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Asymptotes of Pleasure: Thoughts on the Nature of Roman Erotic Elegy

Joy Connolly

> The wedding was very much like other weddings, where the parties have no taste for finery or parade; and Mrs Elton, from the particulars detailed by her husband, thought it all extremely shabby, and very inferior to her own.--"Very little white satin, very few lace veils; a most pitiful business!--Selina would stare when she heard of it."--But, in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union.

Few would call Jane Austen a writer of erotica. Still, whether they constitute a sincere endorsement of the couple's wedded bliss, a sardonic comment on the genre's conventional happy ending, or some complicated mixture of the two, the closing lines of *Emma* conform to the traditional structure of erotic narrative. The union achieved, the narrative ends. This pattern is typical of Austen's oeuvre and, in fact, as many readers have noted, of all sorts of works dealing with desire and the path of its gratification. Most of these texts devote the greater part of their energies not to the participants' ultimate attainment of satisfaction but rather its expectation, its preparation, the imminence of its arrival. By this token, the denouement that arrives at the end of these narratives is causally related to the fact of its conclusion. It is not by chance, then, that the terms we apply to the development of narrative structure--climax, buildup, deflation, thrust, and others--derive from contemporary popular and scientific discourses of sexual activity. **[End Page 71]** Our critical language reflects the fact that even when the text is not explicitly concerned with erotic desire, its narrative structure remains the same. [1]

Diverting, ignoring, or otherwise transgressing the conventional pattern usually introduces conspicuous difficulties for both author and reader. As it happens, *Emma* is good evidence of this. Austen must struggle to maintain narrative momentum throughout the last section of the book. For while the text does not end until the wedding celebration in the 55th chapter, Emma and Knightley acknowledge their love for one another, and become engaged, at the comparatively early stage of Chapter 49. At that point, the pair returns to her house, an important step in the stylistic routine that Austen regularly adopts at the very end of her novels, the final paragraphs of which generally feature the "removal" of the couple to the home in which they will spend their married lives (see *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and, more indirectly, *Northanger Abbey*). [2] Only with a perceptible effort does the narrative pick up again in the first paragraph of Chapter 50, with a redundant summary of the previous events ("What totally different feelings did Emma take back into the house from what she had brought out!--she had then been only daring to hope . . . she was now in a flutter"), followed by an abrupt transition to the minor matters of the final six chapters: "As long as Mr. Knightley remained with them, Emma's fever continued, but when he was gone, she began to be a little tranquilized and subdued." She is not the only one. Emma's father lethargically approves the lovers' plans, in the face of Austen's earlier efforts to underscore his potential to obstruct them. The novel's readers are similarly sedated, having long guessed the issue of the few remaining sub-plots. Finally, the wedding takes place--as Mrs. Elton notes, without much fanfare. **[End Page 72]**

The Pleasures of the Text

In his perceptive and lyrical work on the structure of narrative, Roland Barthes writes that "the pleasure of the text is like that untenable, impossible, purely *novelistic* instant so relished by Sade's libertine

when he manages to be hanged and then to cut the rope at the very moment of his orgasm, his bliss." [3] In Barthes' reading, bliss, or *jouissance*, represents fulfillment in both textual and sexual forms. It is an unstable phenomenon, he continues in *The Pleasure of the Text*, "unspeakable, inter-dicted . . . It cannot be spoken except between the lines." As such it tends to arrive at the end of a narrative, because, in essence, the achievement of bliss removes the reasons for the text's existence. According to this narrative logic, texts that are entirely caught up in an account of bliss "cannot be anything but short (as we say: *is that all? It's a bit short*)." [4] What is there to be said about bliss, after all, other than the fact of its occurrence? How to describe a sensation that is by definition a climax, an ending, a loss? To press the limits of its representation is to risk the narrative deflation experienced in the final chapters of *Emma*. Instead, as Barthes contends, most texts aim to represent the kind of pleasure that arises from anticipatory expectation or desire. Desire, he claims, has an "epistemic dignity" denied to its rival: the excessive expenditures it causes--the lover's self-sacrificial search for the beloved, the obstacles placed in the lover's path, the torments caused by absence and lack--constitute the bulk of most texts' preoccupations. [5] Bliss may arrive only after the vicissitudes of desire, often prolonged and agonizing, and only in the final pages, and only for a brief time. The nature of the pleasure of most readerly texts, then, Racine, Michelet, Goethe, Flaubert, Balzac, and Proust being Barthes' favorite examples, is bound up in their extended interrogations of the narrative register of desire. Such texts "content, fill, grant euphoria"; they are texts that "come from culture and do not break with it . . . [they are] linked with a *comfortable* practice of reading." [6] **[End Page 73]**

Barthes' italicized use of the word "novelistic" to describe the Sadean moment when narrative desire finally cedes to bliss is no accident. For though he implies that it applies to all texts, his narratological theory is predicated almost exclusively on his readings of the traditional European novel and its self-identified counterpart, the *nouveau roman* of postwar France. The narrative structure of the novel as it is defined here--more particularly, its negotiation of pleasure--relies on characteristics peculiar to it as a genre. Its central devices are plot and character development as they are represented through homo- and/or heterodiegetic discourse: these are its most powerful tools in what we might call the "project" of the novel in a generic sense. This project consists of building an extended, complex path toward consummation, which itself takes many forms. It may be expressed through a transparently erotic climax, as in Chapters 49 and 55 of *Emma*; it may be achieved through death (*Crime and Punishment*, *Lord Jim*) or the solving of a code (*Consuelo*, *The Maltese Falcon*); it may even be generated by way of the final frenzied ecstasies of self-referentiality in postmodern novels such as Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* or Cortazar's *Hopscotch*. In each case, the novel may only continue to exist by means of variations and elaborations of the devices of plot and character, putting them through a series of changes: in short, deferring its own end through the deferral of consummation.

What, then, of poetry? Since matters of narrative structure tend to be thrown into the sharpest relief when the text's subject matter mirrors the language we use to describe it--that is, when the text is explicitly erotic--let me here limit the question to erotic poetry. Does it obey the same rules, adhere to the same pattern, as the novel? Barthes' own peremptory dismissal of poetry, particularly lyric, in his influential "Structural Analysis of Narratives" and other essays, suggests that he viewed his narratological account as yoked firmly to the novel. There is some excuse for his lack of interest: with the notable exception of epic, poetry offers extremely limited access to the novel's narrative resources and, historically, it has been a more rigid writerly mode than most types of prose. In the latter regard, lyric and elegy may be the worst culprits, as they are compact and univocal with little plot and less character development; and they provide fewer opportunities for *story*telling, in itself such an important element of what we generally call narrative structure.

Despite all this, I will argue here that Roman erotic elegy engages in an elaborate orchestration of the same narrative registers of desire and **[End Page 74]** pleasure that govern the novel. Its mode of operation and main aesthetic purpose is the careful choice of those strategies of representation that may describe the pathways of and around erotic consummation--bliss, to use Barthes' term--without ever actually achieving it. The project of each erotic elegy, so to speak, is the search for ways to defer bliss and thus its own ending: to extend the space in which its discourse operates by deforming the erotic discourse itself. As Alison Sharrock writes, Roman elegy "goes round in circles," always promising pleasure, but swerving away before reaching its goal. [7] Remarkably, it does so without the valuable advantages of the narrative tools belonging to the novel. In my view, the intricacy and appeal of Roman erotic elegy are rooted in its peculiar negotiation of pleasure and desire. But further, and more significantly, I will claim that every one of the characteristics that define erotic elegy as a genre is predicated on the particular tactics of that negotiation. That is, the disposition of erotic elegy's fictive

characters, its mythological references, artful intertextuality of style, and, above all, its preoccupation with the absence of love rather than its pleasures--in short, the nature of the genre--may all be explained by the necessity to defer the consummation of desire. Nor does the issue end there. Aesthetic conventions are always historically and sociologically contingent, and our genre is no exception. I will conclude by interpreting Roman elegy as a contribution to a broader western cultural scheme, one that inscribes desire in an erotic discourse that places bodies themselves on the margins of representation. Ultimately, Barthes' poetic registers of pleasure and desire, such useful lenses through which to interpret Roman erotic elegy, will be shown to share in the Roman elegiac aesthetic, an ideological production of class and class-related assumptions about the body.

Delay and Deferral in Propertius II 15.1-10

Propertius' elegy II 15 is, as Paul Veyne observes, still famous for its "highly erotic character." [8] Like Ovid's *Amores* I 5, II 15, and III 6 (the first of which is discussed below), this elegy presses the boundaries of its genre, taking up and elaborating the erotic themes that are only hinted at in other poems. The opening lines express the lover's jubilant cry of celebration, **[End Page 75]** the sense of which (if not the grammar) is best caught by the 1919 version of Ezra Pound. [9]

> Me happy, night, night full of brightness;
> O couch made happy by my long delectations;
> How many words talked out with abundant candles,
> Struggles when the light was taken away;
> Now with bared breasts she wrestled against me;
> Tunic spread in delay;
> And she then opening my eyelids fallen in sleep,
> Her lips upon them; and it was her mouth saying:
> Sluggard!
> In how many varied embraces, our changing arms,
> Her kisses, how many, lingering on my lips.
>
> O me felicem! o nox mihi candida! et o tu
> lectule deliciis facte beate meis!
> quam multa apposita narramus uerba lucerna,
> quantaque sublato lumine rixa fuit!
> nam modo nudatis mecum est luctata papillis,
> interdum tunica duxit operta moram.
> illa meos somno lapsos patefecit ocellos,
> ore suo et dixit "Sicine, lente, iaces?"
> quam uario amplexu mutamus bracchia! quantum
> oscula sunt labris nostra morata tuis!

These ten lines take up the most explicitly physical matter in the entire poem, the lovers' nocturnal tussles. The notional speaker of the poem is entirely immersed in the delights of the moment; repetition and assonance govern each phrase. The woman, wrestling with her breasts exposed, is represented as pursuing pleasure even more actively than her partner. She pries open his sleepy eyes, which have begun to close, with kisses, and, in an unusual departure from the normal silence of the *puellae* of ancient elegy, **[End Page 76]** speaks: *"sicine, lente, iaces?"* (8). In a clever play on the relation between the fictive first-person speaker of the poem and the poet himself, Propertius causes the beloved's actions to appear simultaneously to rouse the lover to wakefulness and the poet to renewed energy in describing the couple's activity. Lines 9-10 underline the abundant nature of the pleasure that was insinuated in an earlier couplet, with the repetition of *quam* (3 and 9) as well as *multa . . . quanta . . . quantum* (3, 4, 9). Given the marked attention given bodily pleasure in these verses and their emphasis on light, darkness, and the importance of eyesight, the poem's next two lines seem at first to be particularly appropriate. They offer a piece of erotodidactic advice that praises the power of the erotic gaze: "There is no pleasure in spoiling Venus with blind motion: if you don't already know, the eyes are the commanders in love" (*non iuvat in caeco Venerem corrumpere motu: / si nescis, oculi sunt in amore duces*, 12).

Viewed in the context of the previous section, however, it grows clear that this sentiment is ironically discordant with the poet's own practice. In those lines (1-10), he never allows his gaze to remain in one

place for very long, but instead casts it in an oblique fashion through pools of light and shadow and finally terminates the gaze entirely as his fictive speaker falls asleep. The fact that this modifies the reader's putative view as well is an effect with which Propertius experiments throughout the piece. At the very beginning of the poem, for example, the reader cannot be certain that the beloved is "present" in the imagined scene at all. She (or he) is the presumed referent of the address *et o tu* at the end of the first line, an assumption that takes weight from the fact that it is balanced with the speaker's address to himself at the start of the line (*o me felicem*). But then, in the poem's first narrative surprise, it is revealed in the next line that the speaker is not gazing at his nighttime partner but a small bed (*lectule*), a stand-in for the human figure the reader expects to see. It is the bed that is passively made blessed by the speaker's delights (*deliciae*); like the door so often addressed in the elegiac *paraclausithyron*, it stands simultaneously as a symbol of and a barrier against the pleasure of fictive speaker and reader. [10] In these lines, as Barthes would put it, Propertius confronts the impossibility of representing bliss. Consequently, each couplet consists of a textual Fort! Da! game in miniature: by repeatedly hurling out and yanking back the reel **[End Page 77]** of erotic representation, testing his ability to control the pace and presence of the erotic narrative, the poet masters its potential threat to the textual integrity of his poem. [11]

Propertius first offers metonymic invocations of the night and the bed, both of which stand for and are contingent on the fictive speaker's sexual pleasure. He proceeds to play with the reader's expectation of the beloved's arrival in the elegiac space and to describe the conversation that leads up to the lovemaking. All of these things delay the account of the lovemaking itself. For even as the beloved's body finally appears, expressed synecdochically in the shape of naked breasts (*nudatis papillis*, 5), a material obstacle arises too: her garments that, still partially clothing her, sporadically obscure her breasts from view. Another delay ensues, this time explicitly named: *interdum tunica duxit operta moram*, 6. Every advance is met with a barrier; every glance encounters shadows. By deferring the ultimate moment of bliss both inside the elegiac space (with the bed and the concealing garments) and outside of it (with word-games and narrative teases), Propertius can prolong his representation of erotic pleasure, swerving toward and away from the scene of bliss as he pleases. Note, however, that the strategy requires constant attention and modification, leading the poet to various experiments with characterization and voice. In line 7, the speaker himself is the obstacle to pleasure, having grown too tired to play, and his lover must cajole him. At this stage, as I observed earlier, both poet and speaker appear rejuvenated in their return to the spectacle of eroticized bodies: "with what varied embraces we placed our arms!" (9). But even this vision is tantalizingly limited to first one part of the body, the arms, and then the mouth, when the poet describes the couple's kisses, strikingly, as "lingering" on the beloved's lips. Here, too, appears a word connoting "delay" (*morata*, 10). [12]

If the narrative structure of the scene of lovemaking is actually a teasing series of delays and deferrals, then the capacity of the reader to see what is taking place is even more compromised. From the start, the poet arouses the reader's curiosity, a desire to view the couple together. The tête-à-tête enjoyed in the light of an oil-lamp leads to a struggle in a darkened room. Having built up expectations with the prominent placement of the **[End Page 78]** lamp (*apposita lucerna*, 3), however, he whisks the carpet from under our feet when the light is taken away (*sublato lumine*, 4). Each line promises more of a spectacle than the next will deliver; whatever we hoped to see is concealed by the shadows that, paradoxically, allow the lovers themselves to abandon conversation for sex. At this point, we are back where we began, with the poet's ironic remark that sight is the guide for the ignorant (12).

By now, it should be clear that this piece of advice is a joke. The reader does not receive more than a brief glimpse of what is occurring, for we run into the obstacles of beds, shadows, the sleepiness of the speaker, and, ultimately, the limits of our imagination: how much can we make out of a variety of embraces and a slew of kisses? Even the fictive speaker, the voice that communicates information to the reader, cannot see all that he might wish. Each of these things tugs the poem away from the erotic scene of pleasure--to what, we shall now see.

Exempla, Threats, and Despair in the World of the Impossible

As we know from Quintilian (*Inst. Orat.* 12.4.1-2), the *exemplum* is one of the most powerful tools of the first-century Roman orator. Propertius is especially adept in his poetic use of the device, whether to construct learned backdrops of divine trompe l'œil or, as here, to give subtle texture to his narrative with evocations of history or myth. In the next development in the narrative of II 15, the *exempla* appear to offer the reader some satisfaction, an alternative to the dangers of focusing with excessive interest upon

the insistently present erotic bodies of the human couple. A parade of mythological lovers passes by: Paris, Helen, Menelaus, Endymion, and the sister of Phoebus (who remains unnamed). Three of these figures are naked. With their appearance, the erotic gaze that has already been the focus of ironic comment by means of the juxtaposition of tease (1-10) and celebration (11-12) falters and soon vanishes entirely, as the poem turns from mythological *exempla* to threats of physical abuse, a series of heavily foregrounded literary allusions, highly stylized generic tropes, ecphrases of the natural world in a state of inversion, comments on the contemporary political scene, and, finally, expressions of fear--of death, the gods, and desertion.

What throws the poem into such a state of disorder? *Oculi* may be the proper instruments of love (as we are informed in line 12), but, as it turns out, they are also *duces*, a military metaphor that prefigures a list of characters **[End Page 79]** whose erotic interactions result in the precise opposite of pleasure. By using a form of *nudus/nuda* three times in four lines, the poet implies that their nakedness is a crucial aspect of the erotic pleasure of the mythological figures, located first in the bedroom from which Menelaus is ironically absent (*thalamo*, 14) and then, moving closer to the site of sexual activity, the bed itself (*concubuisse*, 16). Far from being delayed, at first the pleasure of these characters has a sense of immediacy and physical solidity. But, the narrative indicates, even as pleasure becomes the focus of their existence,
its interruption through violence or unconsciousness becomes imminent (*periisse*, 13). For the name of each *exemplum* at once conjures up the cessation of pleasure. Paris is destroyed by the naked Helen (*ipse Paris nuda fertur periisse Lacaena*, 13), while Endymion, also stripped, is lulled into a death-like sleep by Selene after making love with the naked goddess. [13] Their failure to defer their own pleasure, their intent focus on the erotic moment, brings their story, their text, to an end, just as their pleasure brings violence and the termination of life to themselves or to their mythical environment. Though the characters and plots of the miniature mythographies constitute another small text of pleasure, they are introduced and dropped in four lines, a further indication that the stuff of their tale reaches closure quickly on account of passions too rash, unadvised, and sudden.

With the *exempla*'s appearance, three things are achieved simultaneously. First, the characters solve the problem of representing bliss on a narrative level, literally, by deferring an account of the original pair's activity until a later time (though, in the chronology of the poem, that time never actually arrives). Second, in a deeper sense, the *exempla* allow the poet to avoid the issue of physicality in its entirety. Just at the stage when the poem begins to elaborate on the sexual activity of the speaker and his beloved (9-10), their bodies simply disappear from the poetic scene, to be replaced by the mythological characters. Thirdly, I would claim, the *exempla* signify a critique of bodily erotic pleasure itself and, particularly, the representation of pleasure in the elegiac text. This last point is suggested by the significance of the precise moment at which the poet introduces them: the speaker has just been awoken by his insistent lover, who places her face close to his and urges him to rouse himself. In an important sense, it is her **[End Page 80]** success that brings this section to an end. The recounting of their kisses delays it for a while, but the poem does not linger on their erotically charged bodies. Instead, the poetic gaze turns away, and the moment of pleasure dissipates.

Immediately afterwards, the evocation of mythological violence incurred through the erotic pleasures of nakedness is followed by the threat of present and immediate physical abuse, as the speaker resumes his didactic voice with a stern warning to his companion. Here again, the speaker seems to be ignoring the lesson of his own, earlier prescriptions. For despite the fact that the nakedness of Helen, Paris, Endymion, and Selene led to the termination of their pleasures, if the *puella* sleeps with her clothes on, he threatens, she will soon "display bruised arms to [her] mother" (*ostendes matri bracchia laesa tuae*, 20). The *bracchia* recently entwined in lovemaking will soon be black and blue if the beloved does not put her naked body on display: the violence in the world of myth brought on by the eroticism of naked bodies will be enacted in the poet's notional world. [14] The *puella* is trapped between these alternatives: naked or clothed, the spectacle of her body will inevitably lead to violation. On every level and for each participant, then, bodies and their erotic actions disrupt the elegiac environs.

For Paris and Helen, and in a different sense for Endymion as well, violence is the precursor of death. And death is the theme of Propertius' next lines: "While the fates permit us, we will saturate our eyes with love" (*dum nos fata sinunt, oculos satiemus amore*, 23). [15] Next, having contemplated the eternal night of the *puella* (*nox tibi longa venit*, 24), the speaker expresses the wish that his love would desire to bind him with chains for eternity (25-26). Here, finally, is a trace of bliss--but signified, I think, only through a strange paradox. For why does a lover call out for chains? Surely it is because love's passion

has already dissipated: the chains, physical restraints on the lover, are required precisely because the strength of his love is no longer assured. A trope of western love poetry, this sentiment expresses **[End Page 81]** above all the paradoxical distance between the speaker and the register of erotic bliss. The anguished savagery implied by the Propertian speaker's plea for chains strips apart the traditional language of love to reveal its very lack. Or, to put it in a slightly different way, if this verse underscores the Propertian speaker's fervent desire to be in love, we should not mistake that desire for the erotic passion of one individual for another. [16] One of Roland Barthes' observations on the role of the lover's passionate declamation of his feelings is apropos: "For me, [love] *has already taken place* . . . the delight of which I have been the object and whose aftereffects I repeat (and fail to achieve) . . . [T]he amorous event is my little sacred history that I declaim to myself, and this declamation of a *fait accompli* (frozen, embalmed, removed from any praxis) is the lover's discourse." [17] The Propertian speaker's swerve into the animal world in the next *exemplum*, doves paired for eternity (27-28), implies by contrast the absence of such passion in human practice. And when he says in the following lines, "He is wrong, who seeks an end to raging love: / true love knows no boundary" (29-30), the irony reaches its zenith. For we have already been told precisely what that boundary is: it is death (24). Again, as in line 12, the voice of love's advisor is undercut by the ironic inversion of the previous lines.

At this stage, the poem makes its most explicit move away from the world of erotic *Realien* with an adynaton, the cardinal trope of ever-deferred reality (31-34), concluding with "How I wish I were able to transfer my agonies to another--I will live of this, I will die of it (*quam possim nostros alio transferre dolores / huius ero uiuus, mortuus huius ero*, 35-36). The world-in-reverse encapsulated in the adynaton, with its black sun, waters flowing in reverse, and beached fish, reflects an erotic situation gone awry for no reason other than the inability, or unwillingness, of elegy to sustain discussion of erotic pleasure. The adynaton also severely alters the tone of the poem by means of a series of subjunctives and a repetition of *si* that stand in opposition to the indicatives employed at the opening of the poem. Contrast 5-6 with 41-44:

> nam modo nudatis mecum est luctata papillis,
> interdum tunica duxit operta moram **[End Page 82]**
>
> For at times she wrestled with me, her breasts naked,
> but occasionally caused a delay, covered by her tunic
>
> qualem si cuncti cuperent decurrere vitam
> et pressi multo membra iacere mero,
> non ferrum crudele neque esset bellica navis,
> nec nostra Actiacum verteret ossa mare
>
> If everyone wished to spend their lives so
> and to lie low, weighing their limbs down with plenty of wine,
> cruel iron would not exist, nor the ship of war,
> nor would the Actian sea roll over our bones

The movement into the subjunctive and the broadening of theme and cast are two of the final strategies of erotic deferral that the text deploys in its creation of the elegiac space. If everyone would simply spend their lives in pleasure, the speaker says, war and violence would disappear (41-46). But he casts his opinion in subjunctive verbs, implying that, in the present, the body has lost its erotic identity, becoming nothing more than bones in the Actian sea (44). In the last line, death finally brings an end to the poem. This is not, then, what Barthes and others have called the "natural" end of a narrative, in the frequentative consummation of eros, but it is an end none-theless. Resorting to the rhetorical trope of erotic admonition in the tradition carried on by Marvell and Shakespeare, the poet is able to save and renew the subject of elegy for the future (*forsitan includet crastina fata dies*, 54).

The "Erotic" Body of Roman Elegy?

By the definitions of the modern and postmodern era, to call Roman erotic elegy "erotic" is something of a puzzle. Due to native constraints, it cannot spin out its representations of desire in long tales like *Dr. Zhivago* or *Venus in Furs*; nor, however, does its generic brevity lead its practitioners to adopt the road

taken by other normatively identified erotic genres that share its short length (and, in some cases, its high-culture status). Short stories, pornographic films, and magazine accounts all share the tendency to highlight the final moments of sexual fulfillment, to put pleasure on display. Some texts focus almost exclusively upon sexual acts in all their potentials and permutations. S&M accounts, for example, such as Sade's **[End Page 83]** *Justine* and Pat Califia's *Macho Sluts*, are reminiscent of the handbook in their detailed accounts of the appearance and motion of different parts of the active bodies, of the didactic dialogues and internal monologues of each person present, of the supplementary technical apparatus that occupies more physical space (in the fictional domain as well as in the materiality of the text's pages) than the participants themselves.

Roman elegy does none of these things. Propertius II 15 is by no means exceptional: for a genre known as "erotic," the body itself, let alone sexual practice, is not much in evidence. Roman erotic poetry as a whole, whether Catullan, Propertian, Tibullan, Sulpician, or Ovidian, makes little effort toward what Barthes has called the body's adjectivity. [18] In fact, the poets confess the difficulties that ensue when all the obstacles to love are overcome: there is nothing left of which to complain--the verb commonly used by the elegiac speaker to describe his own words (*queri*). [19] Christopher Marlowe, whose translation of Ovid's elegies exerted great influence on the literary production of the 1590s, captures the Roman poet's sentiment perfectly: "Fat love, and too much fulsome, me annoys / Even as sweet meat a glutted stomach cloys" (*pinguis amor nimiumque patens in taedia nobis / uertitur et, stomacho dulcis ut esca, nocet*, *Am*. II 25-26). [20] Passages describing the object of desire are the exception in elegy, not the rule. The beloved remains a shadowy figure with beautiful eyes, a charming mouth, and white skin, as Catullus, a lyric poet who deeply influenced the elegists, attests (86.1-2, 5-6):

> In the eyes of many, Quintia is beautiful. To me, she is fair, tall,
> upright: so I admit these details . . .
> Lesbia is beautiful, the loveliest in every way, and
> alone has robbed all the Venuses of all their charms.
>
> Quintia formosa est multis. mihi candida, longa
> recta est: haec ego sic singula confiteor . . . **[End Page 84]**
> Lesbia formosa est, quae cum pulcherrima tota est,
> tum omnibus una omnis surripuit Veneres.

In this poem, Catullus categorically refuses to elaborate on Lesbia's physical appearance, and devotes only careless attention to Quintia. Instead, he moves laterally, in the direction of a metaphor. The speaker in Propertius II 15 likewise disobeys his own erotodidactic advice, removing the body of his anonymous *puella* from the intense erotic focus that the mythological characters of lines 13-16 employed with such sad results.

When an elegy does take up the body as its main subject, it employs the strategies that I have discussed in Propertius II 15: the artful tease, the move to mythological reference and literary allusion, and the threat, usually of violence. Ovid's *Amores* II 15 is an address to a little ring, a gift to the beloved, the movements of which around and inside her body constitute the definition of a writerly tease. "Would that I might suddenly be able to become my gift!" the speaker cries (*o utinam fieri subito mea munera possem*, 9), but throughout the poem Ovid repeatedly *evades* the most intimate movements of the *puella*'s hand with sidelong glances at his own joke (13, 17, 25-26). The book of *Amores* also includes a poem concerned with the speaker's inability to maintain an erection, additional evidence that the body is the object of a sustained elegiac gaze only when its erotic capacity is compromised (III 7).

At first reading, however, *Amores* I 5 appears to break the pattern that Ovid himself and Propertius before him had set--a phenomenon that calls for closer examination. Marlowe's translation vividly expresses the sense of the beginning: "In summer's heat, and mid-time of the day, / To rest my limbs upon a bed I lay" (*Aestus erat, mediamque dies exegerat horam; / adposui medio membra leuanda toro*, 1-2). [21] Like Propertius in II 15, Ovid pointedly identifies the time and the place of his remembered pleasures in the first section of his poem (1-8). He makes much of the play of light through the half-open windows and hints, like Propertius, that sexual activity can take place only when the light is dim, since the *puella*'s "faint-hearted modesty hopes for shadows" (*qua timidus latebras speret habere pudor*, 8). Immediately after the speaker's musings on the timidity of women, Corinna makes an unexpected and dramatic appearance. Only her neck and hair are described, however, before Ovid

moves to compare her with Sameramis and **[End Page 85]** Lais, *puellae* of historical reality but mythological status (11-12). [22] That simile ends abruptly. As though the memories of beauty have drawn the speaker back to the "present" of the elegiac space, he lunges violently toward Corinna in order to get a close look at her body: "I snatched her gown; being thin, the harm was small / yet strived she to be covered therewithal" (*deripui tunicam; nec multum rara nocebat, pugnabat tunica sed tamen illa tegi*, 13-14, tr. Marlowe). The resistance of Propertius' *puella* remains implied, as the speaker threatens her with violence if she decides to clothe herself; in sharp contrast, Corinna fights back. But she resists in vain: Ovid proceeds to turn his full powers of interrogation upon her body, mapping it with an eye to detail unique in extant elegy (17-22):

> Stark naked as she stood before mine eye,
> Not one wen in her body could I spy.
> What arms and shoulders did I touch and see,
> How apt her breasts were to be touched by me!
> How smooth a belly under her waist saw I,
> How large a leg, and what a lusty thigh! (tr. Marlowe)
>
> ut stetis ante oculos posito uelamine nostros,
> in toto nusquam corpore menda fuit:
> quos umeros, quales uidi tetigique lacertos!
> forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi!
> quam castigato planus sub pectore uenter!
> quantum et quale latus! quam iuuenale femur!

The next lines of the poem, however, betray the significance of the actions that literally escape Ovid's narration: "Why should I go over the details? I saw nothing that was not worthy of praise" (*singula quid referam? nil non laudabile uidi*, 23). Ovid teases the reader just as Propertius does, posing the question of erotic bodily practices and then appearing to offer an answer. Though his initial response does not satisfy the curiosity he has aroused, the *uidi* leaves the issue open, hinting that a fuller visual narrative (the climax) is still to come. Instead, Ovid constructs a second and even more jarring **[End Page 86]** question and answer, throwing the poem's careful negotiation of desire and bliss into sharp relief: "Who is ignorant of the rest? Exhausted, both of us slept" (*cetera quis nescit? lassi requieuimus ambo*, 25). *Amores* I 5, one of the most verbally explicit Roman erotic elegies, concludes with an ultimate denial of the erotic gaze, effectively erasing the sexually active body from the elegiac space. Like Propertius II 15, also notorious for its erotic ambience, it employs careful descriptions of the topographical site of pleasure (rather than its bodily sites), mythological *exempla,* and swerves toward violence, interspersed with the tactics of the tease. The narrative structure of both poems rests entirely on the poets' deferral of readerly expectation, cli-maxing ironically with a circumvention of the body and its pleasures *in toto*.

The unwillingness of elegy to investigate the physical angles of love explains its constant lapses into mythological reference, descriptions of the natural world, travelogue, and literary allusion. It is for this reason, too, that the elegists tend to avoid providing their lovers with consistent nomenclature. Even when they offer a name, the lovers manifest such vagueness and variance of character that the names appear to be nothing more than labels, convenient merely for the purposes of ease of recognition, minor plot development, or meter. [23] Nor do the elegists seem much invested in sketching the characters of their first-person speakers; self-addressed apostrophes aside, the poems contain a bare minimum of specific information about these characters, let alone the poets themselves (as the relative impoverishment of recent biographical readings implies). [24] Such erotic relationships, based on a sexuality distanced from personal identity, revolve around and rely upon the circumstances under which the lovers live: whether they are separated by the narrator's military or political service, the jealousy of a rival, or the avarice of the beloved's mother or older mentor (*lena*); whether she rejects or accepts him on a given night; whether they communicate by means of a servant or, in code, under the watchful gaze of a husband. It is not merely the case that the details of the physical appearance of the elegiac **[End Page 87]** characters are not *relevant* to elegy's project. It is literally impossible for elegy to sustain a focus on erotic bodies because the genre has such a strong discomfort with physicality in general--a discomfort that stands on its own as a vital component of the elegiac space.

In Propertius II 15, the conflict between lover and beloved implied by the speaker's threat to beat her is best understood as a strategic effort to define the two characters in opposition to each other without resorting to the nature of the physical or mental individuality of each. In a sense, the speaker must

intimidate his beloved; the poem must move away from the spectacle of pleasure toward violence: for once clothing disappears, that simultaneous token of transgression and attraction, the body of the beloved is open to a gaze that it cannot sustain. [25] For this reason, the body first undergoes the threat of violence and, subsequently, is abandoned forever, with the exception of one metonymic reference at the conclusion of the poem (*oscula*, 50). The narrative's progress from the representation of erotic pleasure to subsequent themes is generated by what I call the structural imperative of erotic elegiac narrative: its strategy of delay and deferral, the generic response when the poem converges too closely on the scene of bliss. I have discussed only two elegies here, but many more could be adduced: the pattern is replicated throughout the erotic elegiac corpus. [26] **[End Page 88]**

The Social Logic of the Elegiac Aesthetic

As one reader has remarked, to consider Roman poetry in general as poetry about poetry is "not uncharted territory any more." [27] Due to its self-referential, allusive, and programmatic texture, erotic elegy, in particular, has yielded productive readings in the light of recent interest in the so-called Hellenistic aesthetic. [28] It is, however, an unfamiliar aesthetic, requiring explanation, and a variety of accounts of its nature have been duly offered. Among the most provocative is Paul Veyne's claim that, despite (or because of) its emotional insincerity and interpretive indeterminacy, elegy indeed boasts an "essence," and that essence is aestheticization. "Aestheticization is beyond the beautiful, the good, and the true; or, rather, it is what they all come down to," he declares, succinctly concluding, "Or, as Nietzsche says, [it is] to give things the unity *they do not have*." [29] To be sure, one of elegy's most distinctive features is what we might call its "unifying" stance toward the twin discourses of sex and poetics--a disposition that has not escaped the notice of Veyne and those readers who share his interpretive predilections. Propertius II 15 shows evidence of this in its intertextual relation with Catullus 50, to name just one of the Catullan lyrics that ripple just beneath the surface of the elegy. The juxtaposition of words (*uerba*) and a sexual struggle (*rixa*) in II 15 calls to mind Catullus' nighttime battle with his insomniac desire for Licinius, a struggle that, in turn, according to Catullus' sophisticated fiction of inspiration, engenders his lyric poem. The nocturnal sexual experience of Propertius' speaker, we recall, provides the same results (*o me felicem!*, 1). Line 9 of the elegy, a celebration of sexual experimentation (*quam uario amplexu*), thematically implicates Catullus 50: "he was playing with meter, this way and that" (*ludebat numero modo hoc modo illoc*, 5). Compare the Catullan lyric (50.10-12, 14-15) with Propertius' poem (II 15.2, 4, 7-8):

> nec somnus tegeret quiete ocellos
> sed toto indomitus furore lecto
> uersarer, cupiens uidere lucem . . . **[End Page 89]**
> at defessa labore membra postquam
> semimortua lectulo iacebant
>
> Nor could sleep cover my poor eyes with rest,
> but mad with wild tension over the entire bed
> I would roll, desperate to see the dawn . . .
> But later, worn out with hard work, my limbs
> lay half-dead on the little bed.
>
> . . . lectule deliciis facte beate meis! . . .
> quantaque sublato lumine rixa fuit! . . .
> illa meos somno lapsos patefecit ocellos
> ore suo et dixit "Sicine, lente, iaces?"
>
> . . . little bed, blessed by my delights! . . .
> and how many struggles there were when the light was taken away! . . .
> She opened my eyelids, fallen in sleep,
> with her lips, and said, "So, lazy one, are you relaxing?"

Both speakers are exhausted: Catullus' with desire, Propertius' with pleasure. The poets emphasize the scene of erotic agony (*lecto*, *lectulo*, *lectule*), sleep (*somnus*) either does or does not cover the eyes (*ocellos*) of the lovers, and both lie still (*iace-*) following the throes of passion. Catullus refers to the delightful capping of verselets to imply other ways of passing leisure time (*otiosi*) that he and Licinius

may have enjoyed--or so the sexually suggestive words *delicatos*, *incensus*, *semimortua* and the repetition of *ludo* and diminutives such as *uersiculos* and *ocellos* suggest. In a similar fashion, the erotic figuration of the bodies of the speaker and his beloved stands as an image of Propertius' art. In other words, the poems are imagined to arise from pleasure, and prove their origins through deployment of bodily metaphor. Propertius continues the pattern of Catullan allusion throughout the elegy, directly in lines such as 23-24 (Cat. 5) and 49-50 (Cat. 7). In 25-26, he suggests prototypically Catullan themes in a more indirect fashion (e.g., Cat. 87). The references serve to place the elegy in a poetic continuum that seems always to be aware of its own self-consciousness: it is constantly concerned with previous attempts to create textual space in the midst of its own attempts at doing so. **[End Page 90]**

Is this, then, the true project of elegy? Are these complex and sophisticated games equating sexual activity with the writing of poetry intended to play a joke on the reader, as Veyne implies? If he is right, then despite our attempts to yoke the texts together under the rubric "erotic elegy" and to scour them for insights into the life and loves of the elegists (or, alternatively, into the beliefs about sex and love prevailing in Augustan Rome), we will find in the end that we have been drawn into an elaborate maze, one in which sex is not at all the point.

For some readers, Veyne's observations offer an insufficient explanation of the nature of the genre. [30] Most problematic, in Duncan Kennedy's view, is Veyne's assumption that aestheticization is a transcendental essence. Though Veyne ostensibly argues against the transcendence of the aesthetic, Kennedy writes, this only serves to highlight his ultimate retreat into an ahistoricity that deploys "aestheticization" as the master term. [31] As an alternative, Kennedy advocates a historicism of contingency, which (ideally) offers a nuanced account of the sociological origins of aesthetics. This is a productive approach, and indeed, in Kennedy's hands, the essential elements of elegy as I have laid them out here receive very interesting treatment. He reads the pattern of delay and deferral that is built into elegy's representations of erotic pleasure as an opportunity for the poet to express the (fictive) lover's sexual and emotional frustration; this expression, he says, makes a crucial contribution to elegy's masking of the discourse of the real, the genuine article that the poet may call "love." "The [elegists'] language of pain involves a subtle attempt at coercion," Kennedy concludes. [32] The best the *puella* can do in order to resist the speaker's construction of herself as the frustrater of desire is to change: to yield, in effect, to the speaker's demands. But where on the field of authenticity, then, does her defensive and deliberate alteration of self ultimately stand? The unanswerability of that question, in Kennedy's reading, is the basic concern of the elegiac lover's discourse.

It is interesting, given his criticism of Veyne's ahistorical deployment of aestheticization, that Kennedy repeatedly invokes Roland Barthes' writings on textuality, love, and the representation of desire and pleasure in **[End Page 91]** his essays on Roman elegy, for, in his work on love, Barthes makes no pretense of being historically or sociologically grounded. On the contrary, the later Barthes largely abandons the analysis of cultural and linguistic semiotics for a broader, impressionistic palette of discursive meditation, in which his own highly aestheticized vision of erotic relations bears a marked resemblance to the Roman erotic elegists' poetics of desire. That similarity should encourage us to take a closer look at the cultural provenience of the Roman and Barthesian aesthetics of eros and, specifically, to pose the question of *what is lost* in creative and interpretive discourses that so highly valorize aestheticization.

In the case of Barthes' own writings, this is a loss of which some gay male readers have long complained. [33] He himself makes the matter explicit with remarks like this one: "The text of pleasure is not necessarily the text that recounts pleasures: the text of bliss is never the text that recounts the kind of bliss afforded literally by an ejaculation." [34] In fact, Barthes' expressed wish to grant bliss its deserved allotment of epistemic dignity, a claim central to *The Pleasure of the Text*, is not a privilege he wishes to extend to the living body. Instead, in this and other works, he identifies the striptease, the fetish, the gift, the setback, anxiety, waiting, absence, and jealousy (to make a partial list) as the vertices of erotic experience. "Is not the most erotic portion of a body where the garment gapes?" he asks. "It is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing . . . ; it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance as disappearance." [35] In a reading of elegy that is essentially true to Barthes, one might argue that the elegists are trying to connect literary action with human action. Elegists fall in love, and discuss love, because eros is the human act that best connects and correlates literary creation to physical existence. [36] It succeeds in this because poetic language (by definition, **[End Page 92]**

perhaps) appears to abolish the gap between signifier and signified: and this is the process in which erotic elegy engages when it readies the reader for glimpses of intensely pleasured and pleasurable bodies--and then reveals itself to be that body. The "body" for which readers seek so urgently is in actuality the corpus of the poet, the material of the text that the reader holds. Interestingly, Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse* may be read very fruitfully in the same fashion: a love manual in theory, it is in practice Barthes' most provocative meditations on the process of reading and, further, on the process of reading Barthes. The lover's discourse, he says in the prologue, "is today of *an extreme solitude*" (italics his): it is the solitude of discourse itself ("dis-cursus" is defined in the first chapter, following a section entitled "How this book is constructed").

Through titles, programmatic introductory lines, and the ancient biographical tradition, elegy proclaims itself or is proclaimed as love poetry--so successfully, in fact, that it has been interpreted as a subjective record of erotic passion for centuries of western literary history. [37] Yet the basic elements of elegiac narrative structure are the delay and deferral of erotic consummation, the evasion of physical figuration in favor of references to myth, the absence of clear character definition, and the disavowal of representations of sexual activity. Under these circumstances, it is fair to question the conditions under which this collection has gained the authority to call itself "erotic." In sharp contrast to Roman elegy, material remains dating to the Augustan period suggest that the Rome of Gallus, Propertius, Tibullus, Sulpicia, and Ovid took great delight in painted or sculpted representations of erotic activity. The displays of sexual organs and acts in domestic as well as public art, as John Clarke has recently shown, ranged from the demure to the explicit. This, added to the Roman appreciation of mime, should assure us (if we need convincing) that uncommon prudery or lack of interest in the bodily aspects of sex simply cannot supply the explanation for the problematic stance toward the body and its pleasures taken by Roman elegy. [38] **[End Page 93]**

Under the seductive influence of Barthes and readers like him, it is easy to interpret Roman elegy as highly intellectualized reflections of erotic experience and linguistic play. In doing so, we run the risk of paying in-sufficient heed to the highly constrained nature of the erotic elegiac genre, to the things it does not say. If we are to make progress toward understanding the nature of Roman erotic elegy, we must not end our investigations into elegy with Barthes (or rather, Barthesian readings), but instead consider the interpretive sacrifices that his striking attitude toward eroticism and language entail. By his own admission, Barthes discovers in the representation of desire a greater proliferation of meaning, a freer range for the play of textual signification, than he finds in the representation of bodily pleasure. Like him, the Roman elegists present an erotic landscape in which the body exists in obscurity, not delineated but blurred by language. Careful reading of the elegiac account of love unwraps a world in which the pleasured and pleasuring body brings trouble to those who gaze at it for too long, who allow the hot passions of love to draw them into action and away from discourse. In the end, instead of "affirming" erotic activity, both Roland Barthes and Roman elegy appear to call its value, if not its existence, into question. [39]

To defer or limit the body and bodily practice in a literary production that defines itself as an erotic genre is to make a very powerful ideological statement: it is an evaluative judgment of the status of the body in the discourse of "high culture." This small group of Augustan texts marks a moment of great significance in the western literary discourse on love, for the elegists' statement went on to reverberate through centuries of representations of "love in the west" (the phrase Paul Veyne uses as a subtitle for his book on elegy). This much seems clear, Roman elegy initiates a tradition of representing love in ways that call into question the role and value of the erotic, the pleasured and pleasuring body. From where does this attitude arise? For the last time, Barthes suggests the prelude to an answer. "Odd," he writes, "this philosophical permanence of Desire (insofar as it is never satisfied): doesn't the word itself denote a 'class notion'? (A rather crude presumption of proof, and yet noteworthy: the 'populace' does not know Desire--only pleasures.)" [40] In this remark, the nature of erotic elegy begins to reveal itself. Its valorization of the asymptote of pleasure--a curve that **[End Page 94]** intersects the line of the graph at no point, but swerves away into infinity--is enmeshed in a deeply-rooted prejudice against the body, consistently represented as the single site of common experience for men and women, noble and poor, Roman and non-Roman, free and slave. It is precisely because the body is understood to link those who are otherwise differentiated by gender, class, or national identity that the elegists construct a discourse of erotic love that undermines it. Above all, theirs is an elite aesthetic and, as such, it must erase, defer, delay, and deny the pleasures that are represented as deriving from practices that are common in every sense of the word. Barthes' work on the lover's discourse, I think, operates according to the same rule. For both him and the Roman elegists, the aestheticization of the text of erotic love

amounts to the anaesthetization of the body falling into erotic love.

This move appears all the more striking when viewed in contrast to Julia Kristeva's claim that poetic language "is necessarily the place of inscription of the pleasure elements left unsatisfied by the relations of production and reproduction, or by the ideologies which claim to represent them"--and, as such, possesses serious subversive potential. [41] In my reading, the elegists choose not to engage the body in their constructions of erotic passion precisely because the body is a site of erotic pleasure. They consider love a painful affliction not because it enslaves, weakens, or sickens them, but because they view love as arising from and rooted in the body--a provenance repugnant to men interested in the expensive symbolic capital of social status and Hellenistic aesthetics, and eager to distinguish themselves from the masses at a time when a new and invigorated court culture was growing under the powerful patronage of Augustus and his associates. [42] If elegy is a kind of literary striptease, then it is a strange performance: for the aristocratic rules of the genre simultaneously prevent the body's full disclosure and scorn the body as the ultimate object of desire. To view elegy as a sustained tease that generates prurient interest in the body by means of its concealment, then, as several recent readers have done, is to assume an uncritical participation in the aesthetic values of Roman high culture, embedded in the social logic of class distinction. [43] **[End Page 95]**

It seems appropriate to conclude these speculations with the work of an anonymous poet writing in 1747, entitled "The Poetess' Bouts-Rimés": [44]

> Dear Phoebus, hear my only vow;
> If e'er you loved me, hear me now.
> That charming youth--but idle fame
> Is ever so inclined to blame--
> These men will turn it to a jest;
> I'll tell the rhymes and drop the rest:
> ------ ------ ------ desire,
> ------ ------ ------ fire,
> ------ ------ ------ lie,
> ------ ------ ------ thigh,
> ------ ------ ------ wide,
> ------ ------ ------ ride,
> ------ ------ ------ night,
> ------ ------ ------ delight.

Why would the men turn the speaker's words of love into a "jest"? Surely it is because, from the speaker's perspective, they succeed in catching more than a glimpse of the desired body hovering behind the poetic words. And because their comprehension is (represented as being) "idle," limited to the domain of bodily pleasure, they simply laugh. The eighteenth-century poet tries to forestall that crude laugh with a different sort of humor, turning away from the representation of "that charming youth" with a tour de force of the elegiac tease, exploiting to the full the *unwriting* of representations of erotic pleasure that form an essential part of the nature of Roman erotic elegy and, by extension, of the western discourse on love. [45]

University of Washington

Notes

1. Miller 1981 concludes, "In the last analysis, what discontents the traditional novel is its own condition of possibility. . . . There is no more fundamental assumption of the traditional novel than [the] opposition between the narratable and closure" (265, 267). For the prominence of the novel in such accounts, see my discussion below, but it should be noted that pleasure and desire are important critical registers for readers of drama and epic as well, especially in the Renaissance. See, e.g., Parker 1987, who discusses the significant role played by the female body in the "dilation" of the text (esp. 8-17), and the opening remarks of Zeitlin 1990.

2. As it turns out, Emma and Knightley will live in her father's house, a socially irregular decision that is foreshadowed in this chapter.

3. Barthes 1975.7 (italics his).

4. Barthes 1975.21 (italics his); cf. also 55-59.

5. Barthes 1975.58. Also see Girard 1965.94-95: "Thus the most diverse forms of triangular desire are organized into a universal structure. There is no aspect of desire, in any novelist, which cannot be linked with other aspects of his own novel and with all other novels. Desire thus appears as a dynamic structure extending from one end of novelistic literature to the other."

6. Barthes 1975.14.

7. Sharrock 1995.152.

8. Veyne 1988.154-55.

9. Pound 1926.88. For some quotations, I have chosen to reprint poetic translations that seem to me best to reproduce the sense of the original. My intention is to keep the reader in constant awareness of the powerful English tradition in which these Latin poems themselves now exist and aside from which they cannot (and should not) be read. Otherwise, the translations appearing here are my own.

10. Additional poems with the same valence are: e.g., Propertius I 16, Tibullus I 2, and Ovid *Am.* I 6.

11. Freud 1966 describes the game in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle."

12. Pucci 1978 explores the field of significations shared by the anagrams *mora*, *amor*, and *Roma*, noting that "mora, limen (threshold), and amor are here interconnected. A sort of 'detention' within the house assures the continuation of happy love" (53).

13. Not made explicit in the poem but certainly an integral part of the mythological narrative (Plato *Phaedo* 72c; Apollonius Rhodius *Argon*. 4.57ff., with the Scholiast; Cicero *De finibus* 5.20.55; *Tusc. Disp*. 1.38.92; Pausanias 5.1.4; Hyginus *Fab*. 271; and Zenobius *Cent*. iii 76) and, I think, foreshadowed in the sleep of the Propertian lover at 7-8.

14. Pucci 1978 comments that "the lover's wrath for Cynthia's reticence implies also the reader's bafflement with a rhetorical reticence that covers just as it exposes and vice versa" (67), a reticence he ascribes to the "force of transgression" that feeds the tensions of his work (68).

15. Hints of Catullus 5 surface in this and the following line: the insistence of their literary referentiality draws the poem further from the realm of the erotic. On the power of the allusion simultaneously to press the reader in a variety of different directions, see Hinds 1998.17-34.

16. For a radically different approach to this question, see Lyne 1979 and attendant bibliography on the *seruitium amoris*.

17. Barthes 1978.93-94.

18. Barthes 1991.178-79: "Racinian beauty is abstract in that it is always named: Racine says that Bajazet is lovable, that Berenice has beautiful hands; the concept somehow gets rid of the thing."

19. For prominent uses of *queror* and related words: Propertius I 16.13, II 18.12, III 6.18, IV 3.55; *Amores* II 4.27; Tibullus II 6.34.

20. Marlowe 1971.160.

21. Marlowe 1971.118.

22. In these lines, Hinds 1987 traces the presence of Catullus 68.70-75 (Lesbia's arrival at Catullus' "trysting house"), arguing that the literary reference generates "an atmosphere of poetic suggestiveness and mystery" (9, 11): another textual barrier against bodily pleasure.

23. The labels may of course incorporate other programmatic elements of elegy, such as references to Apollo (Delia, Cynthia), or to poetry making itself (Cerinthus), or to poetic influences (Lesbia). Maria Wyke has most fully explored the questions raised by the representation of women in elegy: she concludes that these representations are to be read not as "flesh and blood women" but as "signifiers of moral and political ideologies" (1989b.128).

24. Williams 1968 and Griffin 1976 are two particularly influential examples of this approach (discussed in Kennedy 1993.85-87, 95). More recently, and with regard to lyric, see the readings of Horace in Levi 1998.

25. Note that female bodies are not the only ones to experience pain in Roman elegy. Propertius' speaker in II 15, for example, experiences pain in his voiced desire for chains (*catena*, 25). It is worth noting that these chains reflect the elegiac sexuality of situational desire, a relation of force that must be maintained in the face of brief moments of erotic pleasure. Just as the beloved might refuse the speaker's command to disrobe (hence his threats at 17-18), so here she seems to be denying his love altogether (*utinam . . . nos uincire catena / velles*, 25-26). The swift and unexplained change in her attitude from the commencement of the poem, as well as the manifest references to Catullus, are signs that the poem is once more searching for ways in which the situation of desire may be both thematically discussed and structurally reflected without any regard for the rules of narrative consistency or rational development.

26. Tibullan elegy certainly possesses the same characteristics, though reasons of space prohibit detailed discussion: note, for instance, his use of the *paraclausithyron* (1.2 and 1.5) and his choice of the subjunctive as the dominant mood (especially in Book 1). Tibullus tends to contrast specific references to body parts (hair, hands, feet, and so on) with the blurred horizons of a pastoral countryside (e.g., 1.5.20, 2.1.77), heightening the sense of ambivalence surrounding the beloved's bodily presence, and he shares Propertius' and Ovid's tendency to slip into mythological storytelling (e.g., 1.3.67ff.).

27. Hinds 1998.3.

28. The term is the title of Barbara Hughes Fowler's 1989 study. For other representatives of this approach see *inter alia* Cairns 1979 and Papanghelis 1987.

29. Paul Veyne 1988.178-79 (italics his).

30. In addition to the critique of Kennedy 1993, discussed below, see the insightful remarks of Wyke 1989.

31. Kennedy 1993.98-99.

32. Kennedy 1993.74.

33. Miller 1992 criticizes Barthes' famous analysis of Balzac's "Sarrasine" in *S/Z* for its failure to address the body, specifically, the gay body, referring to the "Barthesian neuter" (15). He goes on to call Barthes' relation to the issue of sexual identity and its self-proclamation "nothing short of phobic" (23).

34. Barthes 1975.55; cf. 58-59.

35. Barthes 1975.9-10. Variations on this sentiment appear throughout Barthes 1978, esp. 67ff. ("When my finger accidentally . . ."), 104-05 ("In the loving calm of your arms"), and 174-79 ("Love's obscenity").

36. A point made by Zeitlin 1990 in her productive reading of Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* (441).

37. An irony of which Veyne, Kennedy, and many others are fully aware: cf. Apuleius *Apology* 10.

38. Clarke 1998 offers a wealth of evidence for the ubiquity of Roman representations of erotic activity in painting and sculpture, emphasizing the explicit nature of works on semi-public or public view in domestic spaces and the baths. Along different lines, Fredrick 1995 links the themes of Roman erotic

painting to those of elegy, especially violence, death, and a general "problematic relation to the body" (286).

39. Barthes 1978 calls his work on love an "affirmation" (1).

40. Barthes 1975.58.

41. Miller 1994 provides a very useful translation and discussion of this section of her argument (127).

42. On love as an affliction, see Veyne 1988.86. Habinek 1998 provocatively discusses the role of elite sensibility in Roman literature, especially poetry.

43. For discussion of the terms "social logic" and "distinction," see Bourdieu 1993.176-91.

44. Lonsdale 1984.414.

45. Many thanks to Joseph Farrell, Alain Gowing, and Stephen Hinds for their insightful critiques of earlier versions of this piece.

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