

# ELEGY AND HORACE: HORACE AND ELEGY

# Horace's Odes and Elegy

- Books 1-3 of the Odes published before 23 BC
- Book 4 later – it is different, too – c. 17 BC
- Shares with the elegists the interest in Greek poetry, although ostensibly continues Catullus' focus on early Greek lyric (Sappho, Alcaeus, Alkman)...
- ...but rejects larger themes in the same way the elegists do – same preference for slender forms
- Considerable experimentation with verse forms: the metre, too, tells us that his love poems are (should be?) different

# Have a look!

‘That rosy neck, those smooth and wax-white arms’ – Lydia, when you regale me with Telephus’ charms, bile boils and chokes me, my mind fails, tears – I can’t help them – trickle, my cheek pales: proof of the slow fires that gnaw at my entrails. And if one of your drunken rows has left scars behind on your snowy shoulders, or bites furiously signed on your lips, I burn! But listen to me: you will lose your ‘faithful’ lover, this savage whose kisses bruise that exquisite mouth which Aphrodite imbues with her quintessential nectar. A hundredfold happy are they alone whom affections hold inseparably united; those who stay friends without quarrels, and cannot be torn away from each other’s arms until their dying day. (Hor. *Carm.* 1.13)

# Love poetry *topoi*

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- *Servitium amoris*: emasculation of male lovers in the face of love
  - ▣ The acceptance of a rival
  - ▣ The emotional (and unmanly, from a Roman standpoint) reaction
  - ▣ The cuckold as a literary character
- Praise for fidelity but from the spectator's position: it is not what the narrator can hope for
- The dream image of shared old age, cf. Tibullus
- Differences?
  - ▣ Less of swinging wildly between hate and love, desperation and hope
  - ▣ **Self-awareness** of the role played: the cuckold
  - ▣ Implicit: awareness of old age approaching

# More importantly...

- ...love is but one of many topics in the *Odes*:
  - ▣ Unlike when we read elegy, there is no temptation to construct a linearly developing love story based on the love poems interspersed in the *Odes*
    - This is underlined by the variation in metre: there is not one theme but many to this collection!
- Love is a trifle, a pastime, not a key task: Horace's appreciation of *otium* and *negotium* differs from that of the elegists
  - ▣ Cf. that of Vergil's shepherds

# Horace on elegy (Carm. 1.33)

Tibullus, give up this extravagant grieving  
For a sweetheart turned sour. 'Why was she deceiving?'  
You ask, and then whimper long elegies on  
The theme of the older man being outshone.  
Lycoris, whose forehead is nearly all curls,  
Is burning for Cyrus. *His* favourite girl's  
Pholoe. *She* in turn throws him a frown  
Meaning 'Does and Apulian wolves will bed down  
Sooner than I'll take a cheat like him!'  
That's Venus' method. According to whim  
She puts bodies and minds to work her brass yoke  
In incongruous pairs – and enjoys the bad joke.

I know. When a far better chance was presented  
I stayed with my freed-woman, chained and contented,  
Though she handed out stormier treatment to me  
Than dented Calabria gets from the sea.

- Elegy from the outside?
  - Incorporates elegiac vocabulary in 1<sup>st</sup> half (*fides, laesus, tenuis, amor...*) but not in 2<sup>nd</sup> (*detinuit* only hint)
- Humorous take on (break-down of?) elegiac narrative
  - Use of names – who is known from elegy here?
- Incongruity as important in elegy
  - Humour theory
- Spelling it out: Elegiac reality?
  - 'Cheat' = *adultero*
- => May we use this as an indication of contemporary reader response?

# Horace vs the elegists

- Love is like a species of musical chairs. In the sequence of days as well as seasons, love begins and ends. And since love in conventional eyes belongs to the amusing margins of youthful life, that in conventional eyes would probably be deemed right – or at least inevitable. It is a truth which permeates the *Odes*. But again of course it is one that is normally anathema to the Elegists, to Tibullus as well as Propertius. (Lyne, 1980, 217)
- ▣ But cf. Trevor Fear's reading of elegy

# Hor. Carm. 1.25

The young bloods come round less often now  
Pelting your shutters and making a row  
And robbing your beauty sleep. Now the door  
Clings lovingly close to the jamb – though, before,  
It used to move on its hinge pretty fast.  
Those were the days – and they are almost past –  
When lovers stood out all night long crying,  
'Lydia, wake up! Save me! I'm dying!'  
Soon your time's coming to be turned down  
And to feel the scorn of the men about town –  
A cheap hag haunting alley places  
On moonless nights when the wind from Thrace is  
Rising and raging, and so is the fire  
In your raddled loins, the brute desire  
That drives the mothers of horses mad.  
You'll be lonely then and complain how sad  
That the gay young boys enjoy the sheen  
Of ivy best or the darker green  
Of myrtle: dry old leaves they send  
As a gift to the east wind, winter's friend.

- *Topoi:*
  - ▣ Paraklausithyron
  - ▣ Characters: the hard-hearted *puella* turning into the bawd
    - *Where are the connotations to witch-craft here?*
  - ▣ Characters: the slave of love
    - Imitation of elegiac discourse
- Is there a difference in tone?
- Is there a difference in approach and technique?

# A two-way street

- We've seen elegiac responses to Vergil's *Eclogues* in Propertius (1.18)
- Clearer engagement with Horace's *Odes* occurs only when elegy itself begins to change to embrace wider themes
  - ▣ Poetological
  - ▣ Contemporary
  - ▣ Mythological
- Especially in the opening sequence of Prop. 3, but across Book 3 as a whole as well (cf. Keith, 2008, 62ff)

# Lecture plan based on poll

1. 2-parter: other genres and book structures
2. Horace workshop: *Odes* 1.13; 1.25; 1.33;
3. Preparing the presentation 1
4. Vergil's *Eclogues* and elegy
5. Historical authors
6. Changes in elegy: Ovid's *Amores*
7. The later Ovid 1
8. Cynthia's wish-list
9. Preparing the presentation 2
10. Elegiac reception