At a prominent point in the middle of the *Remedia amoris*, Ovid momentarily interrupts his series of therapeutic lessons to make room for a statement of poetics. Such statements are customary in the register of literary polemics; some evil-minded people had criticized Ovid for his daring teachings in the *Ars amatoria*, and the polemic tradition (of Callimachean origin) requires that the poet, in justifying the literary techniques he has chosen, also attack the envy of his critics (v. 389 *livor*) and vaunt his own title of author, indeed hope for ever greater successes. Ovid’s declaration of principles is inspired by the same general rule that Horace too, in his *Ars poetica* (v. 86), had thought important: “Descriptas seruare uices operumque colores”—respect for the distinctions among the various literary genres and the appropriate use of expressive and stylistic devices. This is a simplified form of the theory of the *prepon*: Every genre has its own “competence,” each should do its own job. For the wrath of Achilles there is the solemn hexameter of Homer, for the loves of Cydippe the elegiac distich of Callimachus, never has stern Andromache played the part of the courtesan Thais. Thais is the character who symbolizes Ovid’s poetry (the *Amores*, the *Ars*, and now the *Remedia*). Ovid has made no mistake; the *Musa proterva* who sings in distichs the free loves of women like Thais is a perfect image for his elegiac intention.

If a text’s intention is considered as an active tension between vir-
tuality and its actualization, the literary genre can be well defined as
the sign of this intention. A means of signification incorporated into
the text to give form and meaning to the discourse and instructions
to its reader, the genre is in fact the horizon marking the boundaries
of its meaning and delimiting its real possibilities within the system of
literary codification. To become discourse, meaning must necessarily
assume a form in which it can manifest itself; it gives itself a recogniz-
able image and thereby establishes a space of understanding with its
addressee. Without this form to mark out the coordinates of commu-
nicability, meaning would remain wordless—thinkable, perhaps, but
devoid of expression. So it is true that the genre behaves like an “invita-
tion to take on a form”; discourse agrees to assume that form and is
structured by it. The infinity of an indistinct, uncontrolled discursivity
has been sacrificed; in exchange, the text receives a language and a
reader.

But once the world has been cut down in accordance with a “partial”
intention, the genre entices the reader into thinking that this portion
is the whole (it will be up to the reader to relocate it within his own

1. The theoretical positions of W. Iser (1978) can be recommended for the help
they provide in avoiding the risk of naive intentionalism, still too widespread in
2. It is the genre that suggests a global meaning and assigns signifieds to the vari-
ous components, organizing them typologically. In practice, it offers itself as a field
of reference within which the addressee can recognize, by means of comparisons
and contrasts, the specificity of his text. To be sure, the interpreter knows that the
mutable and interpenetrating structures of genres often preclude too rigidly sche-
matic a definition of them. Even if, operatively, genres can be thought pure, their
real action (in texts) is subject to many possible deformations and concomitant
features: they can undergo procedures of combination and aggregation, inclusion
and selection, reduction and amplification, transposition and reversal; they can
undergo functional mutations and adaptations. Contents and expressions which
are already strictly codified can also become dissociated, so that they can be reasso-
ciated with other expressions and contents. But it is still true that, in the classical
literary system, any combination of discourses, however complex and disparate,
always respects one discursive project (one genre) which predominates over all
those that combine to form the text and keeps them subordinate to its own inten-
tions. In philological practice, it is also useful to distinguish the “genres” from the
“modes” of literary discourse and to assign an identity and physiognomy to the
various “subgenres,” languages which can be specifically referred back to larger
discursive structures and models. Out of the immense literature, see most recently
Fowler 1982, with a good, though incomplete, bibliography; see also Conte 1984
at the pages indicated in the subject index s.v. “genere letterario.”
3. I have shown elsewhere that the perception of genres is analogous to that of
citations and of literary allusions, but citations and allusions are phrases which
have already entered the lexicon, whereas genres are ghostly forms that exist only
as signifying structures in the mind (culture) of the reader; they are relatively
constant structures of which the texts are the variants, the declensions of the
paradigm (in fact, some scholars treat genres as texts and call them “archetexts”).
cultural experience, giving rise each time to dialectics and questions. By virtue of this process, literary writing, making itself a real linguistic praxis, codifies the reciprocal correspondence of signifiers and signifieds and deposits it in a rhetoric, which offers an ideology and a language, that is, a way to reformulate the world by extracting from it only certain contents (which stand for all) and constructing an expression appropriate for such a one-sidedness (a language which is selected from all the linguistic possibilities but at the same time feels no deprivation; which is delimited but full). As a language, this rhetoric is partial, in both senses of the word: it is only one part of the world, and it is indifferent to its own relativity, its claim to be complete and total, its belief in its own absoluteness (see Conte 1984: 57-60). It is a limited perspective, but it reduces everything to itself; it turns everything into an image of itself. Modeling the world on its own language, it prohibits the belief that there might be anything else outside of the image of that world it knows how to give.

If every literary genre is obliged to manifest itself by this reduction of the world to a partial field of vision, the genre of elegy nevertheless seems to be the most complete realization of such a systematic codification, if only because elegy performs this operation explicitly and consciously and makes it the very pivot of its poetics. The elegiac poet establishes his identity as diversity, asserting that he is enclosed within part of the world (e.g., love) which seems to him self-sufficient, to contain in microcosm all that is necessary for a full life; the “model of the world” that is thereby proposed, if confronted with reality, will turn out to be partial and will clearly reveal its ideological lines of force. This, I would suggest, is still insufficiently understood in much contemporary classical scholarship. Elegy is not always kept distinct from the various modes and forms of love poetry traditional in antiquity (lyric, epigram, idyll, etc.), precisely because the formative value of the process I describe is not always properly recognized. There is an elegiac ideology which constructs and organizes the text; at the center of this ideological system, the conception of the lover-poet as a slave—of his beloved, of his passion, of his incurable weakness, and, ultimately, of his poetry—must be located. If we agree, therefore, to call an ide-

4. One of the great theoreticians of literature, Julius Caesar Scaliger (1964 [1561]: III, 150), observed that bucolic poetry is constructed as a closed and self-sufficient discourse, in which every element of representable reality makes itself a “figure” of the whole pastoral world: Things enter the text only if they agree to be spoken of in the language of the world of shepherds, only if they know how to adapt to that imaginary system: “Pastoralia . . . cuiuscumque generis negotium semper retrahant ad agrorum naturam.”

5. Given the richness of meanings the concept of ideology has acquired and the ambiguity that derives from the various definitions and interpretations, it is best
ology the reduction of everything to a part, in the case of elegy, out of the “totality” of life only the life of love remains feasible. The idea of servitium amoris marks the borders of this part—but borders that cannot be crossed. Yet even though he is reduced to this restricted space, the lover-poet does not feel poor; the rest of the world, from which he has excluded himself, can be recuperated as long as it is properly translated and relocated within the new system of meaning he has chosen to construct. Otherwise, he would be definitively sacrificing not only things, persons, values, and cultural models but also (the lover is a poet) literary themes and subjects, expressive possibilities, ambitions for a different kind of poetry.

Precisely because it is systematically pervasive, the ideology defined by servitium amoris can set in motion a genuine process of reformulating the world; it constructs for itself an organic language which works by transcodification, inasmuch as it transvalues from one system to another. Consider, for example, the fundamental exclusion, that of war and its values, set in opposition to the most basic values of elegy. On the level of poetic choices, elegiac Callimacheanism systematically requires that the “light Muse” be affirmed precisely by refusing the arms and the heroes of high epic poetry: “Love is the god of peace.” But the refusal of war pertains only to the system of meaning in which war is inscribed: not only the degradations which the recent past has associated with the idea of war (ambition, careerism, greed) but also the less positive features of the heroic model (cruelty, violence, harshness). In the elegy there will be room after all for heroism, abnegation, gloria, patientia, but a heroism of love, an almost infinite capacity for enduring sufferings and outrages for love’s sake, an offering up of oneself that can go all the way to death in the name of love. Indeed, even gloria will be granted to the faithful lover. The genre of elegy, as is well known, delights in “speaking” by drawing on the metaphorical complex of militia amoris; the metaphor (it has been called an antiphrastic metaphor: “I am a soldier of Love, not of Mars,” Labate 1984: 92ff.; cf. Spies 1978 [1930]; Thomas 1964; Murgatroyd 1975; Lyne 1980: 71–78, 251ff.; Conte 1984: 24) is the means of a conversion to point out that by ideology I mean here that model of sense, that structured language, which, by selecting certain values and adapting them according to a discursive project, generates the elegiac text.

6. Since the well-known study by F. O. Copley (1947), the role of “slavery of love” in Roman elegy has been better defined by R. O. A. M. Lyne (1979). See now Labate 1984: 212ff.

7. Some scholars actually believe that Propertius’ “laus in amore mori” is an elegiac reformulation of Horace’s “dulce et decorum est pro patria mori”; cf. La Penna (1977: 50), who shows caution in discussing the motives of those who maintain this thesis.
(a transcodification) of those values for which the elegiac poet would otherwise feel nostalgia.

Let us consider the most obvious constants, the most external features, what the poet would call “materia . . . numeris levioribus apta” (Am. 1.1.19). Elegy knows of only an “irregular” love relation, whose ambience is the amatory life of the city, that cultured and sophisticated life where intellectuals, free women, and men of power can figure. Not only is this type of love destined to suffer conflicts and disappointments (the happiness afforded the poet by the domina is always precarious because it has no share in the solid rights of the vir), but it entails exclusions and renunciations of a respectable and socially approved life or of an advantageous marriage and acceptance of the nequitia of a dissipated existence (“Cynthia . . . / . . . me docuit castas odisse puellas / improbus et nullo vivere consilio,” Prop. 1.1.5–6). Yet the “libertine” choice is not enough by itself to make elegy; from this point of view, the adulescens of comedy, who refuses maidens of honor and dowry for the sake of a meretrix and who ruins himself in the delights of “Greek” life, already has many features in common with the elegiac lover.8 But the horizon of comedy never coincides with that of a single dramatic character; indeed, it consists of the play of confrontation between diverse roles and ideologies. Only in elegy do the poet and the lover coincide; the horizon of elegy becomes drastically restricted and the text ends up seeing only what its protagonist sees. I would suggest that, fundamentally, elegy is born from just this loss of full vision; the greater the closure of the world represented, the greater the effort language must make to reduce to its model all that would remain excluded from it, recuperating and converting it any way it can.

Scholars have often noted the seeming paradox whereby the elegiac poets, who derived a manifesto of life and poetry from the “Catullan revolution,” end up, like Catullus himself but more so, espousing what were the fundamental values of the mos maiorum (Labate 1984: 30; Burck 1952: 169–72; Boucher 1965: 89–90; La Penna 1977: 38–39, 136, 167–69). Thus the need for recuperation induces elegy to welcome within itself the values of fides, pietas, and sanctitas; these poets ask for a matron’s simplicity from a free woman and are tempted to prefer the purity of myth or countryside to the amatory life of high society.

8. This issue has, of course, already been discussed very often and involves the old philological problem of the origins of Roman elegy. The relation between elegy and comedy that interests me here is very different from the one upon which Leo (and his followers) founded the theory of a substantial derivation of Roman elegy from Hellenistic epigram. Nowadays, Jacoby’s approach seems more promising, and rightly so; among the most recent works, see Fedeli 1974 and Stroh 1983; 1971: 197–99. For a different view, see Puelma 1982.
But this operation does not make elegy run the danger of losing its statutory identity, since values—ideas and words—can return only if they are susceptible to transformation; the fides (faithfulness) of elegy is named by a language of love, the chastity requested of Cynthia is not the one severely displayed by the wife and mother, and so forth. The cultural code that “interprets” these values relates their meaning to its own system of signification, and each element, by being subordinated to a project, finds new functions, the ones assigned to it by the ideological syntax of the discourse of elegy. In other words, those values which elegy recuperates from the universe of the culture (within which it has cut out its own autonomy) cease to be signifieds and become signifiers of different signifieds. But the creation of this new kind of signified is a process rather than a result; the act of reinterpretation retains a full consciousness of the substantial difference between text of provenance and text of arrival (and to synthesize new meanings is precisely an effect of rhetorical codification). This creates within elegy a tension which is never resolved and those contradictions which make it an unstable literary experience and an ephemeral one.

The usefulness of my attempt so far to identify as the foundation of the genre of elegy this process of restriction of the discursive universe, of recuperations and transplantations and transvaluations, will be confirmed if it succeeds in explaining an attitude that many people—from the elegiac poets themselves to theoreticians of poetics to readers ancient and modern—have periodically associated with elegy: elegy as a poetry of lament.9 Above all, elegiac love is suffering and frustration; the moments of satisfaction are immediately contradicted by disappointments and bitterness; the very movement of elegy is a wavering between hope and despair, exultation and despondency. Even more, the characteristic gesture of the elegiac poet in his (vain) attempt to free himself from this painful slavery, and the impulse of refusal, has become so common a gesture that it has earned a name in the philological lexicon: renuntiatio amoris.10 But the code of elegy

10. The renuntiatio amoris, a gesture proposing the poet’s liberation from his “painful enslavement to love,” is certainly a codified form of the elegiac experience, but it is also a dramatized expression of that important “pragmatic function” which makes elegy itself a means of courtship. For when the beloved (who is also the addressee of the love poem) sees the failure of the lover-poet’s attempt to free himself from his servitium, she is flattered at the sight of the ineluctability of the sufferings she herself imposes; the poet, for his part, by demonstrating the failure of his efforts, gives another expression—indirect but also stronger—to his courtship. We shall return to the importance of the “pragmatic dimension” of elegiac discourse; it suffices for now to recall that elegy’s “persuasive writing”
also demands that the lover-poet be a patient reluctant to be cured; he loves his suffering as the substance, but above all as the very condition, of his writing poetry, for to live without the suffering of love would mean to remain wordless, no longer to be a poet.\footnote{This is precisely the programmatic meaning of Virgil’s tenth eclogue, a bucolic text which takes into itself as an object of song the \textit{solliciti amores} of the elegiac poet Cornelius Gallus. As I have tried to show in Conte 1984: 13–42, the “dramatic” structuring of Virgil’s eclogue arises from the dynamic confrontation between two poetics, bucolic and elegiac, which compete with one another and in this way gradually define their relative limits. In terms of the present essay (in which I wish to make use of the \textit{Remedia amoris} to throw a spotlight on elegiac love as a literary genre), it is interesting to note how Virgil too, in his own way, formulates a program of “love without elegy” in the tenth eclogue. The obstinacy of Gallus, who cannot accept this bucolic program on pain of renouncing his own poetic voice, is the most obvious confirmation of the elegiac code’s limits. It nevertheless remains clear that, within the perspective of my analyses, the points of contact between elegy and bucolic only emphasize their substantial, irreducible contrast. The idea of treating elegy like “bucolic in city clothes”—this is the thesis of Veyne (1983)—seems to me only to create confusion.}

To be sure, the suffering of love is not a feature exclusive to the genre of elegy. To stay with those poetic forms that have been placed in a genetic relation with elegy itself, the lover in epigram and the adulescens in comedy certainly suffered, but their pains were intimately connected to causes; at the various moments of the love relation, they were contingently motivated and circumscribed. The suffering of the elegiac poet, on the other hand, is the occasion for an even greater suffering, one great enough to invest his very life with meaning. What defines elegiac suffering is its lack of proportion. We could say that, on the one hand, the very “measure” of the epigram and, on the other, its form, a container open to diverse occasions, limited the proliferation of amorous lament, just as in comedy the counterpoint of the different characters (in most cases the common sense of the slave) sufficed to bring back to plausible proportions the young man’s anguish. The elegiac poet’s willingness to make an absolute form of life out of his own unhappiness is related to the statutory motives for elegy itself, to its self-constitution as a language which is restricted and at the same time ambitious. Whoever has enclosed himself within a world which is only and wholly love and cannot see beyond this horizon will of necessity consider the suffering of love to be a total, incomprehensible suffering. If he then decides to import into that world elements recuperated from outside (needs otherwise lost, “words” he does not know how to renounce), he will thereby create a condition of permanent dis-
comfort, a tension between irreconcilable rhetorics. The difficulties of a love relationship (a night refused, a whim or the mistress's inconstancy) will not only make him suffer for what they are but also set off a crisis that threatens the precarious equilibrium of the structure of elegy. They also break up the artifice practiced by elegy through the restoration of the transplanted elements to their original context and meaning. Elegy is this crisis—a crisis which has become poetry. Fides, pudicitia, are not virtues designed for sophisticated free women; they are values which belong to that large part of the world from which elegy has cut itself out, and they constantly threaten to return there. “But then,” the poet asks, doubting the operation he has attempted to perform, “what I am seeking was possible only in the purity of myth or in the ideal simplicity of the countryside or in that age when the world was not yet adult.” The constitutional suffering of the elegiac poet, in short, is the response of a consciousness which discovers the cost of not yielding to a codified welding of signifiers and signifieds or to the difficulties to be met by anyone unwilling to give up the whole of the preexisting semantic universe when he generates new discourses in the culture’s language.

Love as torment, suffering as the indispensable condition of poetry—these are the correlated thematics of elegiac “closure,” but they are also the most unstable elements in the system of which they are part, inasmuch as they bring inside it tensions which will inevitably ensnare its very presuppositions. The poet has wagered that nothing exists but love, though love makes him suffer; but this suffering of his is just as large as the space granted to love, as large, in fact, as the whole world. To express this, the lover-poet can represent his condition only as intolerable. And he represents himself even as having decided to escape from it, to seek different solutions—this is how, almost paradoxically, the liberation from love, the search for remedies against love, becomes a recurrent theme of elegiac poetry. But the paradox is only apparent. So long as the system of elegy “holds,” the attempt at liberation serves only as a negative proof; it fails and in just this way reconfirms the poet’s choice of the world of elegy.

The experience of love as one of suffering is not a discovery of Roman elegy. Rather, it is the generative nucleus of a large set of connotations which, in the tradition of the literature of love, are organized around the metaphor of eros-nosos: love-sickness, love-wound, love-madness, love-poison (Roman elegy, as is well known, almost always works on secondhand material, knowingly appropriating it from the treasurehouse of the great Greek erotic tradition; it speaks, with its own accents, a common language). In the case of eros-nosos, the figure specific to elegy consists of a particular declension of the paradigm: Love is not only an illness but also, and above all, an incurable illness:
“Omnis humanos sanat medicina dolores: / solus Amor morbi non amat artificem” (Prop. 2.1.57f.). Medicine would take away the illness but also the very possibility of writing poetry in the form of elegy, since the form of the elegiac experience consists of the constrictiveness of this indissoluble nexus: sickness plus the refusal to be cured. It is not by accident that Propertius places his successful cure (and his liberation from the painful shackles of servitium) at the conclusion of his largest collection of poems, where it signifies at once “the real end of his love” and “his farewell to the genre” (3.24.17f.).

That an elegiac poet should title one of his works *Remedia amoris* is therefore a flagrant contradiction, a genuine oxymoron for anyone practiced in the language of elegy. Here the cure of love is no longer a codified voluntary gesture, that is, it is no longer a (programmatically disappointed) move within the strategy of elegy, nor is it even the definitive gesture of a withdrawal from the code (as in Propertius’s farewell, 3.24, noted above). Both of these cases, the cure that fails and the cure that succeeds, said in essence the same thing: that it is impossible both to be cured and to continue to write elegy. In the *Remedia*, on the other hand, the cure is the “monographic” task of a poem in distichs which promises reliable medicines, ones effective even in the most stubborn and rebellious cases. To explain this revolution, we must go back a few steps. The *Remedia* is in fact the destination of Ovid’s work in “interpreting” the code of elegy; of that work of revision already begun with the *Amores* (though they are presented as a collection of “subjective elegies” in the manner of Propertius and Tibullus) and destined to be deposited in a new literary construction—the didactic poem in distichs—more adequate to the dislocations that the rhetoric of elegy undergoes. This process of interpretation and revision, which, moreover, is often dissimulated or at least discontinuous on the surface, has not always been grasped with sufficient awareness by Ovid scholars; the *Amores* in particular continue to cause embarrassment, even if few still give credence to the (let us call them romantic) prejudices of those who would almost have wished to turn them into a failed version of Propertius’s poetry, lacking the emotional sincerity of the original and reduced to a school exercise.12 The philologists’ perplexity (sometimes disgust) is merely their response to the composite and impure nature of Ovid’s collection of elegies. Ovid presents himself as the fourth poet in the lineage of elegists (*Tristia* 4.20.51ff.), a true declaration of allegiance which, for that matter, is confirmed not only by an extremely dense network of intertextual relations but also

12. The romantic judgment continued to exercise a decisive influence in a work which for a long time was a “classic” of Ovid studies: Martini 1933: 11ff. The evaluation of S. Mariotti (1957) is important.
by his maintaining all the fundamental premises of his predecessors’ codification. After all, here is poetry which speaks of love in the first person, which ostentatiously identifies life and literature;13 here is a woman who is the center of the love experience (as there had been Lycoris and then Cynthia and then Nemesis, Delia) so that the Amores (the title recalled Cornelius Gallus) could be presented as “poems for Corinna”; here then are all the thematic situations of elegy—rivals, quarrels, betrayals, reconciliations, paraklausithyra, departures and returns, nights of love, messages and messengers, dinner parties, oaths, illnesses and vows for recovery—every act or kindness of the servitude of love. Here is everything, or almost everything, that could be expected of elegy; if there is anything to alarm the reader, it is Ovid’s insistent ostentatiousness, almost as if this code were being displayed more than used, almost as if it wanted above all to speak of itself. As we might have expected, here are the (thoroughly elegiac) sufferings of the poet in love, his bitterness, his lament for his own inevitable nequitia (Am. 2.1.1–3): “Hoc quoque conposui Paelignis natus aquosis / ille ego nequitiae Naso poeta meae, / hoc quoque iussit Amor.” But above all, here is what scholars unanimously define nowadays as a “playful tone”;14 it can be pervasive and become a composition’s structural principle, the application of a mischievous register, or it can take the form of an unexpected punchline which reverses the “traditional” pathos of a group of verses or of an entire elegy.15 Schematically contrasting playful Ovid with the emotionality of Propertius (and Tibullus) would mean relapsing into an old prejudice long since superseded by studies that have demonstrated, in particular, the existence of a “ludibundus” Propertius. And yet there is a certain differ-

13. But on this point the poetics of Ovidian elegy also shows all its novelty: Life is still bound to poetry, but primacy belongs to the formal choice, which, moreover, is presented as entirely arbitrary, the fruit of a whim of Cupid’s. Cf. Labate 1984: 15ff.
14. In the 1930s, two prominent Ovid scholars independently called attention to the poet’s playful, ironic nature: T. F. Higham (1934) and E. Reitzenstein (1935). Their work gave rise to an important series of studies on Ovid’s poetry; cf. Labate 1977.
15. The counterpoint between “traditional” elegies and elegies which by their playful attitude empty out all emotional commitment sometimes manifests itself as two consecutive or quite close compositions. The Gedichtpaar, in which a poem figures in a relation of complementarity of meaning with the preceding one (cf. Jäger 1967), is a compositional form favored by Propertius for structuring elegiac discourse and often used by Ovid to create contrasts; the second half serves to uncover, and sometimes to reverse, the elegiac convention which governs the first (see, e.g., the pair 2.7 and 2.8). Sometimes the counterpoint acts at a distance (in 2.19, the lover-poet protests against the vir’s not guarding the puella enough; in 3.4, the poet protests against the vir’s guarding her too much).
ence, which is not only quantitative, in the playfulness of the various poets of Roman elegy. 16 In Propertius, playful attitudes seem above

16. A recent book by Paul Veyne (1983), worthy of discussion if only because of the author’s notoriety, deserves special mention in this connection. It is embarrassing to speak of this book, since many of its positions must be shared but are put in a needlessly or quite improbably extreme form. Such a strategy might be justified in a “militant” book if provocative paradoxes were needed to unblock static and hardened critical positions, but in fact the critical scene is far more varied, more differentiated, and especially more knowing than Veyne would believe. The author has created a straw man, but for years that straw man has had only a few negligible, and themselves rather uncertain, adherents. I shall omit here some disagreeable factual errors (I have enough sympathy for the author’s cultural collocation not to wish to profit from his philological unsteadiness) and limit myself instead to agreeing when I can. For example, it is a true and well-founded observation that the elegist is not giving voice to the effusions and confessions of a romantic poet, but it is also true that the better critics have long since stopped thinking it was; it is just as well founded that elegy “is a cultural creation” (pp. 167, 198), and that we must abandon “the autobiographical habit” (p. 165); but it is certainly extreme, and in the final analysis mistaken, to say that elegy “is a pleasantry” (p. 124), “a playful lie, that everything in it is a humorous semblance without a trace of irony or harshness” (p. 98), that “only one thing is lacking: emotion” (p. 44), that it is a “playful paradox” (p. 206; if so, then just as all literature is). The real problem, it seems to me, is that Veyne focuses too much upon the ontological status of literature itself rather than upon the various elegiac poets (pp. 23, 166). What are truth and falsehood in literature, the liar who says, “I am a liar” (p. 55), the humor of the liar who says, “I am lying,” while he winks at the reader (p. 56)? From this step, why not wonder whether all culture is a falsehood? (I am reminded of so-called psychosomatic illnesses, which, even if they are of psychological origin, manifest themselves as illnesses that have to be treated clinically and can be serious enough to destroy the “soma.”) Veyne seems to deny elegy its own status, a literary status which exists entirely in contradiction—the very contradiction that Veyne dissolves. We can explain the paradox differently. This French scholar seems still to believe that a literature exists which seeks “truth and reality” for themselves and not for the literary effects it can produce in that artifact, the text. If such a belief is mistaken in any case, it certainly is far more so in the case of a literature like that of the ancients, so subordinated to the rules of codification, so frequently shaped according to thematic and formal stereotypes, so abundantly traversed by various rhetorics. This would amount to going so far as to say that language is false, but would that help at all to explain the literature which uses it? The fact is that “mimesis” and “falsehood” are two poles around which literary conceptions and ideals arrange themselves alternately. But if it is indubitable that some texts are more respectful of reality’s possibilities and others less so, it is just as indubitable that, from the point of view of the constitution of the literary work, fiction as falsehood is a constitutive and indispensable starting point. Hence it is best to accept this pact a priori and, within its framework, to try to interpret the various ways in which those semblances of the real (facts of literature) enter into contact with reality. In literary works, fiction “plays” dialectically with reality; all literature, in fact, is a dialectic between acceptance and refusal of the culture’s stereotypes. The more a fiction tends toward falsehood and improbability, the more the addressee of the literary text is compelled to verify reality’s effective
all to be produced by an awareness of the paradox whereby a poetry entirely committed to Erlebnis and gladly displaying the passionate immediacy of its language discovers that it is in fact heir to an ancient and proven tradition. But the poet ends up almost profiting from this difficulty; the conventionality of words and situations—and the smile thereby produced—becomes an effective element of contrast, a foil against which pathos can better show itself, almost the wager of a poet refusing to surrender to the ineffectiveness of words that have been spoken too often.

In Ovid this consciousness goes farther; no longer only an “archaeological” consciousness internal to elegy’s dialectic (pathos/lusus) and functional for its effects, it has become a total awareness of the elegiac code itself, a renunciation of the effective expression of pathos. In the Amores, pathos is one element of the code like any other, an element whose conventionality is accepted, merely a sign of the language of elegy. Ovid’s poetry tries to look at elegy instead of looking with the eyes of elegy. That is, it looks from a vantage point which is external and hence higher than the one normally granted the practitioner of a literary genre (and the elegiac poet in particular, as we said above). In their superficial form, the Amores still respect the fundamental norm of elegiac poetry; the only voice that speaks in the text is that of the lover-poet. But whereas earlier he constructed the world of love in an entirely exclusive perspective, in which the point of view and the “values” of other subjects (the amica, the rival, the lena) were denied expression, now the lover-poet seems capable of some degree of far-sightedness. He continues to see love with the eyes of the lover-poet (and for this reason elegy survives), but in fact he is now “impersonating” the elegiac lover, a persona which presupposes and permits the legitimacy of other personae. These personae are discursive functions...
which are also different ways of interpreting the amatory world (see Le M. Du Quesnay 1973: 7–13, 29–35). (A scholar like Leo might have smiled with pleasure at seeing Latin elegy end up returning, to a certain extent, to what he had considered instead to be its “theatrical” origins; see note 8.) The lover of comedy possessed (with the added excesses of caricature) the same short-sightedness which encloses the elegist within his world of passion, but the discourse of drama contained within itself the antidote; it could represent other voices that upheld a fuller vision of the love relation (one more prudent because less “ideologically” restricted). In this sense, comedy, as the space of relativity, was the contrary of elegy, the space of absolutization. Horace (Sat. 2.3.260ff.), pitiless critic of the furors which will belong to elegy, showed that he understood this when, in a brilliant transposition of a scene from Terence (Eun. 46ff.), he gave his sympathy to the wisdom of the slave capable of dominating Eros’s alternating rhythms and of governing his young master’s existential torments. Ovid, in the Amores, tries to be both wise slave and young master in love at the same time.

The copresence in the elegiac text of such diverse elements creates a tension which menaces the genre’s constitution (and elegy will end up being subverted by it). The only device the text can use to control the incompatibilities it has let in is ironia. But Ovid’s irony does not function as a trope (antiphrastic displacement, an enantiosemic figure which reverses the meaning of individual elegiac statements according to the structure of “denial by affirmation”; see Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1980); instead, it is the sign of a critical consciousness which is a spectator observing the text’s formation from outside and revealing its implicit practices. Ovid keeps the traditional elegiac lover-poet alive by dislocating onto two different textual levels the two functions which earlier had coincided: as lover, he shares the status of the different elegiac personae; as poet, possessor of the code, he takes advantage of this privilege to govern from above the play of the personae.

Ovid, before being the author of elegiac texts, is the addressee of the passionate poetry of Catullus, Gallus, Propertius, and Tibullus. He has listened to their words, learned to understand how the system that programs them is constructed, discovered what contradictions invest it, deconstructed it by finding its necessary relations; now he knows how to reconstruct it in his own way. Ovid’s text accepts the genre’s conventions; it places itself in a relation of intertextuality, indeed of continuation, with the lineage of elegy—a vista of citations, a mirage of structures which are déjà vu and déjà vécu. But at the very moment in which he acquires a superior understanding of the elegy’s literary characteristics (the way in which it “works out” reality), Ovid stops, as though he were undecided; he refuses both a simple identification with the traditional model of elegy and any clear repudiation of it. Irony
signals this hesitation between discourses which are incompatible or at least in discordan\textsuperscript{17}.

To project the discourse of elegy in the key of irony superficially entails considerable textual fidelity to the models, but it also entails the most serious infidelities. In a famous elegy from the Amores (built very closely upon one of Propertius's), for example, Ovid succeeds so fully in reversing the normal attitude of the lover-poet that he manages to show sympathy and support for a character, the lena, who is traditionally the bearer of anti-elegiac values. The lena, his opponent insofar as he is in love, can be appreciated only by someone who, like himself, now shares her status as trustee of erotic sapientia; she knows the amatory code and can set herself up as a teacher of it (see Otis 1938; Labate 1977: 285ff.). To reach this position on high, the Standpunkt of the teacher of love, Ovid completely revises the codified usages of traditional elegy, but, with programmatic ambiguity, he prefers to disguise himself in forms that are already known and accepted. The repertory of elegy already foresaw that occasionally the lover-poet could teach others, those inexperienced in the love relation, the same norms of behavior and amatory life which governed his own existence; but he could set himself up as a teacher only of his own experience, the restricted experience of someone who knows only his own world and wants others to adapt to it, too. Entirely without the teacher's disinterest, he remains subjectively bound to his own restricted motives as a pursuer of love.\textsuperscript{18} If Ovid's interpretation of elegy consists precisely of his overcoming this restricted subjectivity, it is understandable that the figure of the praeceptor amoris (hitherto an occasional phenomenon) will inevitably acquire space within the discourse of elegy and that the lover-poet will even reveal himself capable of teaching disadvantageous truths—the code must be upheld even when it presages defeats and suffering. To preserve his role in a love which can be ful-

\textsuperscript{17} New studies on irony appear daily, and recent progress in criticism has substantially modified the (mechanical) criteria of rhetorical interpretation. Besides the two well-known books by D. C. Muecke (1969) and W. Booth (1974), see the special issues of the journals Poétique (36 [November 1978]; note particularly D. C. Muecke's useful bibliographical essay, pp. 478–94) and Poetics Today (4 [3], “The Ironic Discourse,” ed. E. Wright).

\textsuperscript{18} The passage from “interested” to “disinterested” instruction can be followed in terms of what happens when Ovid takes over a phrase of Tibullus (1.6.10): “Heu heu nunc premor arte mea.” In Tibullus the precepts that the poet had imparted to his advantage are used again, on a later occasion, against him. Ovid, on the other hand, turns this into the sign of a defense of the code that neglects the lover-poet’s interests (Am. 2.18.20, 2.19.34). The case of Tib. 1.4, the miniature ars amatoria taught by Priapus, is different; it is no accident that what is involved there is the love for pueri, an experience for which Roman elegy’s rhetoric of “pathos” does not seem to hold.
filled only by means of suffering or against obstacles and difficulties, the poet is even willing to step out of that role for a moment to take on someone else’s. What he demands, if he is to love in the mode of elegy (“Nil ego, quod nullo tempore laedat, amo,” he openly declares in *Am.* 2.19.8), is that his counterparts respect the rules of the game; and these are just the rules that he teaches the girl (a true grammar of actions which are the duty of the elegiac puella, who is supposed to shrewdly dispense not only erotic satisfactions but also calculated and seductive erotic disappointments) and the inattentive vir who does not take care to guard her (in fact, he is required to make the lovers’ furtive meetings more difficult and thereby to offer possibilities and occasions for the art of tricks) (Labate 1977: 301).

In cases like this, the attitude of the praeceptor amoris is charged with decidedly ironic functions far beyond the faint, only slightly playful smile which often accompanies the teachings of love in “subjective” elegy. Here irony is the effect of the impropriety of a role which crosses over into antagonistic roles; once the reflection on the code becomes explicitly metaliterary, it must reveal itself in stolen, exceptional spaces, since it obviously has no space of its own within the code itself. (And it is these illegitimate spaces, these incursions, which feed the current image of a “sacred” Ovid.) Irony is often portrayed as the ingredient which Ovid added in large doses to produce all those innovations which make the *Amores* different from earlier collections of elegies. Conversely, I believe that Ovid’s irony is the epiphenomenal outcome of deeper movements, the echo within the language of elegy produced by his escape from the closure found so strongly within the elegiac code; it is the telltale sign of a tension between the “short-sightedness” of someone confined within the enclosed space of subjective elegy and the “far-sightedness” of someone who eludes that enclosure by recognizing its conventionality. Once a metaliterary consciousness has been achieved, it considers the borders that demarcate the language of elegy to be mere rhetorical shackles, codifications of an ideology that claims the status of reality. The addressee of Ovid’s irony learns to read beyond the appearance of elegy the form of the discourse which has constructed it. Raised to the same level of “competence” as the poet, the addressee of elegy acquires at the same time the physiognomy of the addressee of didactic poetry, since the text, enriched and jeopardized by its metaliterary function, reveals to him, together with its discourse of pathos, the norms and prescriptions of that discourse, that is, it displays to him its implicit rhetorical code. And irony, at least insofar as it permits the poet to distance himself, lets us recognize here the dual—literally, “hypocritical”—nature of elegy; it reveals itself as an artistic illusion, it lives its own artificial reality and claims instead to be rooted in real life, that
is to say, in that form of existence which is made up of lived passions. Thus irony installs itself within the text as a “reflective dialectic” and turns its metaliterary possibilities into an effective means for artistic self-representation (see Conte 1985 [1974]: 29; Allemann 1970).

It has often been said that the *Ars amatoria* is a natural outgrowth of the didactic seeds already contained in the *Amores*, but the significant innovations entailed by the passage from the metaliterary to the didactic should not be overlooked. It is true that, as we have just seen, the metaliterary attitudes of many elegies in the *Amores* have didactic implications, and it is true, on the other hand, that there is a metaliterary component as well in the teaching of the *Ars*. But the didactic element of the *Ars* corresponds to a type of discourse clearly different from the one we ascribed to the *Amores*; elegiac subjectivity and didactic objectivity—almost like the elements of an emulsion—naturally tend to separate from one another and end up depositing a pure didactic form. This simplification means above all that the ambiguity which had made the lover-poet and the teacher-poet coincide is dissipated. Now the poet is exclusively a *magister amoris* and the lover becomes exclusively the recipient of his precepts; now that the ambiguous complexity of Ovidian elegy has been drawn off, the text of the *Ars* is left free of impurities and contradictions. We suggested earlier that the elegy of the *Amores* responded to its internal contradictions with irony, ready to cast doubt upon the ideology of elegy at the very moment it affirmed it, and that that irony did not provoke the dissociation of the elegiac discourse but, on the contrary, paradoxically enabled the poet to safeguard subjective elegy by simply exhibiting its marked “literariness,” by merely collocating it (with its readers’ connivance) within the domain of consciously sophisticated languages.

Hence it is no accident that irony—at least as a sign of a live metaliterary consciousness and as a way of inviting the reader to perceive the code’s emotional conventions skeptically—ends up becoming noticeably attenuated in the very poem of instruction about love which many are inclined to call “the poem of ironic demystification.” Now that the poet has renounced the rhetoric of elegy, ever harder to dissemble, and has chosen instead to invest the far-sightedness he has acquired in the form of explicit instruction, his irony no longer acts on the inside of the text as the usurpation of improper linguistic functions. What had been usurpation becomes now, in elegiac didactic, the legitimate right (in other respects the duty) of a teacher who has stipulated with the addressee a pact which is no longer ambiguous. His will not be a teaching internal to the rhetoric of elegy but rather the complete, panoramic enunciation of a system of amatory behavior in which each of the protagonists must be able to find his own “relative” motives. The actors and actions are those of elegy, but they no longer correspond
to its rhetoric made up of “limited” and partial perspectives. This new trait is easily compatible with the possibilities of the didactic poem, a structure traditionally open to every material capable of being taught.

But precisely because didactic poetry is like a container indifferent to the contents it is supposed to receive, a gesture according to which the discourse is to be shaped, the recognizability of the didactic mode is entrusted to a series of strong signals which express the intention of the text to become a vehicle of teachings. Hence there is a whole formulary tending to make the relation between teacher and student obvious: assertions of competence, apostrophes and admonitions and especially the prominence of expressions reducible to the conative and phatic functions of language (one must maintain contact with an addressee of whom one asks obedience). Hence, too, the material is carefully organized by distribution according to an explicit plan adapted to an exhaustive treatment; the discourse is articulated into books and smaller scansions, each one designed to illustrate an individual topic (and explicit moves of recapitulation or resumption are not lacking: “We have already seen this and now we shall see that”). In contrast to the didactic discourse, imperative and monotonous, there are digressions, more or less long, more or less motivated; excursus and exempla become modes of arguing via images or of lingering over descriptions. And always the discourse founds its legitimacy upon the principle of “usefulness”; the student will be able to test in practice the value of the precepts imparted to him. To the claim of “usefulness” and “truthfulness” corresponds the tendency by which the language of didactic poetry loves to adopt the form of maxims or to take refuge in proverbs; it thereby becomes not only authoritative but also more memorable. All this (and other things as well; see Labate 1984: 167ff.) is found in full measure in the Ars amatoria and in the Remedia, and the reason is that the poem wants to “play the role” of didactic poetry.

Yet just that element of the didactic mode which for classical literary codification (and its system of expectations) was not only distinctive but constitutionally primary is lacking; instead of the hexameter, it is the distich which gives form to the teachings of love. This cannot be discounted as a weak signal; it is how Ovid says that his didactic poem has its own unusual characteristics, that it is the fruit of a carefully thought-out experiment. An ars, a techne, is defined as a systematic collection of rules derived from empirical reality and implicit technical procedures. To take the example of the ars oratoria, Cicero is to be believed when he reflects (De orat. 2.32) that the starting point is always in real practice. In the forum some orators speak “temere ac nulla ratione,” others “propter consuetudinem aliquam callidius”; the reasons why some speak better and others worse must be sought, understood (“animadverte”), and registered (“notare”). “Ergo,” con-
cludes Cicero, “id qui toto in genere fecit, is si non plane artem, at quasi artem quandam invenit.” Analogously, behind the *ars georgica* is the daily practice of the peasant; behind the *ars nautica*, the experience of the sailor; and so forth. It would be legitimate to expect the *Ars amatoria* to have been extracted from the practical behavior of real lovers, but instead Ovid’s teachings are presented as an art applied to materials whose “reality” is that of literary phenomena—not to real lovers, therefore, and their daily strategies, but to those represented in the elegies of Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid himself. In other words, the didactic project of the *Ars amatoria* is directed not so much to things themselves but to a rhetoric which has already organized reality and taken its place. The choice of the distich, precisely because it is so obvious a deviation, indicates provocatively the particular nature of Ovid’s didactic poem.

But the graft (elegy is now performed in didactic modes) hides an insidious deceit under the apparent naturalness of the operation. In fact, the resulting harmony ends up effacing even the memory of all the incompatibilities it had known how to get the better of. The statement that the *Ars amatoria* proposes a grammar of elegy creates the expectation that the “application” of its rules would lead to the correct exercise of elegiac love. Yet there is no doubt that a diligent student of Ovid’s poem would be very different from the tormented and unhappy lover of elegy. To make itself teachable, elegy has tacitly had to sacrifice its own nature. The ideology of elegy, in fact, associated love and *furor* in a strict rhetorical bond and, by entrusting erotic passion to the logic of impetuous impulses, denied it the positivity of a stable satisfaction. The rhetoric of “sapienter amare” which governs the whole *Ars amatoria* is thus the exact opposite of real elegy. The didactic principle of the *utile* contradicts in a fundamental point the rhetoric of elegy, which demands that the lover-poet be willing to accept sufferings even to the point of self-injury (Sullivan 1976: 91ff.): the puella is a *dulce malum*, the lover-poet cannot bear to free himself from her. “Aut in amore dolere volo aut audire dolentem, / sive meas lacrimas sive videre tuas,” says Propertius to his beloved in 3.8.23ff. “In te pax mihi nulla placet.” Now we learn instead how to reduce all the moments of a love relation to the strategy of the greatest possible advantage; even suffering is not excluded so long as it is reduced to functioning as a means for attaining the *utile*. To gain the favor of the puella, it will be good for her suitor to appear to be suffering: “Est tibi agendus amans imitandaque vulnera verbis” (*Ars am. 1.611*).

We touch here upon a crucial aspect of the conversion elegy has undergone: from the “ideology” of sincerity to that of fiction. Elegy had made of authenticity the very form of its discourse; Ovid’s didactic poem distrusts sincerity and uncontrollable passions and recom-
mends instead the art of pretending. Like an actor, the lover must play his part: “est tibi agendus amans” (see Solodow 1977; Labate 1984: 170ff.). Here, it should be noted, “playing the part of a lover” is not a generic formula; it means, literally, putting on the costume of the lover of elegy, that is, of a character whose part is already written in the pages of the elegiac poets. Perhaps we can understand at this point why Ovid should have chosen to maintain in his erotic didactic poem that vital relation with elegy which, we said, is signaled by the use of the distich; the fact is that Ovid, at the moment of preparing (with the Ars) a real pragmatics of courtship—one necessarily inspired by the didactic principle of effectiveness—could not forget the importance the pragmatic function had had in the consciousness of the elegiac poet. Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid himself, as is well known, had occasionally declared that the primary reason for their writing poetry was to win for the poet the woman’s love: “Ad dominam faciles aditus per carmina quaero” (Tib. 2.4.19). Elegy had to be “useful”; otherwise there was no point in continuing to write it: “Ite procul, Musae, si non prodestis amanti” (Tib. 2.4.15).¹⁹

This is why the Ars amatoria’s teachings contain a dense network of references for which almost every single precept has a precedent in the larger text of elegy; the Ars is like an ordered summary of situations already seen and of words already spoken (Holzberg 1981: 185ff.). In the Ars, the enlargement of perspective which permits a complete control of the code and its limits corresponds to the “external” position the teacher-poet has acquired. His teachings turn out on the whole to be less exposed to the effects of irony because they are no longer connected to improper functions, ones usurped occasionally (his discursiveness is no longer that of looking beyond the closure of the code); but they still keep irony’s ambiguous implications, which

¹⁹. The study of W. Stroh (1971) is fundamental in this regard. The review of it by A. La Penna (1975), who has difficulty recognizing the importance of courtship as a pragmatic (hence, literally, extratextual) dimension of Roman elegy, rather undervalues it. La Penna, who believes he must measure in quantitative terms the frequency of the courtship function in the elegiac corpus, is led to conclude that the textual space granted that function (werbende Dichtung) is in fact limited to only a few occurrences and that Stroh exaggerates its importance; but he does not notice that each of these occurrences is very important from the qualitative point of view, since they are generally programmatic assertions, authentic declarations of poetic principles in which elegy defines itself with respect to other forms of poetry (and, on the other hand, it is only in this way that the pragmatic function can manifest itself in the text, since it is not so much a “content” as a gesture of the elegiac discourse, an intention which lies behind the words and can come forward only in special places). In this sense I prefer Stroh’s approach, with its inevitable exaggerations due to the length of his work, to the reductiveness of a critic who in literature mistakes a function for a motif.
often characterize metaliterary discourse in literature. I mean that an intertextuality like the one which links the *Ars* to the experience of elegy ends up bringing into play two fundamentally contradictory rhetorics, one next to the other. In fact, the open and far-sighted rhetoric of didactic discourse affirms itself without letting us forget the myopic rhetoric of elegy; indeed, it programmatically reevokes it. A kind of retrospective irony manifests itself in this display of the code of elegy (see Sperber and Wilson 1978); instead of cracks and fissures in a text which lets one catch a glimpse of its inner workings here and there, this discourse, which each time “rereads” its own presuppositions with distance and superior competence, is continuously transparent. This distancing (which is permitted and even guaranteed by didactic fides; the teacher’s instructions are believable because they are objective) engenders so full a competence in the code that its fundamental rules can be rewritten, though with substantial inaccuracy, but it also renders visible, next to the totality of elegy, the intrinsic partiality of the universe constructed by the latter. Elegy’s absolute space now accepts the status of relativity; the teacher of love knows well not only the matters of love but also that there are other matters besides love: other worlds, other values, other models, and other discourses capable of organizing those values, other literary genres, to which the same kind of legitimacy must be accorded. The presupposition of the *Ars amatoria*’s teachings is that elegy must renounce its ambition to reformulate the world: its daring attempt to transcodify into its own language values which are, strictly speaking, heterogeneous is usefully abandoned. The amatory world will thereby gain in awareness and homogeneity; it will now be able to call itself perfect. Freed from the risk of contradictions, it will show itself stable (even if we shall often miss the density and richness of what had been the discourse of elegy). In short, extracting the poetry of love from the ideological form of elegy and restoring it to a vaster axiological universe imply the recognition that the erotic does not necessarily coincide with the discourse of elegy.

If Ovid’s teaching constitutes the fulfillment of this simple program (it will turn out that a love without frustrations and sufferings is possible, after all), we can add that Ovid does not rest content with an “affirmative” demonstration (“I shall teach you how to love”) but also accepts the challenge of a negative proof (“If your love is mistaken, I shall teach you how to free yourselves from it”). Freeing students from the errors to which they have become accustomed is no less important a concern for the good teacher than imparting his positive techniques; hence the corrective exercises of the *Remedium amoris* are added to the precepts of the *Ars*. Following too mechanically this scheme of interpretation might lead one to the belief that the *Remedia* were a kind
of palinode which “undid” (if only as sophistic play) the teachings of the *Ars* (see Geisler 1969: 39 n. 1; Mariotti 1957: 622). To a certain extent, Ovid exposed himself to this misunderstanding when, in the second part of the *Remedia*’s proem (which in reality constitutes its true didactic proem), he emphasized its pedagogical function by juxtaposing two discourses of divergent intention: “Discite sanari per quem didicistis amare; / una salus uobis volnus opemque feret” (43–44). And again: “Naso legendus erat tum cum didicistis amare; / idem nunc uobis Naso legendus erit” (71–72).

Perhaps it was precisely in order to avert such a misunderstanding that the poet had begun with a kind of preamble, a trial before the god of love, first with the accusation against the teacher, then with his self-defense, and finally with his acquittal. The fact that it is Cupid himself who acquits his poet is not merely an expedient of the lively staging but corresponds to the implicit fundamental motives of Ovid’s project; Cupid intervenes as the specific symbol of erotic poetry in the form of elegy, a role sanctioned in the *Amores*’ proem (to which the *Remedia*’s proem refers in many significant aspects of both structure and content). It is the title of the new work, incredible and alarming, which provides the occasion: *Remedia amoris* sounds like a genuine declaration of war against Cupid. In effect, the god’s anxieties are far from groundless. The “distinctions” with which the poet argues (“My war is against mistaken love, not against love itself”) ought not entirely to appease his interlocutor; or rather, they can attain this effect only if the god Love renounces forever his role of guarantor and defender of elegiac love or of that form of love (life and poetry) which closed off its horizon in an exasperation of suffering, admonished itself like a sickness, pushed itself to the point of self-destruction, delighted even in thoughts of death. Ovid seems aware that with the *Remedia* he is exhausting the ultimate possibilities of a literary form still to some degree recognizable as elegy; hence there will never be another opportunity for him definitively to clarify his poetics of love. Looking back, he can now measure the subversive force of the way in which he had actualized the discourse of elegy; what this definitive rendering of accounts announces in distichs is the end of elegy.

But the poet does not acknowledge that he is contradicting himself (“nec noua praeteritum Musa rexit opus,” *Rem.* 12); instead, he takes

20. The pentameter recalls the motif of Telephus, to whom lines 47ff. explicitly refer: The myth of the Mysian king, who could be cured only by the rust of Achilles’ spear, the same one which had wounded him, became a fixed exemplum in elegy for the painful condition of the lover, whose wound could be healed only by the person who caused it (cf. Prop. 2.1.63ff.; Ovid *Am.* 2.9.7ff.). On this level, too, therefore, the *Remedia* seem to propose a reversal of elegiac practice and encourage the misunderstanding of which I have spoken.
advantage of the presence of the god Love to testify that he has always loved, has always written about love, has taught it, too. Yet he almost seems to say, “Never have I really written elegy (especially starting with the Ars); if elegy is for the most part suffering, if it is the poetry of one who ‘male fert indignae regna puellae’ (v. 15), I have always sought a different elegy. You are a child and only games suit you; the kingdom of love should not know harshness and torments.” Love will continue to rule the space of the amatory life, with its exciting skirmishes which do not hurt too much. If elegy really cannot do without lament, they will have to content themselves with the “plaintive” song of a lover singing his nocturnal serenade (36). And the poet does not fail to improvise an improved little grammar of elegy:

Effice nocturna frangatur ianua rixa  
et tegat ornatas multa corona fores;  
fac coeant furtim iuuenes timidaeque puellae  
uerbaque dent cauto qualibet arte uiro,  
et modo blanditias, rigido, modo iurgia, posti  
dicat et exclusus flebile cantet amans.

(31–36)

The objection Ovid feels he can raise touches the very heart of the poetics of elegy. Even if the identification of life and poetry which this form postulates is merely a literary convention, there is a constitutive ambiguity here which not only does not adequately protect literature against life (it does not respect the autonomy of the world of images and words) but does not even save life from the suggestions of literature. “To speak” of sufferings, madness, sickness, and death can be very dangerous when—in the real world, the one outside the world of words—there really are people who are suffering to the point of sickness, madness, and death. The poetics of elegy, confronted with life, succumbs to its insidious deceit:

Cur aliquis laqueo collum nodatus amator  
a trabe sublimi triste pe pendit onus?  
Cur aliquis rigido fodit sua pectora ferro?  
Invidiam caedis, pacis amator, habes.  
Qui, nisi desierit, misero periturus amore est,  
desinat, et nulli funeris auctor eris.

(17–22)

In short, if the poet refuses to resign himself to admitting the “tragic” into the space of love and the language of erotic poetry, he will necessarily feel himself committed to devising an effective liberation from elegy, its cultural models, and the perceptual codes which condition its experience. The same poet who had already taught readers how to achieve the joys of love was qualified to take on this task;
indeed, he alone could undertake to find the right medicine, not only by reason of his proven erotico-didactic competence, but above all because his teachings had never impaired his credibility as a teacher by suggesting practices which would have exposed his pupils to the sickness's contagion. That is, the rhetoric which governs the *Remedia amoris* is the same as the one which informed the positive teachings of the *Ars*: Both presuppose the representation of the world of eros from a vantage point high enough to enable both the complicated interlacing of relations within the elegiac-amatory model to be embraced and everything outside of it to be seen, so that that model can be given the autonomy which belongs to a space which is reduced and self-satisfied. What distinguishes the *Remedia* from the *Ars* resides in the specific motives of a work which proposes itself as the teaching of a therapy (see Hollis 1973: 110); now the text must make use of the acknowledged partiality of the world of elegy to indicate the existence and the advantages of other worlds which lovers can escape to, where they can seek refuge and healing. Moreover, each of those worlds—forms of life and culture different from love—can be granted its own validity, a validity which can even be recommended, since the rhetoric of Ovidian elegy (as we have already said) had never pretended to totalitarianism or tried to appropriate to itself all those values of external origin that elegy could not bear to give up.

It is no accident that, after these proems and preambles, the didactic argument of the *Remedia* goes on to attack elegy in one of its fundamental ideological presuppositions: the refusal of the active life, the deliberate choice of *otium desidiosum*.21 If otium, indolent laxity, nourishes the sickness of love, the cure begins with a commitment to the active life: “qui finem quaeris amoris, / (cedit amor rebus) res age, tutus eris” (*Rem.* 143ff.). The teacher takes care to translate this principle into a set of concrete examples of possible useful activities; the medicine he prescribes to the unhappy lover reproposes to him all that part of the world which elegy had excluded from its space, its nequitia, when it had cut out the literary horizon within which it could enclose itself; above all, the activities of the forum and of war, whose refusal had meant for the elegiac poet the renunciation of career and respectability.22 Then follows agriculture, the traditional economic ac-

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21. Cf. Boucher 1965: 15ff. From what had been a Catullan motif (“Otium, Catulle, tibi molestum est; / oto exultas nimiumque gestis,” 51.16ff.), elegy had made one of the recurrent themes which correspond to its fundamental preference for nequitia and often coincide with it; cf. Fraenkel 1957: 211–13; Frank 1968; and especially, for our text, Prinz 1914; but see also Veyne 1983: 256–69.

22. See, e.g., Ovid *Am.* 1.15.1ff.; see especially van Berchem 1948, and also Labate 1984: 85ff. (with further bibliographical references). It is significant that in this
tivity of the Roman gentleman, here, however, recommended as a model of life in which the aspects of utility are virtually subordinated to the preponderantly aesthetic attractions which a country estate can offer (see Narducci 1983: 65ff.). And naturally, the passion for hunting (and, secondarily, for fishing) must be included among the ways to combat otium: The irreconcilable contrast between Diana and Venus is one of those fundamental oppositions which are registered even in the anthropological code (Conte 1984: 28ff.): “Saepe recessit / turpiter a Phoebi victa sorore Venus.”

Reintegrating the rhetoric of elegiac love into a varied and manifold ideological horizon like that of life in its totality is indeed the basic principle of the art of healing (it already was for the “art of loving”). What had been the elegiac lover now seems no different from a “mask,” a character that gives form and voice to a way of being entirely functional to the attribute of being a lover; in other words, it now becomes obvious, paradoxically, that poets who had spoken about nothing but themselves and their lives would in the final analysis have turned out to be complete strangers to us were it not for a few almost extratextual hints (for example, the sphragis of farewell with which Propertius concludes the Monobiblos). Instead, the patient who wishes to be rescued from love must above all renounce being a character, that is, he must remember everything the mask hides. *Lethaeus Amor*—the Love that makes us forget and be healed—appears in a dream to the poet and prescribes to him an unexpected remedy: “Recall your daily troubles and you will forget (551ff.). To escape from elegy, one need only recall that he is really quite an ordinary person: someone who can worry about the installments on a debt about to fall due (561ff.), someone with a strict father (563ff.), a wife without a dowry (565ff.), a fine vineyard that can be damaged by bad weather (567ff.), a ship that can be wrecked with its cargo (569ff.), a son who is a soldier or a daughter who has to be married off (571). “Et quis non causas mille doloris habet?” In this series of occupations and preoccupations of Ovid, and generally in the relevant passages from elegy, the activities refused have negative connotations (“praemia militiae puluerulenta; iberosas leges” and “ingrato . . . foro” in lines 4ff.) and that, on the other hand, a claim is made for the positive value of *ignavia* and *inertia* (elegiac poetry is called “ingenii ineritis opus”); on the contrary, in the *Remedia*, the poet is apparently committed to emphasizing the positive value of the worlds which his student must rediscover (152ff.), and it is now the preference for otium which receives criticism (the same criticism which could come from right-minded moralists, from the *senes seueriores*).

23. Only an elegiac practice that shows the first lacerations of the elegiac convention, like Ovid's in the *Amores*, can admit any freedom from this tacit exclusion of reality: from Am. 3.13 we learn that Corinna’s poet also has a wife.

pations which serves as a distraction from unhappy love, the ancient reader would have easily recognized some of the themes dearest to the polemics of diatribe: to be healed, the lover will have to concentrate on “external” interests and goods, to assign importance and value to these, will even have to seek out the anxieties and worries caused by the uncertainty of material things and the accidents of fortune. This is a project of reeducation, the exact opposite of that search for autarkeia in which moralizing philosophical preachers located the fundamental condition for attaining tranquillitas animi and hence happiness. But the Remedia amoris do not intend to apply their “reverse cure” to diatribe; here too the real objective is elegy, since it is the elegiac form of love which must be undone and destroyed. If in fact the man sick with love can be saved only by behaving like the stulti and insani (this is how diatribe defined those wretched people who succumbed to the attractions of false values), the reason is that the ideology of elegy had already claimed for love the ability to construct a self-sufficient world whose values would render any other possible good “indifferent” (compared to the force of love, what value can wealth, success, reputation, power have?). The autarkeia of eros had presented itself as competitive with philosophical autarkeia (see La Penna 1977: 139–41). And this is why the liberation from elegy also required that the ideology of diatribe be overthrown.

But diatribe can also function as a therapeutic model for the person suffering from the pains of love, above all because its prudent counsels are designed to aid the person suffering from false opinions and from all those vain desires which afflict people like a real nosos. Faced with the sicknesses of the spirit, sapientia had been glad to offer itself as a genuine medical technique; and diatribe had already identified love as one of the most serious and widespread sicknesses it had to combat (see Kassel 1958: 5–33; Prinz 1914: 61ff.; Geisler 1969: 58ff.). This was, of course, the love that blinds and dispossesses, that makes people lose their sense of measure and social proprieties, that, as I have suggested, leads them to madness, self-destruction, and, in certain cases, even suicide. This furor is like the elegiac lover’s. Against it, diatribe had thought up an effective remedy: identifying exactly that part of love that was natural and necessary. Only this part was to be satisfied; the rest (the fact that the beloved was sophisticated, cultivated, elegant, and also difficult, capricious, voluble, spoiled) were only useless complications and reasons for delighted unhappiness. Love was to be reduced to pure physiology.25

25. The manias of the adulterer, who prefers risks and difficulties in love, were a special target for diatribe’s satire. A favorite scene of this satirical literature (cf. Hor. Sat. 1.2.127ff.) was that of the husband who returns unexpectedly and
There is no doubt that when Horace satirized the follies of love, he took pleasure, in the spirit of diatribe, in caricaturing the elegiac type of lover. For the occasion, Horace freely translated an epigram of Callimachus into Latin verses to provide the refrain dear to these insatiable fools: "Like the hunter who pursues the hare in the snow and does not catch it when it is within reach, so is the lover who says, 'Meus est amor huic similis: nam / transuolat in medio posita et fugientia captat'" (Serm. 1.2.107f.). And it is this same epigram of Callimachus that supplies Ovid (in a poem of the Amores whose sole purpose is to draw up the code of the perfect amatory relationship) with the motto that can emblematically represent the torment of the elegiac form of love: "Quod sequitur, fugio; quod fugit, ipse sequor" (2.19.36).

But the therapeutic aspects of diatribe's preachings and the new art of escaping from love also agree on a fundamental principle: that sufferings and hardships arise from a defective perception of reality. Because the stultus is blind, he does not see the things of the world for what they really are and upon this error he builds his unhappiness. Within this type of error, diatribe had already identified the specific, voluntary blindness that afflicts the lover: If he was to be brought back to a "natural" way of love, he had to be taught to open his eyes to the truth and to look beyond appearances. For anyone wishing to teach people how to be healed from elegiac love, abandoning so well-tested a therapy would not have been prudent. How could Ovid forget that Lucretius had argued against obstructing the cure of love by self-deception, and that he had also polemically satirized the blindness of those who wish not to see defects of spirit and body in the person they love, preferring to hide them behind a large repertoire of gentle nicknames? (see Sommariva 1980; Labate 1984: 187ff.). So the Remedies against Love repeat that lesson; indeed, they increase the therapeutic dosages. Not only will the self-deceptions of euphemism be banished ("Open your eyes and call the defects by their real names") but every real virtue will have to be turned into a defect ("If she is shapely, call her fat; if dark, call her black; if slender, call her skin and bones; if she is not a rustic, say that she is immoral"). This is one of the points in which the Ovid of the Remedies seems most explicitly to undo the teachings of his Ars. In the Ars, the euphemisms of love ("If she is fat, call her shapely") were recommended to anyone who wanted to make himself loved, but that was a technique of courtship and the risk of

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surprises his wife with her lover—the same scene which so pleased the public of mimes. J. C. McKeown (1979) furnishes testimonies and interesting texts (but they are connected with one another by a purely mechanical relation of derivation, without any real interest for the different functions which the different literary codes exercise on the individual themes and motifs in question).
slipping into self-deception was merely a corollary the poet scrupu-
lously warned his disciples against (Ars am. 2.647ff.). Both the Ars and
the Remedia treasure the lesson of diatribe for which Lucretius had
been the spokesman: Lovers are blind to the point of being ridiculous.
From this proposition follow two opposite possibilities: If one wishes
to show that one is in love, one must accept the consequence of seem-
ing blind and ridiculous (the Ars); if one wishes to free oneself from
love, one must open one’s eyes wide, and perhaps even see too much
(the Remedia).

If Ovid were an “orthodox” elegiac poet, there would be reason to
accuse him of connivance with diatribe, the traditional enemy of the
ideology of elegy, but this surprising agreement is another obvious sign
of his systematic tendency to overcome the closure of the elegiac code,
to relativize its characteristics within a wider horizon of discourse and
thus, in the final analysis, to destroy its identity. The Remedies against
Love present themselves as a cure for those in love, but in fact they
function as a remedy against a form of literature.

Translated by Glenn W. Most.

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