Latin Elegy and Narratology

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In modern scholarship, the main critical focus of Ovid’s *Amores* has been on issues of gender, genre, the “reality”/“textuality” of the mistress, and on its pervasive metacritical content. Through a reading of *Amores* 1.5, this essay draws heavily on these insights in order to explore what the nature of elegiac narrative might be and how it might differ from the ways in which more traditionally narrative genres tell stories.

At first sight it can be said that there are two overarching stories—inter-twined and inseparable—in the *Amores*: that of the poet struggling to write and battling with Cupid in his search for an adequate subject matter for the new genre (especially in *Am* 1.1 and 1.2), and that of the affair between the lover and his mistress—though we may decide to read this last story as a mirror of the first. Yet these stories can rarely be envisioned as a linear chronology with a clear teleology. This essay suggests that the *Amores* (and Latin love elegy more generally) narrates stories through a succession of snapshots without explicit links and that it is the task of the reader to connect the pictures and imagine the events that operate as transitions. He/she must “fill in the gaps” between the frames of these snapshots, demanding a high level of collaboration from the reader in the development of the story line. Moreover, I will suggest that *Amores* 1.5, the first full presentation of Corinna, inscribes the program of elegiac narrative in her fragmented body, thus acting as a powerful and programmatic figure for the fragmented and “chopped-up” narratives of Ovid’s elegiac body of poetry.

1. Various critics deny the possibility of a chronology in love elegy. See in particular Veyne (1988). On the subject of this lack of continuity in the ‘stories’ of elegy see also Fränkel (1945), 26; Boucher (1965), 401; and the introduction to this volume. Contrast these views with Holzberg’s (2002), esp. 16–17.
1. “It is not a story at all . . .”: The Elements of Narrative

Most attempts at defining narrative envision it as a succession of events. Already Aristotle in his *Poetics* introduces the concept (*pragma*) and affirms that “tragedy is the imitation of an action and is enacted by men in action. . . . The imitation of the action is the Plot . . . the combination of events” (vi.6). The actions imitated are the basic events of the plot. Gérard Genette also refers to narrative as a succession of events and as “the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events.” Gerald Prince, in his dictionary of narratology, in his turn, defines narrative as “the recounting (as product and process, object and act, structure and structuration) of one or more real or fictive events communicated by one, two or several (more or less overt) narrators to one, two or several (more or less overt) narratees.” In the same vein, Mieke Bal states:

> A *narrative text* is a text in which an agent relates (‘tells’) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof. A *story* is a fabula that is presented in a certain manner. A *fabula* is a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors. An *event* is the transition from one state to another. *Actors* are agents that perform actions. They are not necessarily human. *To act* is defined here as to cause or to experience an event. (emphasis in original)

As we observe in these definitions, the concept of event is tightly linked to the idea of narrative. Of course, the episodes narrated in the *Amores* happen in a certain time and space, and several interrelated events form the outlines of stories. Yet, the concept of event, though key to the development of a plot or fabula, is perhaps the most problematic one to work with in Latin elegy and thus it will be a central concern of this essay. Bal defines

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2. See Hutton’s (1982), 50, translation with notes on p. 90.
5. Bal (1997), 5. Bal (1997), 6–7 draws a distinction between story and fabula based on “the difference between the sequence of events and *the way in which* these events are presented” (6; emphasis in original)
6. James (2003), 27 asserts that “Elegy qualifies as narrative” and that the most important narratological concepts in dealing with elegy are character and language rather than plot.
7. Veyne (1988) believes that elegy has no events, or actions: “it is a poetry without action, with no plot leading to a denouement or maintaining any tension.” (51). . . . This is not the story of a single Ego, it is not a story at all.” (52).
an event as “the transition from one state to another, caused or experienced by actors. The word ‘transition’ stresses the fact that an event is ‘a process, an alteration.’” Yet, as Bal observes, it is not always easy to recognize what sentences in a text represent an event. Not every verb of action or apparent action necessarily constitutes an event. Bal mentions at least three elements to take into account in defining whether an action is a functional event of the fabula: change, choice, and confrontation. According to the criterion of change, it is only in a series that events become meaningful for the fabula and an action is an event only if it produces a change in the narrative. A good example is seen in Am. 1.1. Ovid is about to write epic, but Cupid steals a foot and this is the event that produces a change in the narrative and makes the poet compose elegy. Barthes distinguishes between functional and nonfunctional events in that the latter open up a choice between two possibilities. “Once a choice is made, it determines the subsequent course of events in the developments of the fabula.” This can be seen in Am. 2.13 where Corinna has made the choice to end her pregnancy. This choice drives the events of the story in a certain direction, which would be entirely different if she had chosen to have the baby. Ovid would thus have written a completely different poem. Hendricks believes that “the structure of the fabula is determined by confrontation.” Thus in every functional event every actor or groups of actors must be confronted by another. At the beginning of Am 1.12, for example, we see an event which conveys a confrontation between the poet and his mistress. His tablets have been returned and his invitation to meet has been rejected. The wills of the lover and the mistress clash and this gives place to the poem.

This succession of events that forms a fabula is told by a narrator from a certain narrative position. After Bal and Genette, this very important idea in narratology is now referred to as focalization, a technical term derived from photography and film, which more traditionally was known as “point of view” or “narrative perspective.” In Bal’s words, “whenever events are presented, they are always presented from within a certain ‘vision.’ A point of view is chosen, a certain way of seeing things, a certain angle, whether ‘real’ historical facts are concerned or fictitious events.” “Focalization is,
then, the relation between the vision and that which is ‘seen,’ perceived.”  

Since “description” (“a reproduction of what a character sees” [37]) is the “privileged site of focalization” (36), both concepts are tightly intertwined. A passage where the descriptive function (ascribing features to objects) is dominant is, accordingly, descriptive. Descriptions in general, and especially in the realistic tradition, have often been considered problematic and in a sense, antinarrative, as they are seen to “interrupt the line of the fabula.”

Our next challenge will then be to analyze, from a narratological perspective, a poem such as Am. 1.5 where scant events are interwoven in a canvas of (heavily focalized) visual descriptions. Is there a story at all in Am. 1.5? Many of the poems of Latin elegy set scenes, present situations, but do not convey a story in the traditional way. In this strict sense, Veyne may be right, and elegy conveys “no story at all.” Yet, once we have finished each poem and the whole collection, we are able to tell what happened, we have a sense of a chain of events and developments from beginning to end. In this sense, the case of elegy challenges narratological views and the centrality of the event as the guiding element of the story.

If a “narrative,” as critics propose, is a succession of states linked by events, the transitions and links between those states become very relevant in typically narrative genres like epic. In the Aeneid, for example, we see that after leaving the underworld in book 6, Aeneas sails and anchors his ships at Caieta. The beginning of book 7 tells us how Aeneas performed funeral rites there and then sailed away from it. There is a clear mention of narrative events that join states. In Ovid’s Metamorphoses, where a succession of different and somewhat disjointed myths is presented, Ovid strives to forge narrative links between diverse stories, even when these narrative hinges seem a bit strained. For example, the episodes of Daphne and Io are linked only by the fact that their fathers were river gods whose daughters were raped. Io’s father does not show up to the meeting of rivers that come to console and congratulate Peneus (Met. 1.568–87). This is not quite the case in elegy where we have fragments of short narratives, which often lack links between them. For example, in Am. 1.6 we see the lover trying to open the mistress’s doors with his song and in the next poem we see a man tortured and ashamed for having been physically violent with his puella. But how has this happened?

15. Bal (1997), 37. Bal (1997), 37, mentions how in the Republic Plato tried to rewrite parts of the Homeric epics, getting rid of descriptions, so that they would be “truly” narrative. Even Homer attempted to disguise his descriptions by making them narrative, as when he includes the description of Achilles’ shield while narrating its making. See also Genette (1988), 93–94 on descriptive pause.
What has Corinna done? Or how and why did the poet become violent? What is the event that is missing here which triggered the new, changed emotional state in the lover? We are not told by the elegiac narrator and it is left up to the reader to imagine and invent these transitions in the love affair. Likewise, in Am. 1.14 Corinna seems to have lost all her hair. Yet we are not told how or why and neither Am. 1.13 nor 1.15 makes any mention of this. However, the use of the imperfect in Am. 1.14.1–2 seems to imply previous events to this state of Corinna’s “baldness,” in which Ovid kept confronting her about not dying her hair so much: dicebam ‘medicare tuos desiste capillos! / tingere quam possis, iam tibi nulla coma est,’ thus revealing yet not narrating previous events, a previous history. Thus, each poem of the collection can be seen as a snapshot, a state, a captured moment in the life of the love affair. Because we are not told or shown many significant parts of the tale and because many poems are not directly addressed to “us” and assume other internal audiences, we readers frequently find ourselves as spies and almost secretive voyeurs of the whole affair. We are told and shown part of the story, but the rest we must imagine because we are unable to “catch sight” of it in its entirety—like a voyeur who, with eye pressed to the window, keyhole, or door crack, is able to witness only partial glimpses of the scene unfolding within. This feature, so clearly seen in Amores 1.5, I will suggest, is a central trait of elegiac narrative.

2. Amores 1.5: Story and Image

Amores 1.5 tells the story of a sexual encounter between the poet/amator and his puella, now for the first time named Corinna, one early afternoon. The fabula of the poem could be summarized as follows: the poet/lover reclines on his couch, Corinna comes, the lover tears her tunic, she seems to struggle, but then surrenders, she stands naked before the lover’s eyes. He embraces her. The narrator hints that they have made love, though he doesn’t narrate it. They both lie together in repose. This is, in short, what we could call the sequence of events in the poem although, as we shall see, the status of these ostensible “events” in the fabula of Amores 1.5 can be brought into question.

The figure of Corinna is usually recognized as a metaphor for the genre of elegy. Maria Wyke, among others, argues that “we should read Cynthia, Delia, Nemesis, and Corinna as textual bodies bearing both poetic and

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16. For gaze and voyeurism in elegy see Buchan (1995) and Greene (1999).
political meanings” and that “the body of a woman may be read uncon-
tentiously as the anatomy of a text.” Thus the corpus of his mistress is his
literary corpus. She is both “girlfriend and literary project.” If Corinna is
elegy and in her body we can read the “anatomy of a text,” then her “narrative” description must tell us something about what the “anatomy” of elegiac
narrative constitutes. I will here focus on the visual presentation of Corinna
in order to see how the model for the type of narrative that we find in the
collections of Roman elegy is inscribed symbolically in her body itself.

Ecce, Corinna venit. Look, Corinna comes! This is apparently the central
event of the poem and is narrated in a highly visual way. Yet, as Bal points
out, not every verb of action necessarily conveys an event. Should we take
this venit as an event or simply as the beginning of Corinna’s visual presenta-
tion? Is she actually coming through the door or has the narrator/focalizer
simply focused on her? Venit, as we will see, is a verb that indicates the idea
of visual appearance as well as the act of coming. Under Bal’s criterion of
“change” her coming/appearance could be considered an event since the situa-
tion is altered with her presence, but not under Hendricks’s “confrontation”
clause, where two opposed elements are needed, because the act of coming
or appearing does not seem to have an opposing actor. As we can observe in
this example, whether an act is a functional event of the narrative or not is
a matter of interpretation and depends on the reader’s perspective and the
narrative context.

Buchan sees in the name Corinna not only an allusion to the Greek word
for girl, “kore,” but also to its meaning “pupil” (of the eye). Thus he proposes
that “in 1.5, the punning on pupil suggests the total identification of poet
and beloved: Corinna simply is what Ovid gazes upon, as she stands directly
in front of his eye.” While this interpretation is certainly sharp and thought
provoking, it somehow obliterates the gender struggles that one may see in
the poem; the fact that there is a male who controls the gaze and “reifies”
(perhaps oppressively) the image of the woman. We as readers, focalizing
with the narrator, are asked to look with the narrator’s eye (Ecce). Ovid thus
frames the narrative as if through the lens of a camera. Ecce can also be seen
to act as a visual frame and thus to direct our view of what will happen

17. Wyke (2002a), 119 and 124. On Corinna as a fictional creation out of parts see also Liveley
18. Keith (1994), 32. For a thorough discussion of the equivalences between Corinna and the
poetic principles of Elegy see Keith (1994). For pioneer work on the connections between female flesh
and literary poetics see Wyke (2002a). Also on the ‘literariness’ of Corinna see Holzberg (2002), 49.
in this scene. *Ecce Corinna venit* has (at least) a twofold meaning, then. Within the fabula of *Am.* 1.5, Corinna comes—after a long delay of eight lines—as the expected *puella*. Within the larger narrative of the collection, this is the first time that her name is mentioned and thus this “spectacular” arrival announces, in a metanarrative way, the character that will be the central literary subject of the *Amores*. But her sudden apparition may surely also be seen as the arrival of inspiration, of the poet’s Muse. Hinds, who supports the idea that Corinna’s sudden appearance is suggestive of a divine apparition, remarks: “Another circumstantial hint may be felt in the *manner* of Corinna’s arrival. No knock at the door, no explanation of her sudden presence, half clothed (*tunica velata recincta*), in Ovid’s chamber: just (1.5.9) *ecce, Corinna venit*. Simple narrative economy—or a hint also of dream-like epiphany?” Whether, with Hinds and Nicoll, we decide to believe that her entrance has divine overtones, or, with Greene, that the passage does not resemble the entrance of a deity; we observe that Hinds notices a certain absence in the narrative. He wonders whether it is “narrative economy” and points to the many missing details (or events, we should say) that lead us to her appearance.

Immediately upon Corinna’s entrance to Ovid’s bedroom, to the narrative, and to the poem, we focus on the image of her body—she is loosely draped in a tunic girded around—and then on her parted hair hanging down her neck. It is the eye of the “camera,” again which, in a very haptic way begins to trace this segment of the story on Corinna’s body, moving

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21. Just as “metalanguage is a language in which one speaks of another language” (Nikolopoulos [2004], 31–32), I use metanarrative here to indicate the author’s references to the act of narrating. For other understandings of the word see Nikolopoulos (2004), 31–32.

22. Papanghelis (1989), 57, draws a possible comparison between the time of Hesiod’s encounter with the Muses and Corinna’s arrival in the poem. He discusses the *puella* as poetic inspiration.

23. Hinds (1988), 10. Nicoll (1977), 46 also suggests that “With *ecce Corinna venit* Ovid again reverts to a familiar feature of the Virgilian apparition—the dramatic epiphany introduced by *ecce*.” See also Nicoll for connections between epic apparitions in Virgil and *Am.* 1.5. As Keith (1994), 30, notes, there are many links between the figure of Elegy as she appears in *Am.* 3.1 and Corinna in *Am.* 1.5. Elegia recalls with *tunica velata soluta* (*Am.* 3.1.51) the way Corinna appears in *Am.* 1.5: *tunica velata recincta* (*Am.* 1.5.9). *Rara* and *tenuissima* are also usually applied to the “finely-crafted poetry the Latin elegists championed.” Hinds (1988) states that the goddess-like Corinna anticipates Elegia, who later enters the *Amores* as a goddess.

24. Greene (1998), 80 notes how the poem is full of binary oppositions: the window is partly opened and partly closed, the hair is parted. Yet the oppositions represent further ambiguities. For example, the loose tunic suggests a “laxity of virtue,” but the parted hair suggests “modesty and restraint.” Holzberg (2002) points out that “an elegant coiffure also emblematizes minor poetry in the Alexandrian tradition” (52) and that hair imagery occurs frequently in Roman literary theory (53).

25. Alois Riegl proposed the dichotomy *optic* and *haptic*. One can read a picture haptically (by touch) or optically (“according to the pure vectoriality of outlines”), or in a dialectical combination of both. In a haptic way the eye is considered a “tactile creature, an agent of human contact.” See Gandelman (1991), chapter 1, quoted on p. ix.
from her body up to her head. Then the narrator tells that he tore her tunic away (deripui tunicam). So from Corinna’s entrance we move to another event in the narrative that initiates the lovemaking. The “state” of Corinna’s frozen picture (Corinna wrapped in her tunic) that the viewer/narrator has framed for us, is linked to the next “state”: Corinna without the tunic. She responds with a new event. The puella playfully struggles to be covered by the tunic. While Corinna struggled as one who did not want to be overcome, we are told, she indeed gave herself up. These are clearly narrative moments, events that satisfy the three conditions of change, choice, and confrontation.

Lines 17 and 18 bring us back to the narrator’s focalization and the cinematic/photographic presentation of Corinna, centered once more on her body: Ut stetit ante oculos posito velamine nostros, / in toto nusquam corpore menda fuit. She “stood,” a verb that indicates a state rather than an event. Stetit ante oculos will act as the visual frame in which the description to follow is enclosed. We see and focalize with the narrator’s oculos. Toto corpore is important since it makes us view Corinna’s body as a whole, perhaps hinting at the entire corpus of the elegiac story, which later will be broken up into smaller parts. Likewise, in view of the assimilation of Corinna’s body to the body of poetry, it is worth recalling that, as Keith reminds us, menda is often used as a metaphor for literary faults. “By employing the diction of Latin literary criticism to characterize Corinna’s corpus, Ovid implicitly conflates the physique of his elegiac girlfriend and the poetics espoused in his elegiac collection.” And this poetics must include indications of how stories will be told in the genre.

3. The “Chopped-up” Body

What happens next is a perfect example of narrative focalization. We know that Corinna could be a whole person and that one could look at different parts of her body in a different order. Yet, we are directed to focalize with the viewer/narrator and follow his visual/narrative order: from head to toe the narrator will “chop” her body and delay the narrative in various body

26. While Veyne (1988), 52, recognizes the strong and “frozen” visual power of images in elegy, he finds this “antinarrative”: “In some instances their immobility paralyzes each elegy taken for itself, and the poet hesitates, caught between the anecdote and the tableau.”

27. Ovid himself uses emendo to describe the revision of his poetry in exile. See Ovid, Tr. 1.7.4 and 4.10. For more on this question see Keith (1994), 31 and n.19. Holzberg (2002), 49 observes that in Ovid’s case the Callimachean tradition which advises that the poet should carefully “file and polish his texts” is at play.

If the body of the *puella* is a reflection of the body of elegiac poetry, including its narrative aspects, then the way the body is presented can also be seen as a representation of the way in which stories in *Amores* are told. Indeed, there are virtually no true narrative events in this section, and these few lines with their focus on Corinna’s body, I suggest, emblematize the mechanisms of elegiac narrative.

As Greene has clearly shown, “Corinna is a spectacle, the fixed object of the *amator*’s ravishing gaze.” The narrator’s way of visually dissecting Corinna’s body parts can be assimilated to “close-ups” of women in films or to the technique of “body chopping” used in photography. In the narrative of *Amores* 1.5, a series of snapshots takes place and we see fragments of Corinna in successive pictures, where even the series of *Q* words give, for a modern reader, the hint of an onomatopoeic clicking of a camera. *Quos umeros* (10) visually focuses on her shoulders. It is worth here noting that there is no head in this framed description (before only her hair, a locus of sensuality, is mentioned), and thus, no subjectivity and identity of the *puella*. The narrator has visually beheaded her. We move then to her arms, which the narrator has seen and touched (*vidi tetigique*) and with him the reader experiences this imaginary (and haptic) viewing and touching. The next snapshot is of her breasts, which, the narrator tells us, were fit for touching, and under them, the flat stomach. In *apta premi* the narrator seems to imply a general condition of Corinna’s breasts, which leads us to imagine that this is not the first time he has seen her naked and touched her *papillae*. Again we see here that the narrator alludes to previous events yet he does not explicitly tell us about them. This is, however, our first encounter with Corinna. Then, the ideological perspective of the narrator intrudes in the way that he focalizes on her body. While the “eye of the camera” was up to now presenting top-to-bottom, frontal snapshots of the *puella*’s body, he now turns aside to avoid offering us a glimpse of her pudenda. While it seems to have been decorous and acceptable in classical poetry to talk about women’s breasts, the genitalia seem to have been off limits and thus, the poet is forced to use unlikely euphemisms that do not follow the graphic

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29. Regarding the dismemberment of the body as an action of delay in the narrative one can recall one of the versions of Apsyrtus’ death, which delays Medea’s father’s pursuit of his daughter. Greene well recognizes that Corinna “is all parts—dismembered and fragmented by the *amator*’s controlling gaze.” See Greene (1998), 77. Wyke (2002b), 116 gives a thorough analysis of the presentation of the female as fragmented body parts in Propertius 2.3.

30. Greene (1998), 82. James (2003), 174 also refers to the “fetishistic attention to Corinna’s own body parts (at least those below the neck) in *Amores* 1.5.”

31. For the comparison with close-ups in film see Greene (1998), 82. For “body chopping,” used particularly in advertising, see Adams (2003).

32. For Corinna’s dehumanization and lack of ‘head’ here see Greene (1998), 83.
and clear terms used for the other body parts (umeros, papillae, venter, femur, etc.). The linear description from head to toe is momentarily disrupted and the viewer’s vertical gaze is forced to turn to an undefined “side.” Or is it? Does the viewer really gaze at the latus or does he rather stay put where the genitalia should be (in the gap between venter and femur)? This second possibility would exemplify the role of the reader in elegy. He should stay focused where there is a gap in the narrative and fill it with his imagination. Then the narrator continues to mention Corinna’s youthful thigh.

In principle, we ought to consider the description of Corinna’s body as “antinarrative,” a series of “states” without linking events or at least with very weak ones. However, her body is the prelude to lovemaking and entices the reader/viewer to continue reading/looking. The presentation of her body is an ekphrasis or framed description, the symbolic frame being given by Ecce, Corinna, which focuses and frames our imaginary vision. In classical poetry, an ekphrasis is usually a description of a work of art and thus ekphrases are often loaded with metacritical references to the poet’s own artistic ideology. They are a mise-en-abyme that mirrors the author’s poetics. An excellent example is the tapestry of Arachne in Ovid’s Metamorphoses 6, showing gods transforming into other creatures to rape women. However, in a more general sense, we could have ekphrases of natural events, such as the description of Diana’s grove in Metamorphoses 3. These framed descriptions can convey a powerful metacritical meaning. The brief description of Corinna’s body that follows is an ekphrasis that presents metapoetic views about the way elegy narrates its stories. The presentation of Corinna’s body in snapshots reflects how elegy also provides snapshots of stories rather than one continuous and well-articulated fabula.

4. The Final Gap

With typically Ovidian humor, after the amator has described individual parts of the girl’s body, he questions why he should tell us about each of

33. It is somewhat disconcerting that the most thorough commentator of the Amores, McKeown (1989), perhaps prudishly, avoids any comment about latus, thus reflecting in his commentary the same gap in the narrative that the text proposes.

34. For a good general discussion of ekphrasis see Elsner (1995), 23–27. In Latin epic ekphrases of natural events or persons (very commonly women) are often introduced with phrases involving some form of the verb sum and a noun that denotes place or environment. Ovid himself uses this type of formula profusely to introduce ekphrases in Met. 3.1.155; 3.708–9; 5.385, 409–10; 9.334; 11.229; and 5.586 which is particularly relevant since the narrator begins Arethusa’s ekphrasis with aestus erat as frame and then moves on to the visual description of the landscape. For more on ekphrasis in Metamorphoses see Salzman-Mitchell (2005). I believe that Ecce, Corinna! also serves this function as its meaning is indeed equal to saying “Here is Corinna!”
them: *singula quid referam? nil non laudabile vidi*. The narrator tells only in part about the *singula* of Corinna’s body, the rest, the reader must imagine herself/himself. As with *latum*, we find here a gap in the narrative. One can draw a symbolic parallel between the *corpus* of elegiac narrative and the body of Corinna, on which the story of this afternoon of lovemaking is inscribed. There are parts of Corinna’s body that will not be “told,” and which the reader is invited to imagine and complete. These series of snapshots of Corinna’s “chopped” body, a series of states without transitional events, tells us something important and programmatic about the way Latin elegy constructs its narratives. Elegy’s narrative has a tendency to fragmentation and lack of explicit transitions. Each poem is truly a snapshot, a tableau or moment in a series, a state in the life of the love affair.

After the framed description of Corinna’s body, which has somewhat delayed, yet at the same time intensified, the climax of the narrative, we return to the thin events of the fabula: the narrator pressed her naked against his body (24). But instead of moving on to further details about the love-making scene, he claims that he will not bother to tell us what happened, since “who doesn’t know the rest?” Every linear narrative strives for an “end,” a climax, and both Barthes and Todorov propose that: “narrative is essentially the articulation of a set of verbs. These verbs articulate the pressure and drive of desire. Desire is the wish for the end, for fulfillment, but fulfillment must be delayed so that we can understand it in relation to origin and to desire itself.”

In Latin elegy the goal, often frustrated, is to achieve sexual intimacy with the beloved and the relation between text and reader can be viewed in erotic terms. Yet, very few poems actually expose this desired moment. From the very beginning we envision that the goal of *Am.* 1.5 is lovemaking. We have here a new gap in the fabula, the intense action expected in the intercourse scene is missing. Again, the narrator places the command of the narrative in the hands of the reader. In this, reader and narrator collapse and it is now the reader who must bring together in his/her mind the events of

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35. Greene (1998), 83, very interestingly remarks that Corinna’s scattered body parts only appear to have meaning when they are assimilated to the body/*corpus* of the narrator. She is thus *his* body, his text.

36. See Brooks (1992), 111.

37. Based on Barthes’s concept of “passion of (for) meaning,” Brooks (1992) conceives the “reading of plot as a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text. . . . Desire is in this view like Freud’s notion of Eros, a force including sexual desire but larger and more polymorphous . . .” (37). For more on Brooks’s model of “textual erotics” see Kennedy’s chapter in this volume. On this point one can recall *Am.* 2.10.35–38, where the poet/lover conflates the ideas of sexual climax with completion of a work of art. See Keith (1994), 37.
the story. The narrator makes us work, and collaborate, and more than that, he frustrates our desire as well. While he has shown us the girl and will now enjoy her and the “climax” of his narrative, the reader is not allowed to do so, not even as a participating voyeur. While the “eye of the narrator” had allowed and encouraged us to follow every detail of the puella’s body/story, the reader is now left alone, and deprived of the pleasure of at least viewing the scene and partaking in the narrator’s pleasure. Just as in the rest of Latin elegy, we are rarely allowed to see the lovemaking scenes. Instead, the narrator jumps to the afterthoughts: Lassi requievimus ambo. “We both lay exhausted.” While the poet/narrator may be peacefully lying exhausted, yet satisfied, the reader isn’t since he or she has missed the climatic event. The poem concludes with some wishful thoughts for the future of many more occasions like this to come: proveniat medii sic mihi saepe dies! “May middays like this come to me often!,” thus closing the ring of the poem and returning to the idea of midday as a happy setting for erotic pleasure, mentioned in Am. 1.1.1 (aestus erat, mediamque dies exegerat horam). At the same time, this closure can be understood not only as the wish for many more middays like this, but also, in a programmatic way, for many more poems like this—poems/love stories in which there are narrative holes and in which not all events will be told.

5. Elegy and Narrativity

In my analysis of Amores 1.5 I have observed that the fabula was composed of events that linked various “states.” These “states” were presented as snapshots, yet the events were often not explicit and the reader had to collaborate in the completion of the story by filling the gaps of the narrative. Let us now move for a moment to the beginning of the story of the Amores. Am. 1.1 openly displays much of what Ovid’s poetic program in the collection will be. The book begins:

arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam
edere, materiam conveniente modis.
pars erat inferior versus—risisse Cupido
dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.

I was preparing to compose weapons and violent battles with their heavy

38. On the frustration of the audience at this point see Huntingford (1981), 110.
measure, a subject appropriate to the meter. The second line was unequal (to the first)—it is said that Cupid laughed and stole a foot. (Am. 1.1.1–4)

The poet was preparing to sing of arms and violent wars. *Arma* and *violenta bella* refer to the most “narrative” genre in antiquity: epic. *Arma*, of course, is an appropriation of the first word of Virgil’s epic poem.\(^{39}\) Arms and violent wars immediately make us think about the stories of the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid* in particular. Dactylic hexameter, as the poet mentions, is the meter appropriate for these essentially narrative poems. But Cupid laughs and steals a foot. We have a gap in the meter—where we had six feet, we now have five. Something essential and appropriate for narrative has been disturbed and altered: the hexameter. We can then propose that the many gaps and lack of events in elegiac narrative stem, to start with, from a gap in the meter. The missing foot that created the appropriate environment for a linear and well-articulated narrative is now missing a linking element—thus making the meter conducive to a narrative with “holes.”

It is then logical that in *Am.* 3.1 Elegia limps, as one of her “feet” is shorter than the other (*pes illi longior alter erat, Am.* 3.1.8). The narrator even recognizes that there is a fault, a certain lack, in her, but this “fault” makes her even more attractive (to read): *et pedibus vitium causa decoris erat* (*Am.* 3.1.10). In this poem the poet hears the speeches of Tragedy and Elegy and thus he appears as model reader of both genres. Yet, when he “reads” Elegy he struggles to decipher her meaning: “*altera si memini, limis subrist ocellis—/ fallax, an in dextra myrtea virga fuit?*” “If I remember, the other cast sidelong eyes at me—am I mistaken, or was a branch of myrtle in her hand?” The reader of Elegy seems to doubt and has to make efforts to uncover her entire sense. There is something in her hand, and the reader believes it to be a myrtle branch, yet he himself recognizes that this is his own recollection, his interpretation. We see here the reader at work, filling the gaps of the story. As mentioned before, Corinna herself is here closely identified with the genre of Elegy and its elusive nature (*Am.* 3.1.49–52). Just as the reader needs to complete and fill in the gaps in the body of elegiac narrative when he strives to complete in his mind and his recollection the details of Elegy in *Am.* 3.1, he must also fill in the gaps in the erotic narrative inscribed on Corinna’s body in *Am.* 1.5.

As we have seen, important critics of Latin elegy have argued against any possible narrative content in the genre. It should be clear by now that I

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39. See Stroh (1971), 144ff. and Kennedy (1993), who thinks that *arma* is less of a false start than we may think, given all the erotic connotations of love–war. For a discussion of *arma* see also Buchan (1995), 54–56.
disagree with them. Instead, using the narratological concept of event, central to the conformation of a fabula, I have shown how elegy indeed constructs stories. However, it does so by omitting many events and thus leaving gaps in the narrative. The narrator provides snapshots, frozen states with weak links between them. This does not mean that the events have disappeared, but rather that they are required to be imagined by the reader, who therefore strongly participates in the construction of the story, filling the gaps out of snapshots of a love affair.