

AUGUSTAN LOVERS 8

The Elegiac Relationship

Lecture overview

- Typical features of the elegiac relationship:
 - Inversion of normative patterns of gendered behaviour: active and passive
 - Slavery of love: *servitium amoris*
 - Character action
 - Linguistic register: referring to the beloved as 'domina', 'mistress' (femine of 'master')
- Elegiac writing and the presentation of the elegiac relationship: reality and fantasy juxtaposed

Slavery of love

- It becomes a literary common place (*topos*) from the elegists onwards
 - ▣ You will see it referred to as ‘servitium amoris’
- The male lover/narrator describes himself as being a slave to love with the female beloved as his slave master
 - ▣ Striking inversion of gender roles
 - ▣ Remember the class of these writers and their audience – as striking an inversion for these upper-class young men to debase themselves as one could possibly imagine

An early example: Prop. 1.4

Why press me, Bassus, by your
praise of all those girls to
change my mind and leave
my mistress? Why not let me
spend whatever life is left me
in the **familiar** bondage?

Praise as you may the beauty
of Spartan Hermione and
Nycteus' daughter Antiope
and all the women born in
Time's beautiful days, Cynthia
leaves them nameless. Much
less would a harsh critic mark
her down as inferior when
compared with minor figures.

- The text repeatedly highlights that the narrator is not master of his own actions
 - ▣ Bassus (tempting him)
 - ▣ Cynthia (not allowing him to mention competition)
- The word used for mistress is 'domina', which is exactly what slaves would call their female owner
- 'in familiar bondage' also brings across how harsh a phrase this is; this is the narrator's normal state of being
- Praise for Hermione of Sparta: Euripides' *Andromache* – Bassus already an elegiac lover?

Prop. 1.4 continued

But her beauty's the smallest part of my obsession, Bassus. Greater things there are that make it sweet to die: well-bred complexion, grace of many accomplishments, and joys over which I'd rather draw a veil. So the more you strive to destroy our love, the more we frustrate you with our mutual trust.

- The narrator wishes this state to last (cf. final lines), and enjoys it
 - ▣ Contrast: slavery as metaphor in political contexts, for peoples as well as individuals (see Lyne for examples)
- But: stronger connection to real slavery: e.g. being robbed of free speech
- Note also the description of the beloved as a highly cultured woman

Prop. 1.4 continued

You'll suffer for it. She'll get to know of your wild words and you'll have made no inarticulate foe. Cynthia won't trust us together after this, and won't invite you. She'll remember your offence. In her wrath she'll slander you to all the other girls; no door, alas, will welcome you.

- Bassus is already part of the elegiac world – cf. Tullus and Ponticus 1.6 and 1.7
- Passivity on the narrator's part: he is being entrusted, not going on his own accord
- Bassus already expected to behave in the way of an elegiac lover, begging for entry on the doorstep – sets the scene for Prop. 1.16 especially

Prop. 1.4 concluded

No shrine will be ignored by her lamenting, no sacred stone soever and wherever. No loss is a more serious blow to Cynthia than when her charms are robbed of love – specially mine. I pray that it remains so always and I find nothing to reproach her for.

- Cynthia as the upholder of the ideal of fidelity between lovers?
 - ▣ An early hint that both male and female lovers stray?
 - ▣ Consider the position – this poem follows on 1.3!
- Inconsistencies: this narrator has already written two lamentations of his fate: 1.1 and 1.2
- The ideal of an everlasting relationship
- In Prop. 1.4, the slavery of love is a metaphor borrowing two features from real slavery:
 - ▣ Linguistic register (e.g. domina)
 - ▣ Lack of freedom of speech

Getting physical: Tibullus 2.3

The beloved in the countryside

Imagines adopting the concrete behaviour of a real farm slave for the mistress

Domina

Imagines performing tasks without complaint, going on to liken himself with Apollo serving Admetus

Rura meam, Cornute, tenent
uillaeque puellam: ferreus
est, heu heu, quisquis in urbe
manet. ipsa Venus latos iam
nunc migravit in
agros, uerbaque aratoris
rustica discit Amor. o ego, cum
aspicerem dominam, quam
fortiter illic uersarem
ualido pingue bidente
solum agricolaeque modo
curuum sectarer
aratrum, dum subigunt
steriles arua serenda
boues! nec quereretur quod
sol graciles exureret
artus, laederet et teneras
pussula rupta manus.

Estates and country-houses intern
my girl, Cornutus; only a man of
steel could stay in town. Venus
herself has flitted now to lonely
fields and Love is learning
ploughman's dialect.

With what determination, if I could
see my mistress, I'd loosen the rich
loam with potent mattock and
follow the curved plough in
agricultural fashion while gelded
cattle worked the land for sowing,
with never a complaint when the sun
scorched my thin arms or broken
blisters made my soft hands sore!

Tib. 2.3

- Tibullus often speaks lovingly of the country side, Tib. 1.1; 1.5; 2.1 – this increases the effect of 2.3
 - ▣ Tibullus often said to be the odd one out: narrators in Prop. and Ov. mostly distinctly out of place in the country
- There, the Tibullan narrator imagines living in simple circumstances in the countryside with his *domina*, cf. in Tib. 1.5.21-35 where his daydream consists of them sharing the burdens
- In 2.3 the inversion of gender roles is extremely conspicuous
 - ▣ Remember the power of life at a small-scale farm as a Roman ideal!
- The notion of slavery of love becomes gradually more set as elegy develops, from finding its form in Propertius Book 1 to being the object of Ovid's literary games in the *Amores*

Tib. 2.3: poetics?

- Ferreus / mollis: City dwellers are accused of being hard-hearted, but it also works on a poetological level
 - ▣ *Mollis* (soft) is frequently used of elegiac verse; the ideal elegists strive for – cf. Callimachean preferences for genres other than epic
- Venus is learning rustic words: there is a transposition of content to another setting - with a certain impact on the genre?
 - ▣ Can elegy work outside of the city, and if not, what does that tell us of elegy?
 - ▣ Cf. Prop. 1.17; 18 for partial support but note the lack of a recipient: elegy abroad resounds in a vacuum? Cf. Verg. *Ecl.* 10
- Is the fantasy of blistered hands an hint that if real, the body of the narrator (the key character) would be destroyed and thus the foundations of the genre deconstructed? Can the metaphor be made real without the genre imploding?
 - ▣ Cf. Ov. *Am.* 1.9 later on!

Tib. 2.3: servitium in good company

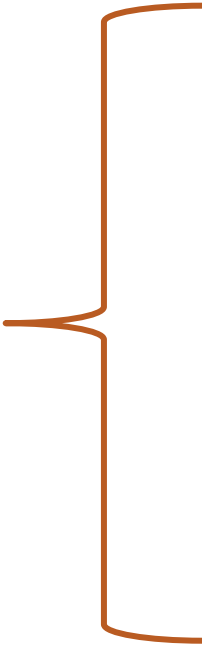
- The example of Apollo serving Admetus – a god subjugated under a mortal like the narrator under the *domina*
 - ▣ Apollo in servitude under Admetus due to a transgression against Zeus/Jupiter (for one year)
 - ▣ Identical sufferings listed, undertaken with good cheer
 - ▣ The narrator aligned with Apollo (poetic activity) hence tempting?
- Tibullus normally uses mythological examples very sparingly: again, it stands out more; it must carry meaning
 - ▣ Reflection on expansion of the genre – Apollo trying out something unusual?

Returning Elegy to Normal?

Though I'm content with Samian ware to extend a merry party or cups of clay turned on the wheels of Cumae, alas, there's no denying that girls adore the rich. Then welcome Loot if Love loves affluence! My Nemesis shall float in luxury and strut the Roman streets parading gifts of mine. She shall wear fine garments woven by the women of Cos, and bordered with threads of gold. She shall have swart attendants, browned in India, stained by the Sun-God steering near. [...] My words are day-dreams. Now her king is a former slave, who once marked time with chalked feet on a foreign scaffold.

- This is elegy as we recognise it from Prop. 2.1
- Elegy is clearly tied to the current climate of foreign conquest
- ...and distanced from ideal image of early Rome as it is presented from the Republic onwards
 - Cf. also Cat. 10 and Pedrick, V. (1986) 'Qui potis est, inquis? Audience Roles in Catullus', *Arethusa* 19, 187-209. [Project Muse, JSTOR]
- 'My words are day-dreams': a comment on elegy as a whole?
- A comment on the enslavement of a narrator such as this not to a woman but to the times?

Working with Tib. 2.3

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- Venus herself has flitted now to lonely fields / and love is learning a ploughman's dialect [1 f]
 - My words are day-dreams. [63]
 - And you, o tender Bacchus, planter of the pleasant vine, [67]
 - Lead on. I'll plough the furrows at the bidding of a mistress / and cheerfully accept the leg-irons and the leash. [83f]

Effects of the *servitium*

- What are the effects of the elegiac narrators taking this pose, in some cases in a very extreme manner?
- Is it romantic in the modern sense of the word?
 - ▣ Does it encourage the reader to feel compassion for the suffering narrators?
- Is it laughable?
 - ▣ Showing the readers clearly that the narrators do not know how to behave as proper grown-up Roman men?
 - ▣ Do the narrators become even more similar to star-struck young lovers in Comedy?

Tib. 2.3 and other Tibullan poems

- As a follow-up, please compare the attitudes and actions of the narrator in Tib. 2.3 with those of the narrator in Tib. 1.2
- Are we likely to read 2.3 in any particular way when influenced by 1.2?
- What do we make of the fact that both these poems exemplify two topoi of elegy: *servitium amoris* and the *paraklausithyron*?

Next week

- No lecture on Monday
- Seminar at 11.15 on Friday (LR11)
 - ▣ For the seminar, we focus on the lover's warfare in Tib. 1.1 and 1.10: instructions are at the bottom of our moodle page
- Change of order of lectures:
 - ▣ Tuesday: Paraklausithyra (in front of the door)
 - ▣ Thursday: Militia amoris (lover's warfare)
 - ▣ Friday: Eternal love (foedus aeternum)
 - ▣ Following Monday: Banqueting scenes and the language of marriage