

AUGUSTAN LOVERS 13

Banquets scenes and secret language

Banqueting scenes and secret signs

- Lovers exchanging signs (and more) at parties while in the presence of a rival escorting the *puella* is a recurring situation in elegy, a *topos*.
- Ov. *Am.* 1.4; 2.5; 3.4; hinted at in Prop. 2.9 and 2.33 ('wine makes a girl not recognise her man', l. 34). It is also mentioned in Ovid's *Ars amatoria* (Art of Love) 1.229-252. Cf. also Tib. 1.2.21-24.
- Particularly writing in wine as a way of communicating messages – also in Tib. 1.10

Does the medium matter?

- Other elegiac media:
 - ▣ Wax tablets (e.g. Prop. 3.6)
 - Poetry books (but usually not for communication with the *puella* directly)
 - ▣ Bark (Prop. 1.18)
 - ▣ Tomb inscriptions (particularly in Ovid, including after the *Amores*)
- Other literary connotations of the banquet scene?
 - ▣ Epic
 - Rules of guest friendship (*xenia*)
 - ▣ Satire
 - Used to reveal social norms
- ...do they matter?
 - ▣ The writing in wine as setting the scene for *otium* and leisure, but also it is also connected to the rejection of normative masculine behaviour

Examples of wine painting

Others can be brave in arms and by the grace of Mars cut down opposing leaders, to tell me, as I drink, of their exploits in the army and paint camp on the table-top in wine. (Tib. 1.10.29-32)

And one of them shows on the laden table the savage battles, he paints all of Troy in a droplet of wine: 'Here ran the Simois, here is the Trojan land, over here stood the tall castle of ancient Priam, there Achilles fought, and Odysseus, here Hector, mutilated, sent the horses galloping with fright. (Ov. *Epist.* 1.31-36)

Ov. *Am.* 1.4

- Reader suspicion: here is a rival, hence this is an elegiac relationship?
 - ▣ Why could a reader make this assumption?
- We have yet to encounter the mistress of whom the narrator speaks – and perhaps more interestingly, she is nameless
 - ▣ As is the rival. Cf. the pseudobiographical details given for the rivals of the Propertian and Tibullan narrators.
- => contributes to generic feel of the poem
- => makes the narrator seem to give his directions into the blue
 - ▣ ...or just to us readers?

Ov. *Am.* 1.4 and 2.5: Elegiac contradictions

- *Am.* 1.4: The narrator advises his beloved on how to communicate and flirt with the narrator at a party where her vir (husband or other lover?) is also present
- *Am.* 2.5: The narrator laments his misfortune as he himself watches his beloved exchange lover's signs with another man at a party

Ov. Am. 2.5

- 'What are you at?' I cried, 'those joys are mine you're spreading around. My legal claim I'll stake.' (Ov. Am. 2.5.29f)
 - ▣ *Mea iura*
- Yet 2.5 also makes obvious that the narrator's previous experience is in illicit love
- The main section of the poem makes obvious that to be an elegiac lover is (often) to be the cuckold
 - ▣ Links with comedy perhaps the strongest in Ovid
- ...but consider the context: what is Ov. Am. 2.4 about?

Ov. *Am.* 2.5: Changing objectives

- The *puella* is now using the narrator's previous advice against him, step by step – he is himself the teacher that the *puella* mentions in the final line
- There is a surprising shift in focus: The narrator does no longer emphasise the *puella*'s trespasses. 'Nowhere except in bed could she have learnt them; a splendid fee some teacher must have got!'
- The interest in didactic is increasing – 1.4 and 2.5 foreshadow the *Art of Love*...
- ...where Ovid explicitly calls himself 'teacher', and where he is just as unreliable as the narrator of the *Amores*.

Ov. Ars 1.565-604

So if, with Bacchus' gifts before you
poured, / you find a damsel next to you
at the board, / pray to the Sire of
Feasts and Powers of the Night / that on
your brain the bottle cast no blight. /
There many a chance for whispers will
occur, / and hints that she can guess are
meant for her. / In winy outline on the
table spell / soft nothings telling her
that she's your belle. [...] To pleasing
next her lover give your mind; / he'll be
more useful as a friend you'll find. [...] 'Here's to my love, here's to her
bedmate!' cry, / but in your heart
'Deuce take the fellow!' sigh. But when
the party's over and guests go out, /
then seize your chance to join her mid
the rout.

- The love teacher's authority is based on experience: *Experience prompts my labours. Heed the sage: with truths, oh Venus!, help me fill my page!*
- The *Ars amatoria* rephrases the adventures told in the *Amores*
 - ▣ How does that happen here?
- Impressions?

Wine in elegy: other uses

- Drinking in elegy is sometimes part of a pleasant setting, but more often not:
 - ▣ We have seen drinking in elegy before, impacting on the narrator's reliability in Tib. 1.2 and Prop. 1.3; 2.29...
 - ▣ We will see drinking again in (e.g.) Ov. *Am.* 1.8 with the madam Dipsas (thirst)
- What is the impact of association with these situations on our banquet scenes?

Progression through Prop. 2.33B

Heedless you drink. Can't midnight change your mind? / Aren't you
tired yet of throwing dice? / Ah, curse whoever it was found the
undiluted Use of mythological exempla? is nectar to
Icarus! What are our impressions of this narrator?
is the son of wine-sneers. / O Centaurs, your destruction too; / yours also, Polyphemos – Ismarian wine! / Beauty is
deceitful. / a girl not
rejoice. / Drink on.
You're dropping
do a low-
keyed voice. / Then seek the beard more lavishly with spilt Falernian /
and let gilt goblets for is always warmer
towards absent lovers. / men in waiting. / Still,
no girl likes retiring to insistence you all miss
something else.

**What might a setting like this tell us
of the purpose of elegy as a genre?**

With whom does the
narrator really wish
to communicate:?

To take away

- *Topoi* like the *paraklausithyron* (singular!) and secret communication between lovers (and the high degree of intertextual interplay between the passages) contribute to denoting these texts as elegy
 - ▣ The *topoi* do appear elsewhere as well (e.g. Greek erotic epigram) but not as frequently combined.
- Though they shape the genre, they at times also subtly undermine the ideals ostensibly proposed by the narrators, thus showing that the ideal elegiac world cannot exist: the narrators give away how they themselves behave in ways less than ideal, etc. Ovid 'turns the volume up' on this