

WOMANUFACTURE IN OVID

Augustan Lovers 6.2.13

Ovid: The first poems of the *Amores*

- 1.1 – the narrator claims he wanted to write epic (*arma gravi...bella parabam*) but the decision to write love poetry is forced by Eros and connected explicitly to the technicalities of writing poetry
- 1.2 – the narrator suffers lovesickness, but doesn't know why
- 1.3 – the narrator now knows he is in love, but focuses significantly more on his own suffering than on the object of his desire (who remains anonymous)

Ov. Am. 1.3.

*I'm not love's acrobat to leap
from bed / to bed. Believe me,
you'll be mine always: with you
may heaven let me pass my days
/ through the span granted by the
Sister's thread, / and die with you
there weeping. Offer me /
yourself, a happy subject for my
verse: / my verse will issue worthy
of its source. / So many owe their
fame to poetry - ... We too shall
live in verse the whole world
through, / and my name shall be
ever linked with you.*

- Foedus aeternum
- Threads and poetry
- The puella as inspiration
- Pride in poetry
- Eternal life by poetry - topos

The first poems of the *Amores*

- 1.4 – the beloved is still not named. The elegiac *topos* of a feast scene and flirting in secret, with signs understandable only to a select few; cf. Callimachean poetics
- 1.5 – scene set for sex, Corinna appears for the first time, and is described body part by body part:

Ov. *Am.* 1.5

In summer's heat and mid-time of the day

To rest my limbs upon a bed I lay.

One shutter closed, the other open stood,

Which gave such light as lies within a wood,

Like twilight shade at setting of the sun,

Or when night's gone and yet not day begun.

Such light for bashful girls one should provide,

In which their shyness may have hope to hide.

In came Corinna in a long loose gown...

- In bed at noon? Not a Roman thing to do!
- The shutters – one closed, one opening: transferring the reader's gaze to what may come on stage
- Twilight / dawn: further emphasises new beginnings and that something is about to break
- Bashful girls: note the plural – this is a general statement
- Entry of Corinna: note the 'stage note'-like appearance

Ov. Am. 1.5

In came Corinna in a long loose gown / her
white neck hid with tresses hanging down; / so
to her many lovers came Lais / or in her
bedroom fair Semiramis. / I snatched her
gown; being thin the harm was small, / yet
strove she to be covered therewithal, / and
striving thus as one who wished to fail, / was
simply beaten by her self-betrayal. / Stark
naked as she stood before mine eye, / no
blemish on her body could I spy. / What arms
and shoulders did I touch and see, / how apt
her bosom to be pressed by me! / Belly so
smooth below the breasts so high, / and waist
so long, and what a fine young thigh. / Why
detail more? All perfect in my sight; / and
naked as she was, I hugged her tight. / And
next – all know! We rested, with a kiss; / Jove
send me more such afternoons as this.

- 7: veiled in gown
- 8: hair covering ivory shoulders
- 9f: compared to courtesans of Greece;
note the intrusion of other lovers here!
 - ▣ Note also that they are lovers known from literature!
- 11f: gown is disposed of, but still covers girl
- 13f: wants to be defeated
- 15f: before the narrator's eyes, unveiled,
without blemish – focus on the body
 - ▣ Cf. Callimachean tenets of polishing
- 17f: shoulders and sides, narrator moves
from looking to touching, breasts suited
for squeezing
- 19f: flat tummy
- 21f: sides and thighs
- 23f: body to be pressed to his, no notice
taken of particular things

Body part puzzles and literary tradition

- Greek erotic epigram shares this practice (although in a somewhat more crude fashion); Roman poets like Martial and Juvenal will too
 - ▣ Set list of body parts to be described: hair, breast, and eyes is the minimum, but note that elegy never is sexually explicit. Cf. Richlin (1992) Chapter 2.
- Erotic epigram was one of the genres appreciated – and produced! – by Callimachean poets
- This link to epigram writing also underlines the absence of one single storyline in elegiac poetry books – epigram books are very rarely consistently focussed on one topic, let alone one character!

Pygmalion the elegist

- Ov. *Met.* 10 tells the story of the artist Pygmalion, which has been read as a reflection on the creation of the elegiac beloved
 - ▣ Sharrock 1991 'Wom manufacture' [JSTOR]
 - ▣ Ov. *Met.* 3 on Narcissus is also often read as a reflection on the elegiac beloved as an artist creation/reflection – cf. Rimell, 2006
 - ▣ Pygmalion rejects love as so many women are faithless (cf. how the elegiac narrators never really set out to write elegy, and later tries to move on from elegy because of disappointments in love) but creates, again piece-meal, a statue so lovely that he falls in love with it
- The statue is more beautiful than any real-life woman could ever be: 'Meanwhile with happy skill and miraculous art, he carved a snowy ivory / and gave it shape and beauty such as no woman could be born with, and he conceived a love of his creation' (Ov. *Met.* 10.247-249)

Using Pygmalion

- The language of the epic *Met.* 10 is very similar to that of elegy and elegiac descriptions of both writing poetry and of the bodies of the beloved:
 - ▣ The statue is made of ivory, a material often used to describe female bodies in sexual/erotic situations in elegy, and likened to snow, which is even more associated with eroticism
 - Prop. 2.1.19: Cynthia has ivory fingers while she plays the lyre: does she momentarily become a statue performing art?
 - ▣ Is it real or not? To find out Pygmalion tentatively touches the statue – the same word is used as in Prop. 1.3.15
 - An indication that the reader shouldn't feel too confident Propertius' Cynthia is real, either...

Effects of building a girlfriend

- The reader is encouraged to look at the elegiac beloved as a conscious creation by the poet, matter rather than person
 - ▣ The one-sidedness of the elegiac relationship is underlined: note how Pygmalion is the subject of ‘conceived’; he invents his own falling in love, much as the Ovidian narrator in Am. 1.1-3 starts with love, and only later finds a target for that love
- ‘His concern is absurdly unreal’ (Sharrock, 1991, 41); the Pygmalion story thus underscores that elegy is more about the power of the artist/poet to set up this illusion than about reflecting reality

The need for learning

- The *puella* is made up of pieces that all fit the alexandrian standards of exclusiveness and neatness, and she is also sufficiently learned to appreciate Callimachean poetry (*docta puella*)
- This means that she both IS the elegists poetry, AND its recipient

Ov. *Am.* 2.4

She's educated, those rare skills are pleasing; or crude, then pleasing her simplicity. She'll say, compared with mine Callimachus' poems are rough – I like her liking me. She'll criticise my poems and the poet, I'll cuddle that hard critic blissfully. Her walk is lithe, I love it, or she's stony, a man can touch the stone and lithe she'll be.

To take away from this lecture

- *Puella* and poetry intimately connected throughout the elegiac corpus
- Impulse to read as a realistic tale balanced by the conflation of the creation of the *puella* and of poetry itself
 - ▣ Cf. Prop. 1.1 and 2.1 – from character to matter
 - ▣ Influence from Callimachus and Hellenistic poets
- ‘Womanufacture’: Wyke, Sharrock
 - ▣ Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: Pygmalion a parallel