

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ROMAN ELEGY:
COUNTER-CULTURAL FEMINISM

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DOMUM SERVAVIT. LANAM FECIT: “She kept up her household; she made wool.” This was the ideal Roman woman – in the eyes and words of what was doubtless a male obituary writer, late second century B.C. vintage.¹ Our information on the role traditionally assigned Roman women – and by *role*, as distinct from social position and rank, I mean the socially prescribed pattern of behavior manifested by females when dealing with people who are not females – suggests that it involved little more than submissiveness, supportiveness, and stability. By the end of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the Empire, the men empowered to determine how women could and could not comport themselves apparently modified certain inconvenient regulations; nevertheless, they remained remarkably faithful to the spirit, if not the letter, of earlier laws reducing women to chattel status. While Roman society undeniably acknowledged the existence of women’s physical charms and mental endowments, for the most part it merely “patronized” females, accepting them only when they adhered to rigidly (and externally) delimited norms of conduct. Women were not as a rule admired for their individual qualities, much less permitted to function autonomously or esteemed for so doing.

But very few rules want for exceptions. In Latin love elegy, and the particular upper and upper-middle class social environment in which it flourished, we directly encounter a violation of the general behavioral principles outlined above. The women featured therein managed to attain a singularly exalted stature, to be appreciated as people in their own right. Their admirers, moreover, not only glorified them out of genuine adoration, they were also motivated by a powerful, often mischievously subversive desire to differentiate themselves and their own system of values from existing forms of conduct. Consequently, the amatory elegists do not restrict themselves to venerating their beloved. They even cast her in the active, masterful role customarily played by men. They do not simply conceive of their emotionally-absorbing romantic liaisons as acceptable activities; they consider them, and the poetry emanating from them, no less strenuous and praiseworthy pursuits than conventional Roman careers in

business, the military and the law. What is more, they are not satisfied with justifying their behavior; the Augustan elegists even recommend it wholeheartedly to others! By utilizing a new form of art to portray this role-inversion and achieve their sought-after moral conversion, they seem also to characterize themselves as a veritable “counter-culture,” a modern term whose applicability to the love elegists deserves further exploration. We should, however, first ascertain the exact role of women in the elegists’ Rome so that we can comprehend precisely what they reject and redefine. Then we may redefine. Then we may examine more closely the perversity and proselytism in the elegiac poetry of Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid.

I. *Mores*

We can marshal abundant and varied evidence to substantiate our initial assertion that Roman society relegated women to a subservient, confined role. Tomb inscriptions, for instance, affirm that wifely obedience (the technical Latin term is *obsequi*),² domesticity, chastity and fidelity to one man brought their occupants earthly fulfillment and will qualify them for eternal acclaim.³ Literary works also portray “nice women” as submissive and docile. Capitalizing upon the permissive, “holiday,” mood granted comic performances, the playwright Plautus parodies the conventional Roman marriage formula, which consigns the bride to her husband’s tutelage (*Cas.* 815-824). There a male slave, masquerading as a blushing bride, receives instruction from a slave woman on a Roman wife’s duties and rights. Like everything else in the scene, however, the advice reverses reality: it depicts the *wife* as the dominant, forceful marriage partner.⁴ Of equally great interest is the account which the Augustan historian Livy gives of the first protest demonstration over women’s rights (or lack thereof), the insurrection against the *Lex Oppia* in 193 B.C. (34.1-8.3). Even the story’s most outspoken liberal, the tribune who successfully agitated for the law’s repeal, believes that women are by nature passive and retiring. He seasons his complaints over Roman women’s lack of privileges and his demands for their equitable treatment with pious homilies on how women prefer dependence on males to emancipation of any sort (34.7.12-13). In this passage, moreover, we may discern the much-touted Augustan attitude toward women, a crucial component of the emperor’s moral rearmament programme. This effort (promoted by wool-spinning among the socially invisible women of the imperial household and repeated claims of the empress’ virtue) provides

further, historical, corroboration for a view of Roman women as quiet, submissive creatures.⁵

But contradictory evidence confronts us as well. Scholars are quick to point out that, by the first century B.C., Roman women enjoyed considerable power and freedom, particularly when one compares them to their counterparts in fifth century Athens and in the early Roman Republic.⁶ Marriage no longer required that a husband possess absolute ownership, *manus*, of his wife. Under the conditions of what was called marriage *sine manu*, wedded women could for all intents and purposes control property they had acquired from their male relatives and thereby retain some sort of individual identity; this arrangement also entitled either party to a divorce if he, *or she*, so wished.⁷ And upper class Roman women could lead morally relaxed, independent lives without having to resort to *divortium*. One modern scholar notes that they began emulating the conduct of the exotic émigrées, largely Greek freedwomen, who flooded Rome from the eastern cities of her newly-obtained Mediterranean empire.⁸ We can probably attribute such consciously loose behavior to a combination of envy and delayed emotional development: married by their fathers at the onset of puberty, Roman women faced the responsibilities of matronhood before they could cope with the romantic and sexual fantasies of adolescence.⁹ Whatever the explanation, some *matronae* from illustrious Roman families so completely adopted the freedwoman's dissolute mode of conduct that students of Latin poetry have never been also to determine the marital status and social class of the Augustan elegists' mistresses with any certainty.¹⁰

How, then, can we reconcile these two sets of facts? First, by recognizing that Roman society offered its women only a limited and illusory brand of liberation – visible independence, yes; autonomy, no. Limitations first. For one thing, whatever possibilities for emancipation *did* exist only affected a small minority of Roman women, the wealthy and the rootless. For another, even the most emancipated and self-assertive Roman woman lived in a state of bondage if we compare her to the most retiring Roman male. Historians who deal with first century B.C. Republican Rome are prone to talk about the political sway exercised by the ladies of Rome's leading houses.¹¹ Women with the right connections – such as Fulvia, wife successively of Clodius, Curio, and Antony, or Brutus' mother Servilia – no doubt constituted a political force in their own right.¹² But to wax enthusiastic over the *total impact women as a group* had on the Roman political scene is in many ways tantamount to marvelling over the extent to which house pets influence

their owners' living habits. *Quanta erit infelicitas urbis illius, in qua virorum officia mulieres occupabunt*, Cicero is reported to have said – stating unreservedly that woman's place is *not* in the forum.¹³ Forbidden to vote or hold political office, women could not have possibly exerted an influence on political affairs that even vaguely approximated their representation in the general population. We should not, moreover, cling to any false notions about Roman women's freedom to come and go as they liked, or imagine that they cast off all sexual restraints. Before the civil wars women invariably stayed at home while their husbands travelled abroad to fight and engage in provincial administration; even after Augustus formally instituted the practice of taking his wife along on journeys, respectable women practically never left Italy without a male escort.¹⁴ And, as Saara Lilja points out, while husbands had the right to philander as they chose – as long as they respected the chastity of a virgin or of another man's wife – wives were legally bound to uphold *fides marita*.¹⁵

Moving on to the grand illusions, we must not lose sight of the fact that a woman's social class and social acceptability were determined by the men in her life, her "patrons" as it were. The upper class matron owed her eminence – and probably her blueblooded husband – to the wealth, contacts and maneuverings of her father and other male kinsmen; by the end of the Republic, the very survival of a marriage like hers depended upon her attractiveness as a symbol of success.¹⁶ In addition, she was as strongly compelled to gratify men's whims and yield to their demands as was a freedwoman like Volumnia/Cytheris, an actress whose coquetteries gained her the affections of Rome's leading men (among them Antony and the love elegist Cornelius Gallus). A major historical study of the late first century B.C. relates how some women of the upper classes took selfish advantage of existing social opportunities – involving themselves in politics and the arts, managing their own financial affairs – and paid dearly. Such "uppityness" lost them the ability to attract their male peers. "The emancipation of women had its reaction upon the men, who, instead of a partner from their own class, preferred alliance with a freedwoman, or none at all."¹⁷

This brings us to the second major *trompe-l'oeil* of Roman women's so-called liberation: the fact that women's new freedoms had really evolved in order to render them more serviceable to men and male political ambitions. As marriage without *manus* deprived a wife of claims to her husband's estate, one scholar on Roman law conjectures that it was originally devised by the prospective bride-

grooms' families to obtain for their sons the advantage of a marital alliance without the usual obligations.¹⁸ Easy divorce had similar benefits. It permitted fathers and brothers as well as spouses to discard politically useless in-laws in favor of more useful ones. Furthermore, in this world of constantly changing ententes and enmities, where women functioned as temporary cement, the power-hungry males who selected a kinswoman's marital partners often viewed women as things, not sentient, sensitive human beings. They tended to value women *as* mere political assets and not *for* redeeming personal qualities, evincing no concern for any feelings they might have. Witness Julius Caesar's behavior: how he cold-heartedly broke his daughter's engagement so that he might marry her to Pompey, or how he later contemplated shedding his own loyal wife in order to wed Pompey's daughter.¹⁹ Or how his nephew Augustus forced a match between his daughter Julia and stepson Tiberius, at great emotional pain to them both.²⁰ Or how their legendary ancestor Aeneas abandons Creusa and Dido, two women who deeply love him, the first basically out of loyalty to male relatives, the second so that he may continue upon a political quest. When Aeneas finally decides to commit himself to a lasting relationship with a woman, he selects as his mate a king's daughter who cares nothing for him; he must also destroy much that is beautiful in primitive Italy to achieve this aim.²¹ Hot political properties to be sure, but properties nonetheless, women of the late Republic and early Empire essentially reverted to their acquiescent, 'non-person' status under early Roman law. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. No wonder women "over-availed" themselves of what freedoms they did have, indulging in clandestine sex or engaging in challenging activities at the risk of losing male approbation!

But we must reconcile the *ideal* of Roman women's seclusion and obsequiousness with the *fact* that many proper Roman women could and did mingle freely in public and have legally sanctioned carnal knowledge of more than one man. We must also come to grips with the patently licentious behavior of freedwomen and with the openly acknowledged demand for unrestrained, free-wheeling women of their type voiced by the men of the propertied classes. The frequent claims of uxorial rectitude on funeral inscriptions, Augustus' efforts to re-affirm the "old" Roman morality – such insistent self-righteousness suggests that its eulogizers are trying to combat a trend in the other direction, to contrast examples of "what should be" to "what actually is." The *princeps*' moral programme – lest we forget – included not only propaganda and financial rewards for child production. Its architect

designed it for the express purpose of replenishing the depleted senatorial and equestrian ranks, Rome's ruling élite; it also featured laws requiring intra-class marriage of upper class males and forbidding adultery.²² Clearly Augustus, notorious exploiter of the new moral freedom though he was, found the conduct of certain upper class men, and the effect that it had upon the females whose lives they controlled, downright subversive.

Suetonius and Cassius Dio tell us that the 'new, moneyed' aristocracy, the equestrian rank, opposed Augustus' marriage and moral legislation.²³ We have, in addition, a far more eloquent and extensive protest against the sanctimonious moral assumptions and abusive social conventions of the late Republic and early Empire than ever could have echoed in the halls of the Roman Senate. It is, moreover, readily available and well-known to all students of ancient Roman culture. I refer to Latin love elegy, a form of self-revelation and indirect social criticism created and developed by members of the dissident equestrian class.²⁴ To be sure, the elegists' personal dissatisfaction with standard *mores* extended far beyond simple disenchantment with women's role – idealized and actual – in contemporary society. Yet Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid all reveal discontent with both the traditional Roman view of women as demure, submissive chattels and the current Roman practices which allowed women an ostensible increase in freedom so as to exploit them more fully. They write of a social milieu which pays no heed to common social expectations about female – and, conversely, about male – behavior. The amatory elegists, or at least their literary *personae*,²⁵ speak on behalf of the people whose iconoclastic actions ultimately struck Augustus as threatening. They constitute what present-day social historians would call a "counter-culture," a movement which seeks to "discover new types of community, new family patterns, new sexual *mores*, new kinds of livelihood, new esthetic forms, new personal identities on the far side of power politics."²⁶

I do not employ this current phrase, "counter-culture," simply to sound chic and *au courant*. If the wisdom of the past has anything to teach the present (certainly a belief cherished by all self-aware classicists), then the insights of contemporary man should bear on previous human experience as well. Furthermore, the label I am applying to the Latin love elegists and their coterie could not be more *à propos*. Like the counter-culture which sprang up in the industrialized Western nations during the late 1960's and early 1970's, this particular group was both young and conscious of youth's special privileges,²⁷

advantaged in terms of social and educational background, and relatively affluent.²⁸ Their youthful self-assurance, well-placed connections, high degree of intellectual attainment, and financial security enabled them to disdain accepted social practices. While more humble, unschooled and impecunious Romans deemed the “nuclear” family arrangement an economic necessity, the elegists could reject the idea of a subservient, supportive wife who bears multitudinous potentially useful offspring in favor of an exciting, attractive and spiritually inspiring female companion. These same personal advantages also permitted the amatory elegists to display a certain cynicism about politics; Propertius, for example, actually appears to question whether he or *any* individual can influence the governmental processes in what latter-day terminology would call a totalitarian state.²⁹ Instead, they invested their hopes and energies into maintaining romantic attachments, replacing the loyalty they were expected to pledge their *patria* with undying allegiance to their *puellae*. In addition, the Latin love elegists, like the counter-culturists of today, tried to forge a new, more meaningful set of values, embody them in actions which substituted for conventional social practices, and glorify them through art, the most exalted and effective means of human communication. Their redefinition of female and male roles, our concern here, nicely exemplifies their arch contrariness and wistful inventiveness in all matters; the attractive way in which they generally depict their relationships with women helps recommend their *vitae novae* to others.

II. *Amores*

From the very first, the Latin amatory elegists indicated both their non-compliance with widely-accepted behavioral norms and their bent toward social innovation by consciously and deliberately (if sometimes ironically) inverting conventional sex roles in their poetry. Catullus draws on the language of Roman politics in describing his relationship with Lesbia. He thereby infuses his avowals of love and devotion with a peculiar immediacy for the Roman reader; at the same time he indirectly attempts to question current social assumptions about upper-class male conduct and re-tailor them to accommodate his own emotional needs. Thrice in his elegiac poems, most notably in the closing lines of 109 with *aeternum hoc sanctae foedus amicitiae*, Catullus terms his association with his beloved a *foedus*. The word *foedus* means a bond, a treaty, a political pact made by two equally powerful – in other words, *male* – parties;³⁰ *amicitia*, moreover, does

not only signify friendship in our modern sense, but the political alliance in Catullus' day which substituted for party affiliation and demanded unswerving loyalty.³¹ The poet depicts this *foedus* as a hallowed pledge of mutual devotion, requiring efforts of a religious nature to sustain. Thus he attests to his own *pietas* and labels his commitment to his mistress *sancta fides*, *fides* being the late Republican word for "the bond of shared trust making possible political *amicitiae* between equals" (72.2-3).³² Catullus, then – in direct contrast to many contemporary Roman males who regarded their womenfolk as insensate political pawns – conceives of his Lesbia as a full equal deserving of the deepest trust. What is more, we have no evidence to indicate that Catullus ever revered or deeply involved himself in the late Republican political scene or adopted its underlying values; consequently, we might further conjecture that he is also expressing some doubts as to the ultimate validity of a system in which men's feelings about their personal associates are often respected while women's just as frequently pass unacknowledged. Such an interpretation of Catullus' purpose in utilizing political imagery can also apply to lines 3-4 of poem 72, where Catullus swears that he loves Lesbia *non tantum ut vulgus amicam / sed pater ut gnatos diligit et generos*, "not only as most men love their girlfriends, but as a father loves his sons and sons-in-law."³³ A recent study of Catullan poetic language argues that these lines are also employing the metaphor of political alliance; Roman aristocrats of the late Republic chose sons-in-law (and their own sons' fathers-in-law) with great care.³⁴ They deemed a suitor's political connections and influence far more important than their daughter's feelings about him, since marriage would join their house with his.³⁵ In this passage, therefore, Catullus would be comparing his special affection for Lesbia to that which men hold for their closest political allies and "public representatives." His juxtaposition of *gnatos* and *generos* may well, furthermore, imply that while politically ambitious men tend to prize their hand-picked supporters as highly as their natural male offspring, they accord a lesser degree of esteem to their female children, whom they force to function in an adhesive capacity. Whatever Catullus' poetic and social intents, by likening his fondness for Lesbia to paternal pride and support, he distinguishes himself quite trenchantly from most Roman men.

Catullus' poetic vocabulary in his love elegies abounds with other politically-charged words and expressions: *officium*, *iniuria*, *bene velle*, *benefacta*.³⁶ Inasmuch as the end of the Republic also brought down the curtain on the large-scale political maneuverings

by ambitious aristocrats (what Lily Ross Taylor calls “party politics”), we should not be surprised that the Augustan elegists never employ the word *amicitia* for the relationship between poet and mistress and invest the words *foedus* and *fides* with far more imprecise connotations.³⁷ Yet Catullus delineated his emotions and unusual social behavior through non-political language as well, by inverting an aspect of Roman social reality which endured for far longer than the political machinations of the late Republic. I have already mentioned the obligation imposed upon a Roman wife to remain faithful to her husband alone, though no such pressures impinged upon a male’s sexual freedom. In Catullus, and later in Propertius, we find the males adopting the loyal, trustworthy, conventionally female role and even trying to come to terms with their mistresses’ real and potential infidelities. The former compares himself – in lines 138-140 of poem 68 – to Juno, who was constantly deceived by her philandering spouse (140 *omnivoli plurima furta Iovis*), just as he is by Lesbia (136 *furta feremus erae*). The latter assumes a traditionally female stance in 2.7, when recounting his beloved Cynthia’s joy at the repeal of a law which would have forced him to marry a woman of his own social standing and produce children to increase Rome’s triumphs. In lines 7-10 he expresses utter revulsion at the now-remote possibility of marrying another woman. Even more significantly, he does not entertain the idea of adultery, of continuing his liaison with Cynthia despite his change in marital status; he in fact labels his legal involvement with a woman other than Cynthia betrayal (10 *prodita*) of their love. Further on in the same poem Propertius reaffirms his monogamous intentions (19 *tu mihi sola places*) and begs, in the subjunctive, that Cynthia feel the same way about him (*placeam tibi . . . solus*). One can cite other instances in Propertius’ elegies where a male in love assumes the traditional female role of devoted, dependent passivity and imputes masterful, active conduct to his beloved. Most notable is 2.13a.35-36 where the poet asks that his tombstone claim that he was *unius . . . servus amoris*, the male equivalent of such well-utilized terms for wifely virtue as *univira*.³⁸ Of greatest importance, however, remains the fact that Propertius, like Catullus, expects faithfulness from men as well as, if not more than from, women and thereby spurns the double standard characterizing Roman male-female relationships.

We now come to the most-commented upon inversion of Roman love elegy, that depicting the mistress as enslaver, *domina*, and the lover as slave. Giving vent to one’s darkest, most radically misandrous impulses, one could attempt to trace the source of such an elegiac

convention solely to the love elegists' rightful anger at the way Roman men virtually shackled their women; after all, feminist doctrine maintains that patriarchal societies such as that of ancient Rome treat females no better than they do their lowest, most despised slaves. But such does not turn out to be the case. Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid do not appear to posit any analogy between the social position of women and that of slaves. Nonetheless, the love elegists' use of the *topos* characterizing a lover as his mistress' slave should not for that reason strike us as any less remarkable or revolutionary. The idea of love-as-servitude, it is true, had circulated for centuries prior to the brief efflorescence of Roman elegy.³⁹ Yet the specific literary convention portraying one's lover as enslaver has an altogether different history. Formally originating in Alexandrian erotic poetry, it there invariably casts a *male* in the role of enslaver, whether the enslaved be a male, as happens most often, or a woman.⁴⁰ By transforming the archetypal erotic slave master into a slave mistress, then, by ascribing so much importance to a woman, the amatory elegists are displaying intellectual courage and originality as well as sheer infatuation. One critic calls this sort of transmutation a "radical break with Alexandrian poetic tradition," suggesting that the elegists were making a conscious rupture with literary as well as social and political orthodoxy.⁴¹ But let us examine the development of this particular idea in the elegists themselves.

One tends to think of the Latin word *domina* as nothing more than a fancy term for "woman" or "lady." Such is the sense conveyed by the word's Romance descendants such as *dame* or *donna*; *domina* already has such a diluted connotation in the later books of Propertius⁴² and in the love poetry of Ovid, who employs it in such places as *Amores* 1.4.60 and 3.2.80 as synonymous with *puella*. Its primal meaning, however, is that of "woman in command of household slaves," "the wife of the *dominus* in her capacity as overseer of the operations of the *domus* and its slaves."⁴³ *Domina* makes its debut in Latin love elegy at lines 68 and 158 of Catullus 68. In each of its occurrences it appears in close connection with a *domus* which the lady inhabits, an indication of both its etymological parentage and Catullus' own connection of the word with residence in an impressive abode. But only by extension can we interpret the poet's use of it to describe the enslaving power a *domina* has over her combination lover / house mate. Catullus is, more likely than not, reverting to a socio-political frame of reference, as is his wont: characterizing the *domus* as a woman's particular sphere of influence, an area in which men prove powerless

outsiders. Nevertheless, when he *does* talk about his helpless subservience to Lesbia, he calls her an *era* (68.136, in a passage discussed earlier), a word which also means mistress of slaves.⁴⁴ *Domina*, then, does not come into its own as a term for “enslaving, tyrannical controller of man’s fate as a result of man’s adoration for her” until Tibullus and Propertius begin to use it – and then quickly deteriorates into an amatory commonplace.

Tibullus delineates his subjection to a *domina* as, figuratively speaking, a painful, physical state linked with chains and lashings. At 2.3.79-80 he speaks of doing his mistress Nemesis’ bidding (*ad imperium dominae*) and thereby accepting *vinclis verberibusque*. He opens the succeeding poem by yielding to *servitium* and his *domina*, here again Nemesis, and bidding farewell to his inherited freedom (*libertas paterna*); he depicts this *servitium* as involving *catenae* and *vincla* (2.4.1-4). *Vincla puellae* also figure in poems referring to Delia: at 1.1.55 and (along with *verbera* and *slavery*) at 1.6.37-38. In the twenty-odd times that *domina* is applied, in the elegies of Propertius, to the poet’s mistress, the word lacks Tibullus’ characteristic implements of physical torture as escorts. Only five occurrences of *domina*, all in the Monobiblos, even portray Cynthia as imperious.⁴⁵ Yet Propertius also views his emotional state as a form of *servitium* (cf. 1.4.4, 1.5.19, 1.12.18; 2.20.20; 3.17.41). At lines 21-30 of 1.10, moreover, he dilates upon what this *servitium* entails: complete role reversal with a dollop of masochism. He himself must constantly endure Cynthia’s faithlessness, but can only expect cruel punishment from her if he gives the least sign of infidelity on his own part. Nonetheless, he equates great self-humiliation with deep self-fulfillment in love; in 23-24 of the next poem he proudly attributes his moods to her treatment of him. Although Tibullus’ and Propertius’ modification of this particular “beloved-as-enslaver” convention serves primarily as a poetic, and not a social, protest, the two poets certainly must have taken cognizance of the extent to which men in Roman society decided the fate and feelings of women. At any event, by having women control them, they are sharply reversing social reality.

A post-script on Ovid and *servitium*. As stated previously, the word *domina* has shed its original connotations of “powerful, absolute rule” in Propertius’ later books and in Ovid. What is more, when Ovid does speak of love’s slavery in such passages as *Amores* 1.3.5 and 3.11a.12, he never bothers to define his interpretation of the concept; in his elegies it has become a hollow cliché for the idea of a lover’s dependency. We can best explain the literal enervation of this once

daring, vivid metaphor by saying that as its newness wore off, so did the zeal of its employers to legitimize it. But there may be more to it than that. A point Ovid stresses in both the *Amores* (1.10.29-36) and the *Ars Amatoria* (2.682 and 727-728) is that both male and female should derive *equal* pleasure from love; in fact, he rejects homosexual practices (A.A.2.683-684) for their “undemocratic” nature, in that both parties are not equally gratified by lovemaking. Equal rights to erotic satisfaction – recalling Catullus’ use of political imagery to elevate women’s status in love to equal that of men – strike him as far preferable to inequality of any sort, regardless of the more powerful individual’s sex. Could it be that Ovid is here trying to correct what he sees as emotional and moral imbalance in the attitudes of his Augustan predecessors? Not that he criticizes them outright – far from it. Propertius and Tibullus, especially the former, had to battle fiercely in order to establish the validity of love poetry and its practitioners’ devotion to it (a point to which I want to return later); overstatement and exaggeration of the beloved’s power apparently helped gain love elegy popular acceptance. But, after the battle had been waged and won, Ovid could tone down amatory elegy’s polemic excesses and re-think its assumptions. To me, at least, it seems likely that he both recognizes and resents the ability of either sex to control or exploit the other *and* wants to resolve all sexual rivalries and tensions through equality in sex.

Finally, the most important inversion of all, one greatly facilitated by the love elegists’ comfortable backgrounds and, in the case of the Augustans, by their feeling that they were not vitally needed in the Roman governing and expanding process. I am referring to the elegists’ substitution of their mistresses and the pleasures derived from celebrating them for traditional Roman careers and their rewards. Their poetry describes *otium*, love and elegy (free time, women and song?) as activities which in importance rival accepted pursuits: the law and politics, financial acquisition, and the military, all pursuits which, in addition, supplied the elegists’ male peers with livelihood, challenge, glory and security. To most Roman men of the elegists’ station, women served as a means to one or several of the above ends. To the elegists, their mistresses and the satisfactions – sensual, artistic and emotional – they provided were end enough.⁴⁶ Catullus concludes 68 with the remark that Lesbia makes his life sweet, even though his adored brother is dead (159-160).⁴⁷ Tibullus proclaims at 1.1.57-58 that he does not care about praise; as long as he is with Delia, he can be labelled sluggish and lazy by ambitious men. What is

more, at 2.5.111 he maintains that he could not write at all, were it not for Nemesis. Propertius, who at 2.1.4 calls his mistress his very *ingenium*, at 1.7.9-12 insists, like today's proud-to-be-unliberated suburban housewife, that he only desires identity through his beloved. Ovid ascribes his poetic talent to his mistress' inspiration (*Am.* 1.3.19; 2.17.34; 3.12.16); at *Amores* 1.15.1-6 he maintains that his poetry will grant him as much renown as military, legal and political careers do others.

What is more, all of the elegists use the language of "establishment practices," i.e. politics, law, finance and warfare, to portray their love affairs. Catullus, of course, speaks about his liaison as if it were a political alliance. Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid also employ political and juridical imagery:⁴⁸ Tibullus with *leges* at 1.6.69 and *lege* at 2.4.52; Propertius in such elegies as 3.20 (15-16 *foedera... iura/lex*, 21 *foedere*, 25 *foedera*) and 4.8 (71 *foedera*, 74 *formula legis*, 81 *legibus*); Ovid with *Amores* 2.4.48 (*noster in has omnis ambitiosus amor*), 2.7, and 2.17.23-24 (*in quaslibet accipe leges;/ te deceat medio iura dedisse foro*). We find the Augustan elegists all defending their love life as a respectable replacement for rank and wealth: Tibullus at 1.1.51ff., Propertius in 1.8a and at 2.34.55-58, Ovid petulantly in *Amores* 3.8. Most common of all, however, is the time-honored depiction of love as an equivalent of military service.⁴⁹ One calls to mind Tibullus 1.1.75; Propertius 1.6.30, 2.7.15-18, 2.14.24, 4.1b.135-138, 4.8.63-70; Ovid *Amores* 2.12.1, 2.18.2 and especially 1.9 (*Militat omnis amans*).

By using the "mainstream" language of conventional Roman careers to represent the devotion they bestow upon and the rewards which accrue to them from their mistresses, the amatory elegists are trying to make their feelings understandable to "straight" readers, those who have not undergone the same experiences that they have. They aim for comprehensibility, chiefly so that they can justify their life styles to individuals (and possibly even to portions of their own psyches) who subscribe to conventional assumptions, believing love and love elegy something worthless, "*nequitia*." Yet the Augustan elegists also appear to be struggling toward a greater goal: the conversion of others to their beliefs and behavior. Ovid's attempts to turn potential lovers into practicing ones need no lengthy documentation; his self-styled tenure as *praeceptor amoris* managed to terminate both his stay in Rome and the Latin love elegy. Tibullus soft-pedals his approach in such elegies as 1.1, 1.5, and 1.6: he simply paints his rural idylls with Delia so attractively as to entice his audience away from their

tawdry existences. One immediately thinks of Charles Reich's lyrical, though often infantile and over-simplified, evocations of Consciousness III in *The Greening of America*.

But it is Propertius that should concern us here, since he, more than any of the elegists, fought to convince and succeeded in convincing the Roman literary public of love poetry's worth (without Propertius' victory, we should never have had an Ovid).⁵⁰ Furthermore, Propertius' efforts to justify his life style and recommend it to others deal to a large extent with specifying what personal qualities and traits he admires in the woman he loves. In further clarification of these ideals, he wrote his most spirited defense of and exhortation to his *raison de vivre*, the fourth and final book of his elegies. There, the poet devotes considerable attention to women who are *not* his love objects – something heretofore rather unusual in Latin love elegy. There, through contrasting the behavioral roles and personal values of these various women, both legendary and contemporary figures, with those of his mistress Cynthia, Propertius voices his general discontent with Augustan beliefs and reaffirms the validity of his own.

A word on the special character of Book 4, which in many ways represents a new phase in Propertius' poetic development. Cynthia, omnipresent in Book 1, highly visible in Books 2 and 3, is offstage more than on in Book 4. If any one figure can be said to hold center stage it is Rome – featured in aetiological elegies about her holy shrines, festivals, topography and in love elegies about her inhabitants, past and present. Yet, as stated above, Book 4 introduces several "other women," all in some way Roman, all quite different from Cynthia. Elegy 3 stars the contemporary *nupta relicta*, Arethusa, who bemoans the fact that her husband has left her to fight Augustus' campaigns. 4 is about the fabled traitress Tarpeia, depicted by Propertius as betraying the Roman citadel to the Sabines out of love for their commander, and not, as most accounts do, out of avarice for Sabine golden ornaments. In 5 and 11 Propertius delineates, through speeches delivered in the first person, two newly-dead women: the greedy procuress Acanthis and the idealized noble matron Cornelia. Cynthia's rivals (her successor Chloris in 7, the courtesans Phyllis and Teia in 8) and the Bona Dea worshippers barring Hercules from their shrine in 9 also play substantial parts within the book, not to mention such cameo roles as Arria and Cinara in 1b, Cleopatra in 6.

Cynthia, however, is still very much a presence in Book 4. Elegy 7, in the fashion of elegies 5 and 11, features a *post-mortem* on

her; it largely consists of her own words to Propertius when her ghost appears to him in a dream. She is also dealt with explicitly in 8, implicitly in 1 and probably in 5. Furthermore, Propertius' characterization of Cynthia in Book 4 is perfectly consistent with that presented in Books 1, 2 and 3: a *dura puella*, masterful, assertive and ultimately successful in her attempts to maintain complete control of Propertius. On the contrary, none of Book 4's other leading ladies – Arethusa, Tarpeia, Acanthis, Cornelia – are shown to be truly vigorous, strong-minded individuals who in the last analysis succeed in their endeavors. All pale in comparison beside the incandescent Cynthia: Acanthis and Tarpeia are described as utter failures (5.66-74; 4.89-92), Arethusa and Cornelia as self-obsessed and dependent (cf. 3.11-16, 29-62; 11.29ff., esp. 61-72). And, most important of all, while Cynthia represents the very kind of woman Augustus – judging from the purport of his moral legislation – would have liked to eliminate, the other, “inadequate,” females in Book 4 in one way or another embrace or even embody conventional Roman, that is to say Augustan, beliefs about woman's role. Her triumph implies their defeat, or at least casts considerable doubt on the worth of their conduct and their values.

III. *Clamores*

The plight of the young bride Arethusa in 4.3 poignantly illustrates the dire consequences of war, particularly Augustus' expansionistic campaigns and the enforced estrangements between men and their loved ones that they wrought. An off-and-on nine-year separation from her husband Lycotas⁵¹ has rendered Arethusa querulous, hyper-emotional and neurotic; although she gives evidence throughout the poem that she is basically a stable, self-reliant and resourceful individual (17, 18, 33-40, 57-62), she melodramatically describes herself in a letter to her husband as a weak, minimally functioning creature who is perishing from loneliness (2, 3, 41-42, 55-56). Propertius paints Arethusa with love and sympathy. He intends, I think, that his readers laugh indulgently at Arethusa's efforts to bring her husband home through arousing his pity. Yet Propertius also wants to bring home to his audience the basic incompatibility between the demands placed upon women – to live in seclusion, faithful all the while to one man – and those placed upon men – to abandon the women they love and prove their virility through dangerous warfare abroad. Women in Arethusa's situation have every good reason to become unrealistic about themselves, purposely childlike, ultimately ridiculous. Elegy 9, moreover,

serves as a structural and contentual counterpart of 3; it shows how men's adoption of brutal, warlike postures can alienate them from women of sensitivity and principles: Hercules' testimony to his past conquests avails him not in obtaining access to the spring of the Bona Dea worshippers.

Tarpeia in 4.4 also possesses qualities commonly found in respectable Roman women. By profession a Vestal Virgin, she is basically a passive, sheltered girl who values herself solely in terms of the material advantages she can give her prospective bridegroom: Propertius' Tarpeia's exact word is *dos*, dowry (56); this dowry is Rome betrayed. Propertius does not, moreover, blame her tragic end on her moral impropriety, her defiling her vows of chastity. In fact, he portrays her compassionately, even to the point of assigning her guardian goddess Vesta and ruler Romulus complicity in her crime (69-70, 79-80). What he does see as responsible for her undoing are her materialistic, altogether inadequate, definition of her worth as a person *and* her total miscalculation of her idolized Tatius' nature resulting from her abysmal self-ignorance. In lines 55-60, when listing her qualifications for marriage to Tatius, she never bothers to document her all-consuming love for him. She blindly assumes that her *dos* alone can win him; in lines 57-60 she even claims that ravishing her alone would revenge the rape of the Sabine women – clearly deeming herself an invaluable political asset. Tatius, so noble that he would not honor crime (89), kills her as a traitress. The word employed for his punishment of her is again *dos* (92); Propertius thus stresses the potentially disastrous consequences of women's naive reliance upon connections rather than internal strengths for social acceptance.

In elegy 5, the poet represents the bawd Acanthis as a woman who prizes the conventional, outward signs of manly – and, in his day, Roman – valor . . . material acquisition and military glory. What is more, not only does Acanthis consider material rewards the sole worthwhile incentives in life (21-26) and encourage a client, probably Cynthia, to accept the advances of well-paying soldiers and sailors and slaves (49-53); not only does Acanthis conceive of women's beauty and charms as highly marketable qualities (59-62), valuable only if lucratively capitalized upon, she also views the events customarily comprising a love affair, those which frequently serve as subjects for amatory elegists' poems – quarrels (31-32), observance of Isis' rites (34), involvements with other men (29, 39-40) and one's birthday (36) – as opportunities for a girl to squeeze money out of her admirer. She also tells her client to be dishonest at any, and for every, price, be-

ginning with advice to *sperne fidem* in 27 (cf. also 28, 29, 34, 41-42, 45). Predictably, she also disdains poetry and its practitioners because they lack material rewards (54-58). Acanthis, then, epitomizes the attitudes Propertius and his fellow elegists opposed: esteem for money and the external indications of “manliness” (in the word’s narrowest sense); “reification” of women as potentially profitable items; acceptance of unfaithfulness and mutual exploitation as part and parcel of male-female relationships; scorn for poetry and its spiritual benefits. At the close of 5, Propertius and his ideals are vindicated: Acanthis dies penniless and unmourned. Like other women in Book 4 who care inordinately for money – Arria in 1, even Cynthia’s rival Chloris in 7 – or war – Cleopatra in 6 – she has been doomed to failure, punished for her faulty appraisal of what really matters in life.

Propertius no doubt admires Cornelia, the noble matron featured in the closing elegy of Book 4, for strictly adhering to the behavioral code prescribed for women of her class. But her portrait, a defense of her life which she herself delivers from the grave, is not, upon close inspection and after comparison with the similar posthumous address given by Cynthia in 7, altogether flattering. Although Cornelia makes much of her lifelong fidelity to one man (11, 35-36), although she has virtuously followed the rigid patterns of conduct set forth for “nice” Roman women (cf. especially 33-34, 45-46, 60-64), although she takes great pride in the fact that her male relatives have done all the right things in war and politics (29-32, 37-42, 65-66), although she can congratulate herself on the moral rectitude of her female ancestors (51-54), nevertheless Cornelia is totally devoid of real personality and utterly lacking in substance. In 7.53 and 70 Cynthia speaks openly of her faithfulness to and love for Propertius, a surprising avowal for a *demi-mondaine*; yet we never hear Cornelia say what one might expect from a devoted wife and mother, that she *loved* her husband or her children. One gets the impression, in fact, that Cornelia has no true emotions, just acquisitive impulses. She imagines the events and people in her life as material possessions, describing them either by the physical objects connected with them (11 *currus*, 29 *tropaea*, 32 *titulis*, 33 *praetexta*, 34 *vitta*, 61 *generosos vestis* etc.) or, in the case of her children (12, 73), as financial entities, *pignora*. She herself does not want to be judged as a person; instead, she derives her entire sense of self-worth from her ancestry (11, 23-32, 37-40), the accomplishments of her living relatives – including her mother’s brief and unhappy marriage to Augustus (55-60, 65-66), and her own possession of a socially prominent husband and the three requisite

children (61-64, 64-70). Furthermore, she carries this materialistic evaluation of herself and her colorless behavior to unrealistic extremes: she demands privileged treatment in the underworld (19-26), predicts that her family will be beset with unendurable grief over her loss (77-84), and expects special status in the afterlife (101-102). Propertius has portrayed Cornelia as the ideal wife of both longstanding Roman tradition and contemporary political reality: chaste, fecund, retiring, loyal; rich in political connections and associations with Republican Rome. Yet, when one compares her to Cynthia as she is depicted in Book 4, one understands quite clearly that, and why, Cornelia is not Propertius' kind of woman.

And what is Propertius' kind of woman? Self-sufficient, forthright, unmaterialistic in her desires and self-image. Within the confines of Book 4, we encounter Cynthia rejecting wealthy admirers in favor of Propertius, criticizing the greed of her successor Chloris, expressing her own wants as plain ones, and forcing Propertius himself to abandon luxurious habits (8.51-52, 7.39-40, 7.73-76 and 79-86, 8.75-78). She wants to be cherished for her own personal qualities, notably her honesty and deep affection – not purchased as one would a material commodity. Appearing in Propertius' dreams after her demise, she recalls how she remained faithful to him *in her fashion* (7.52 *me servasse fidem*), thereby winning an ultimate resting place beside Andromede and Hypermestre, both wronged, *sine fraude maritae* (7.62ff.). Yet she does not hesitate to chide Propertius for his ungrateful and unfaithful conduct (7.13-32, 8.73-80). Furthermore, her unabashed frankness extends beyond her displays of passion and temper to her realization that mere complaining does no good in effecting reconciliations with a wayward lover. In 8, while alive, she singlehandedly stages an actual military siege to expel rivals (51-66); in 7, posthumously, she coolly declares that death will soon reunite the temporarily errant Propertius with her (93-94). Cynthia may be willful, unpredictable, domineering; to Propertius she seems sensuous, unaffected, exciting. What better advertisement for his unconventional life style could he have selected than his portraits of her in 4.7 and 4.8, surrounded as they are by pictures of more conventional, far less interesting, female types? What better cause for living counter to standard *mores* than a female companion who defies the expectations of what is ultimately an inequitable, hypocritical society and affords inspiration for a simple, honest and rewarding life?⁵²

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NOTES

- ¹ ILS 8403; cf. also M. I. Finley, "The Silent Women of Rome," collected in his *Aspects of Antiquity* (London 1968) 130-131.
- ² See G. Williams, *JRS* 48 (1958) 25, for instances of *obsequi* on the grave-stones of Roman women from varied social backgrounds and historical periods.
- ³ Cf. *CIL* 6. 1527=31670, the so-called *Laudatio Turiae*; cf. also *CE* 81 and 968 and the inscriptions quoted by Williams (above, n.2) 21 n.20.
- ⁴ So Williams (above, n.2) 17-18.
- ⁵ See R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939) 335, 443-445; cf. also Horace, *Odes* 3.14.5.
- ⁶ For example, Syme (above, n.5) 445; G. Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy*, 2nd edition (London 1969) 22-24; S. Lilja, *The Roman Love Elegists' Attitude to Women* (Helsinki 1965) 31-42.
- ⁷ On the difference between *manus*-marriage and marriage *sine manu*, see Cicero, *Topica* 3.14 and, *inter alios*, P. E. Corbett, *The Roman Law of Marriage* (Oxford 1930) 68-106, 113.
- ⁸ So Luck (above, n.6) 23-24. In dissuading his (male) readers from sexual intrigues with respectable married women, Horace (*Satires* 1.2) implies that adultery, often of a promiscuous variety, on the part of matrons from the best families was a well-acknowledged fact of Roman life in the late first century B.C. Horace condemns such intrigues as dangerous and inconvenient for the men involved – not as immoral in themselves!
- ⁹ On the standard age of marriage for Roman women, see J. A. Crook, *Law and Life of Rome* (Ithaca 1967) 100 n.9, who cites M. K. Hopkins, *Population Studies* 1965, 309ff.
- ¹⁰ See the discussion of Lilja (above, n.6) 37-41, from which one may choose to conclude that the Augustan love elegists deliberately left the social status of their mistresses vague.
- ¹¹ Cf. Syme (above, n.5) 12, 384ff., 414.
- ¹² For their political wheeling and dealing, see, *inter alios*, Cicero, *ad Att.* 2.11.2; Velleius Paterculus 74.2.3.
- ¹³ The remark is quoted by Lactantius, *Epit.* 33(38)5. See K. Ziegler's fifth Teubner edition of the *De Republica* (1960).
- ¹⁴ See J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (New York 1969) 237.
- ¹⁵ See Lilja (above, n.6) 176-177, who in turn cites T. Mommsen, *Römische Staatsrecht* (Leipzig 1899) 22f., 688f. and 691. See also Balsdon, *Roman Women* (London 1962) 214, who calls attention to the elder Cato's dogged championship of a double standard already codified in law, and Cato's own remarks on the topic given by Aulus Gellius (*Noct. Att.* 10.23.5).
- ¹⁶ See C. L. Babcock, *AJP* 81 (1965) 1-32, on Fulvia, the aforementioned female "politico"; he ascribes her ability to attract three prominent and powerful spouses to her consular stepfather and considerable wealth.
- ¹⁷ Syme (above, n.5) 445.
- ¹⁸ Crook (above, n.9) 104. Marriage without *manus* also enabled the male members of a woman's own family to retain control of her property after her

marriage. Admittedly, such an arrangement benefitted women in certain respects. Their husbands no longer held complete sway over them; they could appeal to their fathers against their husbands and vice-versa. But it also permitted and in fact encouraged male relatives to interfere in “personal,” conjugal relationships whenever they felt it in their interest.

¹⁹ Plutarch, *Caesar* 14.4-5; Suetonius, *Julius* 27.1.

²⁰ Suetonius, *Augustus* 63.2 and 65; *Tiberius* 7.2-3.

²¹ See K. Rogers, *The Troublesome Helpmate. A History of Misogyny in Literature* (Seattle 1968) 44, who notes Aeneas’ imperviousness to female charms, “male chauvinism,” and Lavinia’s utter vacuity. In all fairness to Vergil’s Aeneas, however, it should be said that Creusa’s ghost justifies – *ex post facto* – Aeneas’ abandonment of her as divinely ordained (*Aen.* 2.776 ff.).

²² Cf. Suetonius, *Augustus* 34.1; Cassius Dio 54.16; Horace, *Carm. Saec.* 17-20; also the review of Balsdon (above, n.14) by T. J. Cadoux, *JRS* 52 (1963) 207.

²³ Suetonius, *Augustus* 34.2; Cassius Dio 56.1.2.

²⁴ For a summary of the evidence for the elegists’ social standing, see Lilja (above, n.6) 10-16.

²⁵ On the issue of sincerity in the Roman elegists, see A. W. Allen, *CPh* 25 (1950) 145-160. While the elegists’ allegedly autobiographical poetry may not be telling the exact truth about their personal lives, it at least presents an internally consistent picture of the “characters” which the elegists assume *gratia artis*. Latin love poetry also must have purposely contained enough general social realism to strike a chord of recognition in readers’ hearts; i.e. the Roman literary public must have known other men who acted as Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid claimed to behave. See also Lilja (above, n.6) 23-30.

²⁶ T. Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture* (Garden City 1969) 66; cf. also C. Reich’s similar descriptions of Consciousness III in *The Greening of America* (New York 1971) 233-285. Counter cultures have blossomed in other historical eras too – recall the medieval Goliards and their revolt against ecclesiastical moral strictures.

²⁷ So Propertius at 2.10.7 ff., Ovid at *Amores* 3.1.26 and 68 label love poetry an art form for young artists.

²⁸ See again the evidence assembled by Lilja (above, n.6) 10-16 about the backgrounds of the Latin love elegists; see Roszak (above, n.26) 26-41 on those of the 1970-style counter-culturists. From what the elegists tell us about their origins and imply about their education and social contacts, we should, I think, infer that the “poverty” of which they speak (e.g. Tibullus 1.1.19-22; Propertius 4.1b. 128-130, 4.5.54-58) is either fictitious or a voluntary form of social protest against the materialistic occupations and preoccupations of the equestrian class.

²⁹ See, for example, his unwillingness to participate in the emperor’s military campaigns and the national military spirit in 3.4.15-22. Cf. also two recent studies: J. P. Hallett, *Book IV: Propertius’ Recusatio to Augustus and Augustan Ideals* (unpublished dissertation, Harvard 1971) 98-102, on 4.2, which details Vertumnus’ futile pleas for continued forum residence in the

face of the emperor's projected expansion of the Basilica Julia; J. P. Sullivan, *Arethusa* 5 (1972) 17-25.

³⁰ See D. Ross, *Style and Tradition in Catullus* (Cambridge, Mass. 1969) 85.

³¹ So L. R. Taylor, *Party Politics in the Age of Caesar* (Berkeley 1949) 7-8.

³² Ross (above, n.30) 85, who cites M. Gelzer, *Die Nobilität der Römischen Republik* (Kl. Schr. 1.71-73).

³³ *gnatos* can, of course, mean both male and female children, but its juxtaposition with *generos*, which can only signify husband of a daughter or female relative, strongly suggests that it here refers to sons.

³⁴ Ross (above, n.30) 89.

³⁵ See discussion in Taylor (above, n.31) 33-34; see also the evidence regarding Caesar cited in n.19 above.

³⁶ See discussion in Ross (above, n.30) 86-88.

³⁷ At 1.11.23, in fact, Propertius calls Cynthia his *domus* and *parentes*; at 2.18b.34 he expresses a desire to be her *filius* or *frater*. In so doing he recalls the words of Andromache at *Iliad* 6.429-430 and of Tecmessa at 518ff. of Sophocles' *Ajax*, both of whom liken their relationship with their husbands to that a child enjoys with his parents. Yet Propertius is here assuming the dependent, helpless role of these defenseless women and not the protective one of their heroic spouses. Instead of seeking in Cynthia an equal with whom he can carry on an adult relationship of mutual respect, he looks to her for nurturance and protection, roots and direction. See the discussion below on the mistress as *domina* and as a replacement for worldly satisfactions as the logical extension of Propertius' submissive yearnings.

³⁸ Cf., for example, 2.27.13-16, where the mythical plight of Eurydice is assigned to a male lover, the behavior of Orpheus to his *puella* — an observation made by Luck (above, n.6) 128-129; cf. also 1.11.23 and 2.18b.34, discussed in the preceding note.

³⁹ Cf., for example, Euripides, fr. 132; Plato, *Symposium* 183a.

⁴⁰ See F. O. Copley, *TAPA* 78 (1947) 285ff.; A. La Penna, *Maia* 4 (1951) 187ff.; Lilja (above, n.6) 76ff.

⁴¹ Luck (above, n.6) 129.

⁴² 2.3.42; 2.9.45; 2.17.17 are good examples.

⁴³ Cf. A. Ernout and E. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*, 3rd edition (Paris 1951) I 326ff. s.v. "*dominus*." Lilja (above, n.6) 81 notes that we have no Republican examples of the word *domina* to describe a *dominus*' relationship with his wife — the word only refers to relationships between slaves and their mistresses.

⁴⁴ Cf., for example, Ennius, 287 Vahl. (Medea described by her household staff); Plautus, *Cas.* 311.

⁴⁵ 1.21, 3.17, 4.2, 7.6, 17.15.

⁴⁶ Cf. also J. E. Fontenrose, *CPCP* 13 (1949) 371-388.

⁴⁷ The interpretation of these lines given by K. Quinn in his commentary on Catullus (London and Basingstoke 1970) 396.

⁴⁸ For a fuller discussion of "establishment imagery" in the Augustan elegists, see Lilja (above, n.6) 63-73.

- ⁴⁹ The earliest occurrence of the theme is *Anacreonta* 26 A. For the tradition of *militia amoris*, cf. A. Spies, *Militat omnis amans* (Diss. Tübingen, 1930).
- ⁵⁰ On Propertius as ‘ur-Ovid’ (so L. A. Richardson and K. Quinn) or on Ovid as ‘Propertius vulgarized’ (so J. P. Sullivan), see the *entretiens* of the American Philological Association-Propertius colloquium, December 29, 1971, recorded by D. N. Levin, 422 and 426 respectively.
- ⁵¹ 29-20 B.C. Line 9 refers to the war against the Getae waged by M. Crassus in 29 B.C. and to Augustus’ planned invasion of Britain in 25 B.C.; lines 7 and 63 describe a proposed campaign against the Parthians, just prior to Augustus’ recovery of long lost Roman standards from them in 20 B.C.
- ⁵² I would like to thank the following for assistance and encouragement: Sheila Dickison, Katherine Geffcken, Carol Kline, Donald N. Levin, Mary Lefkowitz, Jane Loeffler, John Sullivan and Dorothea Wender.

FORUM

AYA BETENSKY

It seems true enough that the concept of love as servitude with the woman as enslaver (*domina*) is new in Roman love elegy, as Judith Hallett notes (*Arethusa* 6 [1973] 112). But it does not therefore follow that the elegists created this concept as "a protest against social reality in Rome" (p.112). Poetry does not necessarily work like propaganda. There is quite a distance between the poet as person and the poet as *persona*, and one can't infer political sincerity from stylistic sincerity. Hallett herself notes this when she refers in her footnotes to Archibald Allen's "'Sincerity' and the Roman Elegists," *CP* 45 (1950) 145-160. Furthermore, and this is my main point, the concept of *servitium amoris*, the servitude of love, is not a convincing protest in favor of feminism. Quite the opposite. F. O. Copley traces the sources for this concept in "*Servitium amoris* in the Roman Elegists," *TAPA* 78 (1947) 285-300. He states repeatedly that this is a purely romantic, sentimental view of love unrelated to reality (pp. 285, 291, 292, etc.). It may well be a response to the *status quo*, but if so then it is a response through wishful thinking, carried out not in action but rather in art, leading not to a new social role but to a new poetic role.

And is the elegiac poets' goal really to convert others to their new ideology? Hallett adduces Tibullus' rural idylls as an attempt to convert his readers (p.115). On the contrary, it seems to me that Tibullus is especially conscious that his idylls are fantasy, that Delia is not a rustic type any more than he. His rural idylls are set off from his actual city life by indications that he is fantasizing (e.g., 1.5.20, 35: *fingebam demens . . . haec mihi fingebam*).

And what sort of feminist ideal is this *servitium amoris*? Is there any difference whether the woman is under the pedestal or on it? She is still a sex object, even when she is made dominant; the man-woman relationship is as unequal this way as in Roman society. (See also Marilyn Arthur's discussion in her paper in the same issue of *Arethusa* of the idealization of woman in "aristocratic" Greek lyric poetry, and the fact that her social role remained inferior nonetheless). The ideal qualities that Hallett sees in Cynthia, Propertius' "new woman," don't really seem to be there. Hallett claims that Cynthia in 4.7 and elsewhere is "self-sufficient, forthright, unmaterialistic in her desires and self-image," that she "affords inspiration for a simple, honest and rewarding life" (p. 120). This is wishful thinking. As far as I can see Cynthia is materialistic and does not live a simple life. Propertius urges her to simplify her ornaments and cosmetics in 1.2; and the lover traditionally wastes his patrimony on his mistress. She can be shrill and accusatory (4.7), has a terrible temper (1.5), and is often ready to fight and scratch (1.6). On the other hand, Cornelia, the ideal matron (4.11), has virtues which Hallett does not acknowledge. I do not find that Cornelia is devoid of personality or feeling or has only "acquisitive impulses" (p. 119). On the contrary, Cornelia has honest and quiet virtues and a real concern for her family and Rome, even to the extent of urging her bereaved husband to remarry. Her portrait is too virtuous to be real, as Cynthia's is too shrewish, but Cynthia is certainly not an ideal woman in the traditional Roman terms which Hallett tries to apply to her.

The elegists' *servitium amoris* is roughly comparable to the ideology of courtly love: "Medieval lovers—'servants' or 'prisoners' as they called themselves—who seem to be always weeping and always on their knees before ladies of inflexible cruelty..." (p. 1, C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition*, Oxford 1936). In courtly love the woman was in fact the feudal superior (p. 13), which may or may not be true for Roman elegy, but in both cases she is treated as the superior. Lewis has an illuminating comment on a different relationship in Norse mythology.

The position of women in the Sagas is, indeed, higher than that which they enjoy in classical literature, but it is based on a purely commonsensible and unemphasized respect for the courage or prudence which some women, like some men, happen to possess. The Norsemen, in fact,

treat their women not primarily as women but as people. It is an attitude which may lead in the fullness of time to an equal franchise or a Married Women's Property Act, but it has very little to do with romantic love. (p.9)

The sentimental and romantic view of women in both courtly love and Roman elegy forces a masochistic, unrealistic debasement of man to lover, slave, and prisoner and an equally unkind and unrealistic elevation of woman to beloved, mistress, and prisoner. Poetically it is as valid a concept as any, but surely it is far from "counter-cultural feminism."

Cornell University

Forum

WOMEN IN ROMAN ELEGY: A REPLY*

JUDITH P. HALLETT

JOHN STUART MILL'S FAMILIARITY WITH ANCIENT Latin and Greek authors pre-dated the sprouting of his permanent teeth, and much of his subsequent work bears the stamp of classical influence. Yet no one would seriously entertain the idea that his essay on the subjection, or his petition for the suffrage, of women derives any inspiration from the pronouncements of the Roman amatory elegists. Nowhere do the elegies of Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius and Ovid lobby for an egalitarian division of domestic drudgery between every *amator* and his *puella*, or advocate representative quotas for women in the poetic profession. One would be ill-advised to label the Roman love elegists "feminists" in the "socio-political activist" sense of the term now current. After all, little in their poetry would suggest their social or political *involvement* on behalf of Roman women's *universal* emancipation, and we know little about their lives, real or ideal, save what they choose to relate in their poems. Hence I admit that it is reasonable for Aya Betensky to question my use of the word "feminism" in the title of my article, "The Role of Women in Roman Elegy: Counter-Cultural Feminism";¹ so too she justifiably challenges the Roman elegists' commitment to true human social equality by citing the "masochistic debasement of man" and the "unrealistic elevation of woman" in the elegiac convention of "slavery to love," *servitium amoris* (p. 269).

* See Aya Betensky ("Forum," *Arethusa* 6.2 [Fall 1973] 267-269).

I do not, however, find Betensky's other objections to my essay entirely valid. A tendency to judge the Roman elegiac poets, and the culture which spawned them, by what seem to me personal and inapposite standards prompts several of her criticisms. In a number of instances she has evidently misunderstood my contentions – indeed, her opening paragraph misrepresents my actual words. Actually she and I agree more than we disagree about the role of women in Roman elegy, when she says it is essentially “a response to the *status quo*... through wishful thinking, carried out...in art, leading to...a new poetic role” (p. 267; see my comments on pp. 103-104, 108-109 *art. cit.*).

Before considering Betensky's less than tenable assertions, I should defend the applicability of the term “feminism” to the Roman elegists' portrayals of the women they loved. In my article the word “feminist” appears merely once in the text itself, in a passage stating that the convention of *servitium amoris* betokened *not* socio-political, doctrinaire, feminist radicalism but *poetic* heterodoxy (p. 112). “Feminism” was used in the title chiefly because the editor had requested prospective contributors to the “Women in Antiquity” issue to approach their subjects “*from a feminist perspective*.” Yet I do not repudiate my decision to place the elegists in the ranks of feminists, ancient and modern, since no other word better describes their outlook on female behavior. By ascribing to their mistresses qualities conventionally exhibited by Roman males (e.g. braininess, egotism, and libidinousness), by depicting them as acting in a style to which Roman men alone had become accustomed (choosing, deceiving and discarding lovers), the elegists assign them roles which are the antithesis of those which Roman society officially permitted women to adopt. This casting of females in a dominant, rather than a submissive, role implies the belief that women ought to have no less of a say in how they conduct their lives than men do. Such a belief would qualify as “feminism” according to standard dictionary definitions, which explain the word first as “the *theory* that women should have...social rights equal to those of men,” and only then define it as “social and political *activity* in support of women's advancement.”²

I grant Betensky her point (pp. 267 and 269) that the love elegists are basically concerned not with social, but with *poetic*

reality (and indeed, what poets are not?). True, Tibullus and Propertius, in calling themselves their mistresses' slaves, secure their beloved her rights by sacrificing their own (cf. pp. 268-269). But it must be remembered that they distinguished themselves sharply from most Roman males in viewing women as self-actualizing, independent personalities. Furthermore, "masochistic debasement" in heterosexual coupling was far from "unrealistic" (as Betensky terms it on p. 269) among the Romans of the elegists' day; it had a basis in social reality and testified to admirable female virtue. For by degrading themselves before their mistresses, Tibullus and Propertius simply reflect, in an exaggerated fashion, the customary comportment toward respected spouses prescribed for "nice" Roman women such as Propertius' Cornelia (4.11). Social reality impinges upon the consciously "imaginative" character of Roman elegy in other ways too, as my article mentioned. The equestrian class in which the elegists claim membership directly protested Augustus' marriage and moral legislation, just as the elegists themselves reject its tenets. Historical sources document the self-assertive conduct of many individual women from many social backgrounds during the second half of the first century B.C.; above all, Roman love elegy purports to be the autobiographical work of Roman citizens, and thus reflects Roman life (cf. pp. 105-109 of my article on permissible female behavior and its dismissal by dissatisfied members of both sexes). In fact, the reflections of, and reflections of discontent with, social reality in Latin love elegy provide the setting for its innovative, "romantic" (Betensky's word on pp. 267 and 269), and what I called "counter-cultural" elements.

I trust that these comments further explicate my concept of Roman elegiac feminism, i.e. a poetically-voiced, socially "perverse" and visionary (as opposed to a specific and politically efficacious) feminism; so too, I would argue that Roman elegiac poetry and Roman society were mutually interdependent rather than exclusive. Betensky, however, adheres to far more compartmentalized, and often more one-sided, views of things feminist, Roman, and poetic — and so we part company. She apparently feels that since the poetry of the Roman elegists failed to propose or help implement an egalitarian "feminist ideal," their nearly unprecedented willingness to confer personhood upon their mistresses counts for nothing (cf. pp. 267-268, in particular her

remark that the "social role" of women in archaic Greece remained "inferior" despite their poetic idealization in Greek lyric, and the implicit equation of the Greek and Roman situations). Furthermore, she seems to deny that social and poetic realities can overlap, and that social awareness may have an impact upon the technically fictive products of the poetic process and vice versa (cf. her statements on p. 267, especially her distinctions between "action" and "art," "social" and "poetic" roles).

Certain other assumptions of Betensky's strike me as unwarranted. She maintains (p. 267) that Tibullus could not in all likelihood be recommending his poetic idylls to others, inasmuch as "Tibullus is especially conscious that his idylls are fantasy." Yet when have missionaries, or artists, or those whose lives straddle both identities, allowed "a consciousness that they were peddling fantastic visions" to stop them from urging these visions on others? And what about politicians, who rarely let truth spoil the attractiveness of their platforms? Betensky herself would seem to favor this particular analogy, as her numerous contrasts between elegiac method and political strategy attest. By such statements as "Poetry does not necessarily work like propaganda" and "one can't infer political sincerity from stylistic sincerity," and by alluding to the elegiac poets' goal as "to convert others to their new *ideology*" (p. 267), she also leaves the impression that I posited an analogy between the elegists and political-opinion molders in mass totalitarian society, which I did not. My language describing the love elegists' *modus operandi* came largely from religion and art (cf. "adoration" and "veneration" on p. 103, "proselytism" p. 104, "self-revelation" on p. 108, "communication" and "inventiveness" on p. 109). I even noted, on p. 109 and pp. 114-115, their cynicism and disdain toward politics and its values. Tibullus, like the other elegists, like apostles of religious faith, and like all artists driven to disclose the workings of their imaginations, seeks to create stuff for human dreams like unto his own, to convert (cf. my remarks on p. 115) others to the state of mind, and the beliefs and behavior associated therewith, which have made *his* life meaningful.

Betensky deplores the fact that woman in Latin love elegy, though dominant and on a pedestal, is still a "sex object" (p. 268). The chief female beneficiaries of the Roman elegists' literary efforts,

however, are not professional colleagues, but individuals with whom they are sexually involved. Naturally the love elegists concern themselves deeply with these women's sexual allure. The elegists, however, do not demean their loved ones' extra-sexual attributes. They do not esteem a wide range of masculine talents and pursuits while portraying women solely as mindless and passive sexual playthings. Unlike most modern male publications and institutions which stress the pleasure and worth of (hetero) sexual fulfillment, their poetry spurns the traditional definition of "man as the measure of all things," "woman as recipient of one." They even cherish their dependency on the women they love, and cherish these women for the heads on their shoulders as well as the bodies beneath (cf. my pp. 114-115).³

Then there are the places in Betensky's discussion where she has misconstrued my message. On p. 267 she quotes me as stating on p. 112 of my article that the Roman elegists created the concept of *servitium amoris* "as a protest against social reality in Rome"; she then proceeds to contrast poetry and political propaganda. But on p. 112 I say nothing of the sort. Page 113, however, has the following two sentences:

"Although Tibullus' and Propertius' modification of this particular beloved-as-enslaver convention [i.e. by casting a *female* as enslaving a male] serves *primarily as a poetic, and not a social, protest*, the two poets certainly must have taken cognizance of the extent to which men in Roman society decided the fate and feelings of women. At any event, by having women control them, *they are sharply reversing social reality.*" (italics mine)

Betensky has conflated two different phrases from two different sentences. In removing "primarily as a poetic, not a social, protest" and "reversing social reality" from their original contexts, and combining them, she has distorted my actual statement: that Tibullus and Propertius are *protesting* the *poetic* assumption that only a man can play a dominant role in a love relationship, and in so doing *happen to depict* a situation which is the reverse of social reality in Rome.

Elsewhere Betensky displays a similar nonchalance towards my *ipsissima verba*. I have room only for an example or two.

On p. 297 Betensky seems to have forgotten my evaluation of the matron Cornelia: "that Propertius no doubt admires Cornelia" (p. 119) and "has portrayed Cornelia as the ideal wife of both long-standing Roman tradition and contemporary political reality: chaste, fecund, retiring, loyal: rich in political connections and associations with Republican Rome" (p. 120). She feels that Cornelia "has virtues which Hallett does not acknowledge"... "honest and quiet virtues and a real concern for her family and Rome, even to the extent of urging her bereaved husband to remarry." But I *do* acknowledge that Cornelia is chaste (honest?), retiring (quiet?) and loyal (concerned for her family and Rome?). What I doubt is that Cornelia is Propertius' kind of woman. The fact that he never has her say anything about her *amor* or *fides* – the two qualities Propertius adjudges most excellent things in woman – towards her husband would suggest that Propertius would not have wanted such a woman as his own beloved. The interest in material things he imputes to her is also a trait which Book 4 often condemns (see my discussion on pp. 117-120).

Finally, Betensky quotes from C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study of Medieval Tradition* (Oxford 1936), p. 1, to illustrate what she considers elegiac love, or at least *servitium amoris*, to be about. She likens the elegists to "medieval lovers ... *who seem to be always weeping and always on their knees before ladies of inflexible cruelty*" (p. 268 Betensky, with my italics). But even in such an elegy as Propertius 1.10, where the poet reaffirms his servitude to his mistress, he refers to lovers in his personal plight as *felix* (line 29) and not tearful. Nor does he depict Cynthia as "inflexibly cruel": she can utter *verba benigna* (line 24), and yields when appropriately courted (line 28).

Betensky might have done better to select another phrase from Lewis' book, one which ascribes the professed attitude of medieval love poets to their misinterpretation of their Roman forbears, rather than attempting to elucidate Latin love elegy through the example of its eventual successor. I refer to Lewis' frequently-cited formula "Ovid misunderstood" (pp. 4, 11, 43). Its meaning: that medieval love poetry incorrectly took the mocking and ironic tone of the last

of the love elegists seriously, and thus turned *Amor* into a production which only the Marquis de Sade would have felt at ease directing. And this expression, "Ovid misunderstood," has a value above and beyond that of accounting for medieval literary phenomena. It also reminds those of us interested in the Latin love elegists that misunderstandings have previously befallen Roman elegy, and with fruitful results.

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NOTES

¹ *Arethusa* 6.1 (Spring 1973) 103-124.

² See, e.g. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass., 1971), p. 837; *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (New York, 1967), p. 523.

³ Cf. in particular Propertius 2.3 and Ovid, *Amores* 2.4, where the elegists praise intellectual accomplishment as a key attraction in women.

A Further Reply

AYA BETENSKY

Judith Hallett continues to make the same unwarranted connection between society and elegiac poetry ("This casting of females in a dominant and magisterial... role... implies a belief that women ought to have more of a say in how they conduct their lives..." Hallett above, p. 212). But the roles of lover and mistress belong in an elegiac convention which is incompatible with the real world and uninterested in converting the real world to its model. Indeed, for Propertius the power of elegy depends on his consciousness that he is different from everyone else, not only from the soldier or the epic poet but even from the ordinary lover.

He is special; he is obsessed and diseased by love's *furor* (see Archibald Allen, "Elegy and the Classical Attitude toward Love: Propertius I, 1," YCS 11 (1950) 253-277; and J. P. Sullivan, "*Castas odisse puellas*: A Reconsideration of Propertius I, 1," WS 74 (1961) 96-112). There is no escape from his servitude. He is unhappy even in his occasional joy. He is insanely jealous. He loves and he hates. And he has no choice. Whether he simply describes his feelings, tries to analyze them, or mocks them, he does not attempt to change others, and he is powerless to change himself. He is the *magister amoris*, the teacher of love, who warns others to stay away and content themselves with more normal love affairs. All he can hope for is the freedom to speak out his frustration (*sit modo libertas quae velit ira loqui*, 1.1.28). One source of the tension in his poetry is in fact the conflict between his role as *magister* and his role as lover: he can describe the symptoms, but he doesn't have the cure for his own disease (1.5.28). (Ovid, on the other hand, makes a perfect *magister* because he is totally uninvolved.)

The fact that Propertius is obsessed also explains his overvaluation of Cynthia. I do think she is shrewish, and there are objective standards for thinking so. Propertius must not be our "sole critic of Cynthia's comportment" (Hallett above, p. 00). It is part of the lover's role to accept abuse from his mistress, but we can still recognize it as abuse by comparing it to our own experience of the world. As for Propertius' descriptions of Cynthia's positive traits, her beauty must be taken for granted as a requirement of the genre; but Propertius himself criticizes her overdone appearance and seems to realize that she won't change (1.2), and there is little evidence for her intellectual ability except her pleasure in seeing her name in print. Propertius is not the only lover in literature whose mistress is made to seem inferior. Proust's Charles Swann is obsessed with Odette de Crécy, and Marcel recapitulates that obsession with Albertine (see again Sullivan, *op. cit.*); but Marcel, as narrator, simultaneously gives an objective assessment. Since Propertius has no unambiguously objective narration, we must come to our own conclusions about Cynthia's worth, as we must about the whole relationship. We cannot take the word of a lover whose very role is to be held in thrall. Shakespeare acknowledges this irony

in the couplet that concludes Sonnet LVII, whose subject is the slavery of love:

So true a fool is love that in your will,
Though you do any thing, he thinks no ill.

In 1.1, Propertius describes his basic dilemma – the inability to escape from a servitude in which he loves and hates. The rest of the book focuses on particular situations which radiate from this dilemma. From the beginning, the artifice of poetry is as important a theme as the directness of emotions. In Book 2, he strengthens the equation between Cynthia and his poetry and begins a process that continues in Book 3, moving away from Cynthia's influence and confronting the idea of love more intellectually and the idea of poetry more directly, without her mediating power, finally rejecting her in 3.24. His genius no longer needs the girl. In Book 4, in a playful undercutting of Augustus' policies, Propertius does, I agree, turn Cynthia into his private version of a Roman matron, i.e. his own Cornelia, for this purpose smoothing down her abrasiveness. But this is no more an effort to proselytize than the rest. It cannot erase the powerful impression of Cynthia that he has previously created, and it plausible, if at all, only when she is rather theatrically dead.

It is hard to approach a literary text in search of a predetermined meaning, and then fail to find that meaning. Superficially Roman elegy seems to offer a nice example of feminism, but even this cursory sketch should show that it doesn't. Ovid alone among the elegists may be termed a feminist, perhaps pejoratively, in that he reduces both sexes to equal roles in his witty but impersonal game of love. But for Catullus, Tibullus, and especially Propertius, this simply doesn't work. Theirs is an obsession with romance, worlds apart from feminism.

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