

THE POET AS PIMP: ELEGIAC SEDUCTION IN THE TIME OF AUGUSTUS

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In this article, I want to consider how the elegiac poet (particularly Ovid) uses the imagery of venal sexuality and the negative metaphoric associations of poems with prostitutes and poets with pimps as means to poetic empowerment within the historic and social climate of the establishment of the Augustan principate.

The recent work of various classical scholars emphasizes how prostitution serves as a powerful metaphor for patronized poets.¹ Such studies show how these poets attempt to situate themselves within models of venal sexuality (*hetaira/meretrix*, *porne/scortum*) that are either validated or denigrated from the perspective of aristocratic culture. In this manner, patronized poetic composition can be seen as struggling to embed itself in aristocratic culture and thus demonstrate “the dilemma of the artist in a money economy” (Carson 1993.75).

The response of the poets to this dilemma was various. Leslie Kurke argues persuasively that, in the case of Pindar, the poet attempts to appropriate the new economics for old social structures and to construct “a new aristocratic ethos, which depends on embracing the money economy” (1990.254). Thus aristocrats are encouraged not to spurn a monetary system, but to use it wisely. In this way, the nobility are persuaded to demonstrate their gentility and superiority by sponsoring a form of Pindaric composition

1 See the studies of Leslie Kurke 1990 on Pindar, Anne Carson 1993 on Simonides, and Ellen Oliensis 1997 on elegy and 1998 on Horace.

that serves to perpetuate an aristocratic ethos by re-embedding the use of wealth in gift-exchange between similarly minded aristocrats. Hence, Pindar, so he would have it, always depends on the kindness of friends.

This same form of poetic, metaphoric anxiety can also be perceived in the work of Horace in his similar attempt in such poems as *Epistles* 1.17 and 1.18 to trope the dependent poet as a *matrona fidelis* rather than a *levis meretrix*: a literary spouse rather than poetic whore.²

However, such an accommodation of patronized poetry to aristocratic culture was not the only possibility. As Anne Carson has shown in the case of Simonides, this poet “made his mark on economic history by refusing to be embarrassed by money” (1993.76). Thus Simonides’ response seems to have been to embrace wholeheartedly the growing tide of dis-embedded economics and to turn himself, with a degree of shrewd self-promotion, into an unabashed poetic salesman. I shall be arguing that elegiac poetry, as in the case of Simonides, involves a similar form of poetic empowerment through the embrace of metaphoric notoriety.

As Pindar, Simonides, and Horace demonstrate, the metaphoric equation between poems and prostitutes and pimps and poets is not something unique to elegiac poetry. In a Roman context, both Horace (in *Epistles* 1.20) and Catullus (in his opening poem) present their poetic products as textualized incarnations of venal sexuality. In both these texts, a literary product is personified and possesses a flaunting sexual attractiveness (Catullus 1.1–2, Horace *Epistles* 1.20.1–4):

Cui dono lepidum novum libellum
arida modo pumice expolitum?

To whom do I present my new witty book, just now
polished with dry pumice?³

Vertumnum Ianumque, liber, spectare videris,
scilicet ut prostes Sosiorum pumice mundus.
odisti clavis et grata sigilla pudico;
paucis ostendi gemis et communia laudas.

2 This aspect of the Horatian poems has been insightfully elaborated by Oliensis 1997.153–54, 1998.168–72.

3 All translations are my own.

Book, you seem to be looking at Vertumnus and Janus, of course, so that, spruced-up with the pumice of the Sosii, you might go on sale/prostitute yourself. You hate the key and the seal that are welcome to a modest book; you groan at being shown to only a few and you praise the public.

With regard to the Catullan poem, William Fitzgerald shows how the use of pumice conflates literary endeavor (it was used as an eraser), external literary presentation (it was used to smooth the ends of the scroll), and sexual attractiveness (it was used as a depilatory).⁴ In this manner, the literary artist is responsible for the production of a poetic prostitute. He creates a poem that will seek public circulation through the merits of the attractiveness created by depilation both within the text (emendation) and on its surface (polish).

With respect to the Horatian poem, Ellen Oliensis has pointed out that this sexualization of the literary product leads to an expressed anxiety over the propriety of such an act of vulgarization, as sexual integrity is equated with the book that is content with a few readers and prostitution with the book that seeks out the general public.⁵ There is evident here a simultaneous aristocratic distaste for the *turba* and a validation of Callimachean literary aesthetics; such fastidiousness, however, as also expressed by the Horatian narrator in the *Satires*: *neque te ut miretur turba labores, / contentus paucis lectoribus*, “Don’t toil so that the mob may wonder at you, be happy with few readers” (1.10.73–74), resides in tension with a desire for literary fame that is dramatically expressed in *Epistles* 1.20 in an acrimonious argument between author and literary product. The narrator tries to deflect (ironically and humorously) the blame from himself: the Sosii (the actual booksellers), he argues, are the real pimps and salesmen, not the poet, and it is the desire of his literary product, not himself, that his work should end up in the marketplace.⁶

4 Fitzgerald 1995.40–41; on male depilation see Richlin 1992.168, 188–89.

5 Oliensis 1995, 1998.174–81.

6 Oliensis 1995.214 notes that this dynamic is also expressed in Martial 1.3 where the narrator addresses his *parve liber* (2) which has expressed a similar preference to leave the bookshelves of the author, *scrinia nostra* (2), and go to the bookstores, *Argiletanas mavis habitare tabernas* (1). In this manner, the book will escape the continual emendations of its literary *dominus* and seek the approval of a reading *domina*, Rome. The author warns his product, however, that it is unaware of the fastidiousness of such an audience, *nescis*

Horace's poems nevertheless are troped as prostitutes who will provocatively lure readers into Rome's literary bordellos. If the poem is a prostitute, then the poet must be a pimp, and literary success is thus associated with a rather disreputable form of commercial sexual success.

Elegy takes this imagery of venal sexuality a figurative step further. If Catullus and Horace metaphorically base their literary fame on pimping their prostitute-poems, then elegy takes this literary marketing strategy even further by making its poems not only figurative prostitutes, but also by populating its poems with female figures who behave suspiciously like actual prostitutes.⁷ Elegy, in fact, can be perceived as operating on two levels of literary prostitution: the elegiac narrator attempts (generally to no effect) to prostitute his poems for sex within the text, and, at the same time, the external narrator is using the presentation of a venal woman to prostitute his poems outside the text.⁸

The act of literary prostitution in Horace precipitates a figured anxiety over a loss of ownership and control. The poem that is *pudivum* is kept under lock and key at home where it can only be appreciated by the author and by any discerning *existimatores* he might choose to expose it to. On the other hand, the poem that is prostituted to the public passes beyond

dominae fastidia Romae (3). In elegy, the *fastidia* of a *domina* is effected within the text, as the literary efforts of the narrator go generally unappreciated by the elegiac *puella*, but, at the same time, such a narrative of disdain is the means by which the external poet overcomes the *fastidia* of the *domina* outside the text, Rome.

7 The referentiality of the elegiac *puella* is, of course, a vexed issue which has been explored at length in a series of important articles by Maria Wyke: 1987, 1989a, 1989b, 1994. Also of note in this context are Williams 1968.526ff., Syme 1978.ch.11, Veyne 1988.ch.5 and ch.6, Griffin 1985.ch.1 and ch.6, Sharrock 1991, Kennedy 1993.ch.1 and ch.5, Keith 1994. There is little possibility of reaching a consensus here and I think the elegiac text deliberately toys with the reader's desire to see a real woman behind a textualized fiction. In particular, in the context of elegy's propensity to posit both the *matrona* and the *meretrix* as referents for the elegiac *puella*, I think Thomas McGinn's (1998.ch.5) observation highly illuminating: the adultery laws of Augustus were trying to re-establish the polarity between *matrona* and *meretrix* in the face of cultural anxiety over the former acting like the latter.

8 Thus, as has been well elaborated by Molly Myerowitz (1985.ch. 4) in her study of the *Ars Amatoria*, the subject matter of his poetry (including textualized females) provides the *materia* upon which the male poet exerts his poetic mastery. This discursive paradigm is dramatized in *Amores* 1.3 in the narrator's request, *te mihi materiem felicem in carmina praebe*, "provide yourself to me as fertile source material for poetry" (19). To the extent that the *puella* is a fiction, she is, of course, in no position to dispute her author's control, and if she is a woman inscribed under a pseudonym, then there is still little she can do to prevent her textualization.

the capacity of the author and those listeners whose judgment the author trusts, to control and regulate its circulation and interpretation.⁹

Yet, literary success (if success is measured in reaching as many readers as possible) is inevitably connected with such promiscuous reading. If a poem is a sexualized object, as in *Epistles* 1.20, then to effect the widest possible literary audience the author must accept that he cannot regulate the sexuality of his text, but must cut it loose so that other readers might experience its sensual delights. Hence, to achieve literary fame, the poet has to renounce exclusive ownership rights and indulge the promiscuous desires of his work (which, naturally, are his own desires, too, however mystified and metaphorically displaced such desires may be).

Elegiac discourse, with its incarnation of mercenary sexual female figures in the text, not only literalizes the metaphor of textual promiscuity and pimping authors, it also uses this imagery more overtly and systematically to seduce its audience and to raise the public profile of the poet.

THE POEM AS GIRLFRIEND

In Juvenal *Satires* 7.82–87, Statius' *Thebaid* is described as his *amica*:

curritur ad vocem iucundum et carmen amicae
Thebaidos, laetam cum fecit Statius urbem
promisitque diem: tanta dulcedine captos
adficit ille animos tantaque libidine volgi
auditur; sed cum fregit subsellia versu,
esurit, intactam Paridi nisi vendit Agaven.

When Statius has made the people happy and set a date
there is a stampede to his sweet voice and to the poetry of

9 The moving away from home of the poem in Horace *Epistles* 1.20 is obviously analogous to the progression from reading a work in an aristocratically embedded *recitatio* to making a work available to the wider literate audience: earlier in the *Satires* the Horatian narrator expressly validates the *recitatio* over more general and indiscriminate reading and circulation, *nec recito cuiquam nisi amicis, idque coactus, / non ubivis coramque quibuslibet*, “Nor do I recite to anyone except *amici*, and I do that only under compulsion, I don’t recite openly anywhere to anyone” (1.4.73–74). This anxiety over the ability of writing to go on signifying and be subject to untutored interpretation beyond the presence of the author is, as Oliensis (1995.212–13) notes, at least as old as Plato’s *Phaedrus*.

his girlfriend *Thebais*: he moves their spirits captured by such great sweetness, and the multitude hears him with inordinate desire; but when he has broken the benches with his verse, he goes hungry unless he sells a virgin Agave to Paris.

As Shadi Bartsch has pointed out, the use of *amica* conflates the categories of poem and mistress.¹⁰ Moreover, as Bartsch also mentions, much of the vocabulary of this passage is drawn from that of love poetry.¹¹ Thus the passage can be seen as being particularly illuminating with respect to elegiac discourse.

Amica is not, however, just a metonym for mistress but also euphemism for prostitute.¹² Hence, the poem is not only the poet's female companion but also his whore, and so his instrument for securing popular approval. The poet seduces the populace with his poetry, metaphorically incarnated as his *amica*. The intonation of the poet is seductive, *vocem iucundum, tanta dulcedine*, and arouses a passionate desire in his listeners, *tantaque libidine volgi*, which is the measure of his poetic success.

Elegiac discourse fits into this pattern of poetic seduction by incarnating the metaphor of poem as sexualized female more insistently. The poetic product of the elegist is not only potentially a metaphoric *amica*, it becomes virtually synonymous with the *amica* of the poet as depicted in the text. Hence, the metaphor in the passage of Juvenal is personified in elegy, as the public is confronted not just with the sexualized delivery of a poetic product but with a sexually alluring figure incarnated in the text.¹³

10 Bartsch 1994.132; see also Braund 1988.60, Hardie 1983.61.

11 Bartsch 1994.132, drawing on Pichon 1902: the vocabulary in question being *promittere noctem, vocem iucundam, dulcedine captos, intactam*.

12 Adams 1983.348–50.

13 The seductive delivery of Statius: *vocem iucundam, tanta dulcedine* to his audience, mirrors the recommendation of the *praeceptor* in the *Ars Amatoria* that his attempts at poetic seduction should be delivered with a *dulcis sonus* (2.286). The internal dynamics of seduction in elegy mirror, and enable through their erotic content, the external seduction of an audience by poet as elaborated in Juvenal.

**UNVEILING THE ELEGIAC PROSTITUTE:
OVID *AMORES* 1.5**

In the tenth book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, there occurs the story of Pygmalion's creation of a woman out of ivory.¹⁴ The sculptor, in response, the narrator says, to the disgust he feels at being surrounded by the world's first prostitutes (the Propoetides) and his inability to conceive amorous feeling towards such women, creates his own alternative female model out of ivory and falls in love with that instead (10.243–49):

Quas quia Pygmalion aevum per crimen agentis
viderat, offensus vitiis, quae plurima menti
femineae natura dedit, sine coniuge caelebs
vivebat thalamique diu consorte carebat.
interea niveum mira feliciter arte
sculpsit ebur formamque dedit, qua femina nasci
nulla potest, operisque sui concepit amorem.

Because Pygmalion had seen these women [the Propoetides] leading a life of crime, and revolted by the faults that nature had given in plenty to the female disposition, he lived celibate without a wife and, for a long time, was without a bed-partner. In the meantime, he sculpted fruitfully with a wondrous art the snow-white ivory and gave it a beauty such as no woman had ever been born with, and conceived a love of his own work.

The Pygmalion narrative has been read as a meditation on the earlier erotic narratives of its poetic creator. For the parallels between the sculptor and the elegist are easy to draw. As Alison Sharrock has pointed out, both are engaged in “womanufacture” (1991.36):

[T]he story reflects on the eroto-artistic relationship between the poet and his *puella* explored in Latin love elegy.

¹⁴ There are several fine discussions of this narrative: see, in particular, Elsner 1991, Sharrock 1991.

The *Metamorphoses* myth of the art-object which becomes a love-object mirrors the elegiac myth of love-object as art-object. The elegists represent the *puella* as both art and flesh.

The sculptor creates a woman out of ivory and the elegist a woman out of words. However, the difference in manufactured women does not merely consist of the different materials out of which the male artists fashion them. Pygmalion creates a woman whom he intends to be the antithesis of the venal women who surround him. The woman who is created in the elegiac text, on the other hand, seems to bear more of a resemblance to the Propoetides than to the sculptor's sexually innocent statue. Hence, the elegist is not creating an ideal but an aberrant woman.

When Corinna first enters the scene in *Amores* 1.5 there is an evident dissonance in her description. As the narrator sets the scene, he describes the light as being particularly suited to a *verecunda puella* (1.5.7–8):

illa verecundis lux est praebenda puellis,
qua timidus latebras speret habere pudor.

The light was such as is a necessity for modest girls, by which means fearful shame might hope to gain some cover for itself.

It is onto this stage of shy modesty that Corinna initially steps (1.5.9–10):

ecce, Corinna venit, tunica velata recincta
candida dividua colla tegente coma,

See, Corinna comes, clothed in a loosened tunic, with her parted hair falling on her white neck.

The manner in which Corinna is dressed however, *tunica velata recincta*, “clothed in an unbelted tunic,” already presupposes, from a normative Roman perspective, a degree of *impudicitia*.¹⁵ This impression is quickly confirmed as the narrator launches into analogy (1.5.11–12):

15 The unbelted pose of Corinna forms a contrast with the archetype of propriety for female dress, the tight wrapping around of the body of the *palla* and the *stola*—what has been called “the *pudicitia* pose.” For further elaboration see Sebesta 1997.

qualiter in thalamos famosa Semiramis isse
dicitur, et multis Lais amata viris.

Just as famous Semiramis is said to have entered the
bedroom, and Lais loved by many a man.

The disparity between the expectation created by the light suited to a *puella verecunda* and the narrator's comparison of Corinna to two famous prostitutes is acute and points to the apparent disparity at the center of the narrator's perspective. Is the elegiac *puella* a blushing goddess or a shameless prostitute?¹⁶

The comparison of Corinna to Semiramis and Lais that follows the initial entry of Corinna, and the *ecce* that arrests the narrator's and the reader's gaze upon this verbal female figure, is followed by the further directing of the gaze onto the fleshing out of this textual woman (1.5.13–24):¹⁷

deripui tunicam; nec multum rara nocebat,
pugnabat tunica sed tamen illa tegi;
quae, cum ita pugnaret tamquam quae vincere nollet,
victa est non aegre proditione sua.
ut stetit ante oculos posito velamine nostros,
in toto nusquam corpore menda fuit:
quos umeros, quales vidi tetigique lacertos!
forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi!
quam castigato planus sub pectore venter!
quantum et quale latus! quam iuvenale femur!
singula quid referam? nil non laudabile vidi,
et nudam pressi corpus ad usque meum.

16 In Propertius 2.6, the narrator also compares Cynthia to Lais, Thais, and Phryne; on the atmosphere of *Amores* 1.5 resembling an epiphany see Nicoll 1977.40–48, Hinds 1988.4–11, Keith 1994.29.

17 As Ovid comes after a succession of other elegiac poets, Gallus, Tibullus, and Propertius, the unveiling of Corinna in *Amores* 1.5 can also be seen as the premiere of a new model of elegiac woman for the public: Corinna is the latest, updated version of the earlier elegiac female figures, Lycoris, Cynthia, Delia, and Nemesis, presented by the poet with an appropriate suspense-enhancing delay and a long-awaited flourish: *ecce Corinna*.

I tore off her tunic; it was thin and so didn't get much in the way, but she still put up a fight to remain covered by it; yet she fought like one who did not want to win and was easily conquered by her own betrayal. As she stood before my eyes with her clothing laid aside, there wasn't a blemish anywhere on her whole body: what shoulders, what arms I saw and touched! How apt was the shape of her breasts for fondling! How flat her belly under her faultless bosom! How long her flank and of what quality! How youthful a thigh! Why should I recount individual details? I saw nothing that was not worthy of praise, and I pressed her naked body to mine.

Just as the *ecce* of line 9 conflates the gaze of internal and external viewer, so, too, the positioning of Corinna before *oculi nostri* reflects the presentation of her body both inside and outside of the text.¹⁸

John Berger has suggested that part of the success of oil painting is the ability of the medium to suggest the tangibility of the object depicted (1972.88–89). Where the object depicted is a naked person, this added suggestion of tangibility obviously has an erotic charge. It is rather more difficult to produce such tangibility in a verbal medium; nevertheless, the verbal artist tries his best in *Amores* 1.5 with his description of the body of Corinna: *quales vidi tetigique lacertos! / forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi*, “What arms I saw and touched! / The shape of her breasts how suited to be pressed!” (19–20). A visual description encourages a tactile appreciation.

The voyeuristic gaze at Corinna's body carried on inside and outside the text comes hard on the heels of the comparison of this textual female to Lais *multis . . . amata viris*, “loved by many men.” Thus the general availability of the body that has just been described is emphasized.

18 The gaze is expressly one of “fetishistic scopophilia,” *singula quid referam?*; a cataloguing of individual female body parts: the concepts of fetishistic scopophilia and sadistic voyeurism have been most systematically applied to elegy's verbal narratives in Fredrick 1997.182–83, who uses *Amores* 1.5 as a key example; see also Greene 1998.77–84, who remarks that the use of *oculi nostri* “focusses attention on how Corinna is a spectacle, the fixed object of the *amator*'s ravishing gaze” (82). On the fetishization of the female body in male poetry, see Vickers 1980; for the elaboration of the notion of fetishistic scopophilia in the medium of film see Mulvey 1989.14–26; on the application of visual theory to elegy see further Richlin 1992.45–47, Fredrick 1995, 1997, Greene 1998.

When the narrator proceeds to conclude *cetera quis nescit*? “who doesn’t know the rest?” there is a degree of irony in the expression—or a degree of dissonance between the perspective of the internal narrator and the meaning the external poet allows to surface: the point is not only who cannot imagine the pleasures of sex, in general, but also who cannot imagine, or even who has not had, sex with Corinna or a woman like Corinna, the Roman manifestation of Lais, loved by many men. The reader is being invited to penetrate the text.¹⁹

Alison Keith has pointed out how the term *menda*, used in *Amores* 1.5 of the perfection of Corinna’s body, is also a term used metaphorically of literary faults. Hence Keith argues: “Ovid explicitly conflates the physique of his elegiac girlfriend and the poetics espoused in his elegiac collection” (1994.31). Corinna, then, has a perfect body that incarnates the poetic perfection of her author. I would add that Corinna is not just the reflection of her author’s poetics but also the instrument of his poetic ambition. She is a textual female constructed to ensnare the reader.

Amores 1.5 functions as an unveiling of the elegiac *puella* before the eyes of the reader. It is elegy’s equivalent of the nude portrait.²⁰ The elegiac narrator is granted his wish of denuding Corinna within the text, but his represented private viewing is also paraded before a wider voyeuristic external audience.²¹ In this manner, the external poet scripts the undressing of Corinna as he also scripts the clothing of her. It is the external poet who writes in the Coan silks and expensive ornamentation that the internal poet so disparages.²²

The external poet produces his sexualized female object in the same manner that Plautus’ Ballio does in the *Pseudolus*: *cur ego vestem*,

19 Or, as Fredrick 1997.172 observes, an aesthetic text is visualized in alluring female form, “Callimachean metaphor apparently becomes penetrable text.”

20 For more detailed discussions on the relationship between the erotic written texts of elegy and the visual medium of Roman wall painting, the reader is referred to Myerowitz 1992 and Fredrick 1995.

21 Thus the effect of reading elegy could be seen as analogous to the tendencies to voyeurism that John Pollini 1999 has recently postulated may have existed in the sexual lives of the Romans: in the House of the Centenary at Pompeii the small *cubiculum* that contains erotic wall paintings also has a small aperture cut through one of its walls. Pollini argues that this aperture may have served as a form of “voyeur window” to allow those outside to view the erotic activity taking place in the *cubiculum* (40). Such a form of real-life voyeurism would provide an interesting cultural context within which to understand elegy’s scopophilic seduction of the reader.

22 The best example of this theme is Propertius 1.2.

aurum atque ea quibus est vobis usus, prohibeo? “Why do I provide you with clothing, gold, and those things which you have need of?” (182). The answer for Ballio, the dramatic representation of a *leno*, is, of course, that he accessorizes his prostitutes in this fashion to enable them to ensnare lovers who will enhance the material standing of their patron. So, too, the elegiac *puellae* dressed in their Coan silks are also sent out into the text to acquire for their pimp/creator the discursive wealth of literature: readers.²³ Hence, the *lena* who is constructed within the text as the material driving force behind the *puella* can be seen as a natural analogue of the external poet, as will become clear in the later discussion of *Amores* 3.12.

DUBIOUS PROTESTATIONS

Having created an image of female sexual venality within its text, elegiac discourse also appears deliberately to conflate text and female fiction to the point where they are virtually synonymous (as in Statius’ *Thebaid* being troped as his *amica*). This tendency is readily apparent in the opening couplet of Propertius 2.24:

“tu loqueris, cum sis iam noto fabula libro
et tua sit toto Cynthia lecta foro?”

“Do you talk in this way, when you are already a source of
gossip with your book well-known and your Cynthia read
all over the forum?”

Here clearly there is an elision of female fiction and book, as Cynthia is presented as being identical with Propertius’ *liber*. The circulation of both is metaphorically equivalent.

This same form of concision is also apparent in Propertius 2.5.1–8:

Hoc verumst, tota te ferri, Cynthia, Roma,
et non ignota vivere nequitia?
haec merui sperare? dabis mihi, perfida, poenas;
et nobis aliquo, Cynthia, ventus erit.

23 Hence, Martial (10.2.5) refers to the reader as *opes nostrae*.

inveniam tamen e multis fallacibus unam,
 quae fieri nostro carmine nota velit,
 nec mihi tam duris insultet moribus, et te
 vellicet: heu sero flebis amata diu.

Is this true, Cynthia, that you are spoken of all over Rome and that you live in conscious *nequitia*? Have I deserved to expect this? You will pay the penalty, treacherous woman; a wind will carry me off somewhere else away from you. I will find one, from among so many fickle women, who might wish to be well known through my poetry, and will not exult over me with her harsh behavior, and will tear you to pieces: alas, too late you will weep, you who have been loved for a long time.

The initial description of Cynthia here can be seen as applicable to both a book of poetry and a woman: hence, *te ferri* could refer to the gossip circulating about a woman, or it could refer to the circulation of a book. The response of the internal narrator is one of bitter indignation, he accuses Cynthia of *nequitia* and threatens to take his poetic talents elsewhere. He asks if such public circulation of her *nequitia* and his attendant shaming is what he has merited, *haec merui sperare*? From the perspective of a dramatically isolated, and supposedly sincere, internal narrator, the point is clearly that the narrator's poetic celebration of Cynthia warrants more respectful and more exclusive sexual behavior on her part.

However, if elegiac discourse can be viewed as enabling itself through a conflation of the book with an alluring female fictional character, then one also begins to suspect that the external poet is simultaneously exploiting a similar concision between his own textual and non-textual self. For although the common knowledge of Cynthia's *nequitia* is distressing to the internal narrator, it clearly also corresponds to the popularity of the external poet's literary product. Thus the curses of the internal narrator can be seen to hide the smile of the external poet. The textually inscribed *nequitia* of Cynthia is the basis of Propertius' popularity, and although the narrator in the poem bears the same name as the poet outside of it, nevertheless the impact of her behavior on these two synonymous poets is quite different.

THE POET AS PIMP AND THE RAMIFICATIONS OF FLAWED SEXUAL OWNERSHIP

As noted earlier, the elegiac *puella* is presented in terms that do not ultimately depict her as the exclusive sexual possession of the narrator but as a woman whose sexual companionship is more widely available. Hence, the effect of Ovid's verbal portrait is quite the opposite of a nude portrait of Nell Gwynne by Lely as it is described by Berger (1972.52). Berger sees the effect of this portrait of the mistress of Charles II, which the King commissioned, as demonstrating Nell Gwynne's submission to the King, proclaiming the King's sexual ownership, and thus constructing Charles II as an object of envy.

Elegiac discourse produces an effect quite contrary to that of Lely's portrait: it is a proclamation of flawed sexual ownership. The reader/viewer, rather than being taunted with a sexually alluring image that is expressly unavailable, is, in fact, presented with one that encourages the possibility of sexual possession. This presents a kind of paradox at the heart of elegiac discourse, a metafictional conflict between the erotic aspirations of the internal narrator and the poetic ambitions of the external poet. This theme is already present in the poetry of Propertius (as examined in the last section), but is dealt with at greater length by Ovid in *Amores* 3.12.

Amores 3.12 begins, as elegies so often do, with the narrator complaining (3.12.1–4):

Quis fuit ille dies, quo tristia semper amanti
omina non albae concinuistis aves?
quodve putem sidus nostris occurrere fatis,
quosve deos in me bella movere querar?

What day was that one on which you ill-omened birds
chirped grim omens for the one always in love? Or what
star should I think is getting in the way of my destiny, or
what gods might I complain are taking up arms against
me?

The specific nature of the narrator's complaint is clarified in the next two lines (3.12.5–6):

quae modo dicta mea est, quam coepi solus amare,
cum multis vereor ne sit habenda mihi.

She who just now was called mine, whom I began to love
all on my own, I'm afraid now must be shared by me and
many others.

So far the narrator's complaints seem typically elegiac. He is complaining about his inability to possess the elegiac *puella* on a sexually exclusive basis. However, the commonplace nature of his complaint becomes more complex in the lines that follow (3.12.7–12):

Fallimur, an nostris innotuit illa libellis?
sic erit—ingenio prostitit illa meo.
et merito! quid enim formae praeconia feci?
vendibilis culpa facta puella mea est.
me lenone placet, duce me perductus amator,
ianua per nostras est adaperta manus.

Am I mistaken or has she become well known in my books? That's how it is—she is prostituted by means of my talent. And I deserve it! For why did I publicly proclaim her beauty? My girl, through my own fault, has been made into a saleable commodity. She gives pleasure with me acting as her pimp, the lover has been led in under my leadership and her door has been opened by my hand.

The situation that the narrator describes here appears as the negative consequence of his professed ability to confer *fama* on the elegiac *puella* through his literary discourse. In lines 5–6, *quae modo dicta mea est, quam coepi solus amare, / cum multis vereor ne sit habenda mihi*, “She who just now was called mine, whom I began to love all on my own, I'm afraid now must be shared by me and many others,” there is a conflation of professed autobiography and literary venture. Thus, *coepi*, “I began,” can simultaneously refer to the beginning of a love affair and the commencement of elegiac composition. The narrator's status as sole lover, *solus*, and the acknowledgment of his sole possession of his elegiac *puella*, *quae . . . dicta mea est*, similarly point to the originary moment of both love affair and composition, before Corinna became an object of textual dissemination. However, that moment is now relegated to the past, *modo*, “just now,” and, in the present, a potentially disturbing situation has arisen: now Corinna must

be shared with many. Thus this temporal movement from sole to sharing lover corresponds to the temporal circulation of Ovid's text.²⁴

The incongruity between a private girlfriend (the ostensible object of mimesis) and the publicly consumed female literary object (as represented by the poetry-book and its readership) is thrown here into sharp relief. How can exclusive possession be compatible with the necessarily public nature of poetry? The elegiac narrator has been hoist by his own petard. By commemorating the *puella*, he has also advertised her sexual attractions. He has been her pimp, his *ingenium* has been the means of prostitution, and the consequence has been the inevitable downsizing of his own love life.

The dynamic of a poet exploiting a text metaphorically equated with a sexualized female is the same as is evident in the passage from Juvenal's seventh *Satire* (discussed earlier) where Statius' *Thebaid* is represented as his girlfriend/whore (*amica*), and where, as a number of scholars have observed, Statius is cast in the role of a pimp hawking his poetry.²⁵

In elegy, however, the consequences of this metaphoric equation of poet and pimp are more pronounced at the level of the narrative. For the sexualized female who functions as a metonym for the poet's verbal product is also the desired female object of the narrator in the text. Hence, the more successful the poet is in pimping his poetic wares, the less chance the elegiac narrator has of success within the text: the downsizing of the sex life of Naso (the internal narrator) is thus in inverse proportion to the literary success of Naso (the external poet). Hence, the pimping of the *puella* that is to be regretted at the dramatic level of the text is, at an extra-textual level, highly desirable, if metaphorically disreputable.

Elegiac discourse, by applying the name of the external poet to the internal narrator, allows the elegist to construct such a poem as *Amores* 3.12 where the beleaguered "Ovid" in the text is forced to lament the success of his extra-textual counterpart. Little wonder that the elegiac narrator, from his perspective, has little good to say about poetry (3.12.13–14):

24 The conceit is thus the same, if more overtly metafictionalized (as one might expect of Ovid), as that presented at the beginning of Propertius 2.5 (examined earlier).

25 Bartsch 1994.132 lists the following as having observed the pimp analogy in the Juvenal passage: Tandoi 1969.107, 120–21, Wiesen 1973.477–78, Rudd 1976.102, Hardie 1983.61, Braund 1988.60.

An prosint, dubium, nocuerunt carmina semper;
invidiae nostris illa fuere bonis.

Whether poetry is of any benefit is dubious, it has always
harmed me and bore me ill-will.

The narrator also goes on to blame his sexually diminished textual existence on the credulity of elegy's readers (3.12.19–20, 3.12.41–42):

Nec tamen ut testes mos est audire poetas;
malueram verbis pondus abesse meis.

But it isn't customary to hear poets as if they were legal
witnesses; I had preferred weight to be lacking from my
words too.

Exit in inmensum fecunda licentia vatum,
obligat historica nec sua verba fide.

The prolific license of poets knows no bounds and doesn't
shackle itself to historic veracity.

The narrator accuses the audience of reading too literally: of assuming that elegiac verbal art is realist and exists as an unmediated representation of a reality outside of the text. Such readers have no concept of poetic license. To support his argument, he proceeds to relate (at typically Ovidian length) some 20 lines of exempla (lines 21–40). Poets created Scylla, Medusa, the Sirens, told of Niobe turned into a rock, Callisto into a bear, and Jupiter into a shower of gold. To believe in such tales would display an incredible naïveté and would disregard the poet's traditional right to exaggerate and fabricate. The narrator concludes that any readers worth their salt would inevitably have come to the conclusion that the poetic praise of the elegiac *puella* was also dubious: *et mea debuerat falso laudata videri / femina*, "And my woman ought to have seemed to have been praised falsely" (43–44).

Even here, however, there is still an element of prevarication. For the narrator is not exactly saying that the *femina* herself was fabricated, but rather that she was falsely praised. In other words, the *puella* in her poetic form may only bear a tendentious relation to an extra-textual referent. Poetic praise is not to be trusted, it is at best a commissioned emendation of reality.

The image provided by textual inscription does not have to correspond to external reality; indeed, the whole point of textual inscription may be to have in the text what one does not have outside it. The reader should be aware that the elegiac *puella*, even if she is a textual inscription of a real woman, is not an accurate reflection of such a woman. It is only within the text that Corinna's body can be a *corpus sine menda*; she is airbrushed by the poet's pen.

The paradoxical antagonism between internal and external poet that is apparent in *Amores* 3.12 leads to the elegiac narrator, like a character in a metafictional novel, lamenting how his character is made to serve the literary ambitions of his author.²⁶

THE AMBIVALENCE OF *OTIUM*: POETIC PROPOSITIONING AND AUGUSTAN SEDUCTION

Augustus viewed the cessation of civil war, *postquam bella civilia extinxeram*, "after I had put an end to civil wars" (*Res Gestae* 34.1), and the establishment of *pax* within the boundaries of the empire, *cum per totum imperium populi Romani terra marique esset parva victoriis pax*, "when peace had been won by victories by land and sea throughout the whole empire of the Roman people" (*Res Gestae* 13), as major achievements. The cessation of the war led to the consolidation of the *Pax Augusta*. *Pax* and *otium* function almost as synonyms in Latin.²⁷ Hence, the establishment of the *Pax Augusta* naturally also led to an *imperium Romanum otiosum*. The

26 Consider, as an example of such metafictional angst, the opening of Kurt Vonnegut's *Deadeye Dick* (1983.13):

To the as-yet-unborn, to all innocent wisps of undifferentiated nothingness: Watch out for life.

I have caught life. I have come down with life. I was a wisp of undifferentiated nothingness, and then a little peephole opened quite suddenly. Light and sound poured in. Voices began to describe me and my surroundings. Nothing they said could be appealed. They said I was a boy named Rudolph Waltz, and that was that. They said I was in Midland City, Ohio, and that was that.

They never shut up. Year after year they piled detail upon detail. They do it still. You know what they say now? They say the year is 1982, and that I am fifty years old.

Blah blah blah.

27 See section 4a under *otium* in the *OCD*; also Wirszubski 1954.4.

Augustan achievement was, in a sense, precisely the provision of *otium* for the inhabitants of the *imperium Romanum*.

Otium was traditionally, from an aristocratic perspective, the appropriate space for literary composition: a space that, in accord with the *mos maiorum*, could only be enjoyed as an earned respite from the activities of *negotium*. The establishment of the principate, inasmuch as it provided *otium et pax* and reduced elite *negotia* through an increased appropriation and filtration of such *negotia*, produced the necessary conditions for an upsurge in elite literature—of which elegy is one manifestation. Indeed, elegy can be perceived precisely as a literary form heavily invested in the *otium et pax* that the Augustan climate produced.

However, *pax* and *otium* are not unproblematic terms in Roman culture, and their semantic range from the positive to the negative points to the potentially ambivalent manner in which the *Pax Augusta*, and the motivations of its establisher, could be viewed. Writers later in the imperial period express this ambivalence in appropriately oxymoronic terms: Tacitus referred to the Augustan peace as a *pax cruenta*, and Seneca the younger remarked that Augustus' *clementia* was in reality a form of "exhausted cruelty."²⁸ As Karl Galinsky elaborates in his study of the Augustan period, the establishment of *otium* was a "balancing act" as "[d]omestic tranquillity was to be restored without resulting in intellectual and cultural torpor and in a loss of moral fiber" (1996.139). The potentially enervating effects of peace and prosperity were a recurring theme in Roman culture, perhaps most pithily summed up, as Galinsky notes, in Juvenal's phrase: *nunc patimur longae pacis mala*, "Now we are suffering the evils of a long peace."²⁹

From this perspective, the increased possibilities for elite literary composition that were afforded by an extension of *otium* could be viewed as anything but positive. This becomes clear in Cicero's own observations on his writing activities during the dictatorship of Julius Caesar. Cicero typically refers to his literary pursuits during his retirement from politics brought on by the rise of the first triumvirate and the domination of Caesar as *honestum otium*. However, such *otium*, although it might be *honestum*, could also be thought of as *otium sine dignitate*.³⁰ The concept of *otium cum*

28 *Annales* 1.10; *De clementia* 11.

29 Juvenal *Satires* 6.292; Galinsky 1996.138, who also references the various manifestations of Roman anxiety towards *pax et otium*.

30 See Mitchell 1979.83, who lists Cicero *Cat.* 3.9; *Dom.* 83; *Har. Resp.* 54; *Brut.* 227, 308, 311; *Phil.* 2.108, 5.17.

dignitate is most fully developed by Cicero, especially in the *Pro Sestio*.³¹ Wirszubski concludes that this phrase signifies “leisure enjoyed in the midst of an active and successful political career” (1954.12). Thus, with the increasing autocracy of Caesar, Cicero was forced into a position where his exclusion from active politics meant that his *otium* was *honestum* but *sine dignitate*, as it represented not the leisure that occupied an occasional respite from public affairs but a habitual *otium* brought on by a *negotii inopia* (*De officiis* 3.2).

The rise of Augustus can be viewed as producing an analogous situation to that which Cicero laments under Caesar. Tacitus famously noted that Augustus *cunctos dulcedine otii pellexit*, “seduced everyone by the sweetness of *otium*” (*Annales* 1.2). Clearly, from the Ciceronian perspective, which Tacitus perpetuates, the *otium* provided by Augustus was *sine dignitate*, as the internal stability provided by the *Pax Augusta* was at the price both of the ability of the senatorial elite to participate as effectively as it was used to in politics and also of the republican constitution itself.

Hence, Tacitus sees the concretization of the principate as effecting a dramatic constitutional and behavioral metamorphosis (*verso civitatis statu nihil usquam prisci et integri moris*, “the basis of the state having been transformed, the traditional independent Roman character was nowhere to be found,” *Annales* 1.4) that the surviving members of Rome’s elite colluded in: *ceteri nobilium, quanto quis servitio promptior, opibus et honoribus extollerentur ac novis ex rebus aucti tuta et praesentia quam vetera et periculosa mallent* “the rest of the nobility were elevated by means of wealth and public offices according to the extent that each individual was the more ready slave and, enriched by the new state of affairs, they preferred the safety of the present to the dangers of the past” (*Annales* 1.2). As Tacitus sees it, Augustus seduced an enervated Roman elite with the security of *otium*, but this was an *otium* that was tantamount to *servitium*. If one adopts such a Tacitean perspective, then the conspicuous literary patronage of the Augustan age, the introduction of the *recitatio*, and the growing interest in declamation were all part of a process of enslavement through *otium*. The conditions that gave rise to an upsurge in elite literary activities were

31 For more detailed analysis of this concept see Wirszubski 1954, Balsdon 1960, Wood 1988: it seems unclear whether the phrase was invented by Cicero or is a pre-existing political slogan.

precisely the same conditions that could be seen as responsible for weakening and controlling Rome's aristocracy through a *negotii inopia*.

Within this context of problematic *otium*, elegiac discourse as an Augustan literary product has a particular resonance. On one level, there is an interesting parallel between the elegiac poet and the *princeps* as exploiters of *otium*. If the successful establishment of the principate can be troped as an egregious act of political soliciting, then elegy, as examined earlier, can also be read as a sneaky seduction of the reader by the poet. In both instances, there is a motivated employment of *otium* for self-advancement.

Mark Buchan has argued that, in the *Amores*, Ovid produces a daring metamorphosis in that the separation of "Ovid as *amator* and Augustus as *imperator*" is blurred as "both turn into '*imperamators*'" (1995.65). I would add that elegiac discourse produces an even more daring form of conflation between poet and *princeps* as self-serving *lenones*. Thomas McGinn has written with respect to the civic penalties incurred by the legally infamous at Rome, "If we imagine a pimp with political ambitions at Rome, it is difficult to avoid a sense of the ludicrous" (1998.27). Yet this is precisely the picture of Augustus (in metaphoric terms) that Tacitus presents in his image of Rome's first *princeps*, and it is matched on a metaphoric level in the literary ambitions of the elegists.

In addition, given the potential overlap of *otium* and *servitium*, I would like to argue for a reading in which elegy's central metaphor of *servitium amoris* functions as a political metaphor that has particular relevance in an Augustan context. The way in which Rome's aristocracy is figured as being seduced by a *princeps* into a state of *servitium* is thus allegorized in elegy's imagery of a servility fashioned out of an activity (*amor*) that was similarly supposed to be peripheral and strictly subordinated to the traditional needs of engagement in *negotium*.

Peace and love also naturally tend to go together and, in this manner, elegy's erotic content is a natural corollary of the *Pax Augusta*. However, the *amor* represented in elegy is clearly a troubling one of self-destruction and enervation that is depicted as orchestrated by a capricious *domina* for her own advantage. In this way, the dynamics of this literary form function as a pointed allegory of the Augustan settlement and its potential effect on Rome's elite (and particularly those male members of the elite who were passing across the liminal threshold of adulthood as the establishment of the principate was in process).

The control that elegy's *domina* exercises through *amor* over the *iuvenes* of elegy is thus analogous to the emergent control of an imperial

dominus over Rome's elite through the medium of *otium*.³² Hence, elegy's image of elite *adolescentes* subjugated and emasculated through the agency of an imperialistic seductress would have served as a powerful allegorical rendition of the dangers for Rome's aristocracy of *pax et principes*.

The success of elegy as a literary form produced in the transition from republic to principate testifies to the ability of this genre to resonate strongly in its historical context. Elegy's form of poetic seduction was congruent with the wider context of the general solicitation of Rome's populace that formed a foundation for the system of the principate. In this way, elegiac ambition and success was a microcosm parallel to the macrocosm of Augustanism that encompassed it. At the same time, the readiness of a Roman audience/readership to identify with elegy's narrative may have indicated a willingness on the part of a Roman population wearied by constant civil war and disruption to be seduced *dulcedine otii* even if such an affair with *otium* promised to be potentially masochistic. Hence, if Augustus and the elegists can both be figured as pimps seducing their victims with alluring forms of *otium*, then the acquiescence of Rome in making the elegists and Augustus a success could also be seen as a willingness on the part of Romans to prostitute themselves in order to obtain such *otium*.³³

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32 According to Suetonius (*Augustus* 53), Augustus was particularly at pains to prevent any address to himself as *dominus*. If this is true, it would suggest that the term was already coming into use and that, to at least a certain element, the cap fitted.

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