

## THE LITERARY ‘SUCCESSOR’: OVIDIAN METAPOETRY AND METAPHOR\*

### I

In his *Tristia*, Ovid twice refers to literary ‘succession’ in the context of his predecessors in the genre of Latin love elegy:

his ego successi, quoniam praestantia candor  
nomina uiuorum dissimulare iubet.

To these men I succeeded,<sup>1</sup> since goodwill orders me  
to conceal the outstanding names of the living. (*Tristia* 2.467–8)

Vergilium uidi tantum: nec auara Tibullo  
tempus amicitiae fata dedere meae  
(successor fuit hic tibi, Galle, Propertius illi;  
quartus ab his serie temporis ipse fui).

Virgil I only saw; nor did the greedy fates to Tibullus  
grant the opportunity of friendship with me  
(Tibullus was successor to you, Gallus, and Propertius to him;  
I myself was fourth from these in the sequence of time). (*Tr.* 4.10.51–4)

The notion of the literary ‘successor’ is now such a commonplace that no illustrations are here required, yet its very ubiquity may lie behind a failure to explore such vocabulary fully.

Scholars have usually interpreted *succedo* and *successor* in these passages as referring to the later elegists ‘coming after’ or ‘succeeding’ in a simple chronological sense (*OLD* 6);<sup>2</sup> one of Ovid’s models for *Tr.* 2’s account of literary

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<sup>1</sup> All translations are my own. In addition to referring to Ovid’s elegiac predecessors, treated at *Tr.* 2.445–66 (Gallus, 445–6, Tibullus, 447–64, and Propertius, 465–6), *his ego successi* (*Tr.* 2.467) also portrays Ovid as successor to the entire tradition (as *tot*, 469, stresses) of erotic Greco-Roman literature, with authors and texts listed as precedents for Ovid’s own verses from 363 onwards: cf. P.J. Davis, *Ovid and Augustus: A Political Reading of Ovid’s Erotic Poems* (London, 2006), 7.

<sup>2</sup> P.E. Knox, ‘Milestones in the career of Tibullus’, *CQ* 55 (2005), 204–16, has recently suggested that this simple chronological sense is complicated by the order of the elegists given at *Tr.* 4.10.53–4, which disrupts the sequence (traditional among modern scholars) of Gallus, Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid. Knox accordingly argues for a redating of the publication of Tibullus 1 to before that of Propertius 1 to fit this Ovidian ‘evidence’. Such a redating is, however, unnecessary: the likely explanation for the order Ovid adopts here is that he lists his

history, Horace's *Ars poetica*,<sup>3</sup> offers a parallel: *successit uetus his* [*sc.* tragedians] *comoedia* ('old comedy came after these men', *Ars P.* 281).<sup>4</sup> Peter Knox,<sup>5</sup> however, plausibly detects in both *Tristia* passages the metaphor of 'one who follows in office' (*OLD successor a; succedo* 5a; cf. *Pont.* 4.9.58, where *successor* is used in the context of the consulship); suggesting that 'this metaphor appears to be unique to Ovid in such a context', he notes that it is in line with Ovidian use of legal and technical terminology.<sup>6</sup> The vocabulary of 'succession' in these passages, whether it is interpreted chronologically or with the technical implications which Knox spells out, therefore helps Ovid to trace his elegiac heritage as he gives the reader of his own elegies a lesson in literary history.

Nevertheless, more remains to be said on this topic. In this article, I probe Ovid's use of *succedo* and cognates, and argue that Ovid employs such vocabulary metapoetically in other contexts where issues of literary history are at stake; its use in passages with an explicit interest in literary history should encourage us to search for such point elsewhere. Furthermore, returning in the final section to the two *Tristia* passages with which this article began, I suggest that Ovid's use of this vocabulary activates a metaphor with important implications for the *Tristia* poems in which it occurs and which also makes a broader generic point.

## II

Alessandro Barchiesi has already noted that Ovid hints at his position as the literary heir to Callimachus with the vocabulary of succession at *Heroides* 21.145, *succedat epistula pomo* ('let a letter follow an apple');<sup>7</sup> Ovid self-reflexively alludes to the way in which this epistolary poem follows Callimachus in telling of the love of Acontius and Cydippe,<sup>8</sup> as *Heroides* 20 and 21, an exchange of letters between Acontius and Cydippe, revisit Callimachus, *Aetia* fr. 67–75 Pf.

elegiac predecessors in the order of their *deaths*: see e.g. R. Maltby, *Tibullus: Elegies. Text, Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge, 2002), 39. Knox 206 n. 9 rejects this interpretation, which is, however, supported by explicit evocation of the lives (and deaths) of poets in both of our *Tristia* passages (cf. *Tr.* 2.468 *uiuorum* and the reference to Tibullus' premature death at *Tr.* 4.10.51–2). My forthcoming commentary on *Tr.* 2 treats further problems in Knox's untenable thesis (445–68 and 463–4 nn.).

<sup>3</sup> See M. Korenjak, 'Abschiedsbriefe. Horaz' und Ovids Epistolographisches Spätwerk', *Mnemosyne* 58 (2005), 46–61 and 218–34.

<sup>4</sup> See C.O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: Ars Poetica* (Cambridge, 1971) ad loc.

<sup>5</sup> Knox (n. 2), 206 n. 10. S.G. Owen, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Tristium Liber Secundus* (Oxford, 1924) may already have suspected a legal metaphor: he translates 'Their heritage passed to me' at 115.

<sup>6</sup> See E.J. Kenney, 'Ovid and the law', *YCIS* 21 (1969), 243–63 for Ovid's use of legal terminology. Such a metaphor would also fit well with the parallels Ovid draws between himself and Augustus in both *Tristia* 2 and 4.10 (for which, see respectively my forthcoming commentary on *Tristia* 2 and J. Fairweather, 'Ovid's autobiographical poem, *Tristia* 4.10', *CQ* 37 [1987], 181–96 at 193–6): Ovid would thereby suggest to the man who bolstered his position by stressing that he was the heir of Julius Caesar that Ovid too has great predecessors, who support and justify his own poetic career.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. A. Barchiesi, 'Future reflexive: two modes of allusion and the *Heroides*', *HSPH* 95 (1993), 333–65 at 354–5; reprinted in A. Barchiesi, *Speaking Volumes: Narrative and Intertext in Ovid and other Latin Poets* (London, 2007), 105–27 at 120.

<sup>8</sup> For *epistula* to describe an individual poem from the *Heroides*, see *Ars am.*, 3.345 *uel tibi composita canietur epistula uoce* ('or let a letter be sung by you in a well-modulated voice'), with R.K. Gibson, *Ovid. Ars Amatoria III* (Cambridge, 2003), 239.

Ovid provides an early signpost marking his model in *Metamorphoses* 8.547–610, an episode with a clear debt to Callimachus, which pays homage to his unconventional miniature epic *Hecale* by bringing the great epic hero Theseus to the home and hospitality of Achelous, just as he had previously been entertained by Hecale. Lines 550–1 are heavily freighted with metapoetic force, as the host Achelous (described as *imbre tumens*, ‘swollen with rain’, 550) addresses his guest with ‘*succede meis ... inclite, tectis, | Cecropida ...*’ (‘enter my home, famous son of Cecrops ...’). The Callimachean imagery of the swollen waters of epic which precedes Achelous’ invitation,<sup>9</sup> combined with an epic patronymic marking Theseus’ fame,<sup>10</sup> invites the reader to recall the Callimachean heritage of this scene, to which *succede* is a further pointer.

Several hints of metapoetry can also be detected in *Remedia amoris* 461–2, *quid moror exemplis, quorum me turba fatigat? | successore nouo uincitur omnis amor* (‘Why should I be delayed by examples, a crowd of which tires me? Every love is conquered by a new successor.’). These lines suggest that Ovid is the literary successor to Gaius Cornelius Gallus, whose four books of *Amores* Ovid’s own *Amores* follow and surpass.<sup>11</sup> If the notion of Ovid’s *Amores* as a new love following Gallus’ *Amores* is not enough of a metapoetic signpost for the reader,<sup>12</sup> we are further encouraged to read these lines as providing poetic commentary by Ovid’s variation on the Gallan phrase *omnia uincit amor*, ‘love conquers everything’.<sup>13</sup>

Ovid’s poetic self-confidence as the heir to great predecessors is also marked in another passage where he can be seen to employ the vocabulary of succession to inscribe himself in the poetic tradition: *Metamorphoses* 15.1–2: *Quaeritur interea quis tantae pondera molis | sustineat tantoque queat succedere regi* (‘Meanwhile a man is sought who might sustain the weight of a burden so great and succeed so great a king’). While Numa proves to be the successor to King Romulus explicitly evoked by these lines, the reader might be encouraged to look for metapoetic meaning by the prominent opening position of these lines in the final book of Ovid’s epic. Such metapoetic force is not hard to find: *tantae ... molis* recalls Virgil’s similarly programmatically placed and poetically self-reflexive *tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem* (‘It was such a burden to found [write] the Roman race’, *Aen.* 1.33).<sup>14</sup> Ovid thereby suggests that he is a worthy epic successor to

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Call. *Hymn* 2.105–13. Such imagery is carried on by Callimachus’ Latin heirs alluding to pompous, bombastic epic as ‘swollen’: cf. e.g. Cat. 95.10 (the epic poet Antimachus is *tumidus*), Hor. *Epist.* 2.2.201 (Horace is not carried *tumidis uelis*, ‘on swollen sails’), and Ov. *Met.* 1.460 (*tumidum Pythona*, ‘swollen Python’, in the poem’s first properly ‘epic’, martial episode).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. F. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso: Metamorphosen, Buch VIII–IX* (Heidelberg, 1997), 172 and A.S. Hollis, *Ovid: Metamorphoses Book VIII* (Oxford, 1970), 550–1.

<sup>11</sup> Note the pluralizing effect of *omnis* applied to the singular *amor* here, thereby evoking Gallus’ title.

<sup>12</sup> The preceding hexameter is surely also open to a metapoetic interpretation: on such a reading, *quid moror exemplis, quorum me turba fatigat?* would offer comment on the apparently widespread use of mythological *exempla* in Gallus’ work (for which, see e.g. D.O. Ross, *Backgrounds to Augustan Poetry* [Cambridge, 1975], 48), and *turba* would either stress the Callimachean affiliations of both Ovid and Gallus, or reflect Ovid’s view that Gallus has pursued such *exempla* to an un-Callimachean extent, providing a model which Ovid will not follow.

<sup>13</sup> For such Gallan connotations, see Verg. *Ecl.* 10.69 (where the phrase is put in Gallus’ mouth in prominent position, concluding his speech) and (e.g.) F. Cairns, *Sextus Propertius the Augustan Elegist* (Cambridge, 2006), 107–8.

<sup>14</sup> For this line as a self-reflexive comment on Virgil’s poetic task, cf. the poetic connotations of *condere* (see *TLL* 6.153.74 ff.) and (e.g.) R. Hexter, ‘Imitating Troy: a reading of *Aeneid* 3’, 64–79 at 69 in C.G. Perckell, *Reading Virgil’s Aeneid: An Interpretive Guide* (Oklahoma, 1999).

Virgil, strong enough to take on the burden of following him in writing an epic treating Roman material; the vocabulary of succession reinforces and drives home the metapoetic point.

Epic succession is also at stake in an earlier passage from the *Metamorphoses*: in Odysseus' speech in the contest for the arms of Achilles, he attempts to present himself as Achilles' natural heir:

...quis magno melius succedat Achilli,  
quam per quem magnus Danaus successit Achilles?

...Who better should succeed to great Achilles,  
than he through whom great Achilles reinforced the Greeks? (*Met.* 13.133–4)

Ovid here plays upon the way in which the verb can refer to literary inheritance as well as its connotations of *military* reinforcement (*OLD succedo* 4 b):<sup>15</sup> the use of *succedo* in successive lines underlines the switch in sense from the former to the latter,<sup>16</sup> and 133 wittily suggests that Odysseus was successor to Achilles as the hero of a later Homeric epic. Furthermore, the repetition with polyptoton of the name Achilles at the ends of both lines emphasizes that the *Odyssey*, unlike the *Iliad*, was named after its hero, implying perhaps the superiority of epic successors to their predecessors.<sup>17</sup>

### III

The military implications of the vocabulary of succession, as discussed at the close of the previous section, would also fit our *Tristia* passages well. In both poems, Ovid primes his audience to recognize the military implications of what he says through earlier connections between literature and warfare.

*Tristia* 2.421–2, lines which introduce Ovid's long list of Roman authors who have written on erotic themes, and so provide Ovid with a warrant for his own *Ars amatoria*, declare *neue peregrinis tantum defendar ab armis | et Romanus habet multa iocosa liber* ('and lest I be defended by foreign arms alone,<sup>18</sup> Roman literature too contains much that is playful'). When Ovid returns to such military imagery with the notion that he is a reinforcement to the erotic authors of 363–466, he thereby implies that attack is the best form of defence in his *apologia* to Augustus, and hints that he is able to range an army of lovers against Augustus' disapproving reading of his erotic poetry.

Compare *Tristia* 4.10.17–20, where Ovid thus describes the different career path he took from that followed by his brother:

<sup>15</sup> Although legal notions are probably to the fore in *Pont.* 2.5.75, *succedatque suis orbis moderator habenis* ('and may he [Germanicus] succeed to his own reins as ruler of the world'), military connotations may also be present.

<sup>16</sup> See N. Hopkinson, *Ovid Metamorphoses XIII* (Cambridge, 2000), 109.

<sup>17</sup> An appropriate point within a poem as concerned with its literary forebears as the *Metamorphoses*, particularly in the context of a passage treating great Homeric and tragic heroes: Ovid hints that successors are more successful than their predecessors, with obvious implications for his own act of literary succession.

<sup>18</sup> This is a reference to Ovid's list of Greek predecessors in writing of love (*Tr.* 2.363–420).

frater ad eloquium uiridi tendebat ab aeuo,  
 fortia uerbosi natus ad arma fori;  
 at mihi iam puero caelestia sacra placebant,  
 inque suum furtim Musa trahebat opus.

My brother was proceeding to oratory from tender years,  
 born for the strong arms of the wordy forum;  
 but already to me as a boy heavenly rites were pleasing,  
 and the Muse kept stealthily drawing me to her work.

The connection of the metaphor of *fortia ... arma* with the notion of a *literary* career in these couplets should alert the reader to the military metaphor in *successor* later in the poem. This metaphor fits the context of *Tristia* 4.10 particularly well when applied to the successors of Cornelius Gallus, who was unusual among the Latin love elegists in pursuing a military as well as a literary career, and Ovid's reference to his 'successor' perhaps evokes this biographical detail.

More significantly, *successor* as applied to the line of elegiac succession stemming from Gallus in *Tristia* 4.10 may there allude to Gallus' influence upon the prevalent topos of the *militia amoris* ('the warfare of love') in Latin love elegy.<sup>19</sup> Gallus seems to have introduced this motif into elegy: the words put into Gallus' mouth at Virgil, *Eclogue* 10.44–5 (*nunc insanus amor duri me Martis in armis | tela inter media atque aduersos detinet hostis*, 'now crazy love of harsh war holds me under arms in the midst of weapons and facing enemies') and 69 (*omnia uincit Amor: et nos cedamus Amori*, 'Love conquers all; and let us yield to Love') suggest strongly that Gallus' own poetry emphasized the topos.<sup>20</sup> Ovid's military metaphor therefore, in alluding to *militia amoris*, presents the elegists as soldier-poets in love's lists who 'succeeded' one another in (erotic) tours of duty; a witty expansion of the topos elsewhere.<sup>21</sup>

In support of such an interpretation, similar play on military imagery and love poets is already found in a literary-historical context in an earlier Ovidian poem. In Ovid's lament for the dead Tibullus, *Amores* 3.9, lines 61–6 picture Tibullus *in Elysia ualle* ('in the Elysian vale', 60):

obuius huic uenies hedera iuuenalia cinctus  
 tempora cum Caluo, docte Catulle, tuo;  
 tu quoque, si falsum est temerati crimen amici,  
 sanguinis atque animae prodige Galle tuae.  
 his comes umbra tua est, si qua est modo corporis umbra;  
 auxisti numeros, culte Tibulle, pios.

You will come to meet him, crowned with ivy on your youthful  
 brow, learned Catullus, with your own Calvus;  
 you too, if the charge of having outraged friendship is false,  
 Gallus, generous with your life-blood and your soul.

<sup>19</sup> For the dominance of the topos of *militia amoris* in elegy, see R.J. Baker, 'Miles annosus: the military motif in Propertius', *Latomus* 27 (1968), 322–49 and P. Murgatroyd, 'Militia amoris and the Roman elegists', *Latomus* 34 (1975), 59–79.

<sup>20</sup> See R. Coleman, *Virgil: Eclogues* (Cambridge, 1977), 287 and Cairns (n. 13), 107–8. J.C. McKeown, 'Militat omnis amans', *CJ* 90 (1995), 295–304, at 302, already argues that the prevalence of *militia amoris* in Latin love elegy can be attributed to Gallus.

<sup>21</sup> As such, it continues the work of *Am.* 1.9, where Ovid takes the topos of *militia amoris* to its logical (and absurd) conclusion: see e.g. McKeown (n. 20).

To these men your shade is comrade, if disembodied shades exist;  
you have increased the numbers of the blessed, Tibullus.

Here too Ovid plays upon the idea of love poets as comrades-in-arms,<sup>22</sup> with *comes* suggesting *military* as well as poetic companionship.<sup>23</sup> The imagery of reinforcement may also be detected in the polyvalent phrase *auxisti numeros*,<sup>24</sup> which could be translated as ‘you have swelled the ranks’;<sup>25</sup> *numerus* (OLD 9) can have the military sense of ‘a unit, corps’, especially in phrases referring ‘to the enrolment of recruits’.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the vocabulary of ‘succession’ is loaded in Ovid’s poetry, in a way which has been recognized in some individual instances, but never before systematically explored; it is employed on a number of occasions to make witty and generic comments on literary history. Furthermore, in the case of the two *Tristia* examples with which this piece began, this vocabulary also develops further the common elegiac topos of *militia amoris*, demonstrating Ovid’s continued interest in expanding the topos even after applying it in *Amores* 1.9 to every detail of a lover’s life and deeds.

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<sup>22</sup> Arguably, Ovid does not here confine his allusion to the topos to the work of his fellow ‘canonical’ elegiac poets, but rather sees love poets (whatever their metre/s) as sharing generic similarities. Alternatively, Ovid may allude to the specifically *elegiac* love poetry of Catullus (for which, see e.g. Cat. 70, 72, 83, 87) and Calvus, whose elegy on the death of his beloved Quintilia (fr. 15–16 in E. Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* [Oxford, 1993] and fr. 26–8 in A.S. Hollis, *Fragments of Roman Poetry c. 60 BC – AD 20* [Oxford, 2007]) is alluded to at Cat. 96 and Prop. 2.34.89–90: *sic etiam docti confessa est pagina Calui | cum caneret miserae funera Quintiliae* (‘So too the page of learned Calvus confessed, when he was singing of the death of wretched Quintilia’). Ovidian allusion to this Calvan poem would be grimly appropriate, given the concern of *Am.* 3.9 with death and lamentation.

<sup>23</sup> It is the usual word for members of a military cohort (cf. K. Quinn, *Catullus: The Poems* [Bristol, 1973] on Cat. 11.1): OLD *comes* 3 a. For hints of *militia amoris* in Catullus, see the iambic Cat. 37.11–13 (*puella nam mi, quae meo sinu fugit, | amata tantum quantum amabitur nulla, | pro qua mihi sunt magna bella pugnata*, ‘For the girl, who has fled from my bosom, loved by me as no other girl will be loved, for whom great battles have been fought by me’) and perhaps the lyric 11.1 (*Furi et Aureli, comites Catulli*, ‘Furius and Aurelius, comrades of Catullus’); cf. Murgatroyd (n. 19), 65, n. 17. There are no signs of the topos in the scanty remains of Calvus (who worked in a variety of metres): for which, see Courtney (n. 22), 201–11 and Hollis (n. 22), 49–86.

<sup>24</sup> *numeros* also has a metrical sense here (i.e. ‘poetic numbers’ or ‘metre’: OLD 14), suggesting that Tibullus has increased the amount of poetry written.

<sup>25</sup> A similar translation (‘an elegant newcomer to the ranks’) is found in the translation of P. Green, *Ovid: The Erotic Poems* (Harmondsworth, 1982), 156, suggesting that Green has already interpreted Ovid’s imagery in this way.