

Augustan Lovers



**BACKGROUNDS TO ROMAN LOVE ELEGY
FROM EI-EI LEGEIN TO CATULLUS**

Roman Love Elegy as a Genre



- Same themes
- Same attitudes and motifs
- Same format
- Same preferred intertexts (within reason)
- Same period
- Intense interaction with each other (the 'in' crowd effect)

Writing elegiac verse before Gallus



- Elegy as a metre known since mid 7th century BC
 - Already thought of as ‘subjective’ but dealing with a much wider range of topics: didactic, exhortations to battle
 - Also the metre of funerary epigrams (and later on erotic epigram), thus connected to lamentation
 - Pseudo-etymology: *Ei ei legein*

Literary backgrounds: Writing elegiac verse before Gallus



- Callimachean catalogue elegy brings to the fore the ‘I’ of the narrator, and has immense influence on Roman elegy
 - Mythology, literary allusion, irony and wit
 - The preference of a shorter form before epic and the poetic discussion of this choice
- Notable overlap with Hellenistic erotic epigram sometimes featuring
 - the shut-out lover
 - a male lover of upper class falling for a prostitute (male or female)

Transition to Rome: Catullus



- Series of love poems about the relationship between the narrator and 'Lesbia' not unlike later Roman love elegy
 - First-person narrator speaking in Catullus' name
 - The characters of the lovers very similar to those in Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid
 - Exploration of norms of gendered behaviour
- However, Catullus' poems also includes pieces on many other topics, and in many other metres!

Catullus



- The Catullan narrator does not retreat from mainstream Roman society as explicitly the elegists do
- Catullus keeps mentioning family ties, social responsibilities etc throughout
 - The collection may open with two poems central to the Lesbia series (Cat. 2 and 3) but Cat. 1 is clearly dedicated to a patron and Cat. 4 deals with Catullus' home in Northern Italy and real vs. mythological geography
 - Cat. 10 references service as a military legate in Bithynia
 - Cat. 68a and b deals with the loss of Catullus' brother

The Roman background: Comedy



- Roman New Comedy: Plautus and Terence (3rd and 2nd century BC); immensely popular
- Roman comedy often features male young leads very similar to the narrators of later elegy: young, upper class, and madly in love with unsuitable women
- Plautus especially places emphasis on the young lover's alienation from family and society and his rejection of war in favour of love
- Stock characters of the support cast also similar: bawds, messenger slaves, door keepers...

From Plautus' *Pseudolus*



CALIDORUS: For a short season have I been like a summer plant; suddenly have I sprung up, suddenly have I withered.

PSEUDOLUS: Be silent, while I read the letter through.

CALIDORUS: Why don't you read it then?

PSEUDOLUS (reading): "Phœnicium to her lover, Calidorus, by means of wax and string and letters, her exponents, sends health, and safety does she beg of you, weeping, and with palpitating feelings, heart, and breast."

CALIDORUS: At all events, I can in nowise survive if she's removed and carried off from me.

PSEUDOLUS: Why do you weep, you cuckoo? You shall survive.

CALIDORUS: Why should I not weep, who have neither a coin of silver in ready money, nor have the hope of a groat anywhere in the world?

PSEUDOLUS: As I understand the tenor of this letter, unless you weep for her with tears of silver, the affection which you wish yourself by those tears to prove is of no more value than if you were to pour water into a sieve. But have no fear, I'll not forsake you in your love. In troth, I do trust that this day, from some quarter or other, by my good aid I shall find you help in the money line. But whence that is to come,--that whence I know not how to pronounce; except only that so it shall be; my eyebrow twitches to that effect.

Mistress (meretrix) of Comedy



- The young mistress of Roman Comedy is educated and sophisticated (usually of more pronouncedly Greek origins – or upbringing – than the main characters)
- Acceptable as a pastime for young men, but not marriage material, and not at the expense of the family fortune!
 - Numerous plots where the beloved is found to be, after all, of noble birth: Plautus: *Bacchides*, *Menaechmi*, Terence: *The Eunuch*

The *puella* in elegy: similarities with the *meretrix*



- Runs own household, with household slaves
- Sophisticated in dress and has a luxurious home suitable for entertaining professionally
- Described as intelligent and able to convince rhetorically (although not obviously nor maliciously described as manipulative!)
- In need of money (capital rather than readies, as repeatedly reminded of approaching old age)
 - Sometimes has several young lovers at the same time – but unlike elegy, it is made clear that this is out of financial necessity

What the elegists (seemingly) thought



- There are no direct allusions to Roman comedy in Propertius, Tibullus or Ovid's *Amores* as 'forefathers' of the elegiac lover
- There are many allusions to Hellenistic elegy and Hellenistic epigram, as well as to Catullus' elegiac poems
 - We will discuss this especially in the context of Prop. 3.1

Falling in love with elegy	Outsider Characters 1
	Outsider Characters 2
From Greek elegy to Catullus	Love in Arcadia: Vergil's Eclogues
The Beloved	Horace and Elegy
The womanufacture debate: Propertius	Elegiac poetry books
The womanufacture debate: Ovid	Myth in elegy
The Poet and the Lover: the Poet Lover	Unreliable narration
Slavery of love	Historical authors
Foedus aeternum	Changing the genre: Ovid
Outside the door: Paraklausithyra	Preparing your presentation
Banqueting scenes and secret signs	Changing the genre: Propertius
Militia amoris	The later Ovid
The Augustan Context	Sulpicia

Our new wishlist



To take away



- Roman love elegy has four canonical authors: Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid: only three survive in more than a few fragments
- Key features of the genre are:
 - Book structure achieved despite fairly short poems
 - A specific set of values cherished by the narrators, which invert patterns of normative society
 - Advanced literary game-playing: you need to be a reader to 'get' elegy
- No Monday lecture next week, instead: Friday seminar!