

LATIN ELEGY IN THE OLD AGE OF THE WORLD: THE ELEGIAC CORPUS OF MAXIMIANUS*

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I. MAXIMIANUS, IN CONTEXT

For about five hundred years after Ovid, Augustan elegy enjoyed a varied reception in different forms, as elegiac characters and situations were absorbed into epigram, literary epistles, epithalamia, and other genres. But the next elegist to offer a first-person account of his erotic travails was Maximianus, and while our only information about this poet is derived from his verses, scholars agree that he should be dated to the mid-sixth century.¹ Maximianus's poems do not merely rehearse the familiar tropes of our customary Latin love elegy, however. Here the Augustan elegiac lover has become an old man reflecting ruefully on his closeness to death and his youthful love affairs. This represents a radical departure, not only in the sense that there is

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1 For the latest discussion, see Schneider 2003.50–54; for an attempt to place Maximianus within a mid-sixth-century philosophical context, see Vitiello 2006.184–90. The reference to the philosopher Boethius in Elegy 3, about Maximianus's childhood, suggests at least an internal dating of the mid-sixth century for the elegies depicting his later adulthood. References to Maximianus's poems are from the text of Schneider 2003. Translations are our own.

a weight of opinion in Augustan literature that amorous pursuits are suitable for young men only, but also in that the elegists themselves cannot bear to think of a life (or even a death) in which love is no longer possible.² Thus Gian Biagio Conte observes that in Maximianus's poems, "the imminence of death and the sadness of growing old are seen as representing the end of pagan culture and its joy in living" (1994.724).

Moreover, the poetry books of the Augustan elegists presented isolated fragments of an ongoing love affair rather than continuous narratives. But when Maximianus writes elegy in the sixth century, he creates a *libellus* that follows a particular narrative arc. In this respect, the state of the text is somewhat uncertain: early manuscripts suggest that the 686 lines of Maximianus's poetry may originally have been one continuous poem, although it is conventional now to divide them into six individual elegies.³ In this article, we will continue to refer to these elegies as separate poems (i.e., as Elegy 1, Elegy 2, etc.), but it is useful to bear in mind that they can also be thought of as distinct parts of a single, extended narrative. Taken together, they effectively comprise the erotic history of Maximianus's life from his youth, to his old age, and, in a sense, his death.

The primary goal of the present discussion is to situate Maximianus's corpus within both an intellectual context of late antique philosophies of history and a literary context of the Ovidian elegiac tradition. Of course, the elegiac tradition is by no means restricted to Ovid—it is, in fact, far broader than most studies of Latin elegy ever acknowledge. Nonetheless, Ovid's poetry seems to be the most important point of reference for Maximianus as he responds to contemporary debates about the nature of the physical world. Our discussion will take place in two parts: in the first, James Uden will examine Elegy 1, and in the second, Ian Fielding will

2 On love as unsuited to old age, cf., e.g., Tib. 1.1.71: "iam subrepet iners aetas, nec amare decebit" ("Soon impotent age will creep up, and it will not be seemly to love"). Papanghelis 1987 is the most comprehensive study of the way that Propertius fantasizes about the possibility of his death coinciding with an erotic experience. Ovid, too, expresses his wish to die *inter opus*, "on the job" (*Am.* 2.10.36). In *Carm.* 4.1, notably, Horace declares himself too old for love—although, like Maximianus, he finds that it is not easy to renounce.

3 The elegies are divided thus: Elegy 1 (1–292, 292 lines), Elegy 2 (293–366, 74 lines), Elegy 3 (367–460, 94 lines), Elegy 4 (461–520, 60 lines), Elegy 5 (521–674, 154 lines), Elegy 6 (675–86, 12 lines). Schneider 2001.456–60 proposes that these divisions were contrived in the sixteenth century in order to misrepresent Maximianus's poetry as lost works of Cornelius Gallus, and that the perpetuation of this arrangement is due to long-standing preconceptions about the traditional forms of the elegiac medium.

treat Elegies 5 and 6. We intend our distinct approaches and interpretations to complement and inform each other as they frame different aspects of Maximianus's text.

In Maximianus's first elegy, the poet delivers an explicitly autobiographical lament of almost three hundred lines on the ills of the aged body. He nostalgically describes the achievements of his youth; rues the destruction wrought by time on every living thing; and, with graphic unpleasantness, documents the physical breakdown of his own body. The poem as a whole is suffused with a sense of lateness, of delay, of closeness to death. This lateness is, in one sense, metapoetic: allusions to Ovid in the opening of the poem situate Maximianus's *libellus* as a late response to the Ovidian elegiac corpus. At the same time, references to a vibrant cultural milieu in the period of Maximianus's youth and, by implication, the loss of that milieu in the gloom of his old age, resonate strongly with contemporary fears of cultural degeneration and, particularly, with laments over the destructive effects of wars upon Roman society in the West during the mid-sixth century. Maximianus's own "lateness" corresponds with the lateness and closeness to "death" of the society around him. This identification recalls the narrative of the *senectus mundi*, the "old age of the world," according to which the contemporary age, with its disasters and troubles, was viewed as the final stage of human history and beset with troubles like those that beset the bodies of old men.

After considering how Maximianus satirizes the conventional motifs of the *senectus mundi*, this article will then examine how he also undermines its narrative structure. In his most obviously Ovidian poem, Elegy 5, Maximianus relates an erotic encounter he had with a woman known only as the Greek Girl while en route to the East on an ambassadorial mission. When impotence prevents him from consummating his desire with his lover, she laments this final failure of his physical faculties in vocabulary drawn from a funerary context. At this point in the narrative, the reader might expect Maximianus—like Augustine, among others—to renounce his bodily passions in favor of an ascetic immaterialism. Even at the "end of pleasure," however, Maximianus does not reach the moralizing conclusion that love is something to be avoided. In this respect, these later elegies seem to bear the influence of Ovid's *Remedia Amoris*—another elegiac poem in which the end of love does not entail a final renunciation of the amorous life. And through the distinctively cyclical movement that is manifested in the narrative of his poems, Maximianus is able to achieve some kind of closure with regard to the traumatic losses of the physical world.

II. THE ELEGIAC LOVER AND THE *SENECTUS MUNDI*

Aemula quid cessas finem properare senectus?
 cur in hoc fesso corpore tarda venis?
 Solve precor miseram tali de carcere vitam,
 mors est iam requies, vivere poena mihi.
 Non sum qui fueram, periit pars maxima nostri,
 hoc quoque quod superest languor et horror habet. (1.1–6)

Envious old age, why are you slack in hastening death?
 Why do you come so late to this exhausted body? I pray
 you, set my wretched life free from this prison. Death is
 now my respite; living, my penalty. I am not who I used
 to be. The greatest part of me has passed away, and feeble-
 ness and dread have hold of what survives.

The incipit of Maximianus's elegiac *libellus* is *aemula* (here "envious," but cognate with *aemulari*, "to imitate"), a fitting opening for a work filled with allusions to the Augustan elegists, poets from whom Maximianus himself is so chronologically distant.⁴ Indeed, that distance is underlined in these first lines, in which, as well as establishing his persona as a man late in life enduring the "living death" of old age, Maximianus self-consciously draws attention to the temporal chasm between the Augustan period and his own. When Maximianus says at line 5: "I am not who I used to be" ("non sum qui fueram"), he is adopting for himself Ovid's lament in the *Tristia* that "I am not what I used to be" ("non sum ego quod fueram").⁵ Ovid's words had come at a late point in his own career while he was enduring his own living death in exile.⁶ If adopting this phrase suggests an identification between Maximianus and the late Ovid, the second part of the same line

4 On Maximianus's transformation of motifs from earlier Latin elegists (especially Ovid) through the unique lens of the *senex amator*; see Pinotti 1989, Consolino 1997. Uden 2009 addresses Maximianus's use of the figure of the elegiac *puella* in his third elegy. Emphasizing Maximianus's sense of lateness is not to claim that elegy was in any way dormant since the Augustan period. Elegy continued to be written. Nonetheless, the allusions to Ovidian elegy are predominant in Maximianus, and the passing of time between the Augustan period and Maximianus's own is something of which these poems are highly self-aware.

5 *Trist.* 3.11.25. Cf. also *Trist.* 5.1.40: "simque quod ante fui." Ovid's lines themselves echo Propertius's earlier "non sum ego qui fueram" (1.12.11).

6 On exile as a living death, see Williams 1994.12–13, with references.

recalls Ovid's confident prediction in his *Amores* that "I shall live, and a great part of me will survive" ("vivam, parsque mei multa superstes erit"),⁷ though Maximianus reverses Ovid's line, saying that "the greatest part of me [or is it really 'us'?] has passed away" ("periit pars maxima nostri"). The future of the Augustan poet, his *erit*, has, for Maximianus, already become the past (*periit*). Note also that Ovid's incorporeal metaphor is, in Maximianus, fully embodied—if the "great part" of Ovid was his body of work, Maximianus's "greatest part" really is his body, with *maxima* punning appropriately on the poet's name. Death, Maximianus says in line 2, is late (*tarda*) in its arrival, and this sense of lateness suffuses the entire collection.

Maximianus goes on, in the following section of the poem (7–100), to commemorate the achievements of his youth and boast proudly of his sexual appeal and popularity as a young man in order to draw a strong contrast between then and now. The range of Maximianus's supposed talents has been seen by some as ridiculously wide, a tongue-in-cheek reflection of an old man's penchant for nostalgia and exaggeration (Szövérfy 1968.356). Yet as the poet describes his early life, in which he was celebrated for his oratory and his literature and enjoyed the cultured *otium* of a cosmopolitan Roman gentleman, Maximianus seems to be evoking an entire milieu (1.9–14):

Dum iuvenile decus, dum mens sensusque maneret
 orator toto clarus in orbe fui:
 Saepe poetarum mendacia dulcia finxi,
 et veros titulos res mihi ficta dabat;
 Saepe perorata percepi lite coronam,
 et merui linguae praemia grata meae.

So long as a young man's charm remained, so long as intellect and feeling remained, I was an orator famous throughout the entire world. Often I would contrive the sweet fictions of the poets, and a fictional theme would win me true acclaim. Often I would collect the garland for my legal oratory, and I earned welcome rewards for my eloquence.

7 *Am.* 1.15.42, expanding on Hor. *Carm.* 3.30.6–7. Cf. Ovid *Met.* 15.875–76, Mart. 10.2.8.

In Maximianus's boast that he was an "orator toto clarus in orbe," the poet again refers to aspects of Ovid's self-presentation in an autobiographical narrative of sorts extending across the Ovidian corpus. Ovid, too, had declared his ambition to be "sung forever throughout the entire world" ("in toto semper ut orbe canar," *Am.* 1.15.7; cf. "per totum . . . cantabimur orbem," *Am.* 1.3.25), and claimed towards the end of his career that this poetic ambition had been fulfilled ("in toto plurimus orbe legor," *Tristia* 4.10.128). Again, the hopeful future (and boastful present) of the earlier elegist is transformed, in Maximianus, into the melancholy past (*fui*, line 10).⁸

There is a specific significance to this evocation of a cultural milieu in which the liberal arts flourished. In the third elegy, Maximianus associates the period of his childhood with the period in which Boethius was a well-known "investigator of knowledge"—that is, Italy under the rule of Theoderic. Rome, the city in which Maximianus pictures himself as a young man, was praised by Ennodius and Cassiodorus during Theoderic's reign as a city highly amenable to the liberal arts.⁹ On the other hand, Ennodius's admonitory picture of a cultureless dystopia under Theoderic's predecessor in his panegyric to the king focuses, just as Maximianus does, on public recognition for literary and rhetorical skill: "The most eloquent became dirty amongst the ploughs, and violence denied what eloquence had granted. While the advocate was struck dumb, the tribunes mourned, and no prize was allowed for the orator."¹⁰ Maximianus's gloomy confession later in the poem that the pleasure of song and the "grace of his voice" have fled and died, that he no longer "stirs up the forum" or "composes seductive poetry" (1.127–30), resonates strongly with these fears of cultural degeneration in the Western part of the Roman empire.

The description of elite *otium* in Maximianus's earlier life also takes on a new, melancholy aspect in light of the widespread destruction wrought to the western half of the empire in the mid-sixth century by Jus-

8 Ovid's phrasing is also echoed by Martial at various points throughout his collection, most prominently in the first poem of his first book; see Howell 1980.103.

9 Max. 1.63; Ennod. 290.17 ("urbs amica liberalibus studiis"), 282.26, 225.28; Cassiod. *Var.* 10.7. See Riché 1976.26–31, Barnish 2003.

10 Ennod. 263.76–77: "Sordebat inter aratra facundissimus et, quod peritiam dederat, vis negabat. Muto maerebant actore tribunalia nec ulla concedebatur palma dicenti." These lines recall Ennius's famous description of the effects of the Hannibalic War on Rome ("spernitur orator bonus, horridus miles amatur," "The noble orator is rejected, the uncouth soldier adored," *Ann.* 248 [Skutsch]).

tinian's "reconquest," which must have made such a comfortable lifestyle seem, indeed, to be a thing of the past.¹¹ This background of military defeat finds echoes in the poem in the metaphors of defeat that Maximianus uses to express his individual degeneration in old age. As a young man, the poet was inviolable, his "unconquered endurance spurned all threats" (1.33–34). Yet old age is his unbeatable foe: "You alone subdue me, wretched old age; whatever can conquer all surrenders to you" (1.55). The poet is "conquered by the breakdown" of his "feeble body" (1.257). "Old age teaches itself to surrender to its own burdens" (1.261–62). These images of military defeat are accompanied by axioms about the inevitability of decline: "Old age, as it approaches, eats away at the very rocks. There is no construction which does not fall in time."¹²

As late antique thinkers came acutely to perceive, even the Roman empire was a construction destined to fall in time. "Just as in the beginning, nothing was stronger and more enduring than the Roman empire," wrote Jerome after the barbarian advancement across the Rhine in 407, "so also, at the end of things, nothing is weaker."¹³ The life cycle of the human body was one metaphor through which contemporary thinkers accounted for this fall and incorporated it within a providential design. Romans throughout antiquity had conceptualized their history according to the phases of a human life.¹⁴ But especially in late antiquity, elaborations of the metaphor tended to focus disproportionately on the world's senescence, turning *ekphraseis* of the aged body into invectives against or laments for contemporary ills. Cyprian's *ad Demetrianum*, for example, addressed to a pagan who was blaming the Christians for a series of recent natural disasters, is an early example of the topos: "You blame Christians because everything is diminishing as the world grows old. What if even old men were to blame Christians

11 For the destructive impact of Justinian's reconquest of the West on Italy's landscape and population, see Wickham 1981, Brown 1984.

12 1.273–74: "Ipsa etiam veniens consumit saxa vetustas, / et nullum est quod non tempore cedat opus." Cf. at 1.109–10: "Cuncta trahit secum vertitque volubile tempus / nec patitur certa currere quaeque via" ("Time, ever turning, drags and spins everything with it, nor does it allow each thing to run on a fixed path").

13 *Comm. in Dan.* 2.40 ("sicut enim in principio nihil Romano imperio fortius et durius fuit ita et in fine rerum nihil imbecillius"), cited by Rebenich 2009.55.

14 Seneca apud Lactantius *Div. Inst.* 7.15 (Vottero 1998.77–78), Florus 1.pr.4–8, Ammianus 14.6.4, Fulgentius *de Aetatibus Mundi et Hominis* (Helm 1898.129–79), and, most influentially, Augustine *de Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.23–24 (PL 34.190–93), *de Diversis Quaestionibus* 83 (PL 40.43).

that they are less strong in their old age, that they no longer have the same power as previously in the hearing of their ears, the running of their feet, the sight of their eyes, the vigor of their strength, the lifeblood of their insides, the fullness of their limbs? . . . No one ought to wonder that each thing on earth has begun to fail, when already the entire world itself is in decline and at its end.”¹⁵ Augustine picks up the motif, and even some of the vocabulary, from Cyprian: “You are surprised that the world is failing? That the world is grown old? Think of a man: he is born, he grows up, he becomes old. Old age has its many complaints: coughing, phlegm, failing eyesight, anxiety, weariness. A man grows old; he is full of complaints. The world is old; it is full of pressing complaints.”¹⁶

Like Cyprian, Augustine, and others, and against the implicit backdrop of the mid-sixth-century political disasters besetting Rome, Maximianus laments the ills of the aged body, thereby illustrating the universally destructive effects of *volubile tempus* (1.109). Yet there is such excess, and such grotesquerie, in Maximianus’s lengthy elaboration of the motif that it is hard not to see in the poem a parody of the gloom of other late antique laments for the *senectus mundi*. So, for example, at lines 117–22:

Me vero heu tantis defunctum partibus olim
 Tartareas vivum constat inire vias.
 Iam minor auditus, gustus minor, ipsa caligant
 lumina, vix tactu noscere certa queo.
 Nullus dulcis odor, nulla est iam grata voluptas,
 sensibus expertem quis superesse putet?

Honestly, I’ve broken down in so many parts, one day I’ll
 just walk straight on into Hell still alive. Now my hear-

15 Cyprian *ad Dem.* 4 (*CSEL* 3): “Christianis inputas quod minuantur singula mundo senescente. Quid si et senes inputent Christianis quod minus valeant in senectute, quod non perinde ut prius vigeant auditu aurium, cursu pedum, oculorum acie, virium robore, suco viscerum, mole membrorum . . . nemo mirari debeat singula in mundo deficere coepisse, cum ipse iam mundus totus in defectione sit et in fine.”

16 Aug. *Serm.* 81.8: “Miraris quia deficit mundus? Mirare quia senuit mundus? homo est: nascitur, crescit, senescit. Querelae multae in senecta: tussis, pituita, lippitudo, anxietudo, lassitudo inest. ergo senuit homo; querelis plenus est. Senuit mundus: pressuris plenus est.” For a wider consideration of the topos, see Zocca 1995; on medieval examples, Dean 1997. Schneider 2003.110 mentions the *senectus mundi* motif, but does not elaborate from it a reading of Maximianus’s poem.

ing's less good, my taste's less good, my eyes themselves are fogging up; I can scarcely identify things by touch. No smell is sweet, no pleasure's welcome now: who could think he's still *alive* when his senses are shot?

Old age is "claw-like hands tearing at itchy limbs"; it is a "pallor and a bloodless and deathly hue staining the face."¹⁷ Where it sufficed for Augustine to cite anxiety as one of the characteristics of old age, in this poem, "The old man stands wavering and trembling, always suspecting the worst, and in his foolishness fears what he does himself."¹⁸ For Cyprian, old men lose the "vigor of their strength" (*virium robor*). But that is nothing. For Maximianus, "the entire fact that we're alive is a punishment. We're burnt by the warmth, the clouds harm us, the cold and the breezes injure us, the dew hurts us, and we're broken in two by even a light shower; a pleasant spring or autumn day hurts us."¹⁹ At 1.275–78, the poet-persona is determined to face his destruction head on and end that mortal delay identified in the first lines of the poem:

Sed mihi venturos melius praevertere casus
atque infelices anticipare dies:
Poena minor, certam subito perferre ruinam,
quod timeas gravius sustinuisse diu.

But it's better for me to anticipate the misfortunes approaching and beat those unhappy days to it. It's a lesser punishment to take certain destruction upon yourself all at once than to have been vexed by what you fear for so long.

The poet's use here of the word *ruina* signals one of the characteristic motifs of the poem. "Destruction" and "collapse"—*ruina* and

17 "et lacerant uncae scabrida membra manus" (1.136), "inficit ora / pallor et exsanguis funereusque color" (1.133–34).

18 "Stat dubius tremulusque senex semperque malorum credulus, et stultus quae facit ipse timet" (1.195–96).

19 "Iam poena est totum quod vivimus: urimur aestu, / officiunt nebulae, frigus et aura nocet; / Ros laedit modicoque etiam corrumpimur imbre, / veris et autumnus laedit amoena dies" (1.241–44). See Spaltenstein 1983 ad loc. for the construction *totum quod* in line 251.

ruere—are the most frequently invoked terms in the text to describe the damage wrought by old age. Addressing old age, the poet says at line 57 that “we’ve collapsed together [*corruimus*] into you”; at 223, he pictures old age, “about to collapse” (*ruitura*), balancing precariously on a walking stick. *Ruit* crashes the poem to a close: in the self-reflexive final line, Maximianus imagines the very act of memorializing the past as collapsing, “plunged from its high summit.”²⁰ The frequency with which this imagery is employed suggests that it was not a random choice. Indeed, the image of collapsing (*ruere* or *labi*) was frequently employed by writers of the early sixth century to describe the condition of the state. Ennodius lauded Deuterius, the master of rhetoric at Milan, for sustaining a “freedom about to collapse” (*libertas ruitura*);²¹ elsewhere he speaks of the “collapsing condition of the *res publica*” (*labans reipublicae status*).²² His contemporary Avitus of Vienne, in a letter to two of Rome’s most prominent senators, Faustus and Symmachus, spoke of the grandeur of the Roman name in a “collapsing world” (*mundo labenti*).²³ A panegyric poem from the *Appendix Maximiani* praising Theodahad’s building efforts could speak of “overhanging destruction” (*pendente ruina*) and end with an ominous reference to “imminent destruction” (*instante ruina*).²⁴ Yet there could be no better indication of the frequency of the motif than that passage of Maximianus’s poem in which he is so clearly spoofing it (1.171–74):

Non secus instantem cupiens fulcire ruinam
diversis contra nititur obicibus,
Donec longa dies omni compage soluta
ipsum cum rebus subruat auxilium.

Just as, desiring to prop up the imminent destruction
(*instantem ruinam*), a man struggles with crosswise sup-

20 1.291–92: “Dura satis miseris memoratio prisca bonorum, / et gravius summo culmine mersa *ruit*.” The imagery of collapse is heavily reminiscent of the Stoic vision of cosmic dissolution in Lucan; see Lapidge 1979.

21 Ennod. 85.6 (p. 113), cf. 94.8 (p. 118): “freedom about to collapse now and at any instant” (“*libertas iam iamque ruitura*”).

22 Ennod. 80.81 [*Vita Epifani* p. 94]. Cf. Ennod. 80.52 (p. 90): “*nutabat status periclitantis Italiae*” (“The condition of endangered Italy was tottering”).

23 Avitus *Ep.* 34 (MGH *AA* 6.2, p. 64).

24 *App. Max.* 3.9, 22. For text and background on the anonymous poems of the *Appendix Maximiani*, see Schneider 2003.133–46, 194–99.

ports until, with the framework loosened, the long day makes the prop itself collapse (*subruat*) along with the rest.

Although the “architectural figure,” as Webster calls it (1900.78), is expanded upon, Maximianus still brilliantly captures the portentous tone of the collapsing motif in Ennodius and Avitus. Maximianus applies the figure not to political and cultural breakdown, but to describe his bowel problems. Try as he might to take medicine to cure his ills, whatever medication is prepared for him passes straight out of him, taking part of his body with it.²⁵ Thus both the structure (his body) and the support (the medication) “collapse.” This scatological recontextualization of a somber, if stale, metaphor is a poetic maneuver worthy of the satirical jabs of Catullus or Martial.

The prevalence of the *senectus mundi* motif in the literature of late antiquity indicates a broader shift towards Christian asceticism, which sought to withdraw from the body and from the physical world in general. Augustine, for instance, remarked of this sixth and final phase of human history that “the realm of the flesh has been forcibly weakened . . . as in the old age of an old man, a new man is born, who now lives spiritually.”²⁶ Yet Maximianus’s poem works in the other direction, precisely to re-corporealize the body-society metaphor: his graphic images of the ills of old age force the reader to face the abjection of the aged body not as metaphor but as lived reality. Fittingly, when he prays at lines 227–34, his prayer is not to the Christian God but to mother Earth, pleading for re-absorption into the soil from which he was produced. Unlike his contemporaries, Maximianus’s preoccupations, laments, and desires remain very much of this world.

Emerging in Maximianus’s first elegy, then, are a series of narratives operating on different axes but developing in deliberate metaphorical connection with one another. Implicit, as we have seen in the references to earlier elegy, is the idea of a generic progression in which Maximianus’s elegiac *libellus* comes late in the history of the genre. Then, of course, there is the primary narrative of the poem, the progression of Maximianus’s own

25 So, 167–69: “Non totiens experta mihi medicamina prosunt, / non aegris quicquid ferre solebat opem, / sed cum materia pereunt quaecumque parantur.” See Spaltenstein 1983 ad loc. on the meaning of *materia*: “Le seul sens possible est ‘corps’ . . . cf. Lucr. 3.847, Sen. Ep. 58.24.”

26 *De Gen c. Man.* 1.23.40 (*PL* 34.194): “Hac enim aetate illud carnale regnum vehementer attritum est . . . In ista tamen aetate tanquam in senectute veteris hominis, homo novus nascitur, qui iam spiritualiter vivit.”

life and body from the vitality of his youth to the decrepitude, physical and intellectual, of his aged self, which he goes on to detail exhaustively in the main section of the poem (1.101–292). The descriptions of a vibrant and healthy cultural milieu in the reminiscences of the poet's youth also suggest another identification, between the health of the state and the health of the body. Certainly, there is no lack of specific details in Maximianus's vision of the aged body that resist allegorizing interpretation, so much so that one Renaissance physician later cited extensively from the first elegy as a medical authority on the effects of aging.²⁷ Yet the lengthy laments for the poet's aged body also echo the widespread metaphor of the *senectus mundi* in late antiquity. Indeed, Maximianus's grotesquely physical descriptions of the breakdown of the human body constitute a deliberate provocation to a cultural narrative that looked forward to the sublimation of the physical in a new, spiritual existence.

III. LATIN ELEGY AT THE END OF PLEASURE

In the episodes that follow the first elegy (i.e., Elegy 2, Elegy 3, Elegy 4, and Elegy 5), Maximianus moves on from his lamentations about old age to assemble a history of the various erotic crises that he has experienced. The second half of the collection can therefore be read as “an erotic autobiography, covering systematically youth, maturity, and old age” (Fo 1987.355). To summarize, in Elegy 2, Maximianus reveals that, after many years of apparent harmony with his mistress Lycoris, she has left him for younger lovers; in Elegy 3, he recalls how his youthful affair with Aquilina went unconsummated, precisely after they were afforded the opportunity to fulfill their desires; and in Elegy 4, the recollection is of his infatuation with the dancer Candida, which he abandoned out of shame after her father overheard him calling her name in his sleep. The following discussion will focus on Elegy 5, with some supplementary observations on the twelve-line coda, Elegy 6. The 154-line Elegy 5 recounts the seduction of the geriatric poet by an otherwise unnamed Greek Girl (*Graia puella*, 5.6). This episode takes place against the backdrop of Maximianus's ambassadorial mission to forge peace between the West and the East—another detail that places the poet squarely within the context of the war-torn mid-sixth century. From a

27 Gabriele Zerbi, *Gerontocomia*. See esp. at chapter 6, “The Signs Indicating Old Age both Prognostic and Demonstrative” (Lind 1988.53–59).

narrative point of view, Elegy 5 can be seen to follow the pattern of the three episodes that precede it: here, as elsewhere, Maximianus surrenders to erotic desire against his better judgment, only for that desire to be frustrated by an unexpected reversal of circumstances. In this case, the aging poet becomes hopelessly impotent at the crucial point of the sexual encounter.

In addition, Elegy 5 is the only individual episode in Maximianus's collection in which the situation obviously parallels one from Augustan elegy: that is, from *Amores* 3.7, in which Ovid finds himself at last with the opportunity but, alas, without the means to achieve sexual union with his beloved. But the motif of erectile dysfunction does not indicate a simple continuity between the elegies of Ovid and those of Maximianus. In the predominantly Christian period, 500 years after Ovid, in which Maximianus is presenting himself, the associations of sexual impotence were somewhat different, as were ideas about sexuality and the body generally.²⁸ And so for Augustine, the experience of impotence was symptomatic of the fallen state of man's physical existence whereby the will of the flesh is constantly at odds with the will of the mind; it demonstrates that the libido is "wholly opposed to the mind's control, in general, and sometimes divided against its very self."²⁹ In Elegy 5, therefore, this motif can serve as a touchstone by which we can measure the full extent of Maximianus's departure from Latin love elegy.

As has been discussed above, it is Maximianus's presentation of the elegiac lover as an old man that marks his shift in perspective as a later elegist. Thus in Ovid's poem, the ordeal of temporary impotence prompts consideration of the horrors that await him in later life (*Am.* 3.7.17–18):

Quae mihi ventura est, siquidem ventura, senectus,
cum desit numeris ipsa iuventa suis?

What kind of old age is going to come to me, if indeed it is,
when youth itself does not live up to its own measures?

The perspective of Ovid's elegy is very much that of a young man concerned primarily with the immediate present; the onset of old age, and, with it,

28 Although Curtius, in fact, cites the popularity of Maximianus's elegies as evidence that the Middle Ages "were much less prudish than the Modern Period" (1953.50).

29 "(libido) tota plerumque menti cohibenti aduersetur, nonnumquam et aduersus se ipsa diuiditur," *de Civ. Dei* 14.16.424–25.

permanent impotence, is but a distant and indefinite possibility (*siquidem ventura*). Where for Ovid, however, the failure of his sexual capacities merely anticipates old age, for Maximianus, that failure becomes a point of brutal reality—as the following discussion will show, it confirms that his old age has become a “living death.” But if *Amores* 3.7 is taken to be more broadly representative of love elegy’s interminable narrative structure, which “goes round in circles, always promising climax but never achieving it” (Sharrock 1995.152), what are the implications of the fact that, in his later elegy, Maximianus’s failure to achieve that climax is absolutely terminal?

It is important to observe that at the beginning of Elegy 5, the perspective of Maximianus as the narrator remains that of the typical elegiac lover. That is to say, although he attempts to sequester himself from her sexual advances, when he finally relents, he still views and desires the Greek Girl as the young Ovid does his own lover in the *Amores*:

Urebant oculos stantes duraeque papillae
et quas astringens clauderet una manus.
Ah, quantum mentem stomachi fultura movebat
atque sub exhausto pectore pingue femur (5.27–30).

Her breasts standing firm, which one cupped hand would
enclose, inflamed my eyes with passion. Ah, how her
loins roused my mind, and the fleshy thigh beneath her
drawn-out chest.

The phrases “papillae quas . . . clauderet una manus” and “sub exhausto pectore pingue femur” very closely paraphrase Ovid’s description of the naked Corinna in *Amores* 1.5.³⁰ Thus Maximianus might have wished that he had followed the advice of his predecessor, the fifth-century Christian elegist Orientius, and denied himself the very sight of this exotic beauty.³¹

30 *Am.* 1.5.20–22: “forma papillarum quam fuit apta premi / quam castigato planus sub pectore venter . . . quam iuvenale femur!” (“The beauty of her breasts, how fit to be pressed! How flat the belly beneath the restrained chest . . . How youthful the thigh!”). Like Ovid’s impotence in *Am.* 3.7, the fragmented description of Corinna in *Am.* 1.5 can also be seen as broadly representative of love elegy’s narrative structure in the sense that it arouses the reader’s desire to attain a definite end-point, only to leave that desire frustrated; see, e.g., Hardie 2002, Kennedy 2008, and Salzman-Mitchell 2008.

31 “respice quod paucis floret nec permanet annis, / et tamen aeternis culpa manet lacrimis. / ergo puellares vultus formasque decentes / aut verso aut merso despicies capite” (“Wit-

It is nonetheless apparent that, for all he might have learned from his previous pyrrhic victories over the erotic impulse, at this point the elderly Maximianus remains incapable of restraining his desires. In spite of his willingness, however, one night of successful lovemaking is followed by a less successful second, with Maximianus's body no longer able to meet the demands of sexual exertion. When her attempts to restore his virility meet with no response, the Greek Girl, lying on her "widowed bed" (*viduo toro*, 5.85),³² issues a lament directly to his defunct penis (5.103–04):

Hinc velut exposito meritam te funere plango:
occidit, assueto quod caret officio.

Hence with your corpse laid out, so to speak, deservedly I mourn you: it dies because it lacks the customary attention.

The Greek Girl's sermon will be considered more thoroughly below, but for now it is enough to note that the poem ends, abruptly: "She left me, as though the last rites of death were accomplished."³³ The reader is left in no doubt as to the finality of Maximianus's failure: this is, unambiguously, the "death of love." In *de Consolatione Philosophiae*, Maximianus's contemporary and possible mentor Boethius states that "anyone who wishes to recall his own lusts will understand that the end of pleasure is sorrow."³⁴ Maximianus certainly seems to recognize the validity of this view. And at this point, a more conventional narrative—such as one that adopts the theme of the *senectus mundi*—might have seen Maximianus relinquish his commitment to the bodily passions of love elegy and seek to recover his losses at a higher level of spiritual insight. For him, however, it does not necessarily follow that sorrow can be alleviated by disowning his past

ness that what flourishes in a few years, does not last, although the guilt remains in eternal tears. Thus you will disregard girlish faces and pleasing beauties, with turned or covered head") *Commonitorium* 1.433–36. For the text of Orientius's elegy, see Rapisarda 1960.

32 This is another Ovidian paraphrase: *viduo cubile*, *Am.* 2.10.18; also *viduus torus*, *Prop.* 2.9.16.

33 5.154: "Me velut expletis deserit exequiis."

34 *De Cons. Phil.* 3. p. 7.3: "tristes vero esse voluptatis exitus, quisquis reminisci libidinum suarum volet, intelliget"; compare *Max. Elegy* 4.51–52: "Et nunc infelix tota est sine crimine vita / et peccare senem non potuisse pudet" ("Now my whole, unhappy life is without reproach, and it shames an old man that he was not able to sin"). On Boethius's role in the third elegy of Maximianus, see Shanzer 1983, Barnish 1990.

experiences. Even as he confronts it directly, in Maximianus's poem, the "end of pleasure" appears to be left *open*. At least it is not an ending that the poet attempts to moralize: for all that his previous love affairs may have been traumatic, it is not his conclusion that love, as such, is something to be avoided.³⁵

In this respect, Maximianus's elegies can be situated within an alternative tradition of autobiographical writing, the basis of which Vered Lev Kenaan identifies in Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*. Taking the two poems as complementary parts of a single narrative unit, Lev Kenaan suggests that the *Ars* and *Remedia* set out a schema for a particular form of autobiographical writing in which the process of moving on from traumatic past experiences does not require us to disown the past altogether. Here she draws a contrast between Ovid's erotodidactic works and Augustine's *Confessions*—commonly thought of as the first instance of the modern autobiography—in which the narrative of Augustine's conversion to Christian continence requires that the physical passions of his youth be renounced once and for all. For Lev Kenaan, the ultimate teaching of the Ovidian *praeceptor amoris* is that we can recover from our former love affairs without repudiating the general condition of love in and of itself. And as she observes of Ovid in the *Remedia*, it seems true of Maximianus also that he "regards the inconstancy—the cycle of growth and decay—of the phenomenon of love as a recurring pattern characteristic of the general rhythm of erotic life" (2005.180).

But if he declines to renounce his amorous experiences once and for all, how *does* Maximianus close his collection of elegiac verse? An important part of the ending is taken up by the Greek Girl's sermon, which, with considerable rhetorical vigor, develops certain ideas about the "general rhythm of erotic life" that seem to be in keeping with those of Ovid's *Ars* and *Remedia*. Her speech is introduced with a clear indication that the breakdown of Maximianus's body may have a greater significance (5.105–10):

35 This is the kind of thing that Roland Barthes observes in *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse*: "Every amorous episode . . . follows a path which it is always possible to interpret according to a causality or a finality—even, if need be, which can be moralized ('I was out of mind, I'm over it now,' 'Love is a trap which must be avoided from now on' etc): this is the love story, subjugated . . . to that general opinion which disparages any excessive force and wants the subject himself to reduce the great imaginary current, the orderless, endless stream which is passing through him, to a painful, morbid crisis of which he must be cured, which he must 'get over' . . . the love story (the 'episode,' the 'adventure') is the tribute the lover must pay to the world in order to be reconciled with it," 1979.7.

Hanc ego cum lacrimis deducta voce canentem
 irridens dictis talibus increpui:
 “Dum defles nostri languorem, femina, membri,
 ostendis morbo te graviore premi.”
 Illa furens: “nescis, ut cerno, perfide, nescis:
 non fleo privatum, set generale chaos!”

As she was singing, with tears and slender voice, I laughed
 at her and with such words rebuked her: “Woman, when
 you weep for the languor of my member, you show your-
 self repressed by a more serious sickness.” She raged:
 “You don’t know, traitor, I see that you don’t know: not
 private chaos I lament, but the chaos of it all!”

In his rebuke, Maximianus describes the Greek Girl’s emotional passion in terms of physical sickness (*morbo*), adopting a metaphor that was a commonplace in philosophical discourses especially.³⁶ And although it can be read, to some extent, as a parody, we should not necessarily overlook the possibility that the Greek Girl’s response carries some serious philosophical weight of its own.³⁷ In it, she elaborates her tribute into an alternative universal narrative, with the penis as the source and symbol of all physical regeneration. While this oration extends over some forty-two lines, the following passage will serve as an example (5.147–50):

Mira tibi virtus, mira est patientia: victos
 diligis et vinci tu quoque saepe voles.
 Cum superata iaces, vires animosque resumis
 atque iterum vinci, vincere rursus amas.

36 To cite one particularly significant example: after Boethius begins his *Consolation* with a poem in elegiac meter, the figure of personified Philosophy banishes the Muses from his bedside on the basis that “they accustom the minds of men to sickness, and do not free them from it” (“hominum mentes assuefaciunt morbo, non liberant,” *de Cons. Phil.* 1. p. 1.9). Barnish 1990.25–28 suggests that Maximianus’s Greek Girl represents an obscene counterpart to Boethius’s Philosophy: in the sense that she embraces her “sickness” and laments accordingly, she could represent Elegy’s response to Philosophy.

37 Szövérfy 1968.364 argues that this passage “has been taken too seriously” and should be read as a satire of the “pan-sexuality” of women. But in the broader context of Maximianus’s collection, the perfidy of women is not the dominant theme: Aquilina in Elegy 3, for example, can hardly be considered a figure of anti-feminist satire. See Uden 2009.

Your virtue is marvelous, your endurance is marvelous:
 you love the conquered, and you also often wish to be con-
 quered. When defeated you lie low, you resume strength
 and spirit, and you love again to be conquered, you love
 to conquer again.

Unlike the real battles the poet's ambassadorial mission must seek to avoid, the "battles" of the penis, as envisioned by the Greek Girl, are fought only to be fought again. According to her, the history of the world is not a linear progression from beginning to end, as in the narrative of the *senectus mundi*. Rather, the universe is presented as a cycle of sexual regeneration that has no goal other than its own perpetuation. Thus we can observe the emphasis on the ideas of renewal and repetition in this passage—even in its rhetorical effects. Where Ovid remarks in the *Remedia* that "*successore novo vincitur omnis amor*" ("All love is conquered by a new successor," *Rem.* 462), here there are two instances of polyptoton involving the verb *vincere*.³⁸ The word literally reproduces itself in different forms, first in parallel positions at the end of line 147 and at the end of the first half line of 148 (*victos . . . vinci*), and then in a chiasmic arrangement (*iterum vinci, vincere rursus*) on either side of the caesura in line 150. These rhetorical figures draw attention to the fact that, whereas the Latin elegiac couplet is almost always self-contained as a unit of meaning, it is itself subject to a process of cyclical repetition similar to the one that the Greek Girl describes.³⁹

It is important to note that Maximianus himself offers no direct rebuttal to the Greek Girl's declamation: this is, in effect, the climax of the collection. The fifth elegy is succeeded by an epilogue of just twelve lines (Elegy 6) in which Maximianus urges his "verbose age" to put an end to its "wretched complaints" ("Claude . . . miseras, aetas verbosa, querelas," 6.1). Here *aetas verbosa* may be taken to refer to the old age of the poet

38 Such polyptota are particularly frequent in Maximianus: see Spaltenstein 1983.56.

39 In Latin, of course, the elegiac couplet is almost always self-contained as a unit of sense, and its circular structure is marked by a tendency towards the construction of parallelisms and antitheses. See, generally, Kenney 2002.30–36, 48–56. This circular structure is best illustrated by the so-called serpentine couplet, in which the first half of the hexameter is echoed in the second half of the pentameter. Elegy 5.99–100 is one of three instances of a serpentine couplet in Maximianus's collection: "*Nempe iaces nullo, ut quondam, perfusa rubore, / pallida demisso uertice nempe iaces*" ("You're certainly limp, no longer suffused with a blush; pale, with your head held low, you're certainly limp").

himself or to the age in which he finds himself living, replete with laments (such as those to which the first elegy alludes) for life at the world's last stages. In this very brief peroration, Maximianus reconciles himself to the natural inevitability of death and implicitly questions the end of love as a final point of closure. The last lines read (6.11–12):

Infelix ceu iam defleto funere surgo
hac me defunctum vivere parte puto.

I rise unhappily, as it were from my lamented funeral rites:
though dead in this part, I think that I live on.

How should this final couplet be understood; in what sense does the old man Maximianus think that he defies death? The two modern English translations of the elegies render the lines to the effect that the poet will live on in his work.⁴⁰ This is feasible, especially if we compare them (as above) with the final line of Ovid's first book of *Amores*. But returning to Maximianus's opening complaint from the first elegy—"the greatest part of me has perished" ("periit pars maxima nostri," 1.5)—it is possible in this case as well to perceive a corporeal metaphor. Taking *hac parte* in a specific, sexual sense, the last line could be translated, "Although my member is dead, I think I live on."⁴¹ Even at the last, the imagery of Maximianus's poems remains emphatically "embodied"; it is possible, therefore, to interpret this couplet as a comment on the debates about corporeality that represent a contemporary intellectual context for these later erotic elegies.⁴²

In Elegy 5 and in the other episodes that make up the second half of Maximianus's collection, what is dramatized is an ongoing conflict between the will of the flesh and the will of the mind. Here, as elsewhere, Maximianus recognizes the danger of physical desires and strives to withdraw from them, but this only makes them stronger. The inexorable conflict

40 See Ashton-Gwatkin 1975.43: "Woe's me, I rise from requiem; I belong / To Death; and yet I live—immortal in my song!"; and Lind 1988.336: "Although my member is dead, I shall live in my art."

41 Although *pars* usually takes some specific adjective when used to refer to the sexual organs (e.g., *pars genitalis*, *partes naturales*), there is a catalogue of examples of its use without a complement at Adams 1982.45.

42 On Maximianus's representation as an impotent old man in relation to the Christian rejection of corporeality, see Schneider 2001.459–60.

between body and mind was one that profoundly troubled Augustine—but he did express the hope that the desires of his own body would eventually be brought into harmony with the will of his mind.⁴³ This would occur when the narrative of the *senectus mundi* reached its imminent point of closure—that is, at the end of time, when the corrupted physical world would finally give way to the spiritual afterlife. Maximianus, on the other hand, offers no reflections on such an afterlife; and at the end of his elegies, he seems no longer to seek to rectify the antagonism between body and mind by subjecting the former to the latter. If he is able to come to terms with this conflict, he does so *not* by renouncing bodily desires per se, but rather by renouncing the very possibility of any kind of ultimate harmony, in this life or the next. In this way, he reconciles himself to a cyclical conception of erotic life in which love always gives way to inevitable loss. This is a distinctly Ovidian view, whose tenets can be traced back to the elegiac *Ars* and *Remedia*. What makes the contribution of this later elegist so extraordinary, though, is that he is able to assert this cyclical conception of erotic life even as his own appears to have come to a close with the most ignominious loss of all. Locating himself at the “end of pleasure,” then, Maximianus has not so much revived Augustan love elegy as confronted its worst fears—and in this way, he may have overcome them.

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43 E.g., *Conf.* 10.30.42: “augebis, domine, magis magisque in me munera tua, ut anima mea sequatur me ad te concupiscentiae visco expedita” (“More and more, Lord, you will increase your blessings upon me, that my soul should be freed from the trap of sexual desire and follow me to you”). It would be impossible to do justice here to the complexity of Augustine’s thoughts on the body and sexuality. The seminal discussion is Brown 1988.387–427; see also Markus 1990.45–62.

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