

AUGUSTAN LOVERS

28 JANUARY



Prop. 1.1.1f

Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis
contactum nullis ante Cupidinibus

Cynthia first, with her eyes, caught wretched me /
smitten before by no desires;

- Programmatic opening
- Cast
- Attitude of narrator – and of beloved:
- While generalising about elegy is tricky, but we can trace several cornerstones of the genre in and from this line:

Features of Roman love elegy

- This is an **overview** only – more to follow
- First-person narrator using the real-life author's name to tell of his woeful love stories – but be careful! These are fictitious *personae* and *constructed literary characters*
 - ▣ Names given for Cynthia and the friend Tullus in Prop. 1.1; presented as real-life people contrasting with mythological examples
 - ▣ Prop. 1 reads like a love story told in retrospect

The well-to-do lover in Prop. 1.1

- The narrator deviates from his normal behaviour:
 - ▣ Ante (before) (l. 2); describes his behaviour as furor (mania) (l. 7) and a topsy-turvy world (adversos deos, l. 8) (adverse gods)
- Other things expected of him; *cursus honorum*:
 - ▣ *Donec me docuit castas odisse puellas*
improbis, et nullo vivere consilio
 - ▣ Tullus reappears in Prop. 1.6, following the normal pattern for education of a young upper-class Roman; it is implied in 1.1 that the narrator is his equal (and should behave the way Tullus does)

The *puella* / beloved

- *Cynthia prima me cepit*
 - The female character is the subject of the sentence; she takes the active role while the narrator is the one acted upon
 - By Cynthia
 - By Amor
 - Roman gender norms: active and passive
- *Castas odisse puellas (hatred of chaste girls)*
 - Cynthia does not belong in that group? The beloved of elegy often appears to be a *hetaera*
 - In other elegies, it becomes more prominent that she is highly educated

Typical situations

- Slavery of love / reversal of gender roles
 - The narrator does not expect to be freed from his suffering
 - Love is described exclusively in terms of suffering (*noctes amaras* (l. 33); *malum*, l. 35)
- The shut-out lover (*exclusus amator*)
 - Unrequited love
 - More or less explicitly realised: we will discuss poems on the threshold (*paraklausithyra*) later on
- Eternal love; love as an ongoing state of being (*foedus aeternum*)
 - *Uos remanete, quibus facili deus annuit amare
sits et in tuto semper amore pares.* (l. 27f)
(Stay home, all you to whom God nods with easy ear, / and be
paired in love forever true.)

Make love, not war

- One of the most prominent metaphors in the genre is that of *militia amoris*
 - ▣ Love **as** war
 - Fortiter et ferrum saeuos patiemur et ignis,
sit modo libertas quae uelit ira loqui (l. 27f)
(Bravely I will suffer knife and cautery, / given liberty to
speak as anger bids)
 - Auxilia (remedies) in l. 26 has military associations
 - ▣ Love **instead** of war
 - Emphasis on contrasts between friends outside of the elegiac world and the narrator

Unifying factors of the genre

- Motifs and themes shared
- Short collections of poems
- Similar structure of individual books (cf. Prop. 1 and Ov. *Am.* 1)
- Intense interaction with each other's texts – an 'in-crowd'
- Elegiac verse:
 - One hexameter, one pentameter:
 - *Odi et amo. Quare id faciam fortasse requiris?*
nescio sed fieri sentio et excrucior (Cat. 85)

How the ancients saw it

- Quintilian cites Gallus, Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid as writers in this poetic genre:

“We also challenge the supremacy of the Greeks in elegy. Of our elegiac poets Tibullus seems to me to be the most terse and elegant. There are, however, some who prefer Propertius. Ovid is more unrestrained than either, while Gallus is more austere.” (Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.93)

- Ovid names himself with Gallus, Tibullus and Propertius as elegists in *Ars* 3.535-38, *Rem.* 763-766 and *Trist.* 4.10.51-54
- Dates: Elegiac poetry books dating from 40 BC (Gallus) to late 20s BC (or early 10s, Ovid)

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.

PSEUDOLUS (reading): "Phœnicium to her lover, Calidorus, by means of wax and string and letters, her exponents, sends health, and safety does she begó 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*

Attitudes to luxury

Besides all this, Lucius Sulla, in order to secure the loyalty of the army which he led into Asia, had allowed it a luxury and license foreign to the manners of our forefathers; and in the intervals of leisure those charming and voluptuous lands had easily demoralized the warlike spirit of his soldiers. There it was that an army of the Roman people first learned to indulge in women and drink; to admire statues, paintings, and chased vases, to steal them from private houses and public places, to pillage shrines, and to desecrate everything, both sacred and profane. [...] In truth, prosperity tries the souls of even the wise; how then should men of depraved character like these make a moderate use of victory?

Sall. *Cat.* 11.5-7

- ...but bear in mind that the topos of intrusion of dangerous luxury goes back into the height of the republic too: cf. Lintott, A. W. (1972) "Imperial Expansion and Moral Decline in the Roman Republic." *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte*, 21(4), 626–638.

Who is the puella?

Convention in society and elegy, and potential real-life backgrounds

Lecture outline

- *Puella* and *amator*: the mistress in the real world
- Primary sources: Prop. 1.2; 6; 8; 11; 14; 15; 2.4; 6; Tib. 1.3
- What behaviour characterises the mistress?
 - ▣ Last lecture: like a hetaira?
- What is the real-life background, or, is there any?
- Is that reflected anywhere else in literature?
- We will be skirting the issue of just how embedded the poetics of elegy are in the character of the beloved – next lecture will be on ‘womanufacture’.

Who is the *puella*?

- Remember: 'she is a generic woman', both in terms of real-life background and of literary 'ancestry'
- Therefore, we are by not discussing the possibility of a specific real-life woman hidden behind a pseudonym
 - ▣ This was a key feature of 19th and early 20th century elegy scholarship, partly influenced by the possible identification of Catullus' Lesbia with Clodia
 - ▣ ...and partly by a statement made by 2nd century AD rhetorician Apuleius of Madara that all four elegists used pseudonyms
 - ▣ 20th century elegy scholarship has disproved this hypothesis

The elegiac beloved

- Good summary in James 2003 36f:
 - ▣ She can choose from different lovers
 - ▣ She demands expensive gifts
 - ▣ She is relatively wealthy, and controls several household slaves
 - i.e. she is not a slave herself, nor under a father's authority
 - ▣ She knows about fashion trends, and follows them despite incurring sizeable costs both monetary and to her health
 - ▣ She sometimes has a male companion who is the rival of the poet lover

Basis in real life?

- A courtesan class? Very scant evidence that such a group existed in Rome.
 - ▣ Evidence from Greek contexts is good, the most famous example probably Pericles' mistress Aspasia.
- We know of a few individuals, e.g. Hispala Faecenia and Volumnia Cytheris, mime actress and mistress of Mark Anthony, cf. Cic. *Fam.* 9.26.
 - ▣ It has been suggested that Cytheris is the inspiration for Gallus' Lycoris
 - ▣ Several examples from imperial times

Cytheris and Cicero

I have just lain down to dinner at three o'clock, when I scribble a copy of this note to you in my pocket-book. You will say, "where?" With Voluminus Eutrapelus. One place above me is Atticus, one below Verrius, both friends of yours. [...] Now listen to the rest. Below Eutrapelus lay Cytheris. At such a party as that, say you, was the famous Cicero, "To whom all looked with reverence, on whose face Greeks turned their eyes with wonder?" To tell you the truth, I had no suspicion that she would be there. But, after all, even the Socratic Aristippus himself did not blush when he was taunted with having Lais as his mistress: "Yes," said he, "Lais is my mistress, but not my master." It is better in Greek; you must make a translation yourself, if you want one. As for myself, the fact is that that sort of thing never had any attraction for me when I was a young man, much less now I am an old one. I like a dinner party. I talk freely there, whatever comes upon the tapis, as the phrase is, and convert sighs into loud bursts of laughter.

(Cic. *Fam.* 9.26)

Other Men: Tib. 1.3

- Tib. 1.3 plot: the narrator has left his beloved Delia at Rome to follow his patron Messalla on a military expedition to the East. He falls ill during the journey and remains behind on the island of Corcyra
- Finally, he fantasises about returning suddenly to Rome and Delia:
- ‘But Delia, please be true to me, and let the old woman be there to guard your honour with her continual care. She shall tell you stories and when the lamp is lit draw the lengthening thread from her laden distaff, while the girls around her, intent on heavy stints, gradually for weariness nod off at their work. Then I shall arrive and no one give you warning but your first thought will be that I have dropped from heaven. Then, simply as you are, in long-haired confusion, run to greet me, Delia, with naked feet. That is my desire: let bright Aurora bring me on her rose-red steeds that shining Morning Star.’

Tibullus' Delia and the Mime

- Bare feet and unravelled hair
 - ▣ To the narrator: Haste and pleasant surprise
 - ▣ To the reader?: Haste and (un)pleasant surprise: has she been caught out? The mistress caught almost in flagrante is a typical feature of the mime, as is the cuckolded husband
- Cf. links between elegy and comedy
- This interpretation is supported by correspondences with Prop. 1.3 (positioned the same way in the book)



Attic redfigure epinetron by the Clio painter, 440-430 BCE (National Archaeological Museum, Athens: 2383)

Contrast: Delia and virtuous women



- Delia complies with one of the key paradigms of virtuous, female behaviour: she spins
- She spins together with slave girls, as the women of the household would be expected to
- However, the depictions of this paradigm vary considerably across Greek and Roman literature and often allow for variance from it to be expressed
 - ▣ Helen weaving in *Il.* 3
 - ▣ Helen weaving in *Od.* 11
 - ▣ Cf. Columella 12.6 for this task being taken over by the villa overseer's wife as the owner's own wife (the *matrona*) is uninterested

Prop. 1.8: The Illyrian Trip

- The beloved has embarked on a trip with another lover, but surprisingly decides to remain in Rome
- Relationship between poet lover and beloved described in terms of money:
 - ▣ 1.8.2 and 3 'less' and 'so well' (= so much); 1.8.17 'badly' = cheaply); 1.8b.31 'dear' and subsequent mentions of dowries and wealth
- Little is said about the rival, aside from him being a man of means
- Is it clear that the beloved makes an active choice to stay in Rome – or is that the narrator's interpretation only?
 - ▣ Linear reading, cf. 2.16 where the praetor returns, might support this

Prop. 1.2: A Costly Life

- Why choose, my life, to step out with styled hair and move sheer curves in Coan costume? Or why to drench your tresses in Orontes' myrrh and sell yourself with foreign gifts and lose the charm of Nature for bought elegance, not letting limbs shine with their own attraction? This doctoring of your looks is pointless, believe me; Love, being naked, does not love beauticians.

Prop. 1.2: A Costly Life

- This is the first real information we get about Cynthia
 - ▣ Thus suggested that she follows previously known patterns, or the poet would need more exposition
 - Comedy links or earlier elegy?
- ‘Styled hair’
 - ▣ Implied that she has the money to spend, cf. *Ov. Am.* 1.14 where a hair dyeing experiment has gone wrong
 - ▣ Also implies cultural refinement; discussions of hair styles often metaphorical (cf. Sharrock 2000)

Prop. 1.2: A Costly Life

- Coan costume
 - ▣ The most costly cloth dye available, extreme luxury (whether silk or wool)
 - ▣ Purple associated with decadence
 - ▣ ...or exclusiveness, cf. the legislation of purple weaving in the imperial period
- Reaction of the poet lover?
 - ▣ Demands for simplicity: Real conviction or because the luxury may be read as tools of the trade?



Prop. 1.15: Dress and Behaviour

- Many the hurts I've often feared from your light conduct, but never, Cynthia, this betrayal. Look at me, Fortune's victim, in grave danger, but you're not frightened, though you've come at last. And you can use your hands to re-do yesterday's hairstyle, and spend an hour on your make-up, can even flash a string of Eastern pearls as if in honour of a new lover. (1-8)
- You must not hold so cheap those eyes of yours which pass off treason as my truth. You swore by them that if you told a lie they'd drop out into your hands, and can you raise them now to the great Sun-God without one tremor of guilt? Who forced you to turn pale so variously and those reluctant eyes to weep? For them I'm dying now, and warning fellow lovers 'O it is unsafe to trust sweet words!' (35-42)

Prop. 1.15: Dress and behaviour

- The word *perfidia* ‘betrayal’ implies breaking of a contract; appropriating the discourse of marriage
- Again, the beloved has considerable wealth (pearls or gems in 1.15.7)
- Presence of a rival lover implied and connected, subtly, with her access to money and riches
- Ability to sway the poet lover with words implied in the final line 41 f – does this enable the beloved to keep her two lovers?
- This ability is described in negative terms

Differences: Gifts

- Unlike the young prostitutes of Comedy, elegiac mistresses are never paid outright – they demand gifts from their lovers, but only bawds suggest asking for actual money
- Prop. 2.16.15: The return of the rival *praetor* from Illyria
- *It seems that anyone with love can purchase love. Jove, my girl's ruined by shameful gain. She sends me into Oceanus to look for pearls and bids me bring presents back from Tyre.*

Differences: Consequences

- If there is a link between elegy and prostitution, then the description is much less realistic than in Comedy. The elegists have tweaked the realistic basis for other reasons...
- “[...] payment rendered by way of gifts allows two things: first, the woman in question retains her independence; and second, the lover can suggest that she owes him informal, spontaneous, genuine gratitude, to be expressed both sexually and socially, as part of a more equal and truly loving relationship.” (James, 2003, 39)
- Thus the ideal of the elegiac relationship is kept alive and at least theoretically possible

The rival, and the status of the puella

- We previously looked at the rival in terms of the beloved's possible need to be supported by more than one source – but what does his character give away about the social status of the puella?
- She is unlikely to be his **wife** (at the same time having an adulterous affair with the poet lover)
 - ▣ She does not wear the stola nor the vittae of Roman matrons: Tib. 1.6.67f: “Only teach her to be chaste, although the headband does not / hold back her tied hair nor the long stola her feet”
 - Cf. also Ov. *Ars* as unsuitable reading for *matronae*
 - ▣ She is not among the chaste women, who seem to form a group (Prop. 1.1), i.e. possibly wives
 - ▣ She does not appear to live with either the rival or the poet lover on any regular basis, and there is no mention of any family obligations shared between these characters

Behaviour and manipulation: Prop. 1.6

It's not that I'm scared to get to know the Adriatic or sail with you the salt Aegean, Tullus – with you I'd climb Rhipaeian peaks, or march far south beyond the home of Memnon – but I'm verbally estopped by a girl embracing me, who often lends her grave pleas cogent colour.

All night long she protests her passion, and when I leave her charges the Gods with non-existence, alleging she's no longer mine, with menaces of injured girl-friend to ungrateful man. Even for an hour I can't endure this prosecution; ah perish all cold-hearted lovers!

Would it be worth my while to visit learned Athens and view the ancient wealth of Asia, if Cynthia demonstrates at the ship's launching, scratching my face with her wild censorship, and, if the wind's against, claiming a debt of kisses on grounds of cruelty by a faithless man?

Manipulative mistress? Prop. 1.6

It's not that I'm scared ... – but I'm ... estopped by a girl embracing me, who often lends her grave pleas cogent colour.

- Ability to convince with words and gestures

All night long she protests her passion, and when I leave her charges the Gods with non-existence, alleging she's no longer mine, with menaces of injured girl-friend to ungrateful man. Even for an hour I can't endure this prosecution;

- Ability to adapt techniques to suit purpose; also the possibility of getting a new boyfriend – might be seen to tie in with the beloved's need to support herself.

Prop. 1.6 continued

Would it be worth my while to visit learned Athens
and view the ancient wealth of Asia, if Cynthia
demonstrates at the ship's launching, scratching my
face with her wild censorship, and, if the wind's
against, claiming a debt of kisses on grounds of
cruelty by a faithless man?

- Rage further increased; the lines also strongly
imply that Cynthia is well-read, as the final
couplet echoes Cat. 70: the words of a woman
should be written on the wind and rushing water

The language of marriage

- Elegy nevertheless continually uses words associated with marriage and marital status to describe extramarital relationships – mentions of wedding torches, and ‘foedera’ (treaty, contract) are many
- Both male and female lovers are described by ambiguous terms:
 - ▣ Vir, used of rivals, or by the beloved of the narrator, means both ‘man’ and ‘husband’
 - ▣ Coniunx, of the beloved, normally means ‘wife’, but is often used of the beloved by the narrator
- NB: Elegy also uses a range of typically elegiac pet names: domina, lux, vita etc.

Between matron and mistress

- Prop. 2.6.41 f: No wife, no girl-friend ever shall lead me astray; always you'll be girl-friend and always wife to me.
- “Cynthia is to be *matrona* and *meretrix* in one, and consequently from the perspective of traditional Roman ideology she can be nothing at all since these categories are mutually exclusive.” (Miller, 2004, 63)
- Or, the beloved is no-one, only a reflection of the male narrator, as we shall see further next week.