

OUTSIDER CHARACTERS

Augustan Lovers 13

Outsider characters in elegy 1

- Characters aligned with normative society: patrons, and friends
 - ▣ Maecenas and Messalla: who's who?
 - ▣ Literary patronage – links to lectures on the Augustan context
- What functions do these characters have?
 - ▣ Upholding the notion that elegy is descriptive of real-life situations/stories
 - ▣ New themes: exoticism
 - ▣ Foils for the narrators

Who's who?

- G. Maecenas (70-8 BC) served in several military campaigns before and during the civil wars, and then as advisor to Augustus
 - ▣ 38-20 BC at least he also features prominently in contemporary poetry as a leading patron of new literary work: Vergil and Horace are perhaps his most famous clients
- M. Valerius Messalla Corvinus (64 BC – 8 AD), consul 31 BC (in place of Anthony, despite previously having worked against Octavian).
 - ▣ Main period of literary patronage slightly later than Maecenas; Tibullus, and Ovid among his clients

What did a patron do (and not)?

- School book / traditional view: Maecenas Augustus' propaganda manager
 - ▣ Encouraging poets to write on specific topics, and interfering directly in their work: evidence from Servius (late 4th C AD) on specific prompts for Vergil's works
 - Value?
- Developments of the 1960s
 - ▣ Equation of Augustus' reign with mid-20th C dictatorships
 - ▣ Syme *The Roman Revolution*

Current scholarship

- Maecenas and Augustus? No dedications to Maecenas after 20 BC, and direct dedication to Augustus in *Carmen Saeculare* in 17 BC
 - ▣ Williams, G. (1992) in Gold, B. K. (ed.) *Literary and Artistic Patronage in Augustan Rome*, Austin.
- Current scholarship: 'The poets are seen neither as ideological supporters nor cryptocritics, but as purveyors of ambivalences, ambiguities, and ironies on a rather massive scale. [...] There is not much to be gained by measuring Augustan poems by the standards of [Augustus'] wishes, whatever they may have been. [...] The poets had their own minds, a fact fully recognized by [Augustus] and Maecenas. They are Augustan because they lived during his reign, and their poetry in many ways is a response to their times. They had their own perspectives on them, which often are not uniform even within the same poet's oeuvre and which range [...] from the articulation of shared ideals to frank criticism. Moreover, the poets were anything but merely reactive; they helped to shape Augustan culture as much as he did.' (Galinsky, 1996, 245f; cf. also Gale, 1992)

The place of patrons within elegy

- Central to all readings: the characters aligned with normative society function as foils for the characters of the elegiac narrators:
 - ▣ Tullus in Prop. 1.6 doing what a young man should do
 - ▣ Macer in Tib. 2.6 going to war while the narrator prefers the *militia amoris*
 - ▣ Friends writing epic and tragedy (e.g. Prop. 1.7)
- As mentioned, this has been read as an outright rejection of military service (and Augustanism)

Patrons and elegiac games

- If we accept that the narrators of elegy are also comical creations, what roles do the patrons fulfil?
- The narrators have a blinkered world-view (as readers, we have already exposed this): they are 'locked in' in that view point
- New, antithetical characters give access to new themes without the narrators acting out of character
 - ▣ Exotism – a topic generally appealing to writers inspired by Hellenistic material; also a response to wealth and luxury goods flowing into Rome as a result both of conquest and of inner peace
 - Allows elegist narrators to balance the libertine and conservative views
 - ▣ Traditional topics: triumphs, political events
 - Depiction not always straightforward: Prop. 2.10 on the Parthians distorts historical events for effect
 - Language in some of these passages also elegiac, and maps historical events onto elegiac relationships... ...cf. how Augustus becomes the dura puella of Ovid's exile poetry

Patrons and elegiac games 2

- Other options:
 - ▣ The game of how badly can you misunderstand the patronus/clients relationship? Are the recurrent *recusationes* another indication of the ineptitude of the narrators in handling normal society?
 - Cf. misunderstandings of social relationships as a key topic in Roman satire and epigram
- Or, does the link between the narrators and their friends outside of the elegiac world make them just Roman enough for the comic effects created by their relationship to women and politics in general to have/maintain an edge?
 - ▣ Political reading: Shows that the narrators are aware of the protocol, ie. their rejection is an informed decision

The example of Tib. 1.7

- In the honour of Messalla's triumph awarded following his victory over the Aquitanians in 27 BC, on the specific occasion of his birthday
- The poem 'offers a panoramic sweep of Rome's imperial reach' (Bowditch, 2012, 122)
- Birthday poems an expression of affection and friendship, and in later authors often a confirmation of links of patronage
- ...but they are also reflective of actual practice, including that of celebrating and performing sacrifices in the absence of the person celebrated
 - ▣ Extensive prose and epigraphic evidence, cf. Argetsinger, 1992.

Tib. 1.7

- 1-8 on Messalla's triumph
- 9-22 list of rivers which Messalla must have marched alongside
 - ▣ Note the remark about the narrator's own presence, upsetting his earlier claims about rejecting foreign service
 - Or, is it his elegiac poetry that contributes by honouring such triumphs?
- 23-48 Osiris; equated with Bacchus ('Osiris taught the tying of the tender vine to poles')
- 49-54 Osiris asked to attend and assist the enjoyment at the party held in Messalla's honour
- 55-64 Wishes for Messalla

Osiris, Bacchus, and Messalla

- 'Not sorrow or dull care, but song and dance, Osiris,
/ and fickle love suit you' Tib. 1.7.42f
 - ▣ Implicitly: Messalla too is being pulled into the world of elegy
- 'To farmers' hearts exhausted by long labour /
Bacchus brings deliverance and joy. / Bacchus
offers respite to mortals in affliction, / though
chains clank on their ankles.' Tib. 1.7.39-41
 - ▣ Chains:
 - Reference to the narrator and fellow elegiac sufferers?
 - Reference to prisoners paraded in the triumph?

The narrator, Bacchus, and Messalla

- Bacchus as reliever of toils => references to Messalla's accomplishments in war not a suitable topic when under his influence
 - ▣ Cf. the distinction between otium and negotium, leisure and work
- Instead, Messalla is praised for the repairs of the Via Latina:
- 'May visitors to Tusculum and white Alba's ancient Lar / talk of your memorial, the road - / for here is hard-packed gravel laid at your expense / and here are stone blocks fitted skilfully together. / May farmers sing of you, as they come from the great city, / returning in the dark without a stumble.' Tib. 1.7.57-62

The Via Latina



- Messalla has done well by farmers lurching home from the city – and the emphasis on wine in the previous sections may lead one to suspect they are not entirely sober either
- The narrator is thus shown to have the same blinkered view of the world as elsewhere, since his emphasis slips from Messalla's military achievements to leisure
- Is the birthday just an excuse for a good party?
- Parallels between Messalla and Osiris amusing too? Interesting area for speculation, but we do not have enough facts to substantiate this.
 - ▣ Feminine characterisation of Osiris, Tyrian clothing, tender feet – has Messalla, implicitly, become elegiac too?

To take away

- Patrons and friends appear frequently in elegy
- They offer a range of new themes...
- ...and are useful as foils for the character of the narrators
- Literary patrons and Augustus – traditional preconceptions rely mostly on late antique evidence. The workings of literary patronage are subtle and complex

Reading:

- P. White (1993) *Promised Verse. Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome*, Cambridge
- Bowditch, L. (2006) '*Propertius and the Gendered Rhetoric of Luxury and Empire: A Reading of 2.16*' *Comparative Literature Studies* [on Project Muse]