

# Ovid essay



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Ovid's use of the *domina amoris* and *servitium amoris* as the foundation his *Amores* was not unique, but rather reflected a theme created in the time of Plato. Plato wrote of the idea of a "love lady" in his *The Symposium*. Ovid was just one of the many writers in the history of the Western literary tradition to utilize this construction. From his *Corinna* to Dante's *Beatrice* to *don Quijote's Dulcinea del Tobosa*, the *domina amoris* has constantly been present and has always remained a key theme in the Western world, as reflected in our literature, history, and modern culture. The construction of the *domina amoris* can still be found in modern wedding vows, song lyrics, Hollywood movies, and as a central focus of Christianity.

The first mention which we know of, of the *domina amoris*, was in Plato's *The Symposium*. In the work the reader overhears the story, told three times removed, of a symposium where the subject discoursed was love. One of the ideas presented was that of the *domina amoris* and the *servitium amoris*. Both relate to the idea of a man dedicating his deeds, in Ovid's case his poetry, to a certain woman in the hopes of elevating her to a higher position.

The idea of the *domina amoris* is one of respect, love, and devotion. Unlike the Ovid found in the closing poems of *Amores*, numerous authors and antagonists in the Western literary tradition have found the *domina amoris* to be a very real thing. Dante immortalized the woman he was in love with in real life in his *Divine Comedy*. By placing *Beatrice* as his guide, Dante positioned her above himself and was able to keep the memory of her alive for centuries. *Don Quijote* sallied forth in the name of *Dulcinea del Tobosa*. Each time he "vanquished" one of his enemies, *don Quijote* made him confess the beauty of *Dulcinea*, because it was for her that he fought.

Although fictional, don Quijote's dedication is a perfect example of the *domina amoris* and the *servitium amoris*. Ovid may have liked Don Quijote if he had ever had the chance to read it, because in it, the man that seems to be the prime example of the *servitium amoris* is actually crazy. In Ovid's *Amores*, we can see, at least at first, that the narrator subscribes to the idea of the *domina amoris*. In Book One, Poem III, Ovid states, " Whatever skein of life the Sisters give, I would devote to your eternal care...Give me yourself as a matter for my song. " He is telling his audience that he is dedicating his poem to the thought of a lady, one who is much better than himself. In his use of words such as " devote" and the phrase " When I die, (I will) be lucky if you grieve," the reader is able to see that Ovid is placing the lady, Corinna, on a level far above himself.

By dedicating his life's work up to that point to her, Ovid is placing Corinna in the position of a *domina amoris*. There are many other examples throughout the poem of Ovid's placement of Corinna as a traditional *domina amoris* but, as the poem comes to an end, things begin to change. The poet begins to realize the problems associated with publicly praising someone you hope to be with. Ovid's poetry put Corinna on a pedestal which made her much more desirable to other men. In Book Three, Poem VII, Ovid tells the reader that " I have no doubt that my art makes her the talk of town," and " I am her pander...I serve as a guide for her lovers. " Here we find Ovid lamenting the fact that he ever wrote his poem and shared it.

By writing so highly of Corinna he only made her more desirable, causing men better than himself to seek her out and woo her. Against these men he, a poet, had no recourse, no chance to be better than them in Corinna's eyes.

Indeed, Ovid finds out that by writing the poetry that placed Corinna as his *domina amoris* he proved the old adage wrong. It did elevate her, but it did not get her for him.

Ovid's poetry drove her into the arms of other men and led to his dismissal of the entire idea that a woman should be something to treasure and someone to be devoted to. Ovid finds that women, at least those that he isn't married to, are fickle and vain, not the type to be elevated to the position of a *domina amoris*. Ovid may not have been the last to come to the realization of the folly of love. He and Cervantes have something in common, even if it was completely unintended. Don Quijote, the errant knight, went mad from the books he read, which caused him to devote himself to Dulcinea and become her *servitium amoris*.

Ovid, inspired by Virgil and his fellow neotri, devoted his poem to securing the elevation of Corinna. It is towards the end of the poem that the lover Ovid realizes the foolishness of love and the irony of the *domina amoris* and returns to his role as the husband Ovid, much as don Quijote de la Mancha regains his sanity and dies Alonso Quijano el bueno, fully realizing the folly of his quests and the foolishness of his dedication to Dulcinea del Tobosa. The *domina amoris* has long been present in the Western literary tradition, and will most likely continue to remain so into the future. Ovid entertained the idea, but then seemingly realized the irony of it. His attempts to treat Corinna as something higher than himself, someone to aspire to be with, only led to fame for her and nothing for him. In the end, Ovid returned to Sulmo and his wife.

Although he disputed the domina amoris in regard to his dealings with Corinna, it is possible that his return to his wife is a mutation of this idea of the domina amoris. The poet Ovid brought fame to her by bringing it to himself. In his poem, he returned to her during the sacred festival of Juno, and although he never says her name, she will always be immortalized as the woman that Ovid, the great lover of the Amores, settled down with. The domina amoris has long been present in Western literature and culture, from Plato to Eleanor of Aquitaine to the Virgin Mary.

It is a cultural construction formed over 2000 years ago that still persists around us today, and presumably always will, as it has made itself a major part of the Western culture. Bibliography Simpson, David L. "Notes on The Symposium." Web Publication. The School for New Learning, DePaul University. Accessed Nov.

20, 2005. <http://condor.depaul.edu/~dsimpson/tlove/symposium.html>