

Propertius and Tibullus lecture

A) Development of Roman love elegy

(subjective love poetry, in elegiac couplets: i.e. hexameter/pentameter)

i) precedents in Greek elegiac poetry e.g. Callimachus' *Aetia* (but in Roman elegy, beloved in depth over a number of poems; subjective viewpoint)

ii) “founder” Catullus (some of his poems to Lesbia in elegiacs e.g. 68)

iii) Gallus: b. 70/69 BC; d. 26 BC; politician (prefect of Egypt); 4 books of *Amores*; Lycoris (= Cytheris, mime actress, courtesan, freedwoman, ex-lover of Antony)

iv) Propertius: 4 books: Book 1 completed 29 BC; Books 2-4 written 26-16 BC. Esp. featuring beloved Cynthia

1) “Cynthia was the first, Cynthia shall be the last” (Prop. 1.12.20)

2) “You alone are my home, Cynthia, you alone my parents, you are my every moment happiness” (Prop. 1.11.23-4)

v) Tibullus: Book 1 after Propertius Book 1; Book 2 after Propertius Books 2 and 3. Some homoerotic love poems. Female beloved = Delia

vi) (female) Sulpicia (???)

vii) Ovid

B) Background to Roman elegy

- politics and patrons. Gallus writing at end of republic/start of Augustus' rule (Octavian defeats Antony at Actium, 31 BC). Propertius and Tibullus writing under Augustus.

3) “My fate will then be sweet to me, Caesar, when you are the most important part of Roman history, and when I read of many gods' temples the richer after your return for being hung with trophies” (Gallus fr. 2)

- *militia amoris*, the soldiery of love

4) “How should I furnish sons for our country's triumphs? No soldier shall ever be born of my blood. But if I were following the real camp, that of my mistress, then Castor's charger would not be grand enough for me. It is through service to her that renown has glorified my name.” (Prop. 2.7.13-17)

5) “Allow me, whom Fortune willed to lie ever prostrate, to give up my final breath to this worthlessness. Many have contentedly perished in a long love-affair: in their number may the earth cover me too. I was born unfit for glory, unfit for arms: love is the warfare fate wishes me to undergo.” (Prop. 1.6.25-30: adopts path of warfare of love, in contrast to Tullus who has conventional career)

- actual as well as metaphorical war in Propertius: poems 1.21 and 22 on Perusine war (41-40 BC: Fulvia and Lucius v Octavian. Octavian laid siege to Lucius at Perugia; shadows over victory)

6) “from your tears let your sister learn the news that Gallus, though he passed unscathed through Caesar's lines, yet could not escape an unknown killer; and, whatever bones she finds scattered on

the Tuscan hillside, tell her that these are mine.” (dying soldier to fellow soldier, Prop. 1.21.6-11)

7) “If you know Perusia, grave of our countrymen who fell in the days of Italy’s agony, when discord at Rome took hold of her citizens – soil of Etruria, especially to me do you bring grief, for you have borne the abandoned limbs of my kinsman with not a handful of earth to cover his poor bones - there neighbouring Umbria, bordering on the plains below, ... gave me birth.” (Prop. 1.22.3-10)

- twist to previous ideas: realistic setting, not Cynthia; real war not warfare of love; real death (of a soldier called Gallus)

8) “[Gallus] swooning [*morientem* =dying] in your girl’s embrace” (Prop. 1.10.5)

9) “Is this small strip of sand to cover my corpse?... Will you be able to talk about my fate dry-eyed and never hold my bones to your breast?” (Prop. 1.17.8-12, Propertius imagining his death at sea)

- Poet mocking his elegiac persona

- Tibullus' patron= Roman general Messalla. Propertius' patron = Augustus' right hand man, Maecenas (after Book 1). Need to praise patrons and validate their own alternative lifestyle (e.g. Tib.1.1: has life of love and is spoil)

10) “Tis’right for thee, Messalla, to campaign by land and sea, that thy house’s front may show the spoils of foemen: I am a captive fast bound in the bonds of a lovely girl; I sit a janitor before her stubborn doors. I care not for glory, Delia dear; let me only be with thee, and I will pray folk call me sluggard and idler.” (Tibullus 1.1.53-8)

11) “Now let gay love be my pursuit while it is no shame to break a door down and a joy to have plunged into a brawl. Tis’ here I am brave captain and private. Begone ye trumpets and ensigns! take wounds to the men of greed, and take them wealth” (Tibullus 1.1.73-7)

C) Background to Roman elegy: attitudes to love, sex and marriage

- men: acceptance of casual sex with freedwomen/prostitutes etc , esp. for youths. Respectable women should be chaste

- *otium* alongside *negotium* (“business”)

- Marriage: arranged marriage for dynastic advantages. Producing children important (function of marital sex, in theory)

12) “Lascivious movements are of no use whatever to wives. For a woman forbids herself to conceive and fights against it, if in her delight she aids the man’s action with her buttocks, making undulating movements.... Whores indulge in such motions for their own purposes, that they may not often conceive” (Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 4.1268ff.; tr. Rouse; rev. Smith)

- divorce possible; mainly initiated by men; marriage ceremony has idea of equal partnership but...

- Romantic Love: in marriage? Power to say no? Courtesans, e.g. Cytheris (‘Lycoris’); other men’s wives/widows

13) “I hate her who gives because she must, and who, herself unmoved, is thinking of her wool. Pleasure given as a duty has no charms for me; for me let no woman be dutiful” (Ovid, *The Art of*

Love 2.685-8; tr. Mozley; rev. Goold)

D) Why do elegists write love elegy?

- Because of love for their girlfriends?

- Because they want to make a point about women's status? Disagreeing with treatment of women (Hallett)

- Because they wanted to follow in footsteps of Catullus/literary predecessors? Catullus' Lesbia = looks to Sappho of Lesbos; Lycoreus, a cult-title of Apollo > Gallus' Lycoris; Delos, the birthplace of Apollo > Tibullus' Delia; cult title of Apollo, Cynthius (Cynthus = mt of Delos) > Propertius' Cynthia

- Draw of love elegy: allows picture of subservient male and untraditional attitudes? female used to define the male

14) "We should live, my Lesbia, and love / And value all the talk of stricter / Old men at a single penny." (Cat. 5.1-3; tr. Lee)

15) "The Lesbia whom alone Catullus / Loved more than self and all his kin"(Catullus 58.2-3; tr. Lee)

16) "Cynthia first with her eyes ensnared me, poor wretch, that had previously been untouched by desire. It was then that Love made me lower my looks of stubborn pride and trod my head beneath his feet, until the villain taught me to shun decent girls and to lead the life of a ne'er-do-well. Poor me, for a whole year now this frenzy has not abated, while I am compelled to endure the frown of heaven" (Prop. 1.1.1-8)

17) "What are you after, lunatic? To feel my sweetheart's fury? Wretch, are you hastening to experience the ultimate in woe, to make your luckless way through unimagined fires, and drink all Thessaly's supply of poison?" (Prop. 1.5.1-6)

- Mistress also a device to explore generic play and poetry?

18) "While you are singing, Ponticus, of Cadmean Thebes, and the sombre warfare of fraternal strife, and, upon my oath, are vying with Homer himself (if Fate but deal tenderly with your verse). I, as is my wont, am still busied with my love poetry seeking something to use against a hard-hearted mistress." (Propertius 1.7.1-6, to epic poet Ponticus)

19) "hereafter let the disdained lover read me avidly, and let it profit him to learn of my torments..... You, too, if the Boy strikes you with his unerring bow ... it will be away with your camps, poor wretch, away with your seven hostss, and you will weep that they lie unresponsive beneath dust ne'er to be disturbed; and in vain will you desire to put together tender couplets" (Propertius 1.7.13-19; cf. 1.9 where Ponticus at mercy of beloved and his epic poetry is useless)

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