereus and Philomela in *Metamorphoses* 6, in which the acting skills of the protagonists determine the course and outcome of the whole narrative (pp. 259–72). Bacchus, the god who presides over the illusionist presences of the dramatic stage and who offers his worshippers a religion of ecstatic communion, has further uses for the exiled Ovid desperate to reconnect with his lost community (pp. 303–6).

Comedy, as well as tragedy, plays with illusions of presence and dislocations of identity: particularly important for Ovid, perhaps, is the comic dramatisation of the illusions and delusions of the frustrated lover, as in the following complaint about Love's tortures by Alcesimarchus in Plautus' *Cistellaria* (206–12):

iactor, crucior, agitor,
stimulor, uersor
in amoris rota, miser exanimor,
feror, differor, distrahor, diripior,
ita nubilam mentem animi habeo.
ubi sum, ibi non sum, ubi non sum, ibi est animus.

I am tossed, tortured, driven, goaded, turned on the wheel of love, made lifeless in my misery; I am carried this way and that, dragged and torn apart, such is my mental fog. Where I am, there I am not; where I am not, there my spirit is.

Paradoxical juxtapositions of *praesens* and *absens* are particularly common in Plautus and Terence (see n. 53 below); for an example of an epistolary absent presence in Plautus see pp. 107–8. The pointed formulations of absent presence in Virgil's Dido episode may register a debt to comedy, as well as to tragedy.³⁶

³⁵ Tissol (1997) 78–9 points out that most modern commentators fail to recognise that Ovid's dreams are stage-actors, unlike Dryden (himself an experienced writer for the stage) in his translation.

³⁶ We should perhaps reexamine Anderson's (1981) conclusion that Servius was simply wrong in saying that *Aeneid* 4 has 'an almost comic style'. Before ever the 'costumed' Venus delivers herself of a Carthaginian tragic prologue, she addresses Aeneas in the language of comedy (1.321

Ovid is a major representative of the Alexandrianism in Latin poetry that goes back to the neoterics and beyond, and he returns to the works of Callimachus and other Hellenistic poets with renewed attention. Recent criticism has dwelt on the ways in which Hellenistic poetry invests in illusions of presence of various kinds, perhaps as a compensation for the detachment of writing from its original occasions of performance or presentation,³⁷ or as an expression of a cultural displacement experienced in the civic enterprise of Alexandria, geographically detached from places of Greek origins.³⁸ Ecphrasis becomes a favoured resource, verbal descriptions of works of art through which texts strive to attain the immediate visibility and presence of a painting or sculpture. This is also the period in which epigram is developed into a major genre. The epigram is in origin a text attached to or even inscribed on a physical object. Such objects are in many cases themselves signs or memorials of persons, or (in the case of certain classes of votive offerings) of activities, that once existed in another time and place. Particularly important in this respect is the funerary epigram, a text lending voice to a monument that is a substitute for the absent person of the deceased.³⁹ At the point when funerary epigrams are detached from this original function, released from their unique stone resting-place to circulate in indefinitely reproducible papyrus copies, there arises a double absence, as the text now substitutes for the absent (or fictitious) monument, itself a substitute for the presence of the once living person. Richard Hunter discusses the way in which Callimachus' famous Heraclitus epigram (2 Pfeiffer) 'forces upon us the absence of the tomb of the deceased', and notes that '[i]n Callimachus the gradual shift from "real" epitaph to "literary" epigram has been taken a further . . . stage: now there is no tombstone and no corpse, merely memory – not only of Heraclitus, but also of the whole poetic tradition into which Heraclitus has now been absorbed.'⁴⁰ Epigrams become still further detached from an original unique physical location when they are quoted within another text. Such quotations are frequent in Ovid, as in other Augustan poets, and

heus . . . ?); the scene in which she asks if Aeneas has seen one of her companions is an adaptation of 'a familiar situation from Comedy' (Austin on *Aen.* 1.321).

³⁷ But note the revisionist claims of Cameron (1995), arguing for the continuing social function of Hellenistic poetry in the world of private symposia and public festivals.

³⁸ As powerfully argued by Selden (1998).

³⁹ See Svenbro (1993) chs. 2–3. On ways in which Alexandrian epigram exploits the possibilities of its detachment from an original monumental context see Fantuzzi (2002).

⁴⁰ Hunter (1992a) 120, 123.

are points at which texts rise to an awareness of their (mere) textuality (see pp. 20–1, 83, 289).⁴¹

The detachment of poetic texts from performance on specific occasions is often held to be a factor in the development in the Hellenistic period of a kind of poem that compensates by building an occasion into the text through the pretence that the speaker of the poem reacts to events that occur as he or she is speaking.⁴² The effect is to draw the reader in turn into an illusion of being present during the unfolding events. This kind of poem is, somewhat confusingly, given the label of ‘mimetic poem’, in the particular sense of being an imitation of a sequence of events; it can also be thought of as like the script for a dramatic mime. Examples include some of the Hymns of Callimachus in which the speaker responds to the developing ritual occasion, which may include the epiphany of the god: a textual illusion of presence aims at that most overwhelming of presences, the manifestation of divinity itself.

Ovid begins his poem on Roman religious ritual, the *Fasti*, with a *tour de force* of evocations of presence. After the prologue, the first day of the calendar opens with this couplet (1.63–4):

ecce tibi faustum, Germanice, nuntiat annum
inque meo primus carmine Ianus adest.

See, Germanicus, Janus heralds an auspicious year for you and takes first place in my poem.

The first word *ecce* is an interjection announcing presence, but a slippery kind of presence since *Ianus adest* slides between ‘Janus is present in my poem’, and ‘is present as a *praesens diuus*’. An attempt to secure a more certain presence follows immediately, as Ovid switches his address from the vocative *Germanice* (the dedicatee of the poem) to the vocative *Iane*, introducing the kletic prayer to the god at 65–70 *dexter ades . . . dexter ades* ‘favour us with your presence’. At 75 it is the reader who is addressed in the second person singular in order to witness the fires kindled on Roman altars, signalling that this is a ‘mimetic hymn’.⁴³ Visual vignettes of the scene on the Roman Capitol lead up to a sudden expansion of horizon from a view *towards* the Capitol, out to a view of the world, wholly subject to Rome, enjoyed *from* the Capitol by the Capitoline Jupiter. This view coincides with the universal view of *Fama* from her House in *Metamorphoses*

⁴¹ For dedicatory epigrams in Ovid see McKeown on *Am.* 1.11.27–8.

⁴² For the definition of the mimetic poem see Albert (1988) 24.

⁴³ Cf. esp. Callim. *Hy. Apoll.* 4; Hardie (1991) 57.

12;⁴⁴ the possibility that Jupiter's vision is merely a figure for the poet's vision is a cue for what follows in *Fasti* 1, the sudden contraction of the panopticon to the space contained within the four walls of Ovid's study where, like Callimachus in the Prologue to the *Aitia*, the poet takes up his writing-tablets. It is here, rather than in the public and religious space of the Capitol, that the epiphany of Janus finally takes place – or rather has taken place, since the present tenses of the mimetic hymn have shifted to the perfects of a narrative poem. In this opening episode Ovid mobilises the resources of the mimetic hymn for use later in the *Fasti*, and at the same time lays bare the textual, Callimachean, genealogy of this ritual and religious illusionism.⁴⁵

The primary Callimachean model for the *Fasti* is the *Aitia*, the most important manifestation of the Alexandrian taste for aetiological poetry, narratives of 'origins' that reflect a desire to trace some vestiges of a vanished past in the present day, whether in the form of a fixed monument or of a renewable commemoration. Aetiology doubles for writing itself, which perpetuates the memory of object or events no longer present. *nunc quoque* is the typical marker of an aetiological narrative, as also of a narrative of metamorphosis.⁴⁶ The absent presence inherent in an aetiological explanation is seen in the origin of deer-sacrifice to Diana in the sacrifice of Iphigeneia (*Fasti* 1.387–8):

quod semel est triplici pro uirgine caesa Dianae,
nunc quoque pro nulla uirgine cerua cadit.

Because once upon a time a deer was sacrificed to triple Diana in place of a virgin, still today a deer is killed, though not in place of a virgin.

That which happened, unrepeatably, 'once upon a time' is nevertheless repeated, 'still today'. Continuity is expressed through the verbal repetition of *pro uirgine*, with the crucial insertion of *nulla* in the second occurrence of the phrase: language, like ritual, preserves the memory of a person who is not there, and as often in Ovid linguistic repetition draws attention to the traces of presence in language. Aetiological substitution (a ritual now instead of the event then) is here overlaid on sacrificial substitution (a deer instead of a girl). The kinship of this aetiological

⁴⁴ With *Fasti* 1.85 *Iuppiter arce sua totum cum spectat in orbem* 'when Jupiter surveys the whole world from his citadel', compare *Met.* 12.62–3 [*Fama*] *ipsa . . . totumque inquirat in orbem* 'Fame herself investigates the whole world'.

⁴⁵ On Ovid's use of the Callimachean mimetic hymn see Miller (1979/80); Fantham (1998) 11–15. On the self-consciousness of Callimachus' use of the mimetic hymn see Hunter (1992b).

⁴⁶ Myers (1994) 66.

substitution with the structure of metamorphosis is revealed in Ovid's formulation of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia at *Metamorphoses* 12.34 *supposita fertur mutasse Mycenida cerua* '[Diana] is said to have changed the Greek girl for a deer put in her place', a benign variation on the fate of Actaeon. Stories of metamorphosis identify items from the inventory of the natural world as having the same power to commemorate the former existence of persons and events as the rituals and artefacts in Callimachean aetiology.

Pastoral poetry is another invention of the Hellenistic period, but the modern reader should beware of too readily projecting back on to the Theocritean originals that wistful yearning for a lost plenitude of bliss summed up in the post-classical tag *et in Arcadia ego*.⁴⁷ It seems to be Virgil who first makes a pathos of presence and absence central to the pastoral experience, through a combination of a selective reading of Theocritus with the Lucretian account at *De rerum natura* 4.572–94 of the role of echo in creating illusions of divine presence in the countryside (see pp. 152–6). The first *Eclogue* opens with a fantasy of a fulfilled presence as Tityrus, secure in the possession of his love Amaryllis, teaches the sentient woods to fill the landscape with the echo of her name. It is then revealed that this erotic and poetic *plenum* in the private sphere depends on a supernatural presence in the public world outside, the *praesens diuus* (41) in Rome who has ensured Tityrus' continued existence in his pastoral idyll.

The political is also written into an intricate negotiation of pastoral presence in *Eclogue* 5, the poem that concludes the first half of the book in summative and recapitulatory mode. Mopsus' song laments the disappearance of the pastoral hero Daphnis, ending with a funerary epitaph that converts the words spoken by the not-quite-yet-dead Theocritean Daphnis (Theocr. 1.120–1) into *post-mortem* inscription, *Ecl.* 5.43–4 *Daphnis ego in silvis, hinc usque ad sidera notus, | formosi pecoris custos, formosior ipse* 'Daphnis [was] I in the woods, famed as far as the heavens, guardian of a beautiful herd, more beautiful myself.' This textual substitute for the absent pastoral hero works hard to maintain his presence, opening with the name attached to the first-person pronoun, *Daphnis ego*, and ending with *ipse* 'myself', and it seeks to elude the temporality to which the mortal Daphnis succumbed through the absence of a finite verb. But the Odyssean allusion in 'famed as far as the stars' (Odysseus' boast in his self-identification at *Odyssey* 9.20) betrays the truth that this universal presence is merely that of fame, guaranteed by nothing more substantial

⁴⁷ For the history of the phrase and of the pastoral images to which it is attached see Panofsky (1955).