

AUGUSTAN LOVERS 14

Bawds, procuresses and slaves

Notices

- There will be no lecture Thursday 21st November
- Seminars will re-start week beginning 25th November
- This means we will have seminars in the week beginning 25th November and week beginning 9th December

Binging bawds

- Prop. 4.5 and Ov. Am. 1.8 feature *lenae*, acting as pimps for the *puellae*
 - ▣ The poems are closely related on a number of points, and we shall see again how Ovid plays with Propertius
- The bawds are described in a stereotypical way, old and liable to drink:
- Rotten teeth, scrawny neck, foul breath in Prop. 4.5, ‘old hag’, white-headed, and ‘wine-bleary eyes’ in Ov. Am. 1.8



The impossibility of ageing

- The bawds have been read as horror visions of what the *puella* may become
 - ▣ ‘Whatever the poet’s professions of loyalty [...] it is her beauty which holds the elegiac lover enthralled’, Myers, 1989, 7.
- ...or for what she already is? In satire and invective, gastric hunger is often connected to sexual hunger, as is excessive drinking
 - ▣ This would imply that the *puella* is less than faithful and make the *lena* a stand-in for the narrator’s worries about the *puella*
 - ▣ Cf. Richlin, 1992, 148-152

Aged *puellae*?

- Furthermore – the *lenae* are old prostitutes
 - Cf. Dipsas in Ov. *Am.* 1.8 reminding the *puella* of how her youth will disappear and she needs to support herself
 - ▣ This ties in with James' theories on the *puella*'s lifestyle reflecting some level of real prostitution
- The opposition between idealistic love and prostitution
- Consequently, the narrators resent not only the bawds themselves but what they represent: a window on the *puella*'s future should she turn down the type of relationship they offer
 - ▣ Cf. counter-bids
 - in Tibullus' dreams of spending old age together
 - in Prop. 1.8B: Aurora and Tithonus

Old women are witches?

- Both Propertius and Ovid describe their bawds as witches, working love magic: Ov. *Am.* 1.8.5-18; Prop. 4.5.8-18
- Depictions are stereotypical and denote a literary *topos* appearing in other genres as well (e.g., satire: Horace)

In any case your husband won't believe him, Delia; for so an honest witch assured me by her magic. I have seen her drawing down the stars from heaven. Her chanting can reverse the river's flow. Her spells can split the ground, lure ghosts from graves and pluck the bones from smouldering pyres. Now with magic wailing she holds the infernal troop: now with sprinkled milk orders their return. [...] Only she, I'm told, knows all Medea's evil herbs; only she can tame Hecate's fierce hounds. (Tib. 1.2.14-54)

Magic matters

- Love magic appears occasionally in elegy, cf. Prop. 2.28B and most notably Tib. 1.2.43-58 where it is used to deceive a husband, but it is rejected by the narrators
- This rejection means that they claim their own power (e.g. of lover's persuasion) outdoes that of magic (cf. on Ov. Am. 1.6)
- => Is the *lena* a facet of the lovers'/narrators' personalities?

She could have forced Penelope to discount rumours about her husband and marry lewd Antinoos. Magnets at her behest lose power to attract iron and birds become stepmothers to their chicks. Indeed by using Colline herbs at her magic trench she'd wash a standing crop away by flood. Bold to impose conditions of the moon bewitched and disguise herself as a nocturnal wolf [...] Prop. 4.5

Poetry and power

- A threat to the narrator/poet? In Prop. 4.5 and Ov. *Am.* 1.8 she has appropriated their voices
- If the *puella* follows the advice of the *lena*, the subject matter of elegy will disappear
 - No need to woo a woman with words if she can be easily bought
 - This threat discussed by James as well as a reason for rejecting gift-giving
- Dipsas on poets:

Look, what except new verses does that poet give you? You'll get a lover's thousand things. The poet's god himself in golden mantle on gilded lyre plucks his melodious strings. Value a giver higher than great Homer. Believe me, giving too is a subtle art. (Ov. *Am.* 1.8.57-62)

Poetry and power

- The elegiac pose of emasculation: *servitium amoris*, *militia amoris*, etc.
- Contrast: the narrator's power over their discourse, and in turn over the *puella*
- Invectives against *lenae* (who pose a threat to their sexual potency) is a way of affirming masculinity
- Ov. *Am.* 1.8.111-114:
I could hardly keep my hands from her white head, that wispy straggling hair, those cheeks all wrinkled, those red wine-bleary eyes. May you be cursed with want in your old age and long hard winters, no roof above your head and endless thirst.
- Cf. Prop. 2.9.47f:
But how I wish, if I have faithfully lived out my years, that man could turn to stone while making love.

Comedy & real life?

- The 'staging' of Ovid's *lena* poem underlines Dipsas' background in Comedy
 - ▣ Cf. the name Dipsas from διψάω
- Cf. prologues in Roman Comedy – and their propensity for swing-door comedy situations!
- One difference: the pimp proper in Roman Comedy is usually male, a *leno*. Cf. Plautus e.g. *Pseudolus*. Female characters with pimp traits in Comedy do however offer teachings and advice, like the *lenae* in elegy – and like the narrators!
 - ▣ *Think of why it is attractive to the elegists to make their lenae female*
- There is an old hag, an old hag, name of Dipsas, a bawd, so listen if you'd like to know
- Chance let me overhear her long instructions (I was concealed behind the double door).
- Her words flowed on, when my shadow betrayed me; I could hardly keep my hands from her white head

Erotodidactic elegy?

- Full-blown erotodidaxis in Ovid's *Ars amatoria* (*Art of Love*)
 - ▣ Here, Ovid will often let his narrator draw on his experience as set out in the *Amores* – that is what makes him qualified to offer advice to other lovers
- Elegies with high erotodidactic content via other speakers: Tib. 1.4 (Priapus), Prop. 4.5 and Ov. *Am.* 1.8 (both *lena*e)
- Elegies with erotodidactic elements: e.g. Prop. 1.9; 20; Ov. *Am.* 1.4; 2.19, and 3.4

Dipsas and the Narrator's Discourse

- Dipsas' chief criterion for selecting lovers is practical use and gain
 - ▣ On the surface, elegy rejects (with its rejection of financial gain and civic honours) measurable results
 - ▣ On the other hand, the elegiac narrators too demonstrate a penchant for practicality: their poems are used to woo women e.g. by bestowing fame on them
 - ▣ Ovid will take this further in the *Ars*, wholly governed by 'utile'
- Nicolas Gross on how Dipsas takes over and twists arguments made by the Ovidian narrator – and how the narrator in 1.8 tries to misrepresent her speech
 - Prop. 2.11:

Others can write about you, Cynthia, or you can stay unknown: To praise you is to sow barren ground. You and all those gifts, believe me, one couch, shall carry off at last on death's black day, and passers-by will disregard your bones, not saying, 'These ashes once were a clever girl' (*docta puella*).
 - Ov. Am. 1.8.109:

Her words flowed on'
-- but as Gross shows, the cut-off point is actually at a carefully considered ending point of Dipsas' speech

Whose Side Are You On Really?

- Vis-à-vis the *lenae*, all elegiac narrators claim the moral high ground, as can be seen by Propertius claim that Achanthis could corrupt even Penelope
- This stands in comical contrast with the narrators' earlier advice for deception and deceit.
 - Cf. Augustan moralistic discourse in elegy
- Dipsas' statement that morality at Rome is failing actually reveals the foundations for elegy

Today in foreign wars Mars shows his mettle; in her son's city now it's Venus' reign. Pretty girls play. She's chaste? Well, no one asked her. She asks herself, unless she's too illbred. A matron too whose brows are wrinkled – shake them, from the wrinkles many a mischief may be shed. Penelope used a bow to test her suitors, to prove their prowess that great horny bow. (Ov. *Am.* 1.8.41-48)

Programmatic Poems

- While the narrators always claim to value fidelity, elegy as a genre is founded on infidelity
- Thus, the *lena*e poems implicitly comment not only on the literariness of the genre...
 - Antecedents from Roman Comedy
- ...but on what is at its very heart too
- The programmatic placement of these poems highlight this aspect:
 - Prop. 4.5 in the fourth book which throughout and often explicitly reflects on genre
 - Ov. *Am.* 1.8 placed in the key first 10 poems of Book 1, showcasing elegiac topoi
 - ...and it stands out by being twice as long as any other elegy in Book 1!