

E. Del CHROL **Strange Bedfellows: Thematic and Structural Parallels between the *Tiny Tract on Electioneering* by [Ps-]Cicero and the *Arts of Love* by Ovid**

Does a politician do to you what a lover does? In two major Roman how-to books of the last century BCE, the *Tiny Tract on Electioneering* (*Commentariolum Petitionis*) ascribed to Cicero and the *Arts of Love* (*Ars Amatoria*) by Ovid, we see similar concerns over what it takes to seduce the electorate or seduce the beloved, and the lasting impact on desirer and desired. I argue there is a vital, necessary but heretofore yet unnoticed connection between the two works.

My paper proceeds on two fronts. In the first, it uncovers the similarities in behavior between the good candidate for office (*bonus petitor*) and the good lover (*bonus amator*). Both provide a suspect model of elite masculinity, advocating the use of fawning flattery (*blanditia*), promiscuous generosity (*benignitas*), as well as keeping low company and making deceptive promises. Just as Ovid recommends an elite male lover-aspirant engage in status and gender reversal, undergoing verbal and social gymnastics to be eternally pleasing to his beloved, so does [Ps-]Cicero recommend a successful candidate become a social chameleon, leaving his doors and his person open to all manner of interactions with citizens from all levels of society until he achieves his office.

The second front of this paper assesses the level to which the behaviors detailed in the first section ruin the *bonus vir*, the “good/noble/morally-upright man.” The main philosophical difference between the texts is in their estimation of the impact of acting upon the performer. Frequently in the *Commentariolum* are assurances that the addressee will be able to put down his mask at the end of the performance, and the shameful deeds performed in pursuit of office will be laid aside and forgotten once office is achieved. For example, [Ps-]Cicero writes (*Com.Pet.* 1): “Although nature has control, nevertheless it appears in an affair of a few months it is possible to conquer nature by a falsely assumed appearance.” In other words, the elite male’s good nature may bend for a while, but will return to its former shape once the objective is achieved. At the heart of this argument is a belief that a primary support of elite masculinity is *constantia*, a steadfastness of personality, purpose, and character. The *Ars*, however, makes the counterclaim that the actor never leaves his part: the callous man who acts like a lover persuasively enough to gain his beloved will indeed become a lover. Ovid writes (*Ars* 1.615-19): “Nonetheless, often the faker has begun to love truly/ Often what at the beginning he had pretended has come to be./ Whereby the more, ladies, be easy with imitators:/ He will become a true lover who just now was false.” In other words, the *Ars* believes that the core of a man is actually *inconstantia*, and his core melts in the heat of passion rather than is tempered by it. This debate over whether there is an essential noble core to an elite man is reflective of the political context that produced each work: the *Commentariolum* arose in a time of vigorous political activity during the last decades of the Roman republic; the *Ars* arose during the tense renegotiation of civic identity as the Republic ceded to empire a scant forty years later. Ultimately Ovid’s redefinition of the ethics of self presentation and his parodic use of [Ps-] Cicero’s political language in an erotic context suits the new constraints and opportunities under the first Roman emperor.