

AUGUSTAN LOVERS

Womanufacture (5.2.13)

Lecture overview

- Last lecture: the beloved is a generic, standard-issue, rather than a real-life woman, although her behaviour resembles that of real-life courtesans and comedy prostitutes
- This time: the beloved is only partially there – only the features (both of body and of character) needed by the narrator/poet/lover are ever described
- She is designed to look like a real-life character, but the description of her has significant gaps suggesting that she is as much (if not more) an expression of what the elegists like literature to be as a flesh-and-blood, independently acting woman

‘Wom manufacture’

- This lecture (and tomorrow’s) sketches crucial developments in elegy research taking place in the late 1980s and beyond – revolutionising readings of elegy
 - ▣ They clearly make invalid earlier results: e.g. Lilja, Copley, and to some extent, Lyne
 - ▣ And problematizes interpretations founded on feminist readings which attempt to look at the beloved as a reflection of women’s voices
 - Names to note: Judith Hallett, Marilyn Skinner – cf. especially Hallett’s readings of Sulpicia’s poems later on
- Key players: Maria Wyke, Alison Sharrock (both with several must-read articles), Ellen Greene

Why we try

- It is tempting to read the beloved (and the narrator) as a real-life character because:
- Narrative structure of the poetry books, especially the programmatic Prop. 1: it reads like a love story (partially told in flashbacks); cf. Catullus and Lesbia
- The narrators may be wrapped up in their elegiac world, but there are many references to people carrying on normal lives outside – friends like Tullus and Gallus in Propertius, Messalla in Tibullus
- It is set in a seemingly clearly recognisable world: locations in Rome, near-by country-side, etc.

The illusion shatters

- Not all poems can be plotted on a linear love story pattern, cf. especially Prop. 2-4 (4.7 and 8 are highlights) and Tib. 2
- The narrator himself is less consistent than he claims
 - ▣ Not all poems even within a book talk about the same beloved, and surprisingly often, she remains unnamed
 - ▣ Contrary to protestations of faithfulness, all elegiac narrators have more than one love interest – and both Ovid and Propertius explicitly discuss the appeal of different types of women (Prop. 2.22A, 23, 29A, Ov. *Am.* 2.4)

Prop. 2.29A

*Yesterday night, my light, when I was roving drunk /
And had no servants to lead me along, / A crowd of
little boys met me [...] some were carrying torches,
others / arrows, and a few had cords to tie me up. [...]
'This is the one the angry woman hired us for. [...]' 'He
thinks we are not gods. He must die! / She's been
expecting you for hours on end, but you, / ungrateful
lout, seek someone else's door. [...] they said to me /
'Go now and learn to stay at home of nights.'*

The narrators, the other lovers – and texts

- Prop. 2.4 – Consideration of options:
 - I wish all enemies of mine could love a girl / and any friend enjoy a boy. / Calmly downstream you glide in a safe rowing boat. / What wave off so small a shore can harm you? / A single word will often alter a boy's mood / but a girl will hardly come round though you bleed.
- Prop. 2.22A:
 - You know how many girls I fell for yesterday; you know what trouble comes my way, Demophoon. / My feet can traverse no piazza unwarded. / Oh, public shows – they're given to ruin me, / whenever a dance parts pale arms in invitation / or a flute-girl plays a tuneful medley. / And all the while my eyes are seeking to be wounded / by a pretty girl in the audience with bare breast / or wandering curls adrift on a smooth forehead [...] See how the sky is served in turn by sun and moon. / Likewise for me one girl is not enough. / One can embrace and cuddle me whenever / the other has no room for me.
- The narrator has other love interests
 - Cf. also Catullus' love poetry, where several love objects are addressed – Juventius, Lesbia, Ipsitilla, and several non-named lovers etc.
- Cf. allusion to Prop. 1.1.1 in 2.22A.7 – puts a new spin on our understanding of who was in control at the outset of the 'love story'
- ...but connects even these unnamed lovers to the creation of poetry

The beloved poetry

- Often, poetry itself is as prominent a theme as the professed love interest
- Wyke compares the use of Cynthia's character in Prop. 1.1 with that in Prop 2.1
 - ▣ Prop. 1.1 Cynthia seemingly an active agent
 - ▣ Prop. 2.1 Cynthia providing material for poetry, less important in herself, restated in Prop. 2.34.93f: *'Cynthia (why not?) shall live, praised in Propertius' verse, if Fame agrees to add me to that list.'*
- 'in the poems which frame her second formulation Cynthia is depicted as a matter for poetic composition, not a woman to be wooed by writing' (Wyke, 1987, 48)

Prop. 1.1 and Prop. 2.1

Cynthia was the first. She caught me with her eyes, a fool who had never before been touched by desires. I really hung my head in shame when Love pressed down on it with his feet. He taught me to hate chaste girls! He was cruel when he told me to live without plan. It's already been a whole year that the frenzy hasn't stopped. Even now, the gods are against me.

You ask me how it is I write so often of love and how my verses come soft on the tongue. These no Apollo, no Calliope sings to me; my only inspiration is a girl. Suppose she steps out glittering in silks from Cos, her Coan gown speaks a whole volume. Suppose I spot an errant ringlet on her brow, praise of the lock makes her walk taller. Suppose her ivory fingers strike a tune on the lyre, I marvel at her hand's deft pressure. Or if she closes eyelids exigent for sleep I have thousand new ideas for poems. Or if, stripped of her dress, she wrestles with me naked, why then we pile up lengthy Iliads. Whatever she may do, whatever she can say, a saga's born, a big one, out of nothing.

Callimachean Cynthia in Prop. 2.1

- Cynthia described becomes a vehicle for Propertius to align himself with a specific poetic tradition
- The poet lover chooses themes off the beaten track
- ...and a form announcing a different topic from epic (2.1.17-42)
- Framing devices important in Callimachean writings – poetry and its production is a constant theme
- References to other writing
 - Literary criticism
 - Alexandrian footnotes
- Nor have I the heart to trace back Caesar's name / in rugged verse to Phrygian ancestors. [...]
- She's quick, as I recall, to criticise light girls / and faults the Iliad because of Helen.
- Machaon healed the crippled leg of Philoctetes, / Chiron Phyllyrides the eyes of Phoenix.

Building a girlfriend

- Wyke's interpretation of (e.g.) Prop. 2.1 thus shows that the beloved is intimately connected to the work of the poet, to his ability to create

Further examples:

- Prop. 2.30B39f:
 - *Then I shall suffer the holy ivy to wreath my head, / for without you my wit is powerless.*

- Prop. 2.13.9-14:

- *I am no mere admirer of distinguished looks / or of a woman's pedigree; / I'd like to read my work in the lap of a clever girl* / and have it approved by faultless ears. Should I succeed, farewell to society's babble; / a mistress' verdict acquits me.*
- *puella, note the fact that she is not named here

The need for learning

- The *puella* is made up of pieces that all fit the alexandrian standards of exclusiveness and neatness, and she is also sufficiently learned to appreciate Callimachean poetry (*docta puella*)
- This means that she both IS the elegists poetry, AND its recipient

Ov. *Am.* 2.4

She's educated, those rare skills are pleasing; or crude, then pleasing her simplicity. She'll say, compared with mine Callimachus' poems are rough – I like her liking me. She'll criticise my poems and the poet, I'll cuddle that hard critic blissfully. Her walk is lithe, I love it, or she's stony, a man can touch the stone and lithe she'll be.

Ivory fingers

- Wyke and others have also shown that the connection of Cynthia with poetry in 2.1 tallies with the descriptions of her physical appearance from the first book of Propertius onwards:

- 'Details of physique are pure fiction' (James, 2003, 36)
- Prominent examples are Prop. 1.2 where Propertius paints in words what he says Appelles (famous for deceptively real-looking paintings) did in colour

- We have another example...

- Prop. 1.2:

*Why choose, my life, to step out
with styled hair and move sheer
curves in Coan costume? [...] And
lose the charm of Nature for
bought elegance [...] See what
colour beautiful land sends up,
how ivies in the wild thrive better,
[...] beaches appeal, with native
pebbles painted, and artlessly the
birds sing sweeter. [...] But they
had looks beholden to no jewels,
fresh as Apelles' use of colour.*

Prop. 1.3: Poetry in parts

- Ariadne lay, Theseus' ship sailing away, languid on lonely shores, the Knossian girl; and Cepheus' daughter collapsed in first sleep just free from the hard stone, Andromeda; no less the Edonian bacchante, worn from dances, when she fell on grassy Apidanus: so seemed she, breathing gentle quiet, Cynthia, supporting her head with slipping hands, when I came in, dragging my feet with much Bacchus, and the boys shook the torch late in the night.



Prop. 1.3

- The beloved Cynthia is only reached via a lengthy literary excursus
 - ▣ Ariadne particularly known from Catullus 64; a highly Callimachean poem and one of the first Roman adaptations of that style
 - ▣ The need for the reader to be able to decipher mythical allusions also typically Callimachean: Alexandrian footnotes
 - Cf. also Prop. 1.1: Cynthia only in 1.1.1 – from then on only accessible through the example of Atalanta
- Poses the question: Can the elegiac beloved only ever be understood through literature?

Prop. 1.3 continued

Not yet having completely lost sensation, I lightly try to advance to her, pressing on the couch; And while a pair commanded me, gripped with lust, Love on one side, Liber the other, each a hard god, to lightly try her, her arm thrown up, and to take kisses, my weapon in hand, yet I didn't dare disturb my mistress' quiet, fearing the outbursts of her expert cruelty. But I remained fixed, my eyes intent, like Argus with the strange horns of Inachus' daughter. And now I take the garland from my forehead and place it on your temples, Cynthia. Now I delight to redo your fallen hair, now I give furtive fruits to empty hands. I lavish all these gifts on ungrateful sleep, gifts rubbed repeatedly against dangling breasts. And each time you take breath with a sudden motion, I stop, believing in an empty sign, that some vision has brought you unaccustomed fears, or someone is forcing you unwillingly to be his, until the moon, running across different windows, the moon, busy with lingering moonbeams, opens your composed eyes with its light rays.

- Description of Cynthia body part by body part: head (temples), hair, hands, breasts, chest
- The narrator brings gifts typical of a literary lover: apples!
 - ▣ Callimachus telling of the story of Acontius and Cydippe
 - ▣ Tityrus and Meliboeus in Vergil's *Eclogues*
 - ▣ Prop. 1.1
 - ▣ The beloved unable to appreciate these gifts
- No activity is necessary on the beloved's part; the narrator capable of creating a fantasy woman to satisfy himself
 - ▣ In initial lines, she only seems to breathe, i.e. only seems to exist
 - ▣ The narrator, conversely, is fairly fleshed out to begin with but...

Prop. 1.3: The final illusion

So she speaks, fixing her elbow on the soft couch, “Have another's insults finally brought you back, expelled from her doors, to our bed? So where did you consume the long hours of my night, still languid, my god, with the stars disappearing? If only you could experience the nights you always force me to endure, you asshole! At first I evaded sleep with the purple thread, and again, exhausted, with song of the Orphic lyre. Left all alone, I was singing lightly to myself the frequent long delays when your lover is about. Then drowsiness pulled me, slipping in its soft wings. She at last cured my crying.”

- Does this break the illusion – does it suggest that you can't in fact create an ideal mistress?
- Or does it, as Sharrock suggests, uphold it by producing – with somewhat unexpected effects – a woman being exactly like elegiac narrators profess they want?
 - ▣ Faithful
 - ▣ Paragon of virtue
- Or, is it all a smoke screen?
 - ▣ Harrison's reading
 - ▣ Spinning purple thread

LET'S ALL GET SOME AIR

Ovid: The first poems of the *Amores*

- 1.1 – the narrator claims he wanted to write epic (*arma gravi...bella parabam*) but the decision to write love poetry is forced by Eros and connected explicitly to the technicalities of writing poetry
- 1.2 – the narrator suffers lovesickness, but doesn't know why
- 1.3 – the narrator now knows he is in love, but focuses significantly more on his own suffering than on the object of his desire (who remains anonymous)

Ov. Am. 1.3.

*I'm not love's acrobat to leap
from bed / to bed. Believe me,
you'll be mine always: with you
may heaven let me pass my days
/ through the span granted by the
Sister's thread, / and die with you
there weeping. Offer me /
yourself, a happy subject for my
verse: / my verse will issue worthy
of its source. / So many owe their
fame to poetry - ... We too shall
live in verse the whole world
through, / and my name shall be
ever linked with you.*

- ❑ Foedus aeternum
- ❑ Threads and poetry
- ❑ The puella as inspiration
- ❑ Pride in poetry
- ❑ Eternal life by poetry - topos

The first poems of the *Amores*

- 1.4 – the beloved is still not named. The elegiac *topos* of a feast scene and flirting in secret, with signs understandable only to a select few; cf. Callimachean poetics
- 1.5 – scene set for sex, Corinna appears for the first time, and is described body part by body part:

Ov. Am. 1.5

In summer's heat and mid-time of the day

To rest my limbs upon a bed I lay.

One shutter closed, the other open stood,

Which gave such light as lies within a wood,

Like twilight shade at setting of the sun,

Or when night's gone and yet not day begun.

Such light for bashful girls one should provide,

In which their shyness may have hope to hide.

In came Corinna in a long loose gown...

- In bed at noon? Not a Roman thing to do!
- The shutters – one closed, one opening: transferring the reader's gaze to what may come on stage
- Twilight / dawn: further emphasises new beginnings and that something is about to break
- Bashful girls: note the plural – this is a general statement
- Entry of Corinna: note the 'stage note'-like appearance

Ov. Am. 1.5

In came Corinna in a long loose gown / her white neck hid with tresses hanging down; / so to her many lovers came Lais / or in her bedroom fair Semiramis. / I snatched her gown; being thin the harm was small, / yet strove she to be covered therewithal, / and striving thus as one who wished to fail, / was simply beaten by her self-betrayal. / Stark naked as she stood before mine eye, / no blemish on her body could I spy. / What arms and shoulders did I touch and see, / how apt her bosom to be pressed by me! / Belly so smooth below the breasts so high, / and waist so long, and what a fine young thigh. / Why detail more? All perfect in my sight; / and naked as she was, I hugged her tight. / And next – all know! We rested, with a kiss; / Jove send me more such afternoons as this.

- 7: veiled in gown
- 8: hair covering ivory shoulders
- 9f: compared to courtesans of Greece; note the intrusion of other lovers here!
 - Note also that they are lovers known from literature!
- 11f: gown is disposed of, but still covers girl
- 13f: wants to be defeated
- 15f: before the narrator's eyes, unveiled, without blemish – focus on the body
 - Cf. Callimachean tenets of polishing
- 17f: shoulders and sides, narrator moves from looking to touching, breasts suited for squeezing
- 19f: flat tummy
- 21f: sides and thighs
- 23f: body to be pressed to his, no notice taken of particular things

Body part puzzles and literary tradition

- Greek erotic epigram shares this practice (although in a somewhat more crude fashion); Roman poets like Martial and Juvenal will too
 - ▣ Set list of body parts to be described: hair, breast, and eyes is the minimum, but note that elegy never is sexually explicit. Cf. Richlin (1992) Chapter 2.
- Erotic epigram was one of the genres appreciated – and produced! – by Callimachean poets
- This link to epigram writing also underlines the absence of one single storyline in elegiac poetry books – epigram books are very rarely consistently focussed on one topic, let alone one character!

Pygmalion the elegist

- Ov. *Met.* 10 tells the story of the artist Pygmalion, which has been read as a reflection on the creation of the elegiac beloved
 - ▣ Sharrock 1991 'Wom manufacture' [JSTOR]
 - ▣ Ov. *Met.* 3 on Narcissus is also often read as a reflection on the elegiac beloved as an artist creation/reflection – cf. Rimell, 2006 [LO loan]
- Pygmalion rejects love as so many women are faithless (cf. how the elegiac narrators never really set out to write elegy, and later tries to move on from elegy because of disappointments in love) but creates, again piece-meal, a statue so lovely that he falls in love with it
- The statue is more beautiful than any real-life woman could ever be: 'Meanwhile with happy skill and miraculous art, he carved a snowy ivory / and gave it shape and beauty such as no woman could be born with, and he conceived a love of his creation' (Ov. *Met.* 10.247-249)

Using Pygmalion

- The language of the epic *Met.* 10 is very similar to that of elegy and elegiac descriptions of both writing poetry and of the bodies of the beloved:
 - ▣ The statue is made of ivory, a material often used to describe female bodies in sexual/erotic situations in elegy, and likened to snow, which is even more associated with eroticism
 - Prop. 2.1.19: Cynthia has ivory fingers while she plays the lyre: does she momentarily become a statue performing art?
 - ▣ Is it real or not? To find out Pygmalion tentatively touches the statue – the same word is used as in Prop. 1.3.15
 - An indication that the reader shouldn't feel too confident Propertius' Cynthia is real, either...

Effects of building a girlfriend

- The reader is encouraged to look at the elegiac beloved as a conscious creation by the poet, matter rather than person
 - ▣ The one-sidedness of the elegiac relationship is underlined: note how Pygmalion is the subject of 'conceived'; he invents his own falling in love, much as the Ovidian narrator in Am. 1.1-3 starts with love, and only later finds a target for that love
- 'His concern is absurdly unreal' (Sharrock, 1991, 41); the Pygmalion story thus underscores that elegy is more about the power of the artist/poet to set up this illusion than about reflecting reality

The need for learning

- The *puella* is made up of pieces that all fit the alexandrian standards of exclusiveness and neatness, and she is also sufficiently learned to appreciate Callimachean poetry (*docta puella*)
- This means that she both IS the elegists poetry, AND its recipient

Ov. *Am.* 2.4

She's educated, those rare skills are pleasing; or crude, then pleasing her simplicity. She'll say, compared with mine Callimachus' poems are rough – I like her liking me. She'll criticise my poems and the poet, I'll cuddle that hard critic blissfully. Her walk is lithe, I love it, or she's stony, a man can touch the stone and lithe she'll be.

To take away from this lecture

- *Puella* and poetry intimately connected throughout the elegiac corpus
- Impulse to read as a realistic tale balanced by the conflation of the creation of the *puella* and of poetry itself
 - ▣ Cf. Prop. 1.1 and 2.1 – from character to matter
 - ▣ Influence from Callimachus and Hellenistic poets
- ‘Womanufacture’: Wyke, Sharrock
 - ▣ Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: Pygmalion a parallel