

**NUDUS AMOR FORMAM NON AMAT ARTIFICEM:  
REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER IN ELEGIAC DISCOURSE**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the representation of gender, desire, and identity in elegiac discourse. It does so through the lens of post-structural and psychoanalytic theory, referring to the works of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Jessica Benjamin, and Laura Mulvey in their analyses of power, gender performativity, and subjectivity. Within this thesis, these concepts are applied primarily to the works of Tibullus, Propertius, and Sulpicia, ultimately demonstrating that the three love elegists seek, in their poetry, to construct subversive discourses which destabilise the categories by which gender and identity were determined in Augustan Rome. This discussion is supplemented by the investigation of Ovid's use of elegiac discourse in Book 10 of his *Metamorphoses*, and the way in which it both comments upon Augustan love elegy and demonstrates a number of parallels with its thematic content. This thesis focuses especially on the representation of power relations within elegiac discourse, the various levels on which such relations operate and, finally, the possibilities for the contestation of and resistance to power, in addition to the motivations that might lie behind the poet-lover's frequent attraction and submission to it.

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## **Preface**

My first debt of gratitude is owed to my supervisor, Daniel Malamis, for his patience, good humour, and excellent guidance over the last two and a half years.

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## Introduction

“Propertian elegy, it transpires, has three [...] interlocking themes – love, writing, and gender.”<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, Wyke’s description of Propertian elegy is applicable to the genre as a whole, a subgenre of lyric poetry that existed for just less than half a century, but whose influence over amatory discourse can still be felt centuries later.<sup>2</sup> Its interest lies primarily in its complex representations of gender, sexuality, and power, in which the “elegist, typically, portrays the male in the traditionally passive and subservient role of women and, at the same time, depicts the female beloved as masterful, active, and dominant.”<sup>3</sup>

Two particular scholarly attitudes towards Latin love elegy can be identified. The first accepts the elegiac depiction of the mistress as dominant, arguing that the genre constitutes a form of “counter-cultural feminism”<sup>4</sup> which can be demonstrated to attribute voice and agency to the poet’s mistress. The second, critical of such an approach, maintains that the poet-lover’s posture of servility and adoration masks a less-than-egalitarian agenda; that despite his persona’s outward show of submission, the elegiac speaker never relinquishes his rhetorical control over the female beloved; indeed, that he exploits her in order to explore new models of masculinity.<sup>5</sup>

This latter strand of criticism has influenced contemporary approaches to the genre in its shift from attempts to discover the biographies of the women behind the figure of the elegiac mistress<sup>6</sup> to an understanding of her as a “textual body that incarnates her author’s aesthetic and ideological ambitions.”<sup>7</sup> Being loved and being read amount to the same thing in Latin love elegy; where the writing of elegiac poetry was once considered to be the means of wooing the poet’s mistress,<sup>8</sup> modern approaches view the elegiac mistress as a fictional construct of the poet’s desire. Thus “women are ‘perceived’. We speak often not just of ‘women’, but of ‘images’, ‘representations’, ‘reflections’ of women.”<sup>9</sup>

Current debates thus centre on the construction of the persona of the poet in elegiac discourse; whether Latin love elegy should be considered an obstinately male genre with little interest in female subjectivity and desire, or whether the elegist “opens up spaces in his text in which we can

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<sup>1</sup> Wyke (2002) p.173.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Parker and Hooley in Gold (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Greene in Gold (2012) p.357.

<sup>4</sup> See Hallett (1973) in Miller (2002).

<sup>5</sup> See Green (1998) and Wyke (2002).

<sup>6</sup> See Pomeroy (1975), Lyn (1980), Griffin (1985).

<sup>7</sup> Wyke (2002) p.156.

<sup>8</sup> See Lyne (1980), Griffin (1985).

<sup>9</sup> Sharrock (1991) p.36.

feel and see the presence of 'woman'."<sup>10</sup>

The majority of feminist scholarship interprets it as a narcissistic genre in which the poet explores his own relation to the patriarchal discourses of Augustan Rome "while at the same time elaborating ingenious ways to relegate women to subordinate roles."<sup>11</sup> The conclusion of such an approach is that the mistress constitutes a foil to the poet's own desires:

The poetry devoted to a woman is really quite egocentric. The poet speaks almost exclusively of the actions, passions, sorrows, and words of Ego, who talks only about himself. We are not lacking for his opinions on women or makeup, but what we learn of Cynthia comes down to two things: on the one hand, she has every possible attraction, including incompatible ones, and seems made to fulfil one's every wish; on the other, she makes her poet suffer.<sup>12</sup>

As for the elegiac mistress, whether a signifier for the elegiac speaker's sexual or poetic aspirations, this critical approach represents her as being alternately praised and condemned by her poet-lover; both idolised and suspiciously interrogated. She functions as an idealised object over which the elegiac speaker attempts to gain control in order that he might shape her according to his desire, and use her as *materia* in his negotiations with other men and the literary marketplace.<sup>13</sup> Where elegiac poetry was once considered subversive due to the poet-lover's posture of servility towards his *domina*, this trope is now approached as a "seducer's strategy of manipulation"<sup>14</sup> by which the poet-lover might wear down his mistress' resistance before possessing her.

The discursive mastery which the elegiac lover holds over his beloved is articulated by Alison Sharrock in her discussion of 'womanufacture', which consists of the process by which the artist-lover constructs his beloved before subsequently falling in love with her; the art-object thus transforms into the love-object.<sup>15</sup> The primary example through which Sharrock explores such a metamorphosis is Ovid's Pygmalion episode, in which the titular protagonist ostensibly wields complete sexual and artistic power over his artwork/beloved, having constructed her according to his own ideal conceptions of femininity.

In opposition to these interpretations of elegiac discourse, scholars such as Gold support Hallett's original claim that Augustan elegy is a genre that subverts traditional categories of gender.<sup>16</sup> Gold

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<sup>10</sup> Gold (1993) p.92.

<sup>11</sup> Greene in Gold (2012) p.357.

<sup>12</sup> Veyne (1988) p.136.

<sup>13</sup> See Greene (1998).

<sup>14</sup> Wyke (2002) p.158, referring to Greene (1998).

<sup>15</sup> Sharrock (1991). See also Greene (1988).

<sup>16</sup> Gold in Miller (2012).

adapts Alice Jardine's conception of 'gynesis' to classical texts and argues that by rendering the identity of the elegiac mistress fluid and overdetermined, while inserting the poet-lover into the literary position usually reserved for women, Latin love elegy destabilises the categories by which gender and sexuality were understood in Augustan Rome.<sup>17</sup>

Studies of Sulpicia in particular challenge the dominant view of elegy as a male-oriented discourse. Establishing herself within the elegiac tradition, Sulpicia appropriates the voice of the elegiac poet-lover while depicting desire from a feminine perspective. Her rhetorical control over her male beloved imitates that practiced by poets such as Tibullus and Propertius, contradicting the control which she ostensibly relinquishes to her beloved. The only Roman female poet whose work is still extant, the fact that Sulpicia is, in particular, an *elegiac* poet is perhaps accounted for by the nature of the genre itself:

the Sulpician play with gender in the elegiac genre, the narrator's adoption of multiple masculine and feminine subject positions, is not unparalleled elsewhere in the corpus of elegiac poems, and that it is precisely elegy's pervasive occupation with the question of gender categories that makes the genre readily available for appropriation and transformation by a woman writer.<sup>18</sup>

However, despite the occasional admission that Sulpician elegy might not differ in essence from that of her male contemporaries, most of the aforementioned approaches to elegiac discourse ultimately replicate the hierarchical power structures of ancient Rome, reducing the relationship between poet and *puella* to a single relation of unequivocal subject and object. The subject is depicted as exerting his or her power over the object, with little exploration of the ways in which the individual might *resist* such an enactment of power, or even choose to *participate* in her or his own powerlessness.

The primary aim of this thesis is to explore a variety of representations of gender and power in elegiac discourse through the lens of post-structuralist theory.<sup>19</sup> This involves a crucial reconceptualization of power, not as a possession that one might wield uncontested, but as a relation between two subjects; a relation which demands the continual maintenance of, and resistance to, power in every moment of its instantiation. It is my contention that, just as the post-structuralist understanding of power destabilises traditional conceptions of its workings, so does Latin love elegy represent amatory relationships in a way that destabilises the hierarchical constructions of gender and *imperium* that constituted the dominant discourses within Augustan Rome. It is moreover a genre which challenges not only the boundaries separating the male from the

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<sup>17</sup> See Jardine (1986).

<sup>18</sup> Wyke (2002) p.165.

<sup>19</sup> Incorporating the works of Foucault, Lacan, Butler, and Benjamin from a gender-based perspective.

female, but also those between author and text, Self and Other.

To what end might the elegiac poet attempt to subvert such normative discourses? Stating that the traditional performance of masculinity in Augustan Rome had already been reduced to mere pantomime, Wyke suggests that

when attention is focused on the enunciative system of Augustan elegy, on the process by which the male narrator and his verse are marked out as effeminate, the male *ego* of the elegiac text could be read as exploring, in his own person [...] a broader crisis of masculinity evident in the period of transition from republic to principate.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, Wyke suggests that, through the trope of *servitium amoris*, the elegiac poet might even be *re-enacting* in his poetry the servile submission of Rome's male elite to the new princeps, reflecting their forfeiture of their republican virility.

This thesis will, for the most part, approach the attractions of effeminacy and submission on a more private level than that suggested by Wyke: one of erotics and poetics rather than politics. My interest lies in determining the extent to which the poet-lover's show of powerlessness reveals a genuine impulse towards masochism and submission, and the personal motivations that might lie behind such an impulse. Consequently, I have found useful Jessica Benjamin's psychoanalytic approach to intersubjectivity, which explores and develops Hegel's master-slave dialectic and discusses the means by which relations of power might both challenge and affirm identity and autonomy.

Negotiations of power operate on a number of levels within Latin love elegy, however, and the elegiac poet's masochistic impulses go further than the erotic sphere. Indeed, in the elegist's fascination with *imperium* and vulnerability, the concept of gender becomes intimately interconnected with that of genre, and masculinity in crisis can also manifest itself as the poet's anxiety of influence. Thus, the poet-lover's sexual desire to become one with his *domina* is reflected in the poet-author's construction of his *puella* as flawless Callimachean text in his desire to achieve a perfect identification with this idealised Other.

I have stated my intention to explore elegiac representations of power as *relational*; as a ceaseless negotiation between two subjects – the poet and his mistress. Such a relation is threatened when the dehumanisation and objectification of one subject by another results in the collapse of Self into Other. This thesis must therefore address the means by which the poet-lover/author resists the power enacted upon him, and the distance that he must establish between himself and the idealised Other. It is my contention that this desire for both unification and distance

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<sup>20</sup> Wyke (2002) p.176.

is built into Latin love elegy, resulting in a complex dialectic between the poet and *puella* in which desire is continually aroused, but always deferred; in which relations of power are constantly renegotiated, but never resolved.<sup>21</sup>

This thesis will explore three different, albeit interconnected, strands of elegiac discourse. Before approaching the works of the Latin love elegists themselves, in Part One (Chapters One and Two) I shall address ancient narratives which approach this genre as if from the outside, and which function as commentaries upon it as both a poetics and a technology of gender.<sup>22</sup> My main argument will be that elegiac discourse is indeed an unstable discourse in which all categories that construct identity are subverted. In order to demonstrate this, I shall take Ovid's "Pygmalion" as my primary focus, thus revising Sharrock's approach to this narrative (and to love elegy as a whole).

Sharrock establishes a number of connections between Latin love elegy and Ovid's "Pygmalion". Despite the poet's use of iambic hexameter, this episode nevertheless functions as an example of elegiac discourse in terms of its thematic material. This episode, I would argue, is not a critique of the elegiac poet's misogynist agenda, nor does it depict simple subject-object relations between the artist and his creation. Rather, it replicates the complex power relations of elegiac poetry, and suggests the possibility of multiple subjectivities in elegiac discourse. The boundaries between the artist and his creation, between categories of gender, and between Self and Other are made problematic in this episode, suggesting some of the complications that will be encountered more fully further on in this thesis.

However, although I consider Ovid's "Pygmalion" a useful episode in which to first approach Latin love elegy, I feel that this episode is best understood when the reader also takes into account the general construction of the tenth book of the *Metamorphoses*, as well as the figure of Orpheus, who functions as the narrator of Pygmalion's story, and whose own metamorphosis from epic poet to embittered elegiac poet-lover complements and reflects upon Pygmalion's own narrative, further challenging an already complex representation of power and gender. Consequently, Chapters One and Two will focus not only on the Pygmalion episode, but on the framing narrative of Orpheus and Eurydice, and the significance of both episodes as commentaries upon elegiac poetry in Augustan Rome.

Part Two (Chapters Three to Five) will focus on the works of three Latin love elegists,

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Judith Butler's dialectical model, in which "knowledge proceeds through opposition and cancellation, never finally reaching an 'absolute' or final certainty, but only positing ideas that cannot be fixed as 'truths'" (Salih, 2002, p.3).

<sup>22</sup> A term coined by Teresa de Lauretis, derived from Foucault's theory of sexuality as a 'technology of sex', which proposes that gender, too, both as representation and as self-representation, is the product of various social technologies such as cinema, as well as institutional discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices" (1987, p.ix).

namely, Tibullus, Propertius, and Sulpicia. The Tibullean corpus is unproblematic, and both of his works will be taken into account. As for Propertius and Sulpicia, I shall limit my focus to Propertius' first three books and the six poems typically attributed to Sulpicia.<sup>23</sup> With regard to Propertius, I have chosen to omit Book 4 because I wish to focus on elegiac works in which the elegiac persona plays a central role. In Sulpicia's case, although scholars have argued convincingly that more poems from the *Corpus Tibullianum* can be attributed to her,<sup>24</sup> I have chosen for simplicity's sake to focus on the six poems whose authorship is generally uncontested. The authorship of Sulpicia's writings has been further complicated by arguments surrounding her status as a female poet.<sup>25</sup> In accordance with general scholarly consensus, I shall approach Sulpician elegy as if it were written by a woman, assuming at the very least that this is indeed the intention of the author, whether male or female.

Chapters Three and Four will focus on the works of Tibullus and Propertius, each chapter exploring a particular trope: the *servitium amoris* and *militia amoris* respectively. These two tropes construct masculinity in complex and contradictory ways; each focusing on different elements of submission and control. However, in every instantiation of control, there is also an element of resistance; these chapters shall therefore also explore the possibilities for female subjectivity that the elegiac text offers. Significantly, these two tropes demonstrate clear parallels between the strategies employed by Orpheus and Pygmalion in their own subversive expressions of masculinity: Orpheus, as the poet-hero; Pygmalion, as the poet-lover.

The fifth chapter will be constituted by an analysis of Sulpician elegy, and of the ways in which elegiac discourse is affected by the insertion of female subjectivity and desire. Although her poetry departs from male-authored elegy in a number of ways, it nevertheless replicates a number of the latter's discursive strategies, suggesting that the genre as a whole is open to a variety of subjectivities regardless of gender, and that it depicts relations of power in terms of a playful dialectic that challenges normative understandings of sexuality, gender, and power.

If [...] Roman elegy is an obstinately male genre that evinces a pattern of male discursive control over the female object of both his erotics and his poetics, then [...] the texts of Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid scarcely deserve the further scrutiny of feminist scholars of antiquity.<sup>26</sup>

Latin love elegy, I maintain, is eminently worthy of further study, constituting an almost post-modern awareness of the interplay of gender and power, and rendering categories such as male and female, as well as self and other, unstable and indeterminable through its playful dialecticism.

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<sup>23</sup> Namely, poems 13-18 from the third book of the *Corpus Tibullianum*.

<sup>24</sup> See Parker (1994).

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Holzberg (1999) and Hubbard (2005).

<sup>26</sup> Wyke (2002) p.161.

N.B. With regard to the ancient sources used throughout this thesis, all translations thereof are my own, unless otherwise stated.

## Part One: Orpheus and Pygmalion

Ovid's rendition of the Pygmalion story in his *Metamorphoses* has been subjected to a wide range of critical interpretations, the focuses of which have shifted dramatically over the last two decades. While earlier interpretations were primarily interested in the tension maintained within this episode between the realms of art and nature, for example, or the figure of the artist,<sup>27</sup> feminist analyses have more recently introduced and problematized the relations of power between the artist-lover and his creation.<sup>28</sup> These analyses, however, are anything but uniform in perspective, and most tend to fall into polar camps where the question of power and gender relations is concerned.

What makes this episode particularly significant is that it cannot be studied in isolation from other ancient texts; indeed, of increasing interest to feminist critics are the thematic and linguistic connections that this episode exhibits with Latin amatory poetry, especially the genre of Latin love elegy. Consequently, many of the varied, conflicting discussions of power and gender surrounding the Pygmalion episode can be – and are – considered applicable to this genre.<sup>29</sup>

However, although I will argue that Ovid's Pygmalion episode *does* bear a strong resemblance to Latin love elegy, I would like to extend my discussion to the framing narrative of the Orpheus episode as well, and to explore the manner in which these two narratives provide a more complex portrayal of power than most critical appreciations suggest. Jessica Benjamin, in *The Bonds of Love*, warns that "a major tendency in [feminist analysis] has constructed the problem of domination as a drama of female vulnerability victimized by male aggression."<sup>30</sup> This thesis will therefore not only determine the extent to which these two episodes constitute elegiac discourse, but also whether a feminist perspective is possible within one's reading of it. I maintain that the power relations within these episodes are exactly that: relational, rather than hierarchical;<sup>31</sup> that these two narratives construct male and female subjects not in terms of oppressor/oppressed but in a way that explores the new possibilities for subjectivity that power and desire create in the moment of their instantiation.

In accordance with contemporary feminist theory, in order to suggest an alternative interpretation of the episodes within Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (and of Latin love elegy in general), it is

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Santas (1996).

<sup>28</sup> For misogyny in the Pygmalion episode, see Sharrock (1991), and Salzman-Mitchell (2005). For interpretations that move towards the possibility of female empowerment in this episode, see Liveley (1999).

<sup>29</sup> See Sharrock (1991) and Liveley, in Hardie, Barchiesi, and Hinds (1999).

<sup>30</sup> Jessica Benjamin (1988) p.9.

<sup>31</sup> See Rimell (2006). While Rimell explores power relations in these terms in Ovidian poetry, I intend to apply this concept of power to Latin love elegy as a genre.

necessary to adopt particular reading strategies; in particular, that of resistant reading. In *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, Judith Fetterley claims that it is imperative that the feminist critic “become a resisting rather than an assenting reader.”<sup>32</sup> One means by which this is achieved is by reading against the text: becoming critical of its underlying agendas, the literary devices by which it wins the reader’s unquestioning assent, and the implicit assumptions that it, and therefore the uncritical reader, might take for granted. Within the Pygmalion episode, for example, the speaker claims that

*virginis est verae facies, quam vivere credas,  
et, si non obstat reverentia, velle moveri:  
ars adeo latet arte sua.*<sup>33</sup>

It took the shape of a real maiden, which you might believe to be alive,  
and about to move, were it not that modesty held her back:  
thus was his art concealed in art.

Through the speaker’s address to the reader – *credas* – the reader’s perspective is assimilated into that of Pygmalion, as he falls under the spell of the illusion created by his own art. However, a significant number of critics have failed to challenge this equation of reader and character, opting instead to simply remark upon it, if they notice it at all.<sup>34</sup> It is only in the more recent works of ‘resisting’ readers such as Genevieve Liveley and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell that the position of the reader has been brought forward from the margins, that the question “what if the reader is actually a woman?”<sup>35</sup> has been asked in Classical criticism.

Consequently, in her reading of male-biased works, in which a masculine perspective is presented as being universally human, the unresisting female reader is compelled to undergo her own metamorphosis in order to adopt the masculine perspective offered by the text – to read as a man. Such a metamorphosis can only be a farce: as Liveley notes, it “makes of the woman reader an excluded mimic: miming the reading position and perspective of a man while maintaining her distance from the experience and the identity that excludes her.”<sup>36</sup>

With the increasing popularity of reader-response criticism, which “gives pre-eminence to

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<sup>32</sup> Judith Fetterley (1978) p.xi.

<sup>33</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.250-2.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Elsner (1991) p.164, who, having observed the speaker’s use of *credas*, betrays his assimilation into Pygmalion’s male gaze through his observation that “as Pygmalion loves and desires, so the reader loves and desires.”

<sup>35</sup> Salzman-Mitchell (2005) p.69.

<sup>36</sup> Liveley, in Hardie, Barchiesi, and Hinds (1999) p.198.

the eyes of the reader rather than to the text as a sacrosanct voice,"<sup>37</sup> a growing interest in the gendered nature of reading has resulted in the development of various new strategies by which the female reader

is invited to reread, to reject, to re-appropriate, and above all – to resist: to resist the patriarchal dominance of the canon; to resist the misogyny and misunderstanding of male authors; to resist the claims of male-biased texts to present universally valid truths about *human* experience.<sup>38</sup>

The necessity of becoming a resisting reader is especially true for the classical field, in which the so-called 'objectivity' of the ancient text has longed been stressed, while feminist classicists were relegated to the outer perimeters of Classical Studies. Thus, in 1990, two decades after feminist criticism gained momentum in the 1970s, Amy Richlin could still state:

Feminism asks questions about the politics of gender, thereby moving this issue to the centre from the margins where it had, incredibly, been put; feminism recovers women. Neither task was ever on the agenda of Classics, and those concerned with women are often told they have limited themselves to a narrow subfield.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of this decades-long resistance to feminist criticism, a growing number of classicists are joining the arduous project of rereading ancient texts, with the goal of developing new interpretations which make possible a feminine perspective.

Liveley takes pains to state, however, that the aim of becoming a resisting reader

is not so much to perversely 'misread' male-authored and male-biased texts [...for] it is not the texts in and of themselves that exclude the woman reader and deny the possibility of a female perspective, but rather the readings of those texts, through which 'only one reality is encouraged, legitimized and transmitted.'<sup>40</sup>

Rather, this reading strategy, formalised in Fetterley's *The Resisting Reader*, focuses on the inexhaustibility of a text: its capacity to generate a multiplicity of readings, thus supporting numerous and diverse perspectives – a strategy eminently suitable to a reading of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Such an approach, as articulated by Salzman-Mitchell, "redefines literature, not as

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<sup>37</sup> Salzman-Mitchell (2005) p.17.

<sup>38</sup> Liveley, *ibid.* p.198.

<sup>39</sup> Richlin (1990) p.178.

<sup>40</sup> Liveley, *ibid.* p.199.

an object but as an experience, because it makes the responses of the reader, rather than the contents of the text, the focus of critical attention.”<sup>41</sup>

And so it is that feminist classicists such as Amy Richlin can state of Ovid’s works: “Their combination of stylistic brilliance with violent content, especially violence against women, I find fascinating but repellent; I cannot ignore it myself”<sup>42</sup> at the same time as critics such as Leslie Cahoon, who finds “such dark visions the most resonant and the most productive. For the culturally estranged, the shock of evil and the confrontation with evil bring more reformation than do the loftiest pieties.”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, in her mention of the necessity for positive models, Cahoon states that “here, too, [...] Ovid can sufficiently supply the resources for a feminist hermeneutics.”<sup>44</sup> Although received readings of a text privilege a single perspective, and aim to provide a definitive meaning, feminist resistant readings encourage a diverse range of perspectives, optimistic or otherwise.

In accordance with this project of resistant reading, the aim of this thesis is to call into question the simplistic categories of subject/object and male/female attributed to elegiac discourse, of which Ovid’s Pygmalion and Orpheus episodes constitute significant examples. This will be achieved primarily through Butler’s approach to the discursive construction of gender categories:

if there is something right in Beauvoir’s claim that one is not born, but rather *becomes* a woman, it follows that *woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification [...] It is, for Beauvoir, never possible finally to become a woman, as if there were a *telos* that governs the process of acculturation and construction.<sup>45</sup>

Butler thus rejects not only the notion that sex and gender are biologically determined, but also that the two are even necessarily related, reinterpreting gender as a sequence of performative acts that accumulate into the impression of being a natural condition, but that are anything but.<sup>46</sup> In order to contest received notions of gender categories as ontological realities, Butler demonstrates how these categories are discursively constructed within a particular matrix of power, thus exposing their

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<sup>41</sup> Salzman-Mitchell (2005) p.18.

<sup>42</sup> Richlin (1990) p.179.

<sup>43</sup> Cahoon (1990) p.201.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. p.201. Cahoon mentions, for example, the figure of Ceres as she appears in Ovid’s work.

<sup>45</sup> Butler (1990) p.33.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p.25: “In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed.”

contingency.<sup>47</sup>

The constraints imposed by gender categories create opportunities for resistance and subversion, especially through performances of gender that deviate from normative constructions thereof.<sup>48</sup> Significantly, however, Butler rejects the notion of a performer behind such an act, subscribing to the idea of performativity, which holds that identity is an effect, rather than a cause, of the performance.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, although discourse precedes and constructs the subject, inscribing itself upon the body, a subject might nevertheless ‘do’ gender in a way that contradicts notions of it being natural or essential. Butler thus draws attention to parodic performances of gender – like ‘drag’, which emphasises the disjunction between the performer’s body and the gender that is being performed. In demonstrating such discrepancies, parodic performances of gender thus displace dominant constructions of gender by exposing their artificiality.

However, not all parodic performances are subversive, and Butler warns that “there is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very ‘taking up’ is enabled by the tool lying there.”<sup>50</sup> If the constraints imposed by gender categories create opportunities for resistance and subversion, to what extent is subversion actually subversive?

Elegiac discourse poses a similar problem to the reader, and it is therefore necessary to determine the extent to which it subverts or reinforces categories of gender and power. In order to attempt an answer to such a question, Chapters One and Two of this thesis will focus on Ovid’s Orpheus and Pygmalion episodes respectively, employing the textual approach of resistant reading to their analysis of these episodes. My focus shall be the construction of gender within these episodes; in particular, the means by which the poet suggests complementary strategies of subverting masculinity in order to fully embody it, and the ways in which this reflects upon the strategies employed by the elegiac persona within Latin amatory poetry.<sup>51</sup> My primary aim is the exploration of the desiring subject as a subject-in-process.<sup>52</sup> This exploration will be carried out through the lens

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<sup>47</sup> See Salih (2012) p.48.

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter Two, Section 2.5.1 for further discussion on power and resistance.

<sup>49</sup> In this, Butler’s conception of performance differs from theatrical models, which posits an actor behind the performance, and which considers such a performance to be entirely within the control of the individual. Theatrical models, therefore, ultimately assume that “as a social construct gender [is] a mere arbitrary artifice than can easily be dispensed with” (Jagger, 2008, p.8). Butler, on the other hand, considers performances of gender to be constituted by the dominant discourses which construct identity and both produce and define subversion.

<sup>50</sup> Butler (1990) p.145.

<sup>51</sup> Discussed in more detail in Part Two of this thesis.

<sup>52</sup> Most significantly through Judith Butler’s revision of Hegelian theory. In her work, Butler discusses the Subject’s desire for self-consciousness, its construction through dialectic, and “whose instability and porousness deny it a fixed or final place in the world, a protagonist in what Butler calls a ‘comedy of errors’, a

of feminist film theory, as well as post-structural thought, namely, Foucault's theory of discourse, with its penetrating analysis of the constitutive force of knowledge and language in relations of power, and Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity.

I hope to demonstrate that "Pygmalion" is more complex than an exposé on the sinister workings of Latin love elegy<sup>53</sup> or a sordid tale reworked into a sentimental love story.<sup>54</sup> Instead, this episode suggests the possibility for power relations that go beyond the simple dichotomy of powerful/powerless, for the destabilisation of traditional gender categories, and for desiring subjects who operate in a dialogue with one another, rather than the lone artist-lover who subjects his beloved to the monologue of his desire.

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journey (or a drama) which [...] involves repeated error, misrecognition and self-reconstitution" (Salih, 2002, p.30).

<sup>53</sup> See Sharrock (1991).

<sup>54</sup> See Bauer (1962) and Griffin (1977).

## Chapter One

- 1.1. Introduction
- 1.2. The Structure of *Metamorphoses* Book 10
- 1.3.1 Intertextuality: Orpheus and Vergil
- 1.3.2 Orpheus and the Heroic Ideal
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- 1.4 Orpheus/Pygmalion as readers
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### 1.1 Introduction

The central and outermost episodes in Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* constitute fertile material for gender studies in that they undermine traditional constructions of masculinity in Augustan Rome through the parodic performances their two protagonists, Orpheus and Pygmalion. However, Ovid goes further than simple parody, highlighting not only the contingent boundaries separating the masculine and the feminine, but those between the Self and the Other as well. In these two episodes, identity is depicted as increasingly unstable; the erotic encounter between Self and Other becomes an erotic struggle between the desired integration of Self *into* Other.

This chapter will focus on Ovid's depiction of Orpheus and his struggle to transcend the dictates of the ideal hero – a paragon of traditional masculinity – through the parodic performance of what Butler refers to as 'drag'. This subversive gender performativity nevertheless results in the failure of his heroic quest, as well as a consequent destabilisation of his identity and a metamorphosis from epic poet to love elegist. However, the Orpheus narrative successfully parodies masculinity on a textual level as well, in the disjunction between the Vergilian depiction of this legendary bard in his Fourth Georgic and Ovid's own portrayal of him. Orpheus' failures thus become Ovid's warning to his audience.

## 1.2 The Structure of *Metamorphoses* Book 10

Ovid's structure is not merely like a Russian doll, one story inside another, it is like a snake-pit, in which a pretty indeterminable number of snakes are devouring and being devoured by each other.<sup>55</sup>

As the extract quoted above suggests, before one can approach Ovid's "Pygmalion" the several narratives that frame this episode must be accounted for. To read each story within the *Metamorphoses* in isolation is to miss out on a great deal of Ovid's artistry: many of the episodes within his epic echo, overlap with, and comment upon one another, its episodes and books forming a dialectic that affects the reader's interpretation of individual books and episodes as well as the work in its entirety. On the other hand, to deny any sort of structure at all would be to identify Ovid's *Metamorphoses* with the total chaos that governs the first episode of the epic; a *rudis indigestaque moles*.<sup>56</sup>

In order to discuss the frames which precede the Pygmalion episode, one needs to identify a loose structure by which one might navigate through the numerous episodes that constitute this book. While numerous critics mistakenly seek to impose various rigid forms of order onto a poem that holds the instability of form as its fundamental theme, I have found to be of great assistance Douglas Bauer's "The Function of Pygmalion in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid", in which he convincingly demonstrates a loose symmetry in the tenth book of the *Metamorphoses*. In this essay, he organises the nine stories that constitute this book into four groups, of which the Pygmalion story forms the centre.

The outermost frame of Book 10 is constituted by the stories of Orpheus and Venus, whom Bauer describes as "the masculine and feminine personifications of love."<sup>57</sup> These two are further united in the loss of their beloveds, Eurydice and Adonis, due to their failure to heed a particular warning, namely, against turning their gaze back onto their respective partners during the process of their beloveds' revivification. However, although I agree for the most part with Bauer's elegant organisation of the tenth book, for the purposes of this chapter I would choose to extend this external frame to the beginning of the eleventh book, in which Orpheus' story is concluded, thus incorporating the rest of the stories in Book 10, including that of Venus and Adonis, into his song.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, although I will later embark upon a more detailed discussion of the frames that precede

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<sup>55</sup> Rimell (2006) p.1, quoting Hofman and Lasdun (1994) p.xii.

<sup>56</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 1.7-9.

<sup>57</sup> Bauer (1962) p.10.

<sup>58</sup> With the single exception of the Cypris episode, which is presented by the external narrator.



and into the beginning of Book 11. Venus may be the female personification of love,<sup>62</sup> playing a significant role throughout Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and in the "Pygmalion" episode in particular. However, I think that it is important to keep in mind that throughout this book Orpheus speaks *for* Venus, rather than in parallel with her and that his story continues after the conclusion of her own.

I have mentioned my extension of Rimell's theme of oscillation from individual episodes to the complementary half of each frame. If one looks at the outermost frame, for example, which provides Orpheus' narrative, while the first half of his story focuses on his Apollonian aspect, the second half, in which he is murdered by a group of maenads, is concerned with his Dionysian nature. The first half deals with his failure to bring Eurydice back into the world of the living; in the second half of the frame he goes down to join her. Just as, in the Elysian Fields, Orpheus is able to follow or lead Eurydice at his pleasure, each half of this outermost frame both reflects upon and revises the other.

While I shall not discuss in detail the second and third framing narratives of Book 10, the motif of oscillation is evident within both. The second frame is constituted by the stories of those who are loved by the gods, and who consequently come to a tragic end. It is here, rather than in the first frame, that the male/female dichotomy plays out, in the deaths of the youths loved by Jupiter and Apollo in the first half, and Venus in the second. The third and final frame is formed by narratives in which the protagonists deny the divinity of an immortal, namely Venus, and are punished for their defiance. The Propoetides deny Venus, it may be assumed, through their deliberate chastity, while Hippomenes neglects to thank the goddess for her help in ensuring his union with Atalanta. Both the Propoetides and Hippomenes are punished by Venus, who compels all of the transgressors to engage in unlawful or shameful sexual acts.

Finally, I have chosen to pair the Pygmalion episode with that of Myrrha. Although Bauer groups her story with that of the Propoetides under the overarching theme of "unlawful female passion,"<sup>63</sup> I hope to demonstrate that viewing the Myrrha episode as a complement to Orpheus' narrative of Pygmalion contributes to a more effective interpretation of the latter episode. It is here that the motif of oscillation is most relevant to this discussion, as the Myrrha episode's significantly darker revision of the Pygmalion narrative has important ramifications for one's reading of the latter and, indeed, of elegiac discourse in general.

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<sup>62</sup> Although, it shall be demonstrated that Orpheus may not be an adequate complement.

<sup>63</sup> A description which, I will argue, is inapplicable to the Propoetides episode.

### 1.3.1 Intertextuality: Orpheus and Vergil

Because it is not simply the unnamed narrator of the *Metamorphoses* (for convenience's sake referred to henceforth as Ovid), but Orpheus who presents the audience with the story of Pygmalion,<sup>64</sup> it is important to first examine Ovid's attitude towards this legendary bard. Although both Ovid and Orpheus are presenting a single, 'identical' narrative, the presence of two narrators – one internal and one external – creates the potential for different focalizations; the consequent meaning commonly attributed to the song of Orpheus might be substantially different from that of Ovid's narrative. It is therefore necessary to determine whether there are any factors within Orpheus' own narrative that will warn against a conflation of the two poets and affect the audience's understanding of the Pygmalion episode.

One might expect Ovid to treat this consummate singer as a fictional substitute for himself; to present Orpheus' tale with sympathy instead of derision. Indeed, many critics<sup>65</sup> have read the Orpheus episode in this way: "received readings on the *Metamorphoses* [...] resist [the] plurality [of two narrators], and seek instead to emphasize the unity of the text, its themes, narratives and narrators."<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, an increasing number of scholars have noticed the discrepancies between the two narrators, and have thus suggested alternative interpretations – many of which reflect negatively on the unfortunate Orpheus. Anderson, for example, describes Orpheus as

a melodramatic, egoistic poet of overblown rhetoric and shallow self-indulgent sentimentality...a third-rate poet-orator...a shallow, self-satisfied, self-indulgent 'lover'...more than a flawed lover: he is also a flawed poet.<sup>67</sup>

In his essay, "The Problem of the Counter-Classical Sensibility and Its Critics," Walter Johnson attempts to explain why it is that Ovid might have chosen such an approach to figures like Orpheus, and why his aforementioned critics might be justified in their interpretation of this episode. Remarking upon the persistent dislike within the field of literary criticism of certain ancient playwrights and poets (i.e. Euripides and Ovid) in favour of others (i.e. Sophocles and Vergil), Johnson draws a distinction between what he terms the classical and the counter-classical. "Counter-classical poetry," he claims,

tends to underline possibilities for disharmony even as classical poetry tends to underline possibilities of harmony; where classical poetry attempts affirmations of man's capacities or his perfectability [sic] or his nearness to God, counter-classical poetry attempts to stress man's weakness and his limitations.<sup>68</sup>

It is not, however, the intention of counter-classical poetry to revel in imperfection and disintegration; rather, it serves as a warning against it. It achieves this, Johnson argues, "by altering the traditional forms and themes of classical poetry, whether slightly or radically, whether gently or

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<sup>64</sup> As well as most of the remaining framing narratives.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Segal (1972) or Solodow (1988).

<sup>66</sup> Liveley, in Hardie, Barchiesi, and Hinds (1999) p.200. Indeed, not only are Ovid and Orpheus frequently assimilated into a single artistic figure, but Pygmalion is often thrown in as well, for good measure.

<sup>67</sup> Anderson in Warden (1982) pp.25-50.

<sup>68</sup> Johnson (1970) p.126.

sardonically,<sup>69</sup> undermining the affirmation found in classical poetry that it might outline its limitations. Johnson claims, however, that the function of counter-classical poetry has long been misunderstood, resulting in a scholarly trend of condemnation of any texts that express such sentiments. Scholars such as Brooks Otis therefore state of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that "when he tried to treat great heroic themes in a serious or Vergilian way, he met an absolute check, and fell into the worst sort of bathos."<sup>70</sup>

Johnson's discussion focuses on the last books of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but I think it applicable to the Orpheus and Pygmalion episodes as well. The Orpheus episode in particular has been recognised as a response to Vergil's classical poetry, and his treatment of Orpheus in the fourth poem of his *Georgics*. Rather than present him as a transcendent lover and artist, I would argue that Ovid depicts Orpheus as but one figure in

a poem in which scepticism about the received ideas about society and culture, about the uses of power, and about the possibility of order and lucidity in human existence, which the classical tradition fosters, is united with a deep awareness of and deep compassion for man in his failure.<sup>71</sup>

I will argue that Ovid's rendition of the Orpheus episode not only highlights the limitations of Orpheus as an artist and a lover, but also the limitations of the strategies employed by him in order to secure and embody his masculinity and power.

The merit of Anderson's criticism is easily demonstrated through a comparison of Ovid's Orpheus and Vergil's own treatment of the bard. Vergil strives throughout his description of this episode to evoke sympathy for the plight of these famous lovers. Eurydice's flight is described in pathetic detail: the *moritura puella*, the *immanum hydram*,<sup>72</sup> and the lamentation of both Eurydice's friends and Orpheus himself all contribute to the tragedy of her death. The echoing *te* in Vergil's apostrophe to Eurydice carries with it the echoes of Orpheus' song of bereavement:

*ipse cava solans aegrum testudine amorem  
te, dulcis coniunx, te solo in litore secum,  
te veniente die, te decedente canabat.*<sup>73</sup>

[Orpheus] himself, soothing love's suffering with his hollow lyre, sang of you,  
sweet wife, of you, alone on the desolate shore,  
of you as the day neared, of you as it departed.

Ovid's Eurydice, however, *occidit in talum serpentis dente recepto*.<sup>74</sup> There is no chase, nor any real description of the monstrous snake which takes her life. Before she can even be named, Eurydice falls down dead. Orpheus' grief is over just as quickly: while Vergil's protagonist is said to have wept for seven months, roaming the barren and icy wastelands, the description applied to the grieving period of Ovid's Orpheus is *satis*. This description applies to the immediate loss of Orpheus' wife;

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p.127.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p.138, quoting Otis (1966) p.323.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p.147.

<sup>72</sup> Vergil, *Georgics* 4:458.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 4:464-6.

<sup>74</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.10.

once he has failed her a second time, “he sat in rags for a week”<sup>75</sup> before eventually turning to pederasty.<sup>76</sup>

It is true that in Book 10 of the *Metamorphoses* Ovid makes no condemnatory remarks with regard to homoerotic pairings. However, if one takes into account not only the opinions expressed in his other poems,<sup>77</sup> but his remarks on Iphis’ dilemma in the episode of that name, and which immediately precedes his account of Orpheus’ pederasty,<sup>78</sup> then one might agree with Makowski’s scepticism regarding Segal’s opinion of the Orpheus frame: that Ovid here “introduces [...] a realistic note and a humanizing correction of Virgil,”<sup>79</sup> as well as his later statement that “these affairs result from the depth of his devotion to Eurydice.”<sup>80</sup> Indeed, as Makowski notes, for Ovid to make any further disparaging remarks regarding Orpheus’ choice would be redundant: “the story of Iphis [...] stands as a frame and proleptic comment on the forthcoming tale of Orpheus.”<sup>81</sup>

While Ovid’s mention of Orpheus’ ultimate aversion to women and consequent preference for younger men constitutes a marked deviation from Vergil’s treatment of the bard, this portrayal of Orpheus was certainly not new.<sup>82</sup> In choosing to return to a pre-Vergilian depiction of Orpheus, Ovid presents his audience with an alternative interpretation of the bard’s character, reminding us that Orpheus had often been mocked by the ancient Greeks for his cowardice and effeminacy, rather than praised for what Vergil depicts as his heroic descent into, and return from, Hades.

### 1.3.2 Orpheus and the Heroic Ideal

In addition to this large-scale parody of Vergil’s fourth Georgic, John Heath, in “The Stupor of Orpheus”, suggests that one can find hints of contempt for Orpheus in even the most minor details; that “Ovid has left distinct signposts...to direct the attentive reader past Orpheus’ artistry towards his inherently unheroic nature.”<sup>83</sup>

Heath points to two obscure mythological allusions within the Orpheus episode, in which the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 10.75.

<sup>76</sup> A detail which Vergil chooses to omit.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, *Ars Amatoria* 2.683-4:

*Odi concubitus, qui non utrumque resolvunt;  
Hoc est, cur pueri tangar amore minus.*

<sup>78</sup> Iphis, in despair over her love for Iphigeneia, cries out:

*'quis me manet exitus,' inquit  
'cognita quam nulli, quam prodigiosa novaeque  
cura tenet Veneris? si di mihi parcere vellent,  
parcere debuerant; si non, et perdere vellent,  
naturale malum saltem et de more dedissent.  
nec vaccam vaccae, nec equas amor urit equarum:  
urit oves aries, sequitur sua femina cervum.  
sic et aves coeunt, interque animalia cuncta  
femina femineo conrepta cupidine nulla est. (Met. 9.726-34)*

<sup>79</sup> Segal (1972) pp.477-8.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p.487.

<sup>81</sup> Makowski (1996) p.32.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Plato’s *Symposium* (179d) and *Republic* (620a).

<sup>83</sup> Heath, (1996) p.354.

bard is presented in a distinctly unheroic manner through the use of an unflattering epic simile.<sup>84</sup> Having disobeyed Hades' injunction that he resist looking back towards Eurydice, and having subsequently lost her for a second time,

*non aliter stupuit gemina nece coniugis Orpheus  
quam tria qui timidus, medio portante catenas,  
colla canis vidit; quem non pavor ante reliquit,  
quam natura prior, saxo per corpus oborto,  
quique in se crimen traxit voluitque videri  
Olenos esse nocens, tuque, o confisa figurae  
infelix Lethaea tuae, iunctissima quondam  
pectora, nunc lapides, quos umida sustinet Ida.*<sup>85</sup>

Stunned by the double death of his wife, Orpheus was like the cowardly man who glimpsed the three-headed hound, bearing chains on its middle neck, and whose original state left him before his dread did, and stone sprang up to cover his body; or like Olenos who, wishing to appear guilty, took upon himself his wife's crime – yours, unlucky Lethaea, too confident of your figure. You and he, two hearts once joined in love, now two stones, sustained by moist Ida.

Feeney, in his introduction to Raeburn's translation of the *Metamorphosis*, discusses the ambiguity inherent within the work's overarching theme of transformation:

Metamorphosis can be a liberation in this poem, or a claustrophobic nightmare; it can be banal, or sublime, a realization of a person's possibilities or a 'savage reduction', sometimes an apparent appendage with no evident link or motive. The main connecting thread is an interest in identity: what is it about a person that makes them that person, and what is it about humans that make them human?<sup>86</sup>

While Orpheus does not in this episode undergo a literal metamorphosis, he is subjected to metaphorical petrification. In the light of Feeney's discussion of metamorphosis, I would argue that Orpheus' figurative transformation calls into question several issues relating to identity, heroism, and masculinity.

In the above extract's description of Orpheus' stupor, he is transformed from the famous bard capable of animating lifeless stone,<sup>87</sup> as well as, more importantly for his quest, silencing Cerberus, into something without agency, itself deprived of a voice. His failure reduces him from the active (masculine) hero to the passive (effeminate) victim. Furthermore, in the lines of this simile,

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<sup>84</sup> Compare to the simile used by Vergil to describe Orpheus' grief:

*qualis populea maerens Philomela sub umbra  
amissos queritur fetus, quo durus arator  
observans nido implumis detraxit; at illa  
flet noctem, ramoque sedens miserabile carmen  
integrat, et maestis late loca questibus implet.* (*Geor.* 4.511-5).

<sup>85</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.64-71.

<sup>86</sup> Raeburn (2004) p.xxix.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Book 11.1-2 and 44-5.

Ovid's failure to lead Eurydice out of Hades is implicitly compared to Hercules' success in his own catabasis, thus articulating Orpheus' emasculation within the heroic sphere. Unlike the unknown "terrified person" whose fear of Cerberus literally turns him into stone, Hercules succeeds in his mission to steal the hell-hound; in spite of all of Orpheus' artistic skill, it is "Hercules, not Orpheus...who overcomes death by retrieving the object of his quest from Hades."<sup>88</sup>

Although this allusion is obscure and, at first glance, insignificant, Ovid in fact goes out of his way to stress the Herculean context of Orpheus' own catabasis. He alters not only the accepted chronology of the various heroes' descents into Hades,<sup>89</sup> placing Hercules' series of quests in Book 9 so that it precedes Orpheus' narrative, but also adjusts the genealogy typically attributed to Cerberus. Although the hell-hound is usually said to be born of Echidna, Ovid asserts that the beast is descended from Medusa instead<sup>90</sup> – a claim which "is never before or after applied to Cerberus."<sup>91</sup> While Orpheus will not encounter the gorgon, this unusual epithet might remind Ovid's audience that Hercules *would* come face to face with her shade in his descent into Hades. As Rimell notes, "Medusa and Cerberus are analogous ogres: Medusa's snake-hair is akin to Cerberus' many heads, and both are ever-watchful threshold creatures of Hades which must be put to sleep by valiant epic heroes."<sup>92</sup> This rather artificial connection that Ovid establishes between Cerberus and Medusa, also serves to suggest a hero other than Hercules later on, namely, Perseus.<sup>93</sup>

Thus, before Orpheus can begin to prove himself a hero, his descent into the underworld marks him out as inferior to the heroes of epic verse, and to Hercules in particular. It is therefore unsurprising that Orpheus '*stupet*' in the moment of crisis, caught in a moment of feminine stasis rather than masculine action.

Significantly, Orpheus himself reminds both his internal and external audiences of his place in a series of heroic catabases<sup>94</sup> and unwittingly stresses his un-Herculean character in his address to his infernal audience. Upon entering Hades he informs his listeners,

*[...] non huc, ut opaca viderem  
Tartara, descendi, nec uti villosa colubris  
terna Medusaei vincirem guttura monstri.*<sup>95</sup>

I have not come down here that I might look upon  
murky Tartarus, nor that I might chain the three-throated monster  
born of Medusa, whose coat bristles with snakes.

Of course, the truth of this statement is proven all too soon, albeit in a fashion unanticipated by Orpheus.

In fact, *were* it his intention to capture this three-headed hound, Orpheus would have found himself

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<sup>88</sup> Heath (1996) p.356.

<sup>89</sup> Heath notes that, traditionally, Hercules' descent occurs after that of Orpheus (p.359).

<sup>90</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.21-2.

<sup>91</sup> Heath (1996) p.360.

<sup>92</sup> Rimell (2006) p.116. It is not only his three snake-like heads that associate Cerberus with Medusa, but also the fact that his very coat, like Medusa's head, is "bristling with adders" (10.21-2).

<sup>93</sup> See below.

<sup>94</sup> See Heath (1996) for a discussion of Orpheus', Hercules', and Odysseus' descents into the underworld.

<sup>95</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.20-2.

to be somewhat at a loose end as Cerberus in this episode is conspicuous only by his absence. Orpheus' descent into the underworld is seemingly without incident: a surprising twist for the reader, as this guard-dog of Hades typically represents an obstacle for the invading hero to overcome. While the Sybil assists Vergil's Aeneas by feeding it drugged cakes,<sup>96</sup> Orpheus is usually said to silence the beast through his musical abilities.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, Heath mentions a passage from the *Leontion* of Hermesianax, in which Orpheus, having reached Hades' domain, must "[endure] the dreadful glance of the hound."<sup>98</sup> But Ovid's Orpheus will not encounter Cerberus at all; in neither his descent nor his ascent will the hound make his usual appearance.

Rather unflatteringly, it is Eurydice who will be presented in the guise of Cerberus – in Orpheus' moment of *stupor*. While the unnamed individual of Ovid's simile is literally petrified at the sight of the monstrous hound, Orpheus is figuratively turned into stone through the sight of his wife departing once again – this time forever – and the realisation of his "own very human loss of control, [rather than] his artistic inadequacies."<sup>99</sup> I would here argue that this simile is more than simply humorous; instead, through the images of petrification, and Eurydice's transformation from distressed damsel to the monstrous guard-dog, Ovid is subtly commenting on Orpheus' already questionable masculinity. The Greeks ridiculed Orpheus for his musical talents, and called him effeminate because he was a cithara player;<sup>100</sup> Ovid emasculates Orpheus through his inability to control himself at the most crucial moment. Williams, in *Roman Homosexuality*, states that

control and dominion constituted the prime directive of masculinity. A man must exercise dominion over his own body and his own desires as well as the bodies and desires of those under his jurisdiction [...] A man might lose his grip on masculine control in various ways [...one of which is] yielding to his own passions, desires, and fears.<sup>101</sup>

Orpheus fails to match up to Hercules not because he is physically weaker or because his musical abilities fail him; rather, his emotions direct his behaviour, and his lack of control over himself excludes him from the heroic sphere. If the traditional hero is characterised by action and movement, the immobile Orpheus is made to stand in stark contrast to this masculine ideal. In casting Eurydice in the role of Cerberus, Ovid is here adding insult to injury in that Orpheus is rendered motionless not by a worthy foe but by the shade of the woman for love of whom he is emasculated.

Salzman-Mitchell also points out that while Heath notices the absurdity inherent within this conflation of the pitiful Eurydice with the monstrous Cerberus, he fails to expose the gender implications contained within this simile, and suggests that Hercules is not the only hero against whose success Orpheus falls woefully short. In assimilating Eurydice into "a hellish denizen who turns onlookers into stone,"<sup>102</sup> Ovid is comparing Orpheus to yet another more-successful hero, namely Perseus, who is most famous for his defeat of the gorgon Medusa. The difference between these two characters lies in that word so exhaustively discussed by Heath, *stupor*:

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<sup>96</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.420-21.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Euripides' *Alcestis* l.360-2.

<sup>98</sup> Heath (1996) p.361, quoting from Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 13.507b-c.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* p.363.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Plato, *Symp.* (179d).

<sup>101</sup> Williams (2010) p.155.

<sup>102</sup> Heath (1996) pp.363-4.

like Perseus, Orpheus *stupet*, but not just temporarily as the hero. His stupefaction has profound implications for his life and marks the loss of his beloved's image, the failure of his gaze, and the collapse of his masculinity."<sup>103</sup>

Thus far, I have discussed this moment of *stupor* in terms of its significance to Orpheus, as if Eurydice's only function were to provide an opportunity for Orpheus' emasculation. However, Ovid transcends the binary opposition of subject/object, subtly suggesting the possibility of two mutually powerful/vulnerable subjects through the ambiguity in which he depicts the gaze between the two lovers.

Indeed, Rimell goes so far as to describe as "a culminating mythologization of the 'look between lovers'."<sup>104</sup> For, while Eurydice may be analogous to Medusa, it is Orpheus' gaze which leads to her (second) death. In this moment, the boundaries of identity become fluid: Orpheus and Eurydice are compared and conflated with a multiplicity of identities and genders from the unknown onlooker of Hercules' victory, to Cerberus, Medusa, Olenus, and Lethaea. Orpheus, at this point in the poem, is both Medusa and Perseus, and despite being metaphorically turned to stone nevertheless possesses a powerful gaze of his own. Rimell remarks that "the initial instruction given to Orpheus at 10.51 (*ne flectat retro sua lumina [...]*) was itself a version of the taboo that masks Medusa."<sup>105</sup>

Indeed, Rimell continues, as the two lovers attempt to traverse this "dusky threshold of the visible world,"<sup>106</sup> identity becomes confused not only in terms of the content of the poem but in the grammatical structure of the language itself; that "the question of who is in control of viewing in this passage and who Ovid's readers are watching at any one time, is open to debate."<sup>107</sup> For example, in the lines

*hic ne deficeret metuens avidusque videndi  
flexit amans oculos, et protinus illa relapsa est,  
bracchiaque intendens prendique et prendere certans  
nil nisi cedentes infelix adripit auras*<sup>108</sup>

He, fearful lest he/she be separated from the other, and longing eagerly to see her,  
turned his loving eyes upon her; immediately she fell back,  
stretching her/his arms out to him/her, struggling to snatch his/her hands in her/his own.  
But she/he, unlucky, caught nothing but the yielding air.

*ne deficeret* could be applicable to both Orpheus and Eurydice:

the fear is (either/both) that *she* might grow weak and fall back, or lest *he* might be pulling away from her and might fail in his mission to return her safely to the upper world and to keep the conditions

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<sup>103</sup> Salman-Mitchell (2005) p.76.

<sup>104</sup> Rimell (2006) p.104.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p.116.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p.104.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p.110.

<sup>108</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.56-9.

laid down by the gods of the underworld.”<sup>109</sup>

Similarly, Rimell notes, while most translations assume that it is Orpheus holding out his arms in line 58, the language itself does not suggest a shift from Eurydice (the *illa* of line 57). Yet, as with *deficeret* (56), the action could be applicable to either/both Orpheus and Eurydice. The language therefore subtly destabilises both gender and identity even before establishing the lovers’ associations with Medusa through Eurydice’s death and Orpheus’ *stupor*.

While petrification is the most common form of metamorphosis within Ovid’s epic, which contains “over thirty transmutations into stone,”<sup>110</sup> Heath notes that the above unnamed “terrified person” with whom Orpheus is so unfavourably compared is the only one to be turned into stone through fear alone – and second-hand fear at that, since this anonymous unfortunate is nothing more than a witness to a completed event: that of the successful Hercules leading away the already-captive Cerberus. Additionally, just as this fear is displaced onto a witness of a hero, rather than the hero himself, Ovid’s further diverts the audience’s attention from the twice-bereaved Orpheus through a shift in focus to yet another couple within this twofold simile which in its very construction serves as a diversion because of its difficult and tangled syntax.

### 1.3.3 Orpheus as Lover

The allusion described above undermines Orpheus as a hero. The second allusion refers to the otherwise unknown Lethaea, turned into stone on account of her vanity, and functions to undermine Orpheus’ status as a lover. Confronted with the predicament of his wife’s petrification, her husband Olenus chooses to take her punishment upon himself rather than live life without her. In his song to Dis and Proserpina, Orpheus, too, announces his willingness to make this same choice, stating:

*quodsi fata negant veniam pro coniuge, certum est  
nolle redire mihi: leto gaudete duorum.*<sup>111</sup>

But if fate denies mercy for my wife, I am resolved  
never to return; you may rejoice in both our deaths.

However, upon his failure to lead his wife out of Hades, Orpheus does *not* choose to take his own life and return to the underworld to be with her: “the symbolic death found in a literary catabasis must be transformed into a literal death, and Orpheus is unprepared.”<sup>112</sup> Instead, failing to return to retrieve her a second time, Orpheus chooses to return to the world of the living without her; to return to his music and pursue a life of pederasty. Therefore, failing in his heroic quest, Orpheus also refuses to fulfil a lover’s prerogative, that of dying in order to remain with his beloved, in favour of following his chosen path as an artist. It is only when his art finally fails him that he is able to return, dead at the hands of the avenging maenads, to Eurydice in Hades.

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<sup>109</sup> Rimell (2006) p.110, who comments on the possible legal sense of *deficio*, to refer to “the failure to fulfil a condition.”

<sup>110</sup> Heath (1996) p.356.

<sup>111</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.38-9.

<sup>112</sup> Heath (1996) p.366.

The comparison between Orpheus and Olenos is therefore an ironic one: the otherwise-unknown Olenos is turned into stone through his decision to share his wife's punishment. Orpheus, rather than follow upon the heels of his departing wife, is petrified, unwilling to follow her at the expense of his own life, belying his sentimental promise to not return without her.

Ovid therefore suggests two means by which Orpheus might have been reunited with Eurydice. Failing to bring her back with him to the world of the living, Orpheus could have chosen to return with her to the realm of the dead. Having already proved unsuccessful in bringing Eurydice back to life, it is interesting to note that in failing to take this second option Orpheus proves himself inferior not only to unlikely figures such as Olenos and Alcestis (who chooses to die not in order to be with her lover, but to take his place!), but also to traditionally heroic characters such as Achilles, who chooses death in order to avenge Hector's murder of Patroclus despite the fact that his success will not bring his lover back to life.<sup>113</sup> Orpheus' art does not fail him, but I would argue that it is compromised by his failure as a hero and a lover: just as he finds himself inferior within these two realms, his art is literally reduced from the "weightier vein"<sup>114</sup> of Homeric and Hesiodic themes to shorter lyrics, many of which reveal the latent misogyny and wishful thinking that result from the bitterness of his previous failures.

#### 1.3.4 Post-structuralism and Resistance

I have argued, thus far, for an Orpheus characterised by weakness, passivity, and effeminacy. However, Michel Foucault's post-structural revision of power demonstrates a capacity for resistance and the contestation of power from a position of such weakness.

Throughout his career, Foucault was especially critical of Marxist and early feminist conceptions of power as one individual or group's will being imposed upon another or as a possession which competing parties strive to attain. Examining relations of power in works such as *The Birth of the Clinic*, *Discipline and Punish*, *Power/Knowledge*, and *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault claims that "power must be analysed as something which circulates, or as something in the form of a chain."<sup>115</sup> He rejects the dichotomy of powerful/powerless in favour of reconceptualising power as a network that permeates all levels of society, and in which power is no longer a simple one-way movement from the oppressor to the oppressed, but is instead enacted and contested in every moment of its instantiation.

Furthermore, Foucault suggests that power does not only constrain or censor particular forms of behaviour, but is also productive of new types thereof; he asks, in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*: "if power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think that we should manage to obey it?"<sup>116</sup> For example, in ancient Rome, the highly restrictive masculine code was intended to suppress and control those who deviated from it. However, it also resulted in the Roman fascination with, and fear of, deviance, thus producing endless treatises on the subject.

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<sup>113</sup> See Plato's *Symposium* 179d.

<sup>114</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.150.

<sup>115</sup> Foucault (1980a) p.98.

<sup>116</sup> Foucault (1980a) p.36. See also Butler's discussion of gender performativity, and the ways in which the constraints imposed by discourse are also productive of subversions of the discourse itself (Introduction to Part One).

Foucault not only conceptualised power as productive, but also set himself against theories in which the individual is a passive product of overarching ideologies and, through his conception of power as a force operating at both a macro and a micro-scale, makes room for resistance to the enactment of power and reconceptualises the individual as an active subject. Indeed, Foucault regards resistance as a necessary component of any power relation; “where there is power there is resistance.”<sup>117</sup> In every interaction in which power is enacted, the inevitable space for opposition consequently results in the continual need to renew and maintain power relations. Foucault therefore suggests that power is not as stable as previous conceptions of it might imply; that it is always vulnerable to resistance.

One important element that facilitates both the expression of power and resistance to it is knowledge. Foucault argues that power and knowledge are necessarily related; that “it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.”<sup>118</sup> Knowledge does not only facilitate the enactment of power; rather, the attempt to express power is implicit in the very act of producing knowledge. The production of knowledge, therefore, is not a disinterested or objective process, but primarily acts to construct and enforce power relations through the authoritative selection and circulation, or exclusion, of any information that might become accepted as fact or truth. It is this aspect of power which I intend, at present, to focus upon, and its articulation with knowledge in terms of the gaze.

Foucault addresses the conjunction of power and knowledge on both a macro and micro level. In terms of the latter, he discusses the effects of the observation and monitoring of the individual by the state, and its consequent effects of rendering the individual more passive and open to control. The individual, aware of the fact that s/he is being monitored – subjected to the gaze of the state – experiences a sense of helplessness and a lack of personal autonomy.

But what is significant about Foucault’s theory is that his discussion of the relation between power, knowledge, and observation can also be addressed on a smaller scale – an aspect of his theory that he terms the microphysics of power – as a relation of power between individuals. Foucault argues that “power [is] an intrinsic element of all human interactions [and that] at the lowest denominator of human relationships [...] a power differential would develop.”<sup>119</sup> And where one finds an imbalance of power, Foucault claims, there will inevitably be a production of knowledge; specifically, this newly-created knowledge will have as its object the less powerful party in the power differential. Therefore, to find oneself the object of another’s understanding is to be subjected to an unequal relation of power: to find oneself the object of the gaze, which, in addition to physical perception, also implies realising, or understanding. As Mary Ann Doane states, “ways of looking are inevitably linked to ways of speculating, of theorizing.”<sup>120</sup>

To be the possessor of the gaze, in any of its forms, is to find oneself in a position of power, and the production of knowledge, by and large, ensures that the object of this knowledge is kept in a position of comparative powerlessness. However, because Foucault rejects the notion of power as a one-way force, and because he asserts that resistance is a necessary component of any power relation, the production of knowledge need not only be an oppressive practice. The production of knowledge can also be exercised by the *less* powerful party: in producing knowledge about areas intentionally ignored by the authoritative party, and in producing knowledge that contradicts the

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. (1978) p.95.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. (1980) p.52.

<sup>119</sup> Paul Oliver (2010) p.43.

<sup>120</sup> Doane (1987) p.37.

status quo, knowledge can consequentially play an important role in introducing change.

One must note that the contestation of power and knowledge is not a purely abstract struggle; as Butler contends, one significant site upon which conflicting discourses inscribe themselves is that of the body. An analysis of the body therefore reifies these discourses of control and resistance, both of which have material effects upon the body. An interesting ambiguity is evident here: discursive conflicts are made solid through their inscription on the body; the body, however, is rendered less substantial in light of the fact that it is these discursive conflicts that construct the body. Because the body is socially and historically located, it is therefore always vulnerable to change. It is through such discursive activity, Foucault argues, that individual identities are constructed. Rather than existing as stable, unique identities, particular to each individual – the essence of their humanity – the negotiation of power relations do not only shape the body, but produce different types of identities as a result. It is important to recognise that this is a two-way process: that while the individual might be subjected to discourses that articulate their bodies and, consequently, their identities in a particular way, it is also possible for that individual to resist through the construction of counter-discourses.

One can see this process in terms of artist-lovers such as Orpheus who is set in opposition to the heroic individual. In terms of the traditional discourse of epic verse, the hero is regarded as superior to his less powerful counterpart. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, however, Orpheus does not attempt to reconstruct himself as a traditional hero, nor does he view himself as inferior to the hero. Instead, he attempts to construct a counter-discourse in which the artist-lover is superior to the traditional hero, capable of performing great feats without resorting to the violence to which the traditional hero is prone.

If the traditional hero succeeds through strength and destruction, then the artist-lover attempts to succeed through creativity. The traditional hero wins his lovers through violence;<sup>121</sup> Orpheus, the archetypal poet, will win his beloved through song. Although in this particular instance the challenge is to win Eurydice from Hades, this particular strategy of counter-identification can also be seen to be applicable to the elegiac poet, who must vie against his more wealthy or 'masculine' competitors with his poetic abilities.

I have discussed the significance of Ovid's repeated allusions to the heroic context of Orpheus' catabasis.<sup>122</sup> What is interesting is that, even having failed in his goal to achieve that in which only Hercules, the prototypical hero, had succeeded before – leading the dead back into the world of the living – Orpheus does not admit defeat in reconstructing himself as a hero. Instead, he provides his audience with a narrative in which, again, the artist wins love through his creativity and devotion. In accordance with Foucauldian theory, therefore, Ovid's artists do not accept that there is only one perspective determining their identity; instead, they explore the ways in which they can constructively revise the positions determined for them by overarching discursive activity.

#### 1.4 Orpheus/Pygmalion as Readers

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<sup>121</sup> See, for example, Achilles and Briseis, of whom the latter is won as part of the spoils of war. One might also look at a number of Zeus' extramarital affairs, in which the girl is obtained through violence.

<sup>122</sup> See Chapter One, Section 1.3.2.

The Orpheus episode, I have suggested, constitutes an interesting portrayal of heroism in its relation to gender. However, Orpheus is not only a character within the *Metamorphoses*: he is himself a reader and narrator of mythological tales. Most of the episodes within Book 10, therefore, cannot be accepted at face value; instead, the reader must take into account Orpheus' character, which will inform his own reading of the narrative that he provides. Due to constraints of space, I shall not discuss in any detail the episodes that precede and follow after the Pygmalion and Myrrha sections. However, I would like to conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of the "Propoetides", and the possibility that Ovid himself suggests – intentionally or otherwise – the importance of resistant reading through the ways in which Orpheus' song betrays his own 'misreading' of these mythological narratives. In Orpheus' song, the discrepancies between internal and external narrator become crucial, and the reader is encouraged to read *against* Orpheus' narrative, rather than simply assent to its authority.

If the first half of the second frame focuses primarily on homoerotic desire, suggesting Orpheus' newfound interest in his own sex, the first half of the third and final frame surrounding the Pygmalion episode confirms his misogyny, being concerned with "girls who have been inspired to a frenzy of lawless passion and paid the price for their lustful desires,"<sup>123</sup> namely the story concerning the prostitution of the Propoetides.

However, to those already suspicious of the extent to which Ovid agrees with his internal narrator, Orpheus, it is this episode that first intimates to the resisting reader that important discrepancies exist between Ovid and Orpheus, and that the Pygmalion story will not yield to interpretation as easily as it has been thought to in previous attempts to account for it.

For example, as Liveley points out, the Propoetides "are prejudged – and the reader's perspective thus prejudged – by the epithet *obscenae*."<sup>124</sup> In Orpheus' narrative, and in the eyes of Pygmalion, who will make his appearance in the next episode, the Propoetides are lewd before they are forced to undergo any sort of metamorphosis; their vices are 'natural',<sup>125</sup> common to all women. Consequently, like Pygmalion, many critics<sup>126</sup> have also adopted the misogynist perspective of Ovid's internal narrator, attributing the Propoetides' prostitution of themselves to their own agency, and their transformation into stone to the supernatural intervention of Venus. It is interesting that they do this in spite of the fact that the narrative emphasises that their prostitution is in fact the work of Venus, whose divinity these '*obscenae*' women deny "presumably by living in celibacy and abstaining from sex"<sup>127</sup> – much like Pygmalion himself, as well as Vergil's Orpheus.

And so both Orpheus and Pygmalion misread the character of these women: Orpheus, because their tale cannot be described as a tale in which girls are "forced to pay the price for their lustful desires," and Pygmalion because he imposes the stereotype of the hypersexual, mercenary seductress onto an entire sex, turning away from the love of actual women in favour of his own conception of what a 'real' woman should be.

Theorists such as Butler, however, warn against perceiving notions such as sex and gender as 'real'; indeed, Butler argues against the 'metaphysics of substance', which "refers to the pervasive

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 10.153-4.

<sup>124</sup> Liveley, in Hardie, Barchiesi, and Hinds (1999) p.201:  
*Sunt tamen obscenae Venerem Propoetides ausae  
 esse negare deam* (Ovid, *Met.* 10.238-9).

<sup>125</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.244-5.

<sup>126</sup> See, for example, Downing (1993) and Elsner (1991).

<sup>127</sup> Liveley, in Hardie, Barchiesi, and Hinds (1999) p.202.

belief that sex and the body are self-evidently 'natural' *material* entities [whereas] sex and gender are 'phantasmic' cultural constructions which contour and define the body."<sup>128</sup>

If one therefore resists the conflation of the perspectives of Ovid, Orpheus, and Pygmalion, one might argue that Ovid is here suggesting that Pygmalion's perspective is not to be trusted; that the story of the sculptor and his *eburna puella* is less a fairytale romance than a subversive message on the gendered nature of desire, and the complex gender relations inherent within the Latin love elegy.

This is particularly important, as the Pygmalion episode emphasises the conflation of nature with construction: the Propoetides possess the vices 'natural' to all women, and Pygmalion's statue is so lifelike that it transcends art and nature alike, becoming a living woman too perfect to have been produced by nature. It is therefore significant that Ovid highlights the discrepancies between the assumptions encouraged by the text, and the 'reality' behind those assumptions.

### 1.5 Conclusion

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a protean work in which it is not only the characters described who undergo changes: the text itself shifts through a plethora of moods and suggests a variety of different genres, including Latin love elegy. Although it is chiefly the Pygmalion episode that may be read through the lens of this genre, I would argue that the outermost frame – that of Orpheus and Eurydice – employs a number of elegiac themes as well, forming a complement to its central episode.

I mentioned earlier the way in which the idea of oscillation governs Book 10; how complementary frames revise and reflect upon one another.<sup>129</sup> In the next chapter, I shall demonstrate the significance of this with regard to the Pygmalion and Myrrha narratives, especially in terms of the negotiation of power between the artist and his creation. In this manner, the episodes within Book 10 parallel and work against one another, constituting a number of dialectical variations upon the same central themes of gender, desire, power, and creation.

Within the Orpheus frame, Ovid has highlighted the problem that normative constructions of masculinity pose to one who exists on its margins as well as the strategies by which one might attempt to subvert such constructions, forming a counter-discourse through which one might negotiate power for oneself and, in Orpheus' case, to establish one's own masculinity. Orpheus, an artist, must set himself against the figure of the warlike Hercules; he must subvert the traditional heroic ideal in order to represent himself as equally – if not more – heroic than his rivals. The strategy employed by Orpheus will be developed by the Latin love elegists, articulated through the trope of *militia amoris*.<sup>130</sup>

However, a different, conflicting strategy will be introduced in the central episode – that of *servitium amoris*. Like the Latin love elegists, both Orpheus and – it will be seen – Pygmalion do not simply reproduce and perpetuate established cultural norms; instead, they resist easy categorisation in their attempts to criticise and subvert those discourses which would undermine their authority. Nevertheless, these attempts ultimately prove faulty: although Orpheus and Pygmalion are narrators

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<sup>128</sup> Salih (2002) p.49.

<sup>129</sup> See Section 1.2.

<sup>130</sup> See Chapter Four.

who in some senses are able to demonstrate the contingencies of certain discourses, they do so imperfectly. It is through these two episodes that Ovid encourages his audience to reread, to reflect, and to resist the authority of the text.

Indeed, within this episode, the true parodic act is that of the speaker himself. Just as Orpheus' performance of his own gender challenges the tradition of the epic hero, Ovid's depiction of the Orpheus myth highlights the discrepancies between his poetry and that of his epic predecessor, Vergil, engaging with his verse in a manner reminiscent of the earlier Latin love elegists.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Two

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 “Myrrha” and “Pygmalion”
- 2.3 “Pygmalion” and Elegy
- 2.4.1 Gaze Theory: Scopophilia
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- 2.6 Conclusion

### 2.1 Introduction

In Chapter One, I proposed a structure for Book 10 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*; one that constituted Orpheus’ narrative as the outermost frame of the book, and situated the stories of Pygmalion and Myrrha at the centre. This chapter will explore the significance of my reorganisation of Book 10 for the central grouping of Myrrha’s story with that of Pygmalion. Orpheus’ narrative complicates a straightforward reading of the Pygmalion episode; similarly, Myrrha’s narrative functions as an inverted repetition of its more romantic counterpart, inviting a resistant revision of the preceding narrative. However, as suggested in the Section 1.1 of the previous chapter, the implications that arise from such a reading are not only applicable to Book 10 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, but reflect the depiction of the artist-lover and his creation in Latin love elegy as well, and the construction of gender and power implicit within such a relationship.

The elegiac nature of the Pygmalion episode is a popular topic for scholarly debate, as is the means by which it exposes the more problematic elements of the genre. Thus, a number of different readings of this same narrative have arisen in attempts to explore its depiction of gender and relations of power.<sup>132</sup> While most discussions focus primarily on the importance of the male gaze, it is Liveley who suggests the possibility for a *female* gaze as well, and therefore a greater potential for a resistant reading within both the Pygmalion episode and Latin love elegy as a whole. This chapter will determine the extent to which such a gaze might be possible: whether the artist-lover and his creation might function as both subject and object.

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<sup>132</sup> See Sharrock (1991) and Liveley in Hardie, Barchiesi, and Hinds (1999).

Nevertheless, although psychoanalytic theory and the idea of the gaze provide a useful method by which one might analyse relations of power, I believe that through a post-structuralist approach to gender and power a more complete understanding may be achieved. I shall therefore conclude by expanding upon the first chapter's discussion of identity and power, applying it to the Pygmalion episode, and laying a foundation for Part Two's exploration of gender and power in Latin love elegy.

## 2.2 Framing Complications: "Myrrha" and "Pygmalion"

The Pygmalion narrative is preceded by the story of the Propoetides, who are punished for their defiance towards the goddess Venus. Denying her divinity, they are forced into prostitution and ultimately turned into stone as a result of their 'shamelessness'. Pygmalion on the other hand receives Venus' blessing, and his statue is transformed into a living woman on account of his love and high estimation of female modesty. This happy tale of the creation becoming enamoured of her creator has a more sinister twist, however, in the subsequent story of Myrrha, a descendant of Pygmalion, whose incestuous love for her father results in her own, less happy metamorphosis.

While Pygmalion, with Venus' blessing, is ultimately able to naturally consummate his love for his own work of art,<sup>133</sup> Myrrha's love for Cinyras is realised in the aberrant union of father and daughter. The first narrative has been taken as a happy tale of successful love; in Myrrha's case, Ovid stresses the unnaturalness of this coupling, warning fathers and daughters to stay away from this narrative or to forget it. If they must remember, he insists, they should take note of the punishment that followed Myrrha's crime.

However, despite the seeming contrast between these two couples, it is, significantly, in Myrrha's very shame of her love for Cinyras that she is equated with Pygmalion's creation: in response to her nurse's frantic questions,

*muta silet virgo terramque inmota tuetur*

The maiden said nothing, staring motionless at the ground.<sup>134</sup>

Myrrha here becomes immobile – "still as a statue" in Raeburn's translation – an inversion of her once-ivory grandmother whom "you might believe to be alive and about to move, were it not that

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<sup>133</sup> Unlike his predecessors in previous versions of the tale, who consummate their love for a statue in less than comfortable circumstances (see footnote 142).

<sup>134</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.389.

modesty held her back.”<sup>135</sup> It is interesting that it is the loss of their natural modesty that results in the petrification of the Propoetides, while shame and modesty inhibit motion in the stories of Myrrha and Pygmalion’s statue.

Like Pygmalion, Myrrha’s love is consummated during a festival sacred to a goddess, and the relationship between Myrrha and her grandmother is further suggested through the verbal echoes present in Pygmalion’s request and the Nurse’s recommendation. Just as Pygmalion asks for a woman “*similis mea...eburnae*”<sup>136</sup> Cinyras is offered a girl “*par...Myrrhae*.”<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, instead of their likenesses, both Pygmalion and Cinyras are granted the originals themselves.

As in the Orpheus episode, identity and gender are increasingly destabilised as Myrrha is conflated with Pygmalion through the narrator’s use of verbal echoes. Like Pygmalion, Myrrha, too, is unable to voice the precise object of her desires, and so tells her father that she wants a husband “*similem tibi*.”<sup>138</sup> The stories differ in that, while Venus correctly divines Pygmalion’s true wish, Myrrha’s father remains oblivious. While the blurring of identities in the Orpheus episode provides for a complex analysis of power relations, the conflation of creator with creation, as well as child with creation, in these two central episodes serves to create uneasy undertones of incest and narcissism.

Finally, while Pygmalion’s statue comes to life through the divine agency of Venus, Myrrha is pitied by the gods, and rendered immobile through her metamorphosis into a tree. Pygmalion’s chastity and devotion are rewarded while Myrrha’s aberrant carnality is punished, both by the gods and by her father, who tries to kill her.

Such are the similarities between the two women suggested by the text. Pygmalion is attracted to his creation not only because of her constructed beauty, but because he projects his own values onto her before she can become a subject in her own right. Like Narcissus looking into the pool, Pygmalion creates a statue that functions as a reflection of her creator’s values; like Myrrha, the statue thus occupies an uneasy position between creator and creation. As the embodiment of his desires and ideals, Pygmalion’s statue hints at her creator’s narcissism, and their coupling carries undertones of incest.

The Myrrha episode thus functions as a commentary on “Pygmalion” through the fundamental similarities that underlie its superficial differences. The latter episode is rendered more disturbing when one considers it retrospectively, and the conflation of woman with artwork demonstrated to be more problematic than an initial reading of “Pygmalion” would suggest. In her

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid. 10.251.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 10.276.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 10.441.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 10.364.

description of Ovidian poetics in general, Rimell notes “a narcissistic impulse to collapse other into same/self [being] rivalled by a more complex dialectic or exchange which seems itself to fire and propel desire.”<sup>139</sup> The Myrrha episode demonstrates the failure in maintaining the boundaries between self and other; whether “Pygmalion” ultimately meets with more success remains to be determined.

### 2.3 “Pygmalion” and Elegy

It is the Pygmalion episode that facilitates the transition between the two halves of Bauer’s final frame, not only forming a conspicuous contrast with these two stories of unlawful love, but standing out from the rest of Book 10 as a whole.<sup>140</sup> While the other eight stories end in loss, punishment, or both, the Pygmalion episode is one of successful love sanctioned by the goddess Venus, who makes her appearance in the middle of the narrative and whose power facilitates the birth of a child, Paphos.

As Bauer notes, one significant difference between the Pygmalion episode and the rest of Book 10 is that, “whereas each of the other myths adheres to a firm tradition, ‘it is quite possible, and in fact likely, that in all relevant respects the invention was [Ovid’s].”<sup>141</sup> While there are several versions of the Pygmalion story that precede Ovid’s retelling, one of the earliest ones describes the love of the Cyprian king Pygmalion for a statue of Venus – a love which resulted in his engaging in sexual intercourse with the statue.<sup>142</sup> It is interesting that, in Book 10 of the *Metamorphoses*, a series of stories of which a large number are concerned with so-called perverted desires, Ovid should choose to transform this myth of questionable paraphilia into a story of divinely sanctioned, romantic love.

The most significant alteration that Ovid makes to the Pygmalion story is that it is not a statue with whom Pygmalion is ultimately united but an actual woman, given life through the strength of his love. However, it is not only love, as manifested in the figure of Venus, which secures the singularly happy ending of the Pygmalion episode. It is also the skill of Pygmalion, the consummate artist, which results in his achievement of what has most often been interpreted as a

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<sup>139</sup> Rimell (2006) p.1.

<sup>140</sup> See Chapter One, Section 1.2.

<sup>141</sup> Bauer (1962) p.11, quoting Fränkel (1945) p.95.

<sup>142</sup> Griffin (1977) p.65. The story is first mentioned by Philostephanus of Cyrene, as recorded by Clemens Alexandrinus in his *Protrepticus*:

Οὕτως ὁ Κύπριος ὁ Πυγμαλίων ἐκεῖνος ἐλεφαντίνου ἠράσθη ἀγάλματος· τὸ ἄγαλμα Ἀφροδίτης ἦν καὶ γυμνὴ ἦν· νικᾶται ὁ Κύπριος τῷ σχήματι καὶ συνέρχεται τῷ ἀγάλματι, καὶ τοῦτο Φιλοστέφανος ἱστορεῖ. (4.57.3.1-5)

perfect love. That Pygmalion is depicted as a sculptor – in fact, the creator of the statue – rather than merely the king who admires it, is another of Ovid’s unique modifications of the story. But if Pygmalion is to be viewed as an artist as well as a lover, then the statue is consequently to be considered in terms of her function as an artwork in addition to a woman whose purpose is to serve as an object of desire for the artist-lover. This conflation of the lover and artist, as well as woman and artwork suggests the conscious intrusion of elegiac discourse within this epic poem.

It is Sharrock who most explicitly outlines this intrusion, stating that Ovid’s Pygmalion story tells of a work of art that comes to life through her creator’s love and, in doing so, “the *Metamorphoses* myth of the art-object which becomes a love-object mirrors the elegiac myth of love-object as art-object.”<sup>143</sup> In both stories, Sharrock notes, female bodies are conflated with artistic creations, and lovers with the artists themselves. In the process, the lover is elevated to the status of a hero while his mistress is dehumanised.

Such a critical approach to elegy is not unusual. The growing popularity of elegiac discourse in feminist theory has led to a revision of its representation of gender and power as well as a criticism of previous approaches to the genre. Greene, for example, in *The Erotics of Domination*, mentions that earlier critical approaches to Latin love elegy tended to be limited by the critic’s identification with the male narrator; an approach not dissimilar from that previously utilised with regard to Ovid’s Orpheus and Pygmalion episodes. Consequently, the genre’s tendency to subtly perpetuate the established norms of the period with regard to the depiction of women and female sexuality largely went unchallenged. It is only in the last three decades that an awareness of the elegiac poet’s personal stance, and his portrayal of his mistress, has come to the attention of classical scholars. Indeed, even when it first entered the academic arena, Judith Hallett, writing about Propertius, insisted that “elegy offered a realistic representation of a woman loved for her transgression of traditional Roman prescriptions for femininity [...and that] such poetry carried the appeal of a feminist message.”<sup>144</sup> It is for this reason, therefore, that critics such as Greene can state that

traditional criticism of Latin love poetry has tended to privilege and romanticise the male perspective of the poetic narrator and that the gender specificity of desire in Roman amatory texts has often been ignored.<sup>145</sup>

It is true that a number of critics have argued that it is the function of Latin elegiac poetry to

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<sup>143</sup> Sharrock (1991) p.36.

<sup>144</sup> Wyke (2002) p.2, citing Hallett (2002).

<sup>145</sup> Greene (1998) p.xii.

demonstrate the poet's nonconformity to the traditional values of the Augustan period. It is in love poetry, they suggest, that the poet can escape from established cultural norms, and apply himself to matters of the heart, rather than the more conventionally masculine preoccupations of commerce, politics, and war. However, the poet's desire to explore different constructions of masculinity does not preclude the continued objectification of women, nor the fact that these new conceptions of masculinity might continue to serve the patriarchal agenda of ancient Rome.

Of course, contemporary critics of Latin love poetry were influenced by Ovid's own predecessors, who "portrayed the erotic and imaginative life as offering, at least potentially, a refuge from the degradation in the exterior world."<sup>146</sup> In his rejection of established norms and devotion to his mistress, the Roman love elegist ostensibly elevates the status of his beloved in his poetry, attributing to her a power not commonly associated with women in Augustan Rome, primarily through the trope of *servitium amoris*. It is the contention of critics such as Greene and Sharrock, however, that this representation of the elegiac mistress is utilised by the poet not in order to challenge the status quo, but to exert rhetorical control over his beloved in spite of the poet-lover persona's proclaimed subservience to her, or to "explore alternative models of masculinity, while at the same time elaborating ingenious ways to relegate women to subordinate roles."<sup>147</sup> One of these ways, Greene claims, is in the depiction of the elegiac *puella* as *materia*: fodder for the elegist's poetry, which will secure his artistic fame.

It is not only the identification of the beloved with a work of art that suggests the elegiac nature of the Pygmalion episode. In her discussion of the framing narrative, Sharrock states that "the master-poet's song contains a couple of hints which direct us to read elegiacally."<sup>148</sup> The first is the emphasis given to the transition from heavy-handed epic poetry to a desire to sing *leviore lyra*.<sup>149</sup> This lighter style endorsed by Orpheus is endemic not only to the *Eclogues* of Vergil, in his temporary break from the epic genre,<sup>150</sup> but to the amatory poetry of the Augustan elegists.<sup>151</sup> Such a style serves the elegiac agenda, namely, the subversion of "Roman conventions of masculinity[,] by

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid. p.xvi.

<sup>147</sup> Greene in Gold (2012) p.358.

<sup>148</sup> Sharrock (1991) p.37.

<sup>149</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.152.

<sup>150</sup> See Horace, *Carmina*, 1.6.5-12:

*nos, Agrippa, neque haec dicere nec gravem  
Pelidae stomachum cedere nescii  
nec cursus duplicis per mare Ulixei  
nec saevam Pelopis domum  
conamur, tenues grandia, dum pudor  
inbellisque lyrae Musa potens vetat  
laudes egregii Caesaris et tuas  
culpa deterere ingeni.*

<sup>151</sup> See Propertius 3.1.

assigning to the male narrator traits typically associated with women: servitude (*servitium*), softness (*mollitia*), and triviality (*levitas*).<sup>152</sup> I find it interesting that Ovid should choose as a singer of this elegiac episode one who has not only failed in the realm of traditional masculinity, but one who has refused to fulfil the prerogatives of a lover. Although love is frequently unrequited in Latin amatory poetry, Orpheus' love, like Pygmalion's at the beginning of this episode, and, ultimately, like the elegiac lover's, has been extinguished. It is a disillusioned and embittered lover, therefore, who presents his audience with this elegiac episode.

Thus, in addition to this hint from the protagonist of the framing narrative, the story itself forms an inversion of the typical elegiac trajectory, namely, the elegiac lover's transition from obsession with his beloved to his rejection of her. Just as Lesbia, Cynthia, Delia, Nemesis, and Corinna are all ultimately spurned by their poet lovers,

*Quas quia Pygmalion aevum per crimen agentis  
viderat, offensus vitiis, quae plurima menti  
femineae natura dedit, sine coniuge caelebs  
vivebat thalamicque diu consorte carebat.*<sup>153</sup>

Pygmalion saw [these women] living their lives of crime,  
and, offended by their vices, which nature have given  
in abundance to their female dispositions, wifeless he lived celibate,  
and for a long time lacked a wife for his bed.

*Vitium* and *crimen*, as Sharrock points out, are typically used in elegiac poetry as a description of infidelity towards the poet-lover.<sup>154</sup> It is because of this infidelity that the elegiac lover rejects his *puella*, becoming disillusioned with both love and poetry. Similarly, Pygmalion, disgusted by the promiscuous behaviour of the Propoetides, rejects all romantic love, and chooses instead a life of celibacy. However, Pygmalion's story will run in the opposite course to that of the elegiac lover's, and, through his art, he will achieve that which the unsuccessful poet<sup>155</sup> can only wish for.

It is not only Ovid's use of *vitium* and *crimen* that highlight the elegiac nature of the episode. The statue itself is referred to as *formosa*<sup>156</sup>, a word which simultaneously points to the statue's feminine beauty, and her status as a sculpted work of art. As observed by Knox, *formosa* is also a word more common to elegy than to epic. If one looks at Vergil's poetry, for example, the word

<sup>152</sup> Greene in Gold (2012) p.357.

<sup>153</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.243-6.

<sup>154</sup> Citing Pichon's *Index Verborum Amatoriorum*, s.v. 'crimen' and 'vitium'.

<sup>155</sup> Represented by the unfortunate Orpheus.

<sup>156</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.266.

*formosa* is used sixteen times within the *Eclogues*, and makes one appearance in the *Georgics*; in the *Aeneid*, however, it is used not at all; *pulcher*, is used instead.<sup>157</sup>

*Puella*, too, is a word with elegiac connotations. Although *virgo* is typically used in epic poetry, Knox states that “Ovid uses *puella* 13 times in the *Metamorphoses* (*virgo* 26 times) in contexts which suggest that he is deliberately recalling the association with elegy.”<sup>158</sup>

It is evident that Ovid’s choice of diction hints at the elegiac nature of the Pygmalion story. It is the content of this episode, however, that truly stresses its relation to this genre. In their rejection of traditional Roman conceptions of masculinity, the elegiac poet adopts a passive and subservient stance: that of *servitium amoris*, allowing himself to be governed by the whims of his *dura puella* through his devotion to her. In the process of falling in love with his own creation, Pygmalion is relegated to a similar role as a result of his own infatuation with the statue. Having completed his work of art, he becomes absorbed by the role of the elegiac lover. Like a rejected suitor,

*et modo blanditias adhibet, modo grata puellis  
munera fert illi conchas teretesque lapillos  
et parvas volucres et flores mille colorum  
liliaque pictasque pilas et ab arbore lapsas  
Heliadum lacrimas; ornat quoque vestibus artus,  
dat digitis gemmas, dat longa monilia collo,  
aure leves baccae, redimicula pectore pendent.*<sup>159</sup>

He whispers flatteries, brings her such gifts  
as are pleasing to girls, such as shells and smooth pebbles,  
little birds and flowers of a thousand hues,  
lilies and painted balls and, from the trees,  
the falling tears of the Heliads; he adorns her body with clothing, too,  
gives rings to her fingers, and drapes a long necklace around her throat,  
and hangs smooth pearls from her ears, and ornaments on her breast.

Sharrock highlights the significance of these gifts within erotic discourse in general.<sup>160</sup> *Conchae*, symbols for the female *pudenda*, are also suggestive of the birth of Venus, who emerges from a shell. In fact, as Sharrock points out, *concha* can also be translated as ‘pearl’. Like shells, pearls are also associated with the goddess of love: described by *The Watkins Dictionary of Symbols*, the pearl

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<sup>157</sup> Knox (1986) p.53.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. p.54.

<sup>159</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.259-65.

<sup>160</sup> Sharrock (1991) p.44.

was worn by Venus herself as she came out of the foam, and serves as the

quintessential symbol of light and femininity – its pale iridescence associated with the luminous moon, its watery origins with fertility, its secret life in the shell with miraculous birth or rebirth.”<sup>161</sup>

Coloured balls, meanwhile, “belong to the erotic discourse of epigrams and paintings of Venus giving a ball to Cupid, and of love lyric.”<sup>162</sup> Gifts of little birds bring to mind Catullus’ *passer* poems, while flowers make their appearances in erotic discourse in general, and in elegiac poems in particular.<sup>163</sup> All of these gifts are typical of the impoverished poet, who must compete with his more wealthy rivals by attempting to win his *puella* through his artistic skill.

However, his servitude will lead Pygmalion to offer his statue more expensive gifts, just as the exasperated elegiac poet must give in to the demands of his *puella* if he hopes to win her.<sup>164</sup> In “Pygmalion’s Doll”, Barolsky and D’Ambra suggest that in his description of the sculptor dressing his statue in expensive clothing Ovid is alluding to ivory figurines popular amongst little girls in Rome during the Augustan period. “The story of Pygmalion as Ovid tells it,” they suggest, “says something profound about the childlike sculptor playing with a figurine so lifelike that it seems a living being. For he captures the innocence of a child deep in a world of make-believe, lost in an illusion.”<sup>165</sup> While it is interesting that many of the figurines found in ancient Roman tombs resemble Pygmalion’s statue in all but size, having been found with jewels, amber, and holes in their ears from which to hang earrings, I would argue that Ovid is suggesting anything but innocence in Pygmalion’s semi-delusional obsession with his ivory *puella*.

As Pygmalion caresses the slowly-transforming body of his beloved, Ovid enjoins his audience to

imagine beeswax from Mount Hymettus, softening under  
the rays of the sun; imagine it moulded by human thumbs  
into hundreds of different shapes, each touch contributing value.<sup>166</sup>

Such a description will later come to be laced with the sinister ring of patriarchal control in the words of Shakespeare’s Theseus, who will inform Hermia that to her,

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<sup>161</sup> Tressider (2008) s.v. ‘pearl’.

<sup>162</sup> Sharrock (1991) p.44.

<sup>163</sup> For flowers, see Ovid’s *Amores*. 2.10.261-2, or Propertius 1.3.21.

<sup>164</sup> See, for example, *Am.* 8.93-4.

<sup>165</sup> Barolsky and D’Ambra (2009) p.20.

<sup>166</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.285-6, translated by David Raeburn:  
*cera remollescit tractataque pollice multas  
flectitur in facies ipsoque fit utilis usu.*

...[her] father should be as a god,  
One that composed her beauties; yea, and one  
To whom [she is] but as a form in wax  
By him imprinted, and within his power  
To leave the figure, or disfigure it.<sup>167</sup>

A further, troubling image might be brought to mind: that of Daedalus fashioning two pairs of wings by which he and his son, Icarus, might escape the wrath of King Minos. Like his father, Icarus

*captabat plumas, flavam modo pollice ceram  
mollibat lusuque suo mirabile patris  
impediebat opus.*<sup>168</sup>

would pluck at the feathers,  
and soften the yellow wax with his thumb,  
impeding in his play his father's wonderful work.

Segal observes here that Ovid "reveals the ambiguity that Daedalus' 'imitation' of nature becomes a dangerous violation of nature."<sup>169</sup> However, while this transgression results in the death of his son, Pygmalion and his statue are protected within the fictitious realm of Orpheus' song.

Nevertheless, even within Orpheus' narrative of wishful thinking, there are ominous undertones in Pygmalion's handling of his statue. Even before her metamorphosis, the word used to describe his incessant exploration of her form is *temptare*.<sup>170</sup> While it most commonly translates as 'to attempt/try out', the word also carries the meanings 'to touch', 'to excite', and 'to attack/assail', thus conferring a sense of the erotic and the violent to his treatment of her ivory body.

Of course, Pygmalion is not the first individual in ancient accounts to have fallen in love with a statue. In his essay, "The Failure of Orpheus", John Heath mentions a few other examples in his discussion of allusions to Orpheus in Euripides' *Alcestis*. Immediately prior to Admetus' ludicrous claim that, had he Orpheus' skill, he would make the descent into Hades to bring his wife back, he states

σοφῆι δὲ χειρὶ τεκτόνων δέμας τὸ σὸν

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<sup>167</sup> Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I.I47-51.

<sup>168</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 8.198-200.

<sup>169</sup> Segal (1998) p.16.

<sup>170</sup> I.254.

εἰκασθὲν ἐν λέκτροισιν ἐκταθήσεται,  
ὦϊ προσπεσοῦμαι καὶ περιπτύσσων χέρως  
ὄνομα καλῶν σὸν τὴν φίλην ἐν ἀγκάλαις  
δόξω γυναῖκα καίπερ οὐκ ἔχων ἔχειν·  
ψυχρὰν μὲν, οἶμαι, τέρψιν, ἀλλ' ὅμως βάρος  
ψυχῆς ἀπαντλοίην ἄν.<sup>171</sup>

Your form, fashioned by an artist's  
skilled hand, I'll lay out in our bed;  
I'll fall upon it, enfold it in my arms,  
and calling your name, I'll believe I hold  
my wife in my embrace, though it is a lie;  
A cold pleasure, I think, yet all the same  
I may lessen the weight on my soul.

As Heath suggests, “whatever the squeamish among us may want this to mean, it seems clear that Admetus here envisions sexual relations with a statue made in the image of his dead wife.”<sup>172</sup> Excluding the tastelessness of telling one’s wife who has chosen to die in one’s place of the statue that will replace her, Heath also remarks that this erotic disposition to statues – “agalmatophilia – is always discussed in the sources as inappropriate and strange, even if pathetically touching in some cases.”<sup>173</sup>

Where elegy intrudes upon the Pygmalion episode, it seems to introduce objectification and violence. However, while Sharrock focuses on the similarities between Latin elegy and the Pygmalion narrative in order to demonstrate the inherent misogyny within the story, Liveley, through the strategy of a resistant reading, uses the similarities highlighted by Sharrock to demonstrate the potential for a subversive reading of this episode.

It is frequently, albeit mistakenly, understood that the Propoetides are turned into stone as a punishment for their lascivious behaviour while Pygmalion’s statue, in an inversion of this tale, is made flesh on account of her creator’s chaste devotion, becoming herself the feminine ideal – a silent, modest woman. Liveley, however, notices a subtle distinction between the two stories that creates a space for alternative interpretations of this episode. As they lose their sense of shame, the Propoetides are turned into stone. Pygmalion’s statue, however, although sometimes mistakenly

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<sup>171</sup> Euripides, *Alcestis*, l.348-54.

<sup>172</sup> Heath (1996) p.171.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* p.172.

referred to as a marble creation,<sup>174</sup> is carved out of ivory.

While Sharrock claims that the statue, “made of snowy ivory [...] is erotic even before it becomes female,”<sup>175</sup> it is also true that ivory, “in the classical tradition [...] is often associated with deception, illusion and ambiguity, thus suggesting that the reversals and inversions apparently reflected in these two stories may also be deceptive.”<sup>176</sup> Liveley mentions Elsner’s observation that the roots of ivory’s association with deception may lie in Homer’s *Odyssey*, in which the similarity between *elephas* (‘ivory’) and *elephairomai* (‘to deceive’) is played upon. This association can also be seen in Vergil’s *Aeneid*, for example, in which the narrator tells the audience:

*Sunt geminae Somni portae, quarum altera fertur  
cornea, qua ueris facilis datur exitus umbris,  
altera candenti perfecta nitens elephanto,  
sed falsa ad caelum mittunt insomnia Manes.*

There are two gates of Sleep: of which one is made of horn,  
it is said, and allows the easy exit of true visions:  
the other is made of brightly-shining ivory;  
but through it the Shades false dreams up to earth.<sup>177</sup>

This association of deception with the ivory maiden adds a more cynical twist to Pygmalion’s actions as he feels his creation soften and grow warm beneath his touch. Having already submitted to her, in the knowledge that she was no more than an idol – an inanimate mistress – Pygmalion, in the light of Liveley’s suggestion, seems positively delusional. It is only towards the end of this episode, when the consciousness of the statue intrudes upon the narrative,<sup>178</sup> that the truth of his perception is confirmed by the narrator, and Orpheus/Ovid’s Pygmalion receives a happier ending than his predecessors.

Liveley tries to rescue the statue from the objectified status given to her by received readings, as well as the pessimistic interpretations of critics such as Sharrock and Hershkowitz. She sees significance in the shift in focus from Pygmalion looking at his now-living statue to the perspective of the statue herself. In addition to eliminating the possibility of a ridiculous delusion on Pygmalion’s behalf, Liveley claims that

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<sup>174</sup> See, for example, Solodow (1988) p.2.

<sup>175</sup> Sharrock (1991) p.40.

<sup>176</sup> Liveley, in Hardie, Barchiesi, and Hinds (1999) p.204.

<sup>177</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.893-6.

<sup>178</sup> *sensit et erubuit timidumque ad lumina lumen  
attollens pariter cum caelo vidit amantem* (Ovid, *Met.* 10.293-4).

To have seen her eyes open from Pygmalion's perspective would have shown the woman to be 'life-like', but to see through her eyes – to see as she does – shows the woman to possess the potential for perceiving and interpreting the world as a living, viewing subject.<sup>179</sup>

It is this possibility for a female gaze that I believe can lead to a more subtle interpretation of both the Pygmalion episode and Latin love elegy.

#### 2.4.1 Gaze Theory: Scopophilia

Although the feminist appropriations of the gaze only emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, when feminist theory became one of the most dominant discourses within film studies during the 1970s, their ideas are not irrelevant to a discussion of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which "the stories strive towards a kind of pictorial realization, which is usually found in metamorphosis."<sup>180</sup> In an epic in which the unifying theme is the incessant changing of physical forms, visual imagery, especially in the form of ekphrasis, constitutes a significant part of the work. Indeed, as Salzman-Mitchell states, the poem itself undergoes a metamorphosis of its own, as "Ovid's stories stimulate us to create visual representations and incite us to transform text into image."<sup>181</sup>

The presence, and prominence, of visual imagery implies the existence of both internal and external viewers.<sup>182</sup> Indeed, viewing is a powerful activity within the *Metamorphoses*, evoking a number of physical passions,<sup>183</sup> or even instigating the very process of transformation itself.<sup>184</sup>

However, the viewers within Ovid's work do not possess equal authority, and although the importance of images and viewing have been long discussed within treatments of the

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<sup>179</sup> Liveley, in Hardie, Barchiesi, and Hinds (1999) p.207.

<sup>180</sup> Solodow (1988), p.36.

<sup>181</sup> Salzman-Mitchell (2005) p.1.

<sup>182</sup> Salzman-Mitchell provides a useful summary of the types of viewers to be expected within the *Metamorphoses*: "First, there is the gaze of the characters who literally look. Second, when internal and external readers construct a *phantasia* from a narrative they hear or read, they are endowed with a mental gaze. Third, there is the gaze of the internal and external authors that is previous to the creation of visual images whether in art or text." (p.5) This can be roughly compared to Laura Mulvey's description of the looks present within film: first, the characters' looks at one another; second, the audience's look at the film itself; third, the camera's look at the "pro-filmic reality" (Chaudhuri, 2006, p.35). While both readers and viewers tend to focus on the first, most obvious gazes inherent within the film and the text (and often unconsciously identify with the possessor of the gaze), the more subtle manifestations of the gaze tend to go unnoticed, in spite of the powerful influences that they possess over the position of the audience.

<sup>183</sup> I.e. Apollo's infatuation with Daphne: *Phoebus amat visaeque cupit conubia Daphnes* (Ovid, *Met.* 1.490).

<sup>184</sup> I.e. Actaeon's glimpse of the naked Artemis at Ovid, *Met.* 3.138-252.

*Metamorphoses*, the gendered nature of the gaze and its implications for relations of power between the male and female characters within the epic has only recently gained prominence, having been adopted (and adapted) by classicists.

Feminist film theory finds one of its seminal authors in Laura Mulvey who, influenced by the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan, attempts to account for the ways in which “the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form.”<sup>185</sup> One of her best-known observations, which this thesis will seek to address and which originates within her article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), is that the controlling gaze, both within the film and the cinematic audience, is always male.

Mulvey identifies the pleasure that the audience derives from watching a film with the scopophilic impulse described by Freud in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*. Scopophilia describes the act of objectifying, and thus controlling, an individual in order to use her as a means of sexual stimulation through sight. In its extreme form, scopophilia

can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs and Peeping Toms, whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other.<sup>186</sup>

The sense of separation between the audience and the film, Mulvey argues,<sup>187</sup> helps to create an “illusion of voyeuristic separation,”<sup>188</sup> feeding the scopophilic impulse that has its genesis in early childhood.

Freud’s theory of objectification describes scopophilia in its active aspect. In her discussion of some of the pleasures derived from film, Mulvey also borrows Lacan’s idea of identification, which focuses on scopophilia in its passive, or narcissistic, aspect. Lacan, whose work is based on Freud’s earlier theories, emphasises the importance of the visual to psychoanalysis, and argues “that certain moments of seeing, and particular visualities, are central to how subjectivities and sexualities are formed.”<sup>189</sup> One fundamental example of this is the moment in which a child first recognises its image in a mirror,

at a time when the child’s physical ambitions outstrip his motor capacity, with the result that his recognition of himself is joyous in that he imagines his mirror image to be more complete, more

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<sup>185</sup> Mulvey in Merck (1992) p.22.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid. pp. 24-5.

<sup>187</sup> Assisted by “the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen” (ibid. p.25).

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. p.25.

<sup>189</sup> Rose (2012) p.100.

perfect that he experiences his own body.<sup>190</sup>

This identification is complicated, therefore, with an element of misrecognition; the child identifies himself with this more superior body, which lies outside of his own, “[giving] rise to the future generation of identification with others,”<sup>191</sup> including images found in the cinema. Consequently, the audience derives pleasure both from their identification with the active, (commonly) male subject in addition to the pleasure derived from their enjoyment of the passive, (commonly) female object.

And so it is, Mulvey claims, that women are relegated to the roles of passive, erotic objects, while male actors/protagonists and, through the narcissistic aspect of scopophilia, the audience, function as agents of the gaze, exerting control over, and deriving pleasure from, her through her objectified status.<sup>192</sup>

Such observations are not solely applicable to film theory. The camera’s controlling gaze finds its equal in both the internal and external narrators of a text, who control the audience’s gaze through the calculated use of a number of literary devices, two of which are narrative and description (or ekphrasis). It has already been noted that the cinematic spectator identifies with the active, traditionally male protagonist, who both advances the action of the plot and subjects the passive female to his objectifying gaze. In her observation of this trend, Mulvey states that

the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.<sup>193</sup>

Although referring to the representation of women in cinema, this comment is not irrelevant to the study of literature in general, and to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in particular, in which the speaker’s narrative (and, by implication, the audience’s attention) is frequently arrested by the “contemplation of an immobile figure, paralyzed by the gaze of the viewer/narrator, internal and external.”<sup>194</sup> Whether it is Daphne, ultimately rooted to the ground, or Andromeda, chained,

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<sup>190</sup> Mulvey in Merck (1992) p.25.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. p.25.

<sup>192</sup> A further consequence of this aspect of woman-as-spectacle is that, in his identification with the active possessor of the gaze, whose actions lead to the progression of the story, the audience member enjoys the vicarious impression of controlling not only the object of the gaze, but the order and progression of the narrative itself: “A male movie star’s glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. The character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator, just as the image in the mirror was more in control of motor co-ordination.” (Mulvey in Merck, 1992, p.28).

<sup>193</sup> Mulvey in Merck (1992) p.27.

<sup>194</sup> Salzman-Mitchell (2005) p.68.

statuesque, to a rock, or even Philomela, imprisoned by Tereus within a stone hut, immobile women populate Ovid's epic poem, static and passive, in opposition to the male characters that are defined by action.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, Salzman-Mitchell remarks that "even in pictures of the female body in action (e.g., Daphne and Atalanta) there is an illusion of detention."<sup>196</sup> While the male characters are depicted primarily through a narrative of their actions, the female form is presented to the audience via lengthy descriptions that bear a strong resemblance to the use of ekphrasis to describe a stationary work of art. Thus it is that in "Womanaufacture" Sharrock states that "women are 'perceived'. We speak often not just of 'women', but of 'images', 'representations', 'reflections' of women. Woman perceived is woman as art-object."<sup>197</sup>

#### 2.4.2 Gaze Theory: Fetishization

The scopophilic impulse, however, is not unproblematic. From a psychoanalytical perspective, Mulvey claims, the female figure

also connotes something that the look continually circles around but disavows: her lack of a penis, implying a threat of castration and hence unpleasure. [...] Thus the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, always threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified.<sup>198</sup>

Mulvey suggests two methods by which the male unconscious might escape from the castration anxiety that the female figure evokes in film: fetishistic scopophilia and sadistic voyeurism. While I will return to the both methods in Chapters Three and Four,<sup>199</sup> the drive to fetishize the female figure has immediate relevance to Ovid's Pygmalion episode. Through employing this former method, the male unconscious achieves "a complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous."<sup>200</sup> The female figure is generally fetishized through an emphasis on her physical beauty, and a gaze that focuses on fragmented parts of her body: an idealised collection of parts omitting any problematic areas.

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<sup>195</sup> Although see Chapter One, Section 1.3.2 for a discussion of Orpheus' *stupor*.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.* p.68.

<sup>197</sup> Sharrock (1991) p.36.

<sup>198</sup> Mulvey in Merck (1992) p.29.

<sup>199</sup> See Chapter Three, Section 3.5.1 and Chapter Four, Section 4.4.

<sup>200</sup> Mulvey in Merck (1992) p.29.

### 2.4.3 Pygmalion and the Gaze

Pygmalion and his statue constitute the culmination of the scopophilic impulse. While only two and a half lines are concerned with Pygmalion's creation of the statue, nearly fifty are given to her description.<sup>201</sup> The narrative is halted through this extended description of the statue, whose beauty is depicted through the fragmentary formula of fetishistic scopophilia. The reader is made aware of the statue's "pure white arms", the "rings on the fingers", "necklaces round the throat", "jewels [hung] from the ears", and "breasts [girdled] with elegant bands".<sup>202</sup>

It is not only the length of the description that contributes to the statue's immobility beneath Pygmalion's/the audience's gaze, but Ovid's use of the tenses within the description:

*virginis est verae facies, quam vivere credas,  
et, si non obstet reverentia, velle moveri:  
ars adeo latet arte sua. Miratur et haurit  
pectore Pygmalion simulati corporis ignes.*<sup>203</sup>

It takes the shape of a real maiden, which you'd believe to be alive,  
and about to move, were modesty not holding her back:  
thus is his art concealed in art. Pygmalion marvels  
at the semblance of a body, his heart consumed by flames.

Salzman-Mitchell provides a thorough analysis of the language used in this narrative pause, commenting upon Ovid's use of the present tense in this description, "which gives an idea of detention and synchronic action, often associated with visibility, while diachronicity is linked to narrative."<sup>204</sup>

However, the statue's immobility seems to infect Pygmalion's agency as well, in that his own actions come to be depicted through the use of the present tense. At this point, Pygmalion no longer seems to function as the controller of the gaze but is depicted as almost identifying with the object from which his pleasure is derived. Salzman-Mitchell refers to this shift as a transition from artist to lover, stating that "it is well known that the elegiac lover is always somewhat feminized and static in

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<sup>201</sup> See Elsner (1991) p.155.

<sup>202</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.257-65, translated by David Raeburn.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.* 10.250-3.

<sup>204</sup> Salzman-Mitchell (2005) pp.73-4.

his adoration of the *puella*, especially in comparison to the ‘man of action’.”<sup>205</sup> Thus, in line with Foucault’s discussion of power<sup>206</sup> and the above discussion of fetishization, in the very instantiation of power – in his creation of a woman/artwork, and subsequent attempt to avoid the anxiety that such a creation evokes – the image is able to realise its own subversive power through its capacity to paralyse the viewer who would objectify it.

When Pygmalion’s statue first opens her eyes, she “timidly raised her eyes to the light and saw her lover against the sky.”<sup>207</sup> These lines are generally understood as demonstrating the statue’s complete submission to her creator. Indeed, as Ovid himself states in the first book of the *Metamorphoses*,

*pronaque cum spectent animalia cetera terram,  
os homini sublime dedit caelumque videre  
iussit et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus.*<sup>208</sup>

The other living creatures bend their gazes towards the earth,  
but to man was given a lofty countenance, and was bid to look heavenward  
and to raise his face up towards the stars.

Just as man must raise his head to the heavens in worship, so does Pygmalion’s statue look up at her lover/creator in utter subservience to the man who formed her. However, as discussed above, the statue’s gaze, even before her metamorphosis, has its own effect on Pygmalion. The ambiguities of the text as well as the subtle undermining of Pygmalion’s masculinity and capacity for control make possible a resistant reading of the text and suggest a destabilisation of a gaze predominantly understood to be male.

#### 2.4.4 Possibilities for a Female Gaze

Just as the act of reading has been complicated through the realisation of its gendered nature, so has the act of seeing. Laura Mulvey’s observation that the gaze is always gendered male has resulted in a decades-long debate concerning the possibility for a female gaze. Since the cinematic audience does not consist solely of male spectators, the gaze of its female audience members comes into

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid. p.74.

<sup>206</sup> See Chapter One, Section 1.3.4.

<sup>207</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.294-5.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. 1.84-6.

question. Were women supposed to adopt the gaze of the male protagonist and enjoy the female character as an erotic object? Were they supposed to identify with the female characters and vicariously experience their objectification? Mulvey herself ultimately argues for the former, but both approaches are unsatisfying from a feminist perspective.

Similar problems have been identified with regard to the process of reading Ovid and Latin love elegy. As with the cinematic audience, are sadistic or masochistic approaches to reading the only options available to female readers, or is there an approach that might allow readers to identify with the feminine characters without resorting to enjoying the associated objectification? Could both masculine and feminine characters be perceived to be occupying the roles of both subject and object?

Mary Ann Doane suggests that we look beyond the binary oppositions of active/male and passive/female which Mulvey relies on. Instead, she suggests the dichotomy of proximity and distance. Overidentification with both the subject and object positions catch the female spectator in the sadism/masochism trap. However, through distancing herself from the cinematic image, another possibility arises for female spectatorship, drawing on what Doane refers to as masquerade.

The position that this distance allows enables the female spectator to understand gender – femininity in particular – as a performance; it allows her to become a resistant reader of film. Providing her own resistant reading, Doane suggests that through distance two options are available for female protagonists. The first is the requirement that the female protagonist appropriate the gaze: “masquerade as controller of the look and hence threaten the conventional system in which the gaze is usually aligned with masculinity.”<sup>209</sup> Second, Doane suggests that the female protagonist masquerade feminism, destabilising the image through demonstrating its excess. “The masquerade,” Doane affirms,

in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed. The masquerade’s resistance to patriarchal positioning would therefore lie in its denial of the production of femininity as closeness, as presence-to-itself, as, precisely, imagistic.<sup>210</sup>

It has been argued that the psychoanalytic approach is undermined by its universalizing tendencies and simplistic, hierarchical dichotomies such as male/female, active/passive, agent/object. Despite a number of film critics attempting to produce a more subtle psychoanalytic approach to the gaze, I would argue that it can be more effectively approached through the lens of post-structuralist theory, with a particular focus on Foucault’s revision of power relations. However, Doane’s reading of the

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<sup>209</sup> Merck (1992) p.225.

<sup>210</sup> Doane in Merck (1992) p.235.

female image, although criticised for alienating women from themselves, will prove relevant to both Ovid's Pygmalion and Latin love elegy as a whole, especially when supplemented with Butler's theory of performativity.

### 2.5 A Post-structural "Pygmalion"

In her discussion of Foucault's theory, Sara Mills explores the discursive practices to which the female body is subjected, and the ways in which

feminist theorists have taken the notion of disciplinary regime [...] and used it to analyse the workings of femininity upon the female body [...such that] femininity is achieved (if it is ever achieved) through a long process of labour to force the body into compliance with a feminine ideal.<sup>211</sup>

This feminine ideal is imposed upon the individual until she internalises it to the point where she begins to see it as a desirable goal to achieve.

In such a way does Pygmalion create his statue, as "an image of perfect feminine beauty"<sup>212</sup> - or, more literally, he "gave it shape/beauty such as no woman could be born with."<sup>213</sup> Furthermore, in her seemingly complete submission to him at the episode's conclusion, the statue appears to be not only the external realisation of the feminine ideal, but also its internal manifestation. Before her metamorphosis, Pygmalion freely projects his own values onto her: looking at her through her creator's eyes,

You'd surely suppose her  
alive and ready to move, if modesty didn't preclude it.<sup>214</sup>

The statue's first act is to blush, hinting at her complete internalisation of Pygmalion's own conception of the feminine ideal. Thus, in Sharrock's words, "[The artist] creates [his] own object, calls her Woman, and falls in love with her."<sup>215</sup> The statue is very much the object of Pygmalion's gaze; created by him in accordance with his own ideals, she is irrevocably an object of his knowledge. Creating her as such, Pygmalion establishes a power relation from which he seemingly

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<sup>211</sup> Mills (2003) p.93.

<sup>212</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.247-8, translated by David Raeburn.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.* 10.248, translated by Alison Sharrock.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.* 10.250-1, translated by David Raeburn.

<sup>215</sup> Sharrock (1991) p.49.

emerges the victor.

But in the very act of his creation, Pygmalion sows the seeds of resistance in his ivory *puella*. In addition to Liveley's discussion of the connotations linked with ivory, the maiden's very status as a work of art implies deception. Sharrock notes that "in the convoluted power-struggle between art and nature which informs ancient theories of both poetic and visual art, art is seen as suspect because it deceives, pretending to be nature."<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, the narrator of the episode states that *ars adeo latet arte sua*,<sup>217</sup> expressing thereby its superlative nature as a work of art.

Butler's theory of performativity is interesting here, in that the statue's performance of gender does not highlight the disjuncture between body and gender in the way that Orpheus' does. Rather, although inanimate, the *eburna puella* is performing a particular type of gender – that attributed to the elegiac mistress; a performance that is deceptive in its very resemblance to nature. Indeed, the statue's performance of her own gender does not so much *resemble* nature as *transcend* it – her excessive performance of femininity thus becomes akin to Doane's idea of the masquerade.

The maiden's ivory body confers upon her not only a capacity for deception, but also impenetrability.<sup>218</sup> Unlike the doomed Orpheus or his fictional Pygmalion, the ivory maiden is capable of withstanding any threat to her bodily integrity. Her physical hardness is suggestive of the harshness of the prototypical *dura puella* found in Latin love elegy. As a response to the statue's inaccessibility and beauty, Pygmalion is provoked into adopting the elegiac stance of *servitium amoris*. In his romantic servitude, he does not only give her gifts, but dresses and undresses her, debasing himself and eschewing his own masculinity by performing the tasks normally given to a slave – an individual considered by Romans, in the first century B.C. to be more chattel than human.

## 2.6 Conclusion

As the statue's body softens, the result of Venus' divine favour, one wonders whether she will retain the severity ascribed to the elegiac mistress. There is some hint of her capacity for resistance in the fact that she is granted a gaze of her own. Certainly, Pygmalion himself occupies an ambiguous subject/object position through his servile attempts to woo her, and the statue's impenetrability and capacity for deception suggest resistance to a purely objectified role.

One might also ask whether the newly metamorphosed statue is, in fact, performing her own femininity through engaging in Doane's masquerade. Is she, too, playing the role of the elegiac

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid. p.38.

<sup>217</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 10.252.

<sup>218</sup> See Chapter Three, Section 3.2.

mistress, an engaging combination of impenetrability and vulnerability, domination and submission? Doane associates this form of masquerade with the *femme fatale*, quoting Montrelay's description of her

as evil incarnate: 'It is this evil which scandalises whenever woman plays out her sex in order to evade the word and law. Each time she subverts a law or word which relies on the predominantly masculine structure of the look.'<sup>219</sup>

Reinterpretations of the Pygmalion episode, and theorists such as Doane and Butler, therefore introduce a new conception of power within gender relations which deviates from the simplistic dichotomy of the "oppressor" and the "oppressed". Unlike critics such as Sharrock and Richlin, who ascribe power to Pygmalion alone, Liveley recognises that in the very enforcement of power, new opportunities for resistance are created; that "forms of subjectivity are produced in negotiation with existing power relations and in the very process of those power relations being instantiated."<sup>220</sup>

Thus Liveley, reading Pygmalion's statue as a *puella* from Latin love elegy, attempts to attribute the statue with agency; to examine "the ways in which the statue may be seen to shape the artist, and in which the beloved may be seen to influence the lover."<sup>221</sup> The fact that the statue is depicted both literally and figuratively as *dura*,<sup>222</sup> as well as her associations with deceptiveness and illusion, contribute towards an agency that lies beyond the control of Pygmalion and Orpheus. However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, whether it is enough to perform the role of the elegist's *puella* has yet to be determined.

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<sup>219</sup> Doane, in Merck (1992) p.235.

<sup>220</sup> Mills (2003) p.34.

<sup>221</sup> Liveley, in Hardie, Barchiesi, and Hinds (1999) p.207.

<sup>222</sup> A trait which, Liveley notes, the statue shares with the Propoetides.

## Part Two: The Latin Love Elegists

In Part One, I discussed the gendered nature of reading, the possibilities for resistance that the textual instability in certain episodes of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* offers female readers, as well as the ways in which this might be achieved through the lens of poststructuralist thought and feminist film theory. It is now my intention to extend this discussion from Ovid's Pygmalion to Latin love elegy, of which the former has been argued to form a microcosm.<sup>223</sup>

The construction of femininity and depiction of women will therefore form a significant portion of the next three chapters. However, keeping in mind Jane Flax's observation that women-centred investigation "ironically privileges the man as unproblematic or exempted from determination by gender relations,"<sup>224</sup> Chapters Three and Four shall focus particularly on the discursive construction of masculinity in ancient Rome: the representation of its ideal form in popular discourse as well as the potential for its subversion in elegiac love poetry. Of particular interest is the way in which the tropes of *militia amoris* and *servitium amoris* will be shown to bear strong similarities to the subversive strategies used by Orpheus and Pygmalion respectively in their individual approaches to the expression of masculinity.

My approach to Latin love elegy will differ from those taken by scholars such as Sharrock, Greene, and Hallett in that I do not consider the elegiac poetry written during Augustus' reign to be easily categorised as either a form of 'counter-cultural feminism'<sup>225</sup> or misogyny. Power negotiations in the elegiac text operate on several levels, from the *imperium* held by the beloved over the persona of the artist-lover, to the discursive control exercised by the poet-author<sup>226</sup> over his mistress, to the negotiation of power between the poet-author and his audience. These various sites of struggle can be seen to overlap, undermine, and reinforce each other, resulting in complex power relations that are not easy to deconstruct and define. Consequently, it will become evident that, as in Ovid's Pygmalion episode, relations of power in Latin love elegy do not form a simple one-way movement from subject to object. Instead, I shall argue that this particular genre demonstrates the complexity and ambiguity inherent within every enactment of power, as well as the means and motivations by which the individual is able to either resist domination or participate in his or her own submission.

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<sup>223</sup> See Chapter Two, Section 2.3.

<sup>224</sup> Flax (1986) p. 629, quoted by Greene (1998) p.xi.

<sup>225</sup> Hallett in Miller (2002) p.329-30.

<sup>226</sup> See Lee-Stecum (1998) pp.78 and 183 for this distinction between the elegiac persona and narrator.

## Chapter Three

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Hegemonic Masculinity in Augustan Rome
- 3.3 *Servitium Amoris*
- 3.4 Elegiac Femininity
- 3.5.1 Sadistic Voyeurism
- 3.5.2 Propertius 1.3
- 3.6 Psychoanalysis and Domination
- 3.7 Conclusion

### 3.1 Introduction

In Ovid's Pygmalion episode, the artist-lover's control over his creation is threatened by his obsession with her; his willingness to adopt a servile position in relation to her. The statue, on the other hand, is depicted as both physically impenetrable and emotionally inaccessible despite her ostensible function as the object of Pygmalion's desire. Both creator and creation therefore ultimately occupy ambiguous subject/object positions. Pygmalion, in the very culmination of his artistic triumph, undermines his own masculinity; his creation is, to some extent, able to resist Pygmalion's advances and to return his gaze with a powerful one of her own. Consequently, I would argue that when Sharrock, in "Womanaufacture", argues for a simple, twofold creation in which the art-object is constructed and transformed into the love-object, she fails to address the dialogue taking place between the artist and his creation in which power is constantly being contested and renegotiated.

The genre of Latin love elegy reflects this relational nature of power in that once again one can see the persona of the artist-lover placed in a position of extreme vulnerability, subjecting himself to the whims of his often-inaccessible *domina* as a result of his desire for her. What complicates this genre, however, is that Propertius and Tibullus identify with their elegiac personae. They consciously construct their own powerlessness in their poetry and relinquish traditional constructions of masculinity of their own free will. While the narrator of the *Metamorphoses* distances himself from Pygmalion's character, establishing barriers between himself, Orpheus, and Pygmalion before undermining these protagonists, such distance between poet and persona is lacking in Latin love elegy. It becomes necessary, therefore, to draw a distinction between the

persona of the poet-lover within the text and the poet-author external to it in order to determine the operation of power on these two levels. At the same time, one must question why it is that the poet-author *chooses* to create a persona that threatens his position of authority within the text.

This chapter will focus on the most obvious form of the poet-lover's powerlessness: the trope of *servitium amoris* and its implications for the perceived masculinity of the elegiac persona, in addition to the means by which control over his *domina* might be re-established as well as resisted. I will conclude with a potential explanation for this deliberate surrender of power, exploring the possible attraction in relinquishing dominance and experimenting with one's own vulnerability.

### 3.2 Hegemonic Masculinity in Augustan Rome

The discursive construction of masculinity in ancient Rome was not solely dependent upon biological criteria – i.e. the possession of a penis; instead, a variety of practices, both sexual and social, intersected with biological factors, all of which needed to be taken into account if the Roman male wished to fully embody his masculinity. Of course, anatomy nevertheless played a crucial role in this process in that the penetrative function of the penis in the sexual act was extended to the male Roman body in its entirety, thus constructing it as ideally both penetrative and impenetrable.<sup>227</sup> In order to assert a masculine identity, the Roman male would have been expected to preserve his physical boundaries: to repel any threat to his bodily integrity while taking advantage of those to whom that privilege did not extend. The boundaries between the sexual and the social blurred to the extent that the term ascribed to one male orally penetrating another, *irrumator*, could be used non-literally, “denoting a man who has his own way with others or treats them with contempt or disrespect.”<sup>228</sup> Therefore, while the possession of a penis was the biological basis for *sex*, the way in which the individual conducted himself in both the private and the public spheres of Roman society was the final determinant of his perceived *gender*.

While in the public sphere the ideal male citizen was represented as one “able to defend the parameters of [his] body from invasive assault,”<sup>229</sup> in the private sphere of normative sexual activity the masculine individual was not only the possessor of the phallus, but the one who played the penetrative role in sexual intercourse, irrespective of orifice, with a “*non-man*, whether a female, a

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<sup>227</sup> See Williams (2010) p.18: “penetration is subjugation (in the sense that the act is held simultaneously to be a figure for, and to effect, subjugation), and masculinity is domination.”

<sup>228</sup> Williams (2010) p.179.

<sup>229</sup> Skinner (1997) p.14.

boy, an effeminate man or *cinaedus*, or a slave.”<sup>230</sup> It is important to note that the sex of the Roman *vir*'s partner was not a significant factor; instead, his masculinity is emphasised by his role as the sexual penetrator rather than the recipient of sexual penetration. If one examines the terms ascribed to the Roman *vir* in terms of his sexual function (*fututor*, *pedicator*, *irrumator*), it is evident that the conceptual framework by which sexual inclinations could be expressed was largely phallocentric, referring to the act of penetration rather than to the sex of the *vir*'s partner.<sup>231</sup> Consequently, although the possession of the phallus was a necessary criterion for perceived masculinity, it was hardly sufficient: ultimately, the defining characteristic constitutive of the idealized Roman *vir* was that of impenetrability and control.

It is true, then, that there would have been many biological males – “youths, members of the working classes, disreputable persons, or slaves”<sup>232</sup> – who would nevertheless have failed to meet the criteria of full manhood, and thus been denied the appellation of *vir*. Citing the research of Santoro L’hoir (1992), Jonathan Walters points out<sup>233</sup> that adolescent males who had yet to reach adulthood would have been termed *pueri* or *adulescentes*, while male slaves and ex-slaves would have been referred to as *homines*<sup>234</sup> and *pueri*. Those who, willingly or through coercion, played the part of the recipient in sexual intercourse would also have been viewed as having forfeited their masculinity.

However, what is more significant to one’s understanding of the representation of masculinity in ancient Rome – especially if one wishes to explore its discursive construction in Latin love elegy – is that, although the penetrative function of the penis is applied to the entire male body, and bodily integrity becomes a matter of paramount importance, the concept of penetration and impenetrability is stretched even further, so that

in the end, a man’s full masculinity was not guaranteed simply by asserting the penetrative power of his phallus at another’s expense, and yielding his body to the power of another man’s phallus was only one among many practices that could lay a man open to a charge of effeminacy [...] Effeminacy was thus a disorder embodied in various symptoms, only one of which – and not a necessary one at that – was a predilection for being anally penetrated.<sup>235</sup>

Williams continues to state that the underlying element determining one’s perceived gender is not one’s choice of sexual partner or even, ultimately, the sexual role that one adopts. Instead, “the

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<sup>230</sup> Williams (2010) p.180.

<sup>231</sup> In contradistinction with contemporary Western sexual identities (‘homosexual’, ‘bisexual’, ‘heterosexual’).

<sup>232</sup> Skinner (1997) p.14.

<sup>233</sup> Walters in *Roman Sexualities* (ed. Hallett and Skinner) 1997, p.31. See also Williams (2010) p.179ff.

<sup>234</sup> Walters points out that *homines* is used “in elite literature for low-class and disreputable men” (p.31).

<sup>235</sup> Williams (2010) p.138.

various manifestations of effeminacy are symptoms of an underlying failure to live up to the central imperative of masculinity: control and dominion, both of others and of oneself.”<sup>236</sup> These ideals of control and dominion, manifested in the impenetrable male body, are expressed through the notions of *imperium* and *fortitudo*, while “the essence of a weak femininity, embodied in women and effeminate men, is *mollitia*.”<sup>237</sup> The effeminate man, therefore, would attempt to make his body softer – more pleasing – through depilation, “walking delicately, [...or] wearing loose, colourful, feminine clothing.”<sup>238</sup> Thus Ovid instructs young men:

sed tibi nec ferro placeat torquere capillos,  
nec tua mordaci pumice crura teras;  
ista iube faciant, quorum Cybeleia mater  
concinitur Phrygiis exulata modis.  
forma viros neglecta decet.<sup>239</sup>

But don't take pleasure in curling your hair with an iron,  
nor in smoothening your legs with a sharp pumice stone;  
bid them do that, by whom Cybele the Mother  
is celebrated in the Phrygian manner – with howls.  
Neglect is fitting for male beauty.

Curled hair and soft legs, Ovid explicitly states, are for the *Galli*, the castrated priests of Cybele; Roman men who wish to avoid being seen as effeminate must avoid these dandyish practices.

Not only in the sphere of sexual activity, then, but in the social sphere as well, the Roman *vir* is not primarily set in opposition to the female sex – *feminae*, *puellae*, *mulieres*, and so on – but in opposition to any other social groups constructed as being non-male, including any other biological male whose age, social standing, or habits preclude his being perceived as masculine – as a *vir*. It is not the individual's sexual anatomy alone, but his place within the Roman social hierarchy as well as his sexual inclinations which determine his corporeal inviolability (and *vice versa*) and, therefore, his perceived masculinity. Thus it is evident, according to Walters, that discussions of gender identity cannot be studied in isolation; the discursive construction of Roman masculinity intersects with, and is complicated by, a multitude of other discourses, such as citizen status, age, and social standing, all of which must be taken into account.

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid. p.139.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid. p.139.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid. p.141.

<sup>239</sup> Ovid, *Ars* 1.505-9.

While many ancient texts can be demonstrated to support the status quo, Roman elegy is one genre in which a number of these discourses are frequently disrupted and inverted in the poet-author's depiction of his relationship with his *puella*, including his concern with his status as a love poet. In Chapters Three and Four I will therefore focus on two tropes in which discursive constructions of masculinity intersect with a number of other discourses: *servitium amoris*, and *militia amoris*.

### 3.3 Servitium Amoris

In her discussion of the representation of women gender in Latin love elegy, Ellen Greene asserts that "the discourses of male desire in Latin love poetry [...] demonstrate that love (*amor*) is intimately bound up with the hierarchies and social inequalities in the power systems of Roman politics."<sup>240</sup> Despite the astuteness of this observation, Greene's argument focuses solely on the ways in which elegy reflects and reinforces the patriarchal discourses that supported the ancient Roman status quo. I would suggest, however, in accordance with Foucault's revisionary conceptualisation of power, that Latin amatory poetry functions as a playful dialogue between these "patterns of domination and submission;"<sup>241</sup> at various times supporting some, subverting others, or transgressing their boundaries. One means by which this is achieved is via the trope of *servitium amoris*.

This trope, which depicts the lover playing the role of his *domina's* slave, is generally assumed to have originated in Latin love elegy; indeed, it is a trope of which very few examples can be found in Greek and Roman literature preceding Latin love elegy, and nowhere is it as developed as it is in that genre.<sup>242</sup>

While the elegiac poet's depiction of himself as a *servus amoris* might to modern sensibilities sound somewhat affected or clichéd, it was nevertheless a controversial description at the time, subverting constructions of both gender and class roles in the poet-lover's expression of the state of degradation to which his love for his *puella* had reduced him. In declaring his servitude to Eros<sup>243</sup> – and, more importantly, to his *domina* – the elegist is not only rejecting the traditional Roman conception of masculinity through his dismissal of the public sphere and his submission to the

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<sup>240</sup> Greene (1998) p.xii.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> See, for example, Copley (1947) and Lyne (1979).

<sup>243</sup> Thus declaring his enslavement to his emotions, and, consequently emasculating himself through his loss of control.

*imperium* of a woman;<sup>244</sup> in adopting the stance of *servitium amoris* the poet-lover also renounces his masculinity through the radical act of forfeiting any possibility of inviolability, thus making himself vulnerable to both literal and figurative penetration.

Williams, in his discussion of Roman masculinity, outlines two of its central values: *virtus* and *imperium*, the latter of which is particularly relevant to any discussion of *servitium amoris*, and which can be defined as

the rule or dominion that magistrates exercise over the Roman people, generals over their armies, the Roman people as a whole over their subjects, and Roman men over women and slaves.<sup>245</sup>

The ideal Roman male would therefore resist the exercise of *imperium* over himself, especially if his opponent was perceived as unworthy, i.e. insufficiently masculine. That the Roman love elegists willingly and repeatedly surrender their *imperium* over to women – women of ambiguous social status at that – would have been considered outrageous were it to have actually occurred: the public response to Cleopatra and her power over Antony, for example, is indicative of the average Roman male’s fear of unnatural female *imperium*.<sup>246</sup>

In the elegiac text, this forfeiture of masculinity is taken to extreme lengths, and it is Tibullus who most strongly advocates this position of *servitium amoris*. Indeed, his submission to the violation of his physical boundaries borders on the masochistic.<sup>247</sup> However, although he uses images of physical torture and degradation to overtly state his servitude to both of his *dominae*, the power that both women hold over his emotions is expressed with more subtlety and is certainly more insidious.<sup>248</sup>

Tibullus places himself entirely within Delia’s power, both inviting punishment for his transgressions and offering to perform tasks normally assigned to slaves.<sup>249</sup> However, his expression

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<sup>244</sup> See Lyne (1979) p.127: “His language connects directly with natural Latin modes of speech and evokes circumscriptions and humiliations that were to many only too familiar. What was *not* familiar of course was the avowal of such humiliations being imposed by a woman. That was appalling.”

<sup>245</sup> Williams (2010) p.146.

<sup>246</sup> “In the vicious propaganda campaign waged by Octavian before the battle of Actium, Cleopatra was constructed as an enticing but monstrous character who had lured Antony away from his proper Roman duties and thus endangered the welfare of the whole Roman state. That representation of the Egyptian queen and the Roman lover over whom she made herself mistress was sustained and elaborated in the later histories of Plutarch and Cassius Dio” (Wyke, 2002, pp.245-6).

<sup>247</sup> See, for example, 1.5.5-6; 2.3.85-6.

<sup>248</sup> For further discussion of Nemesis’ influence see Chapter Four, Section 4.2.

<sup>249</sup> *Pauper erit praesto semper, te pauper adibit*  
*Primus et in tenero fixus erit latere,*  
*Pauper in angusto fidus comes agmine turbae*  
*Subicietque manus efficietque viam,*

of his own powerlessness is best expressed in the programmatic first poem when, in an attempt to elicit an emotional response from Delia, he makes a further bid for power:

*Te spectem, suprema mihi cum venerit hora,  
Te teneam moriens deficiente manu.  
Flebis et arsuro positum me, Delia, lecto,  
Tristibus et lacrimis oscula mixta dabis.*<sup>250</sup>

May I look upon you, when my final hour comes,  
let me hold you with failing hands as I die.  
You will weep for me, Delia, even as the flames engulf my bier,  
and mingle kisses with sad tears.

Lee-Stecum aptly notes that

[i]t is in the throes of the ultimate hardship of death, [...] enduring the ultimate discomfort, [...] when he is at his most physically powerless [...] and passive, [...] that the poet believes he will have some power, at least emotionally, over Delia.<sup>251</sup>

It is not enough to invite corporal punishment upon his body. Rather, it is only in death that Tibullus can hope to negotiate any power for himself. This wishful thinking occurs again in 1.3, when he reimagines the Elysian Fields as a refuge for lovers, rather than the heroes of epic verse.<sup>252</sup>

Significantly, however, although they are certainly depicted as asymmetrical, Tibullus does not depict his relationships with Delia and Nemesis as a one-way movement of power, in which his *dominae* can exercise their uncontested power over their helpless slave. Instead, Tibullus approaches erotic relationships in terms of exchange and reciprocity:

Exchange processes, then, give rise to differentiation of power. A person who commands services others need, and who is independent of any at their command, attains power over others by making the satisfaction of their need contingent on their compliance. This principle is held to apply to the most intimate as well as the most distant social relationships.<sup>253</sup>

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*Pauper ad occultos furtim deducet amicos  
Vinclaque de niveo detrahet ipse pede.* (1.5.61-6).

<sup>250</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.1.59-62.

<sup>251</sup> Lee-Stecum (1998) p.55.

<sup>252</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.3.57-66.

<sup>253</sup> Blau (1964) p.22, quoted by Lee-Stecum (1998) p.21.

Tibullus adopts the stance of *servitium amoris* not because he has no other choice than to serve his mistress, but in the hope that this service can be exchanged for her love. In surrendering his physical inviolability and freedom of speech the poet-lover hopes to gain emotional power over his beloved; to put himself in the position of power discussed in the above quotation. His services, however, are seldom sufficient: it is Delia and Nemesis who remain superior in their independence from him, and Tibullus' paradoxical bids for dominance only serve to further disempower him by rendering his body violable and his voice silent.

Propertius, however, ironically invites servile torture in exchange for freedom from his servile state, declaring, in the programmatic 1.1:

*fortiter et ferrum saevos patiemur et ignes,  
sit modo libertas quae velit ira loqui.*<sup>254</sup>

Bravely would I suffer both fire and the savage knife,  
if only I were at liberty to speak as my anger wants.

Although he at times submits to the servitude that Cynthia inflicts upon him, Propertius frequently struggles to reconcile himself to his fate as an elegiac lover, and advises other lovers to avoid his example.<sup>255</sup>

Whereas Tibullus' expression of *servitium amoris* usually emphasises his physical vulnerability, Propertius is primarily concerned with the constraints put upon his speech.<sup>256</sup> These constraints do not only deny him the freedom to "speak as [his] anger wants," but extend to his poetic writing as well. In 1.9, he mocks Ponticus, whose ability to write epic verse can now do him little good:

*Dicebam tibi venturos, irrisor, amores,  
nec tibi perpetuo libera verba fore:  
ecce iaces supplexque venis ad iura puellae,  
et tibi nunc quaevis imperat empti modo.*<sup>257</sup>

I told you, scoffer, that love would come to you,

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<sup>254</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 1.1.27-8.

<sup>255</sup> See *Eleg.* 1.1.37-8.

<sup>256</sup> Although, cf. Tibullus 1.5.5-6, in which he invites such constraints:  
*ure ferum et torque, libeat ne dicere quicquam  
magnificum posthac: horrida uerba doma.*

<sup>257</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 1.9.1-4.

and that free speech would not be always yours:  
behold, you lie downcast and come, a suppliant, before your girl's command,  
a girl – bought a moment since – now commands you.

The bodily integrity and autonomy of a slave was a matter of little concern in ancient Rome: thus Walters states, “beating was a punishment with an intimate connection with the hierarchy of social statuses, with the distinctions between free and slave, citizen and noncitizen, and being beaten was a humiliating mark of low status.”<sup>258</sup> The body of the slave was the property of his *dominus*,<sup>259</sup> and that body could be “beaten, tortured, killed [...] the fact that a slave, male or female, was at the disposal of his or her master for sexual use was so commonplace as to be scarcely noted in Roman sources.”<sup>260</sup> Ideally, the slave would assume the recipient role during sexual intercourse; any allusion to an inversion of this pattern emphasises its unusualness and perceived baseness.<sup>261</sup> Indeed, Williams quotes the Augustan orator Haterius, who once

used as a mainstay of his defense the apparently axiomatic principle that the loss of one's sexual integrity (*impudicitia*), while a matter of 'reproach' for the freeborn and a matter of 'duty' for freedmen, is a matter of 'necessity' for slaves.<sup>262</sup>

As discussed, the significance of penetration to Roman representations of masculinity sets up clear hierarchical dichotomies between active and passive, powerful and powerless, between being able to take sexual pleasure and being forced to give it. However, given the rules by which the ancient Romans navigated their sexual roles, it also necessarily sets up a dichotomy between male and female; the male slave's degradation is therefore equated with the passivity attributed to the ideal woman. Because being termed sexually active was dependent upon the possession of a penis, the dominant sexual discourse of ancient Rome was inherently phallogocentric: “‘active’ is *by definition* ‘male’ and ‘passive’ is *by definition* ‘female’.”<sup>263</sup> Therefore men who, through choice or coercion, played the passive role and were thus penetrated by other men were described as *muliebra pati* - “having a woman's experience” or “suffering like a woman” – and “the anal penetration of [the] male [was] assimilated linguistically to the vaginal penetration of a female.”<sup>264</sup>

To be sexually penetrated was consequently considered a degrading experience, for its connotations of both effeminacy and servility. Indeed, it was a crime at times punishable by death to

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<sup>258</sup> Walters in *Roman Sexualities* (ed. Hallett and Skinner) 1997, p.37.

<sup>259</sup> And ostensibly, in elegy, of his *domina*.

<sup>260</sup> Walters *ibid.* p.39.

<sup>261</sup> See, for example, Seneca, *Epistles*, 47.7.

<sup>262</sup> Williams (2010) p.24.

<sup>263</sup> Parker in Hallett and Skinner (1997) p.48.

<sup>264</sup> Walters in Hallett and Skinner (1997) p.31.

subject a male Roman citizen to such humiliation,<sup>265</sup> while the sexual subjugation of one's slaves was accompanied by no such punishment. Women, however, under the protection of a *vir*<sup>266</sup> were at least in theory immune to such attacks on their bodily autonomy. In cases such as this, it is the woman's social status – her association with a *vir* – that affords her this protection. It is important to note, though, that in the case of such a woman being subjected to physical or sexual assault<sup>267</sup> it would be the *vir*'s integrity/autonomy that would be perceived to be under threat, rather than the woman's.<sup>268</sup>

It is evident that the discursive construction of masculinity was a complex process, with a basis in biology that justified conventional gender roles and extended into discourses surrounding social status. Walters suggests, therefore, that the biological dichotomy between male and female was used in the discursive practices of ancient Rome to serve a social agenda, functioning

to mystify gender by implicitly or explicitly supporting the local gender-system [...] by an appeal to 'nature' (in this case, physiology). By construing certain behaviours as 'naturally' masculine or feminine, each gender "[maps] out the perceived boundaries of its own category."<sup>269</sup>

The connotations associated with penetration – sexual or otherwise – therefore delineate the boundaries of the body as a threat to social and gender identity and consequently impose constraints upon the sexual behaviour of male and female citizens through the implied threats of social discord should those constraints not be adhered to. Walters therefore states that the "status of *vir* and sexual *patientia*, to be a man and to be penetrated by another man's penis, are conceptualized as mutually incompatible."<sup>270</sup>

### 3.4 Elegiac Femininity

Elegy, which asserts itself not only as a genre<sup>271</sup> – a way of writing – but as a way of life, is interesting in that, at least superficially, it is performative of abnormal social and gender roles. Parker, citing Richlin, states that

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid. pp.34-6.

<sup>266</sup> I.e. Widows, married women, and unmarried virgins.

<sup>267</sup> Or even in the case of a wife engaging in an adulterous affair.

<sup>268</sup> Parker in Hallett and Skinner (1997) p.50, quoting Richlin (1992).

<sup>269</sup> Walters in Hallett and Skinner (1997) p.32.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid. p.31.

<sup>271</sup> There is a debate as to whether elegy constitutes a genre in its own right, or whether it functions as a subgenre of lyric poetry (see, for example, Luck *The Latin Love Elegy* (1959)). I have chosen, for the sake of simplicity, to refer to Latin love elegy as a genre in and of itself.

the very act of taking male/active sex as normative and the identification of the 'active' with the 'good' creates an anomaly at the very heart of the system, since it forces the identification of even the 'normal' [passive] woman with the passive, the pathetic, the bad [...] Female sexual *activity*, then, is by definition abnormal, almost an oxymoron. The sexually active woman is a monster.<sup>272</sup>

This is reflected in the language used in ancient Rome to describe sexual activity. While there are specific terms to describe those who play the passive role in anal or oral penetration,<sup>273</sup> Parker observes that there is no word to describe a woman who submits to vaginal penetration.<sup>274</sup> Instead, the term used to describe a woman as a sexual being is *puella*, "which denotes not merely youth or beauty, but the specific status of 'sexual object'."<sup>275</sup> In Latin love elegy, however, the *domina/puella* occupies a liminal space between active subject and passive object. The poet ostensibly submits to her as if her slave, with all the connotations of physical penetrability which that implies, while at the same time often referring to her in her necessarily and essentially passive sexual role.

The sexual relationship between the poet and his *puella* further complicates this ideal of active male and passive female. Parker quotes Tibullus,<sup>276</sup> for example, when he states that even in elegy "the good wife doesn't move [...] A wife who does is the subject of frequent jokes: she is an adulteress who has learned her moves elsewhere."<sup>277</sup> The sexual function of the *puella* is to give pleasure, rather than seek it. However, the *dominae* of the elegiac poets are neither wives nor conventional in their sexual practices. Propertius, for example, in a description of his and Cynthia's lovemaking, states that

*seu nuda erepto mecum luctatur amictu,  
tum vero longas condimus Iliadas.*<sup>278</sup>

Or if naked she wrestles me, our clothes snatched away,  
then in truth we compose long Iliads.

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<sup>272</sup> Parker in Hallett and Skinner (1997) p.50.

<sup>273</sup> *Cinaedus/pathicus/pathica* and *fellator/fellatrix* (see Parker, p.49).

<sup>274</sup> Williams (2010) p.178: Although there is a *verb* depicting the receptive aspect of vaginal intercourse (*crisare*).

<sup>275</sup> Parker in Hallett and Skinner (1997) p.49.

<sup>276</sup> *Illa nulla queat melius consumere noctem  
aut operum varias dispossuisse uices.  
at tua perdidicet, nec tu, stultissime, sentis  
cum tibi non solita corpus ab arte mouet.*  
(Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.9.63-6).

Parker also cites Lucr. 1268-77; Mart. 10.68.10; Plut. *Conjugal Precepts* 18.

<sup>277</sup> Parker in Hallett and Skinner (1997) p. 55.

<sup>278</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.1.13-4.

It is nevertheless important to remember that the *domina/puella* of Latin love elegy also ostensibly possesses the power to reject the poet-lover's advances; the elegies of Tibullus and Propertius are more concerned with the frustration of their desires than their fulfilment. Like Pygmalion's ivory statue, the *dominae* of both Tibullus and Propertius are repeatedly described as being *dura* – harsh, hard, or impenetrable. Indeed, through the adjective *dura*, the mistresses, who deny the poet-lovers access to their bodies, are often implicitly compared to the locked doors mentioned in the *paraclausithyron* typical of Latin love elegy. While the poet-lover's forfeiture of his masculinity is inscribed upon his body by the instruments of servile torture, the elegiac mistress is attributed with the masculine trait of impenetrability.

Impenetrability is not the only quality that the elegiac mistress shares with Pygmalion's statue. Nor, like the statue, does the elegiac mistress possess only masculine traits. The fact that the statue is made of ivory, for example, is significant:<sup>279</sup> that particular raw material associates her with a capacity for deceit traditionally ascribed to women. However, the statue's ivory form also associates her with the erotic in addition to rendering her an immobile art-object. It is for these reasons in particular that the elegiac mistress is often figuratively turned to stone:

*sive lyrae carmen digitis percussit eburnis,  
miramur, facilis ut premat arte manus,*<sup>280</sup>

Or if she draws a song from the lyre with ivory fingers,  
I marvel at how skilfully she presses her supple hands.

The poet thus objectifies his mistress, subjecting her to his gaze; the use of ivory as a description of her paleness, Sharrock notes, is common to elegy, and bears strong connotations of the erotic.<sup>281</sup> However, this combination of the erotic with the impenetrable gives rise to a different, more violent form of gaze, as it gives rise to suspicion and reinforces the poet-lover's desire to inscribe his desire upon his mistress' body.

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<sup>279</sup> See Chapter 2, Section 2.3.

<sup>280</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.1.9-10.

<sup>281</sup> Sharrock (1991) p. 43.

### 3.5.1 Film Theory Part 2: Sadistic Voyeurism and Male Vulnerability

In Chapter Two, I discussed the presence of what Mulvey refers to as fetishistic scopophilia within the Pygmalion episode, through which the anxiety created by the love-object's lack of a phallus is avoided through depicting her as an idealised collection of parts – parts which, it is implied, would fit together to form a perfect whole.<sup>282</sup>

However, another form of visual pleasure is evident in Latin elegiac poetry, one that is incompatible with the poet-lover's posture of *servitium amoris*, and comes into conflict with fetishistic scopophilia. This approach is that of sadistic voyeurism, in which the male unconscious escapes from the castration anxiety that the female image evokes by means of

preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object.<sup>283</sup>

Whereas scopophilia is entirely concerned with the look and is achieved through description,

sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end.<sup>284</sup>

This narrative is achieved through the poet's ceaseless oscillation between devotion and condemnation; his desire to ascertain the guilt of his beloved, and his pleasure in the violence that may be done to her. The *domina* evokes his devotion, the *puella* his jealousy and recrimination; her body is transformed from a static vision of dismembered, beautiful parts to an object of violence from which the poet derives sadistic pleasure.

Fredrick, however, in "The Gaze and the Elegiac Imaginary", suggests that although examples of both scopophilia and sadistic voyeurism are an essential feature of elegiac poetry, the motivations behind these forms of visual pleasure are essentially different:

For Mulvey, narrative cinema is fundamentally conservative while Augustan elegy arguably has a much greater interest in exploring male vulnerability.<sup>285</sup>

Fredrick argues that this second gaze – that of sadistic voyeurism – constitutes a conscious

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<sup>282</sup> See, for example, Propertius 1.2.

<sup>283</sup> Mulvey (1975) p.29.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid. p.29.

<sup>285</sup> Fredrick in Gold (2012) p.429.

disruption of the fetishization of the *puella*. Referring to Mulvey's discussion of these conflicting sources of pleasure, Fredrick claims,

Traditional Hollywood cinema [...] downplays the evident contradictions between the two, in terms of narrative arrest, spatial depth, and the view of the female body as either iconically perfect (in parts, with the omission of her sexual difference) or essentially flawed and therefore in need of punishment or rescue.<sup>286</sup>

The differences between these two forms of the gaze are downplayed in cinema precisely because, if they are to be simultaneously employed as a means of visual pleasure, their inherent contradictions must not be made explicit. However, with regard to Latin elegiac poetry, this voyeuristic gaze seems to deliberately disrupt the elegiac agenda by introducing the violence commonly attributed to epic:<sup>287</sup>

[M]arked by the teeth, nails, and fists of the narrator, the *puella* becomes a kind of deformed text, *laesa* instead of *scripta*, and now more like the conquered victims of epic than the 'natural' beauties of elegiac simile.<sup>288</sup>

The poet-lover demonstrates his devotion towards his *domina*, but punishes and resents her for precisely those qualities that he professes to revere. Whereas modern cinema strives to "safeguard the privileged position of the male viewer,"<sup>289</sup> the elegiac poet participates in complex dialectic through which he undermines himself, retaliates through dehumanisation and violent resentment, exposes his vulnerability, and constructs his own powerlessness.

### 3.5.2 Propertius 1.3

Thus far, I have discussed the interplay of power between the poet-lover and his beloved as it occurs within the elegiac text, as well as without. These two sites for power work against one another: the poet-lover's posture of *servitium amoris* comes into conflict with the poet-author's scopophilic impulses and his sadistic desire to imagine his mistress in distressing circumstances for the purposes of rescue or punishment – both of which place him in a position of power.

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid. p.433.

<sup>287</sup> For further discussion, see Chapter Four, Section 4.4.

<sup>288</sup> Fredrick in Gold (2012) p.432.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid. p.434.

Consequently, despite the poet-author's frequent assimilation into the persona of the poet-lover, there is a vital difference: while the poet-lover is very much at the mercy of his *dura domina*, the poet-author holds the upper hand in his ability to exert rhetorical control over her. It is with regard to the poet-author's depiction of and control over the elegiac mistress that Greene's argument is particularly relevant: that

the apparent elevated stature of women in Latin love poetry does not portray them as subjects in their own right but rather as objects of male fantasies of erotic domination [...] that the subordination of woman as beloved to the woman as *materia* reveals a version of male desire which devalues women and turns them into commodities of exchange in two senses: between their husbands and lovers and between the poet and the literary marketplace.<sup>290</sup>

Greene's discussion of women as *materia* for the poet-author focuses on Propertius' 1.3 and 1.11. Due to the limitations of space, I shall focus solely on the former poem, albeit in some detail. I will argue, however, that the relationship of power between the *puella* and poet-author is not a simple reversal of that between the *domina* and her poet-lover; both relationships operate as *relations* of power rather than hierarchies, resulting in depictions of gender and power that are more complex than Greene's argument suggests.

*Qualis Thesea iacuit cedente carina  
languida desertis Cnosia litoribus;  
qualis et accubuit primo Cepheia somno  
libera iam duris cotibus Andromede;  
nec minus assiduis Edonis fessa choreis  
qualis in herboso concidit Apidano:  
talis visa mihi mollem spirare quietem  
Cynthia consertis nixa caput manibus,  
ebria cum multo traherem vestigia Baccho,  
et quaterent sera nocte facem pueri.<sup>291</sup>*

Just as the girl of Cnosus lay fainting on the deserted shore,  
while Theseus' ship departs;  
or as Andromeda, Cepheus' daughter, lay recumbent in her first slumber,  
free, now, of the harsh rock;  
or like one exhausted from the endless Thracian dance,

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<sup>290</sup> Greene (1998) p.xiv.

<sup>291</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 1.3.1-10.

fallen in the grass by the Apidamus:  
thus did Cynthia appear to me, breathing the gentle silence,  
her head resting upon entwined hands,  
when I came dragging footsteps made drunken with much wine,  
as the boys shook the late-night torches.

In her discussion of 1.3, Greene argues that Propertius not only imagines Cynthia in a state of helplessness, comparing her to both the abandoned Ariadne as well as the newly-freed Andromeda, but also that “the speaker’s arousal seems to depend on turning his ‘real’ mistress into a static, pictorial object he can watch without any resistance or interference from ‘reality’.”<sup>292</sup> In her final comparison between Cynthia and the sleeping maenad, Greene argues that “despite the implication of the Bacchante’s active expression of desire and her autonomy, the speaker’s vision of the Maenad seems to resemble the speaker’s own drunken state more than Cynthia’s sleeping condition.”<sup>293</sup> The sleeping Cynthia is thus frozen into the poet-lover’s static fantasy; reduced via the scopophilic impulse to an object of erotic contemplation or a reflection of the poet himself.

While I agree with Greene’s reading of these verses as being indicative of the poet-lover’s desires and psychology, this depiction of Cynthia in a static state of passivity and helplessness is complicated by the fact that the mythological *exempla* depict her in a progressive series of liberation. As Harmon notes, Ariadne is shown in her sleep prior to her realisation of Theseus’ betrayal and Dionysus’ rescue; Andromeda is described in the midst of a slumber following the consummation of her union with her rescuer, Perseus, while the Bacchante is depicted in exhausted release from the possession of her god, Dionysus.<sup>294</sup> There is, therefore, a sense of tension between these images of liberation and constraint; the poet-lover’s static fantasy and the liberation of the women within those fantasies.

Also significant is the speaker’s use of humour to undermine the poet-lover’s attempt to control his beloved and “arrange her as an artist might arrange a still life.”<sup>295</sup> As with Pygmalion, the speaker in 1.3 attempts to offer his statuesque lover gifts:

*et modo solvebam nostra de fronte corallas  
ponebam tuis, Cynthia, temporibus;  
et modo gaudebam lapsos formare capillos;*

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<sup>292</sup> Greene (1998) p.56.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid. p.56.

<sup>294</sup> Harmon (1974) p.154 ff.

<sup>295</sup> Greene (1998) p.58.

*nunc furtiva cavis poma dabam manibus;*<sup>296</sup>

Now I freed the garlands from my forehead  
and placed them, Cynthia, on your temples;  
now I delighted in composing your loose hair;  
now stealthily slipping apples into your empty hands;

But, as with Pygmalion, the lover is depicted as a foolish, delusional figure. In spite of his efforts, the speaker's service is unconsciously rejected by his mistress:

*omniaque ingrato largibar munera somno,  
munera de prono saepe voluta sinu;*<sup>297</sup>

And every gift I bestowed upon your ungrateful slumber,  
gifts which repeatedly tumbled from your prone lap.

While his static fantasies might afford the speaker illusory power over his mistress, it is her very immobility that frustrates his attempts to control her; in the lover's attempt to exercise power, he meets with resistance. Cynthia is distant and *dura* while he is depicted as a bumbling, servile inebriate, terrified that his *domina* might awaken from her slumbers. His recognition of her power over him when awake undermines that power which he might derive from her unconscious state.

The scene is not, however, without any threat of violence toward the sleeping *puella*; the speaker, in a flurry of suspicion and fear, imagines his mistress being sexually enjoyed by another man against her will. Even as he is transfixed by her every sigh, fantasising about her in a state of distress and captivity, the poet-lover is restless with his desire to commit this very act himself:

*hanc ego, nondum etiam sensus deperditus omnis,  
molliter impresso conor adire toro;  
et quamvis duplici correptum ardore iuberent  
hac Amor hac Liber, durus uterque deus,  
subiecto leviter positam temptare lacerto  
osculaue admota sumere tarda manu,  
non tamen ausus eram dominae turbare quietem,  
expertae metuens iurgia saevitiae;*<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 1.3.21-4.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.* 1.3.25-6.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.* 1.3.11-8.

I, my senses not yet wholly departed,  
 tried to approach her, pressing gently against the bed;  
 and utterly seized with a twofold passion,  
 here Amor, there Bacchus, both harsh gods, urged me onward,  
 to try her as she lay there, my arm slipped lightly under her,  
 and, my hand upon her, to take lingering kisses.  
 I did not dare, however, to disrupt my mistress' rest,  
 fearing her proven rage in a quarrel;

The speaker's dilemma is evident in the speaker's self-comparison with the watcher, Argus.<sup>299</sup> The potency of the male gaze is emphasised through the reference to Argus' hundred eyes, and an implicit comparison is drawn between Cynthia and another captive mistress, namely, Io. However, the poet-lover's power is again undermined through the foreshadowed demise of this mythical guardian. In these mythological descriptions, therefore, there is a tension between the poet-lover and his mistress that will only be resolved when she wakes from her slumber.

*sic ait in molli fixa toro cubitum:*  
*'tandem te nostro referens iniuria lecto*  
*alterius clausis expulit e foribus?*  
*namque ubi longa meae consumpsti tempora noctis,*  
*languidus exactis, ei mihi, sideribus?*  
*o utinam talis perducas, improbe, noctes,*  
*me miseram qualis semper habere iubes!*  
*nam modo purpureo fallebam stamine somnum,*  
*rursus et Orpheae carmine, fessa, lyrae;*  
*interdum leviter mecum deserta querebar*  
*externo longas saepe in amore moras:*  
*dum me iucundis lassam Sopor impulit alis.*  
*illa fuit lacrimis ultima cura meis.<sup>300</sup>*

Thus she spoke, propped up by an elbow on the soft bed:  
 "Has another's wrongdoing driven you away from her shut doors,  
 and brought you back to my bed at last?  
 For where have you passed the long hours of this night that was mine,

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid. 1.3.19

<sup>300</sup> Ibid. 1.3.34-46.

that you are now worn out – alas for me! – as the stars are driven off?  
 if only you, you wretch, would spend such nights,  
     as you always bid me have in my misery.  
 Until a moment ago I was cheating sleep by weaving purple threads,  
     and turned back again, wearied by the songs of Orpheus' lyre.  
 Now and then I, abandoned, moaned gently to myself  
     for you, delayed so long and so often by a stranger's love:  
 until, exhausted, Sleep urged me at last with his pleasant wing.  
     That was my last care, amidst my tears.

Greene describes the newly-woken Cynthia as a “transformation from an idealized object [...] to a hysterical female.”<sup>301</sup> Furthermore, she argues that Cynthia’s concern with “the banalities of circumstance and everyday existence [...] [set] her apart from the speaker’s own highly imaginative poetic practice.”<sup>302</sup> However true this may be, I would also argue that by allowing Cynthia a voice of her own – a disruptive, jarring voice that departs from the silent mythological women of the poet’s fantasies – the poet-author demonstrates that, unlike his poetic persona, Cynthia shows a greater understanding of her lover than he does of her. The poet-lover’s fantasies are shattered when his mistress awakes: she frustrates his desire for an idealised female object by asserting her own autonomy and desires when awake. If knowledge facilitates the enactment of power, the poet-lover’s misreading of Cynthia’s dreams results in his loss of authority over his mistress; Cynthia, on the other hand, knows just where her lover has been, and what sort of an evening *he* has been having: his drunken state betrays his evening activities. Consequently, it is Cynthia who has the last word; her lover is unable to deny her accusations and must remain silent.

Alternatively, one might examine the awakened Cynthia’s complaints and the poet-lover’s fantasies as the conflict between two similar, albeit competing, discourses. Cynthia’s melodramatic accusations remind one again of Propertius’ opening *exemplum* of the abandoned Ariadne. Harmon suggests that, rather than showing too much concern for “the banalities of circumstance and everyday existence,” Cynthia constructs herself as the heroine of her own tragic tale, and

casts the poet in the corresponding role of the faithless hero: though he had imagined himself as a Bacchus or a Perseus, he is (to his shame) a Theseus, the ‘villain’ in her eyes. Indeed, she may think of Propertius as a kind of parody of the hero – a Theseus who finally came back.<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Greene (1998) p.58.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid. p.58.

<sup>303</sup> Harmon (1974) p.162.

Cynthia, therefore, is more than a match for her lover; more than his equal in her imaginative capacity. While he might assume and enjoy the role of the mythological hero, she undermines his sense of power through providing a different reading of the same *exemplum*. Nevertheless, her victory is not decisive. In adopting the role of the heroine that the poet attributes to her, Cynthia might be playing into his fantasies: the poet-lover might know his irascible mistress better than at first seems to be the case.

While Greene's argument of the *puella* as *materia* both compelling and productive in the analysis of a number of elegiac poems, it is necessary to be aware of the subversive humour that the poet-author employs not only in his depiction of his mistress, but also of himself. I agree with Maria Wyke's assertion that

The heterodoxy of the elegiac portrayal of love [...] lies in the absence of a political or social role for the male narrator, not in any attempt to provide or demand a political role for the female subject. The temporary alignment with a sexually unrestrained mistress whom Augustan elegy depicts does not bestow on the female a new, challenging role but alienates the male from his traditional responsibilities.<sup>304</sup>

However, I would also suggest that the elegiac poet's attempt to explore new constructions of masculinity includes an often playful attempt to subvert the simplistic pattern of domination and submission that traditional conceptualisations of ancient Roman masculinity tended to promote. The discrepancy between the poet-lover and the poet-author in their romantic dialogue with the already-liminal *puella/domina* allows for a series of complicated power struggles in which no party necessarily emerges as the definitive victor, and in which deviant performances of gender result in a compelling erotic encounter in which desire is continually aroused and deferred.

### 3.6.1 Psychoanalysis and Domination

It is difficult to determine, however, why exactly the elegiac poet would attempt to explore the loss of control in his poetry; why he would seek to at least ostensibly yield to the *imperium* of a conventionally marginal figure through the figure of the poet-lover; why, even at the level of the poet-author, he would choose to undermine himself and share in the vulnerability of his persona. As discussed in the previous section, I do not think that the trope of *servitium amoris* can be solely

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<sup>304</sup> Wyke (1989) pp.42-3.

described as a ruse behind which the elegiac poet lurks, secretly exerting rhetorical control over his beloved in order to undermine the power that he ostensibly surrenders to her. However, neither do I believe the elegiac poet to be necessarily motivated by any sort of egalitarian desire. What is it about powerlessness that makes it attractive to the elegiac poet that he should deliberately explore it on so many levels?

I have discussed Propertius' 1.3 in terms of Foucault's reconceptualization of power and resistance: the fact that the relational nature of power offers space for resistance to its enactment. This theory is particularly useful when exploring the ways in which marginalised figures such as Pygmalion's statue, the unheroic Orpheus, and the elegiac lover can subvert the discourses that seek to maintain their relative state of powerlessness. However, what interests me about Latin love elegy is that both lover and poet *choose* to depict themselves in a position of powerlessness; one debases himself in the name of love, while the other often undermines the rhetorical control that he possesses over his written mistress. In attempting to explain this voluntary compromise of power, I have found Jessica Benjamin's psychoanalytic study of power relations to be of particular value. Using her discussion of intersubjectivity and power, I shall attempt to address the elegiac poet's exploration of vulnerability at both the level of poet-author and poet-lover.

Like Foucault, Benjamin conceives of power as relational; however, rather than analysing the potential for resistance within power relations, Benjamin views "domination as a two-way process, a system involving the *participation* of those who submit to power as well as those who exercise it."<sup>305</sup> Working within the framework of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Benjamin attempts to address Freud's ultimate conclusion that "we could not do without authority (...) and that we could not but suffer under its constraint."<sup>306</sup>

Benjamin takes as her starting point Hegel's discussion of the self's need – and struggle – for recognition by the other:

[t]he movement between them is the movement for recognition; each exists only by existing for the other, that is, by being recognized. But for Hegel, it is simply a given that this mutuality, the tension between asserting the self and recognizing the other, *must* break down; it is fated to produce an insoluble conflict. The breakdown of this tension is what leads to domination.<sup>307</sup>

The culmination of this breakdown, Benjamin states, is the master-slave relationship. It is not

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<sup>305</sup> Benjamin (1988) p.5. (Italics are my own).

<sup>306</sup> Ibid. p.10.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid. p.32.

surprising that Hegel should predict the inevitable failure of mutual recognition; Benjamin refers to the search for recognition as paradoxical:

the self is trying to establish himself as an absolute, independent entity, yet he must recognize the other as like himself in order to *be* recognized by him [...] The self can only be known by his acts – and only if his acts have meaning for the other do they have meaning for him. Yet each time he acts he negates the other, which is to say that if the other is affected then he is no longer *identical* with who he was before. To preserve his identity, the other resists instead of recognizing the self's acts.<sup>308</sup>

The self's desire to establish himself as an independent entity ultimately triumphs over the tension of mutual recognition, and the domination of the self over the other (or *vice versa*) can be the only result.

Benjamin, however, notes certain problems inherent with the Hegelian perspective: "if I completely negate the other, he does not exist; and if he does not survive, he is *not there* to recognize me."<sup>309</sup> The self's search for recognition, as articulated by Hegel, is ultimately a futile, self-defeating exercise. In order to avoid this, Benjamin therefore turns to the strategy employed by Winnicott in his essay, "The Use of an Object":

the recognition of the other involves a paradoxical process in which the object is *in fantasy* always being destroyed [...] the object must be destroyed *inside* in order that we know it to have survived *outside*; thus we can recognize it as not subject to our mental control. This relation of destruction and survival is a reformulation of and solution to Hegel's paradox: in the struggle for recognition each subject must stake his life, must struggle to negate the other – and woe if he succeeds [...] When I act upon the other it is vital that he be affected, so that I know that I exist – but not completely destroyed, so that I know he also exists [...] For [otherwise] there is no one there to recognize us, no one there for us to desire.<sup>310</sup>

Winnicott's theory of imaginary destruction, Benjamin explains, is a form of innocent aggression by which the other becomes valuable to the self through his or her ability to withstand the self's assertion of itself:

The subject [patient] says to the object [analyst]: "I destroyed you," and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says: "Hullo object!" "I destroyed you." "I love you."

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid. p.32.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid. p.38.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid. p.38.

“You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you.” “While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) *fantasy*.”<sup>311</sup>

It is this recognition of the other as a subject in his or her own right that differentiates Benjamin’s theory of intersubjectivity from most psychoanalytic theory, and what aligns it with Foucault’s reconceptualization of power. Benjamin states, for example, referring to the emphasis placed on internalisation by conventional psychoanalysis:

Internalization implies that the other is consumed, incorporated, digested by the subject self. That which is not consumed, what we do not get and cannot take away from others by consumption, seems to elude the concept of internalization. The joy of discovering the other, the agency of the self, and the outsideness of the other – these are at best only fuzzily apprehended by internalization theory.<sup>312</sup>

Latin love elegy demonstrates – especially at the level of the poet-author – this attempt to maintain the tension between recognising the other and seeking recognition for oneself. However, this project is complicated if one takes into account the prevailing tendency in ancient Rome to construct most ideal relationships – be they sexual, political, or social – as unequal. Furthermore, this dichotomous understanding of relationships is often carried over into modern scholarship. Instead, I would argue that the elegiac poet is attempting to escape from this dichotomy of subject and object; engaging in a series of power negotiations with his mistress and persona in order to achieve some semblance of balance or tension between them. This is achieved primarily through the narrative layers that operate within Latin love elegy and the figure of the poet-author.<sup>313</sup>

This genre also hints at Winnicott’s theory of imaginary destruction. The poet-author, for example, constructs the *domina* as inaccessible so that the poet-lover may prevail against her. He idealises her, offers her his service as her slave, condemns her, and attempts to leave his mark on her,<sup>314</sup> but nevertheless stresses his failure to ultimately become one with her.

There are moments of triumph, of course, in which the *domina* bestows her affection upon the poet-lover, just as there are moments of abject failure in which the poet-lover will descend to the point of self-annihilation in the attempt to win recognition from his *dura domina*.<sup>315</sup> For the most part, however, Latin love elegy rejects the normative power structures of the time, which depict

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<sup>311</sup> Winnicott (1971) p.106, quoted by Benjamin (1988) p.38.

<sup>312</sup> Benjamin (1988) p.43.

<sup>313</sup> See my discussion in Section 3.5.2.

<sup>314</sup> See Chapter Four, Section 4.4 on violence in elegy.

<sup>315</sup> See Section 3.3 of this chapter.

ideal relationships as a one-way expression of power – the master-slave relationship – in favour of more complex interactions. As Propertius' 1.3 demonstrates, the poet-lover can enjoy his imaginary power over his mistress even as the poet-author undermines his persona; the *domina* will accuse her lover of infidelity and rail against him even as she is constructed as equally unfaithful by her lover in his fantasies. Rather than depict the imposition of one single discourse of power of one individual upon the other, the Latin elegiac poet seems to delight in ambiguity and dialectic, often frustrating any desire to determine a clear subject and object.

However, if one looks solely at the position of the poet-lover, one can see a different negotiation for power in his identification as his *domina's* slave. Benjamin reminds her audience that

it is increasingly apparent that the roles of master and slave are not intrinsically or exclusively male and female respectively; as the original "masochist" of *Venus in Furs* (Leopold von Sacher-Masoch) reminds us, the opposite is often true: the actual practice of sadomasochism frequently reverses heterosexual patterns.<sup>316</sup>

It is nevertheless important to keep in mind that for a male to willingly and publically adopt a servile position in Augustan Rome was considered a radical act – a forfeiture of masculinity and, consequently, physical inviolability that merited contempt and disgust. Regardless of whether one repudiates the theory of *servitium amoris* being no more than a witty ruse from behind which the poet-author is pulling the puppet-strings of his mistress, it becomes necessary to question what attractions lie behind even the fantasy of such vulnerability. From the outset, Benjamin suggests that "[w]hat we shall see [...] is a *paradox* in which the individual tries to achieve freedom through slavery, release through submission to control."<sup>317</sup>

The attractions of domination are self-evident, although I have discussed the dangers, pointed out by Benjamin, inherent in the complete negation of the other. However, for that domination to be effective, "the slave must grant power of recognition to the master."<sup>318</sup> What I therefore consider to be significant in Latin love elegy is the poet-lover's consent to the necessary conditions of a master-slave relationship.

Benjamin suggests that such a masochistic position constitutes a "search for recognition through an other who is powerful enough to bestow this recognition."<sup>319</sup> Ultimately, this theory suggests that, although completely disempowered himself, the poet-lover vicariously experiences

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<sup>316</sup> Benjamin (1988) p.74.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid. p.52. (Italics my own).

<sup>318</sup> Ibid. p.54.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid. p.56.

and enjoys his mistress' power as it is enacted upon him; Benjamin's discussion of the master-slave dialectic states that the slave willingly accepts his position as such

under a specific condition: that [his] sacrifice actually creates the [*domina's*] power; produces [her] coherent self, in which [he] can take refuge. Thus in losing [his] own self, [he] is gaining access, however circumscribed, to a more powerful one.<sup>320</sup>

This sacrifice of power is therefore effective in those moments in which the *domina* accepts and returns his recognition of her, in which the poet-lover revels in being the object of her desire, and what he takes to be his own power over her:

*haec mihi devictis potior victoria Parthis,  
haec spolia, haec reges, haec mihi currus erunt.*<sup>321</sup>

This victory is greater to me than conquering Parthia,  
this will be my spoils, my kings, this my chariots.

However, although the psychic tension between the need to both give and receive recognition is resolved into an external dichotomy between two individuals, tension nevertheless continues to exist in that the slave seeks unity with his master while the latter strives to preserve distance between them. The inaccessibility of the *domina*, her ivory skin and *dura* demeanour, "symbolizes the master's resistance to being absorbed by the thing [she] is controlling."<sup>322</sup> The slave fears abandonment by the idealised figure of the master, whereas "the master's denial of the other's subjectivity leaves [her] faced with isolation as the only alternative to being engulfed by the dehumanized other."<sup>323</sup>

Therefore, the master-slave relationship is not without its own tensions, and one wonders why so many turn to such a relationship rather than struggling with one of reciprocation and mutuality. In order to explain this, Benjamin turns to George Bataille:

Individual existence for Bataille is a state of separation and isolation: we are islands, connected yet separated by a sea of death. Eroticism is the perilous crossing of that sea. It opens the way out of isolation by exposing us to 'death...the denial of our individual lives.' The body stands for boundaries:

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid. p.61.

<sup>321</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.14.23-4.

<sup>322</sup> Benjamin (1988) p.57.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid. p.65.

discontinuity, individuality and life. Consequently the violation of the body is a transgression of the boundary between life and death, even as it breaks through our discontinuity from each other. This break, this crossing of boundaries is for Bataille the secret of *all* eroticism; and it assumes its starkest expression in erotic violation.<sup>324</sup>

In order to achieve this transgression of boundaries without the complete dissolution of those who attempt it, erotic complementarity becomes necessary. One must protect one's boundaries, while the other allows the violation of their own. The submissive partner seeks their antithesis that they might enjoy the erotic experience that vulnerability to a master can provide.

Nevertheless, as discussed above, this position is almost inevitably self-defeating:

the sadist is in danger of becoming the will-less thing he consumes unless he separates himself completely; [...] the masochist increasingly feels she does not exist, that she is without will or desire, that she has no life apart from the other.<sup>325</sup>

Such a relationship, Benjamin concludes, tends to terminate in metaphorical – or even real – death, “or, at any rate, [in] deadness, numbness, the exhaustion of sensation.”<sup>326</sup> This is often the way in which the elegiac relationship concludes: the poet-lover ultimately declares:

*quinque tibi potui servire fideliter annos:  
ungue meam morso saepe querere fidem.*<sup>327</sup>

I was able to give you loyal service for five years:  
you will often lament my faith with bitten nails.

However, I would argue that this polarity is mediated by the figure of the poet-author, whose subversive strategies heighten and restores the tension between the persona and beloved.

Thus, on the level of eroticism, a dialectic is established between the persona's desire to collapse into the Other – to become one with them and vicariously enjoy their power and superiority – and to establish protective boundaries between himself and his mistress; to impose a distance between them that will allow for the continuation of the desire that produces elegiac poetry and establishes the poet's *fama*. The simplicity of the subject/object relationship is insufficient; it destroys desire. It is his transcendence of such dichotomies that enables the elegiac poet to

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid. p.63, quoting George Bataille (1986) p.24.

<sup>325</sup> Benjamin (1988) p.65.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid. p.65.

<sup>327</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 3.25.3-4.

articulate his desire through poetry.

### 3.7 Conclusion

Despite the fact that in Augustan Rome power was conceived of as an essentially hierarchical relationship, this chapter has demonstrated the limitations of looking at Latin love elegy solely in terms of the dichotomous pairing of powerful/powerless or subject/object. Much like Ovid's Pygmalion figure, the Augustan elegists attempted to transcend such boundaries; to describe a romantic relationship that worked against the superficial metaphor of *servitium amoris* and maintain a degree of tension between the poet-author/lover and his *puella/domina*.

In order to accomplish this, the Roman elegists problematized the concept of masculinity through the poet-lover's identification as a slave, and his submission to the *imperium* of his *domina*, as well as the poet-author's exposure of the lover's scopophilic and sadistic impulses, and his use of subversive humour in the depiction of both poet-lover and *puella*.

Ultimately, both resistance and voluntary submission to power operate on two different levels: between the poet-lover and his *domina*, and between the poet-lover and poet-author. Both of these levels have as their central focus the poet-lover and, like many elegiac scholars, it is my belief that one of the functions of elegiac poetry was the exploration of new models of masculinity, rather than the emancipation of Roman women. However, this should not necessarily result in Latin love elegy being labelled 'misogynistic', as the elegiac poet's attempt to reconceptualise masculinity also seems to involve fantasies of vulnerability and a movement towards a more relational view of power.

## Chapter Four

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2. *Militia Amoris*
- 4.3 Elegy and Epic
- 4.4 Sexual/Textual Violence: The Body of the Elegiac Mistress
- 4.5 Elegy and Empire
- 4.6 Conclusion

### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the trope of *servitium amoris*, its implications for the poet-lover's perceived masculinity, and the ways in which the slave's devotion to his *domina* is undermined by the lover's jealous suspicion of his *puella*. This suspicion finds expression through sadistic voyeurism: the desire to uncover the *puella's* guilt in order to either redeem or punish her. Thus violence is inveigled into the elegiac text, despite the poet-lover's ostensible renunciation of brutality and the military sphere.

This intrusion is furthered by the poet-author's use of *militia amoris*. In spite of the poet-lover's disinterest in – or even outright condemnation of – military affairs, it is nevertheless true that military images and terms occur frequently in the works of all the major elegists. Indeed, several poems are devoted almost exclusively towards this trope.<sup>328</sup> The epic genre and discourse of empire both encroach upon the elegiac text and form a complex relationship with it in its construction of gender.

This chapter will explore this trope of *militia amoris* and its role in the elegiac poet's depiction of masculinity through his allusions to epic and empire. It will conclude with a discussion of the intrusion of violence upon the erotic sphere and the means by which the lover's attempts to assert his masculinity are reflected in the elegist's desire to establish his own identity as a poet.

### 4.2 Militia Amoris

Working both against, and in parallel with, the trope of *servitium amoris* is that of *militia amoris*,

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<sup>328</sup> See, for example, Propertius 1.6 and 1.7.

which transposes military terms and descriptions onto the poet's love-affair with his *puella*. If *servitium amoris* is constituted by, and attempts to subvert, discourses concerned with gender and social hierarchies, *militia amoris* shows a similar relationship to those discursive strategies surrounding Rome's imperial ambitions, the military, and epic constructions of masculinity. However, while *servitium amoris* implies – at least to a certain extent – a relationship of reciprocal exchange,<sup>329</sup> *militia amoris* is almost entirely concerned with coercion.

Nevertheless, as argued in this chapter, the depiction of “the soldiery of love” in Latin love elegy demonstrates a greater complexity than that of the poet-lover's servile devotion to his mistress through a variety of manifestations within the text. Amongst those manifestations, this chapter shall discuss the poet-lover's submission to either Love or his *domina*, the depiction of the battles between the poet-lover and his beloved, as well as examples of *militia amoris* in which the poet affirms traditional gender roles, and attempts to re-establish his own masculine status.

Ostensibly, within the trope of *militia amoris*

the poet-lover styles himself as a soldier who follows in love's camp, or the *castra* of his girl, rather than in the military retinue of his patron and commander [...] or as a prisoner, neck bowed in submission to his mistress or to Amor himself.<sup>330</sup>

Thus Propertius, describing his mistress' dominion over him, informs his patron, Tullus:

*non ego sum laudi, non natus idoneus armis:  
hanc me militiam fata subire volunt.*<sup>331</sup>

I was not born fitted for weapons or glory:

This is the soldiering which the Fates would have me undergo.

Tibullus utters a similar sentiment, having informed his patron, Messalla, where his allegiance truly lies:

*Nunc levis est tractanda Venus, dum frangere postes  
Non pudet et rixas inseruisse iuvat.*

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<sup>329</sup> See Chapter Three, Section 3.3.

<sup>330</sup> Bowditch in Gold (2012) p.120.

<sup>331</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 1.6.29-30.

*Hic ego dux milesque bonus.*<sup>332</sup>

Now must light-hearted love take place, while it is not shameful  
to break down doors and it is pleasurable to mingle in a brawl.  
Here am I a good soldier; a good general.

It is interesting to find a trope conflating love and warfare in the works of a group of poets who devote much of their writing to distancing themselves from the public sphere of military life and its inherent brutality.<sup>333</sup> However, it is true that this trope does not only establish the differences between these two occupations; it also highlights their inherent similarities:

A survey of the earliest examples of love's warfare tends to confirm this opinion [the resemblance of love to war]: as it was developed it became more complex and eventually in Roman elegy was actually contrasted with real war, but in its most rudimentary form it was simply an application of military language to amatory activities, suggested by their resemblance to military operations.<sup>334</sup>

The power relations inherent within warfare and love are not dissimilar; the language of the former allows for an effective description of the power dynamics that may be found within the latter.<sup>335</sup> As with the trope of *servitium amoris*, however, elegiac poetry differs from other genres in that conventional gender roles are inverted, and it is the *domina* who becomes the general to whose service the poet-lover offers his life.

It is this inversion that distinguishes the Latin love elegists from their predecessors. As with the trope of *servitium amoris*, the Augustan elegists incorporate military vocabulary and descriptions in order to emphasise their own powerlessness and incompetence within the amatory sphere, and thus begin to draw important distinctions between the amatory and military life even as they suggest their similarities.

Furthermore, the military vocabulary employed by the elegiac poet is specifically Roman. Murgatroyd notes that

[i]n former poets the love-deities frequently appear as enemy or conqueror and in the Hellenistic period Love was elevated by the attribution of epic epithets usually applied to the finest warriors or

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<sup>332</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.1.73-5.

<sup>333</sup> See, for example, Propertius 2.15.41-8, Tibullus 1.1.1-6, and 1.10.31-4.

<sup>334</sup> Murgatroyd (1975) p.60.

<sup>335</sup> See, for example, Kennedy in Gold (2012) p.189:

Love and war, love and slavery are not identical, but in presenting them in shared terms, we are invited to view aggression, domination and submission as aspects of the dynamics of erotic as much as of martial activity [...]

the god of war himself.<sup>336</sup>

It is Tibullus, however, who first assigns a rank to the god:

*ure, puer, quaeso tua qui ferus otia liquit  
atque iterum erronem sub tua signa voca.*<sup>337</sup>

I beg you, boy, burn the savage who has abandoned your peace  
and call the straggler back beneath your standard.

He is also the first to introduce the image of the Roman camp:

*at tu, quisquis is es, cui tristi fronte Cupido  
imperat ut nostra sint tua castra domo[...]*<sup>338</sup>

And you, whoever you may be, whom frowning Cupid  
orders to set up camp in our house [...]

In Romanising the trope of *militia amoris*, Murgatroyd claims, the Latin love elegists “clarified in particular the position of Amor and, more important, their own relation to him.”<sup>339</sup> I would further argue that the Romanisation of this trope situates them firmly within the sphere of traditional Roman masculinity, where the elegiac poets might better establish and explore alternative constructions of gender.

In the elegiac poet’s depiction of *militia amoris* it is often the case that either Love or the poet-lover’s *domina* triumph over him. What is interesting is the poet’s attitude towards his own seeming powerlessness. Propertius, for example, opens his *Monobiblos* with his defeat at the hands of both the god and Cynthia:

*Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis,  
contactum nullis ante cupidinibus.  
tum mihi constantis deiecit lumina fastus  
et caput impositis pressit Amor pedibus,*

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<sup>336</sup> Ibid. p.68.

<sup>337</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 2.6.5-6.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid. 2.3.33-34.

<sup>339</sup> Murgatroyd (1975) p.68.

*donec me docuit castas odisse puellas  
improbis, et nullo vivere consilio.*<sup>340</sup>

Cynthia was the first to capture me, wretched one, with her eyes,  
before then was I untouched by desire.  
Amor then forced down my gaze of determined contempt  
and, with his planted feet, held down my head,  
until he had taught me to hate virtuous girls  
and to live without sense – a reprobate.

Cynthia's agency is demonstrated through the active *cepit*, and the emphasis of her ownership of her gaze (*suas ocellis*). Propertius, however, is deprived of his own formerly haughty gaze when Love places his foot on his victim's head in the manner of a Homeric hero.<sup>341</sup> Discussing this gesture in the context of epic poetry, Stahl notes that "in none of these [Homeric and Vergilian] passages does the victor confine himself to the gesture of setting his foot on the defeated."<sup>342</sup> Propertius, having been conquered, has forfeited his physical inviolability; typically, the victim is also verbally humiliated, and stripped of his spoils.

Both Greene and Stahl observe the peculiarity of the victim, rather than the victor, recounting his own defeat. However, whereas Stahl interprets the poet-lover's situation as "torture for the purpose of 'brainwashing',"<sup>343</sup> Greene comments upon the humorous incongruity of this image, noting also the playful use of *ocellis* in the first line.<sup>344</sup> It is unclear as to whether Greene is correct in attributing more agency to the poet-lover than his narrative would have his audience believe, or whether it is simply the case that he takes joy in his own defeat. While the strength of *militia amoris* is dependent upon the similarities between love and warfare, the poet is well-aware that he is not describing a real case of the latter. Being conquered by Love is not inherently a negative experience; indeed, Greene comments that rather than feel shame,

the speaker makes it clear that his new imprudent way of living (*nullo vivere consilio*) is taught to him by a god [...making] it seem as though the speaker is improving himself by learning an important lesson from his mentor.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 1.1.1-6.

<sup>341</sup> See Stahl (1985) p.30, where he lists instances of this pose in Homer and Vergil (e.g. *Aen.* 10.490ff; *Il.* 5.620; *Il.* 13.618ff).

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.* p.30.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.* p.32.

<sup>344</sup> Greene (1998) pp.40-1.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.* pp.41-2.

It is evident that not only does the elegiac lover wage his battles in the private sphere of erotic love, rejecting a military life, but he is seldom the conqueror. From the outset, the poet-lover is depicted as weak and therefore unmanly. However, just as with *servitium amoris*, “the lover fully realizes this and takes a perverse pleasure in it.”<sup>346</sup> In his programmatic first elegy, Tibullus claims:

*te bellare decet terra, Messalla, marique,  
ut domus hostiles praeferat exuvias;  
me retinent vinctum formosae vincla puellae,  
et sedeo duras ianitor ante fores.  
non ego laudari curo, mea Delia; tecum  
dum modo sim, quaeso segnis inersque vocer.*<sup>347</sup>

It behoves you, Messalla, to wage war on land and sea,  
that your house might display enemy spoils:  
the chains of a beautiful girl hold me captive,  
and, like a doorman, I sit before her unyielding door.  
I desire no praise, my Delia; as long as I'm with you,  
I ask to be called idle and dull.

Tibullus, in this passage, relinquishes the opportunity to exert his *imperium* over others (*militia amoris*), and instead subjects himself to the *imperium* of his mistress (*servitium amoris*). The poet-lover's passivity and lack of agency is emphasised not only by the closely-grouped *me retinet vinctum...vincla*, but

the poet manages to keep such [military] ambitions at even greater distance by the bland passive construction. Similarly *tecum sim*, while certainly clear in its erotic implications, is the mildest possible way of expressing the idea. This low-key turn of phrase leads directly to the emphatic lethargy of *segnis inersque*, and the whole expression is cast into wishful subjunctives.<sup>348</sup>

Lee-Stecum also notes<sup>349</sup> that Delia's name is placed in a similar position to Messalla's, thus conflating the *domina* with the general, as well as the poet-lover with the spoils of war.

In Chapter Three I discussed a possible explanation for the poet's willing submission to his

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<sup>346</sup> Murgatroyd (1975) p.79.

<sup>347</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.1.53-8.

<sup>348</sup> Bright (1978) p.128.

<sup>349</sup> Lee-Stecum (1998) p.48.

*domina*,<sup>350</sup> namely, the desire to compromise his own absolute power in order to achieve a position in which mutual recognition between two equal subjects might become possible. However, the poet-lover's renunciation of, and incompetence in, the military sphere suggests a second possibility. Maria Wyke observes that the elegiac poet's construction of his own subservience to his *domina* and

"her [consequent] erotic dominance over her lover-poet serves to mark him as morally and politically irresponsible – so enslaved to love as to be incapable of being a proper Augustan citizen or soldier."<sup>351</sup>

However, not all examples of *militia amoris* suggest such motivations; the elegiac poet's exploration of masculinity and vulnerability does not always take the form of the renunciation of the military sphere. Indeed, despite the elegiac poet's innovative use of *militia amoris*, what I consider to be Tibullus' most interesting representation of the loss of masculinity is his explicit *endorsement* of warfare as a means to erotic success. Initially opposed to warfare and the *longa via* that would take him away from Delia, Tibullus comes to welcome a military life that he might appease Nemesis' desire for luxurious gifts:

*heu heu divitibus video gaudere puellas:  
iam veniant praedae, si Venus optat opes,  
ut mea luxuria Nemesis fluat utque per urbem  
incedat donis conspicienda meis.*<sup>352</sup>

Alas, I see that girls take pleasure in riches:

Now let spoils come, if Venus chooses wealth,  
so that my Nemesis may drip with luxuries  
and be admired for my gifts as she marches through the city.

In his *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero claims

*totum igitur in eo est, ut tibi imperes [...] sed hoc idem in dolore maxime est providendum, ne quid abiecte, ne quid timide, ne quid ignave, ne quid serviliter muliebriterve faciamus.*

Thus everything comes down to this: that you rule yourself...But we must see to the same thing

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<sup>350</sup> See Chapter Three, Section 3.6.

<sup>351</sup> Wyke (2002) p.2.

<sup>352</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 2.3.49-52.

especially in pain: not to do anything in a base, timid, ignoble, slavish, or womanish way.<sup>353</sup>

The second book of Tibullus' *Elegies* therefore constitutes the realisation of Cicero's warning. In his obsession with Nemesis, Tibullus' ideals and aspirations are swiftly eroded: a pastoral dream becomes painful toil;<sup>354</sup> he is willing to sell his ancestral home;<sup>355</sup> crime, sacrilege, and soldiery seem desirable professions if they will provide the wealth the Nemesis demands.<sup>356</sup> Indeed, even Tibullus' worship of Venus is inverted through his desire for his mercenary mistress, and the latent jealousy and sadism evident within Latin love elegy<sup>357</sup> is made explicit when he states:

*sed Venus ante alios est violanda mihi.  
illa malum facinus suadet dominamque rapacem  
dat mihi: sacrilegas sentiat illa manus.*<sup>358</sup>

But may Venus – before all others – be dishonoured by me;  
she promotes crime and gives me a greedy mistress;  
may she feel unholy hands.

Although he finally accepts physical hardship, action, and violence – all signifiers of traditional Roman masculinity – it is not his own desires that Tibullus ultimately follows, but his mistress'. Nemesis' control over the poet-lover is so pervasive that his identity has become warped through his desire for her. Williams states of ancient Roman masculinity that

A man must exercise dominion over his own body and his own desires as well as the bodies and desires of those under his jurisdiction – his wife, children, and slaves – just as the Roman citizenry as a whole ideally dominates most of the rest of the world. A man might lose his grip on masculine control in various ways: [...] by seeking to be dominated or even penetrated by his sexual partners, by subjugating himself to others for the sake of pleasuring or entertaining them, or by yielding to his own passions, desires, and fears. Masculinity was not fundamentally a matter of sexual practice; it was a matter of control.<sup>359</sup>

While Tibullus' lack of control is present from the very first poem of Book 1, its explicit depiction in

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<sup>353</sup> Cicero, *Tusc.* 2.53,55, translated by Williams (2010) p.148.

<sup>354</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 2.3.5-10.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.* 2.4.53-4.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.* 2.4.21-6.

<sup>357</sup> See also Chapter Three, Section 3.5.1 and Section 4.4 below.

<sup>358</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 2.4.24-6.

<sup>359</sup> Williams (2010) p.155.

Book 2 constitutes what I consider to be the most dramatic loss of masculine status in Latin love elegy. Tibullus' willingness to become a soldier that he might retain Nemesis' attentions demonstrates the emasculating effects of elegiac desire, and suggests the master-slave relationship discussed in Chapter Three even as it reflects a superficial adherence to normative masculine behaviour.

In the elegiac poet's ostensible powerlessness, therefore, *militia amoris* seems to be identical to *servitium amoris*, with the simple substitution of military images for those of slavery. However, what complicates it with regard to the representation of gender is the addition of the patron, and his relation to the elegiac *puella* with whom he is often paralleled in terms of their mutual power over the speaker. In Book 1, for example, there is an implied conflation of Delia with Messalla: just as the latter holds power over Tibullus in terms of the service owed to him in return for his patronage, Delia possesses similar authority over her poet-lover. Nevertheless, when these two dominant figures are mentioned together, it is Messalla who is the ultimate wielder of authority, and traditional gender relations are re-established in his presence.

In 1.5, Tibullus imagines a pastoral life with Delia, giving her complete authority over both the land and himself.<sup>360</sup> However, when Messalla comes to visit,

*Huc veniet Messalla meus, cui dulcia poma  
Delia selectis detrahat arboribus;  
et tantum venerata virum hunc sedula curet,  
huic paret atque epulas ipsa ministra gerat.*<sup>361</sup>

When my Messalla comes here, Delia would pluck  
sweet fruit for him, from the choicest trees;  
and, honouring so great a man, she would work diligently,  
and prepare and serve the meal, with her as the servant.

Whatever power she might possess in the private, amatory sphere, when public figures from the broader social/military sphere intrude upon Tibullus' dream, normative gender roles are reinstated. It is Delia's turn to be cast in the role of servant in Tibullus' dream of her waiting upon Messalla. One should note that in the elegiac text the poet-author's discursive construction of gender, "which transforms and re-determines the accepted norm of the man in control [...] and the woman

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<sup>360</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.5.29-30.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.* 1.5.31-4.

subservient”<sup>362</sup> applies only to the relationship between himself and his *domina*. Despite Judith Hallett’s description of elegy as a proto-feminist “counter-culture,”<sup>363</sup> one returns once again to Maria Wyke’s observation that

The heterodoxy of the elegiac portrayal of love, therefore, lies in the absence of a political or social role for the male narrator, not in any attempt to provide or demand a political role for the female subject. The temporary alignment with a sexually unrestrained mistress whom Augustan elegy depicts does not bestow on the female a new, challenging role but alienates the male from his traditional responsibilities. The elegiac poets exploit the traditional methods of ordering female sexuality which locate the sexually unrestrained and therefore socially ineffective female on the margins of society in order to portray their first-person heroes as displaced from a central position in the social categories of Augustan Rome.<sup>364</sup>

#### 4.3 Elegy and Epic

However, although the poet envisions in his amatory poetry the inversion of gender roles on a purely individual scale, the use of *militia amoris* nevertheless expands the elegiac landscape from the private realm of the bedroom to the public realm of imperial conquest. Bowditch, for example, observes that

throughout the canonical elegiac corpus [...] one encounters scattered mention of Aquitania (Gaul), Britannia, Hispania, Germania, India, Arabia, the *colorati Seres* (“Chinese”), Greece, the Propontis and the Black Sea region, among others, and, of course, Parthia and Egypt, the lands that in many ways marked the opposite ends of Augustus’s imperial achievements.<sup>365</sup>

However, even as it introduces a geographical landscape familiar to its Roman audience, Latin love elegy imports “the topography of a particular literary tradition,”<sup>366</sup> namely, epic verse:

*sed tempus lustrare aliis Heliconae choreis,  
et campum Haemonio iam dare tempus equo [...]  
nondum etiam Ascræos norunt mea carmina fontis,*

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<sup>362</sup> Lee-Stecum (1998) p.168.

<sup>363</sup> Hallett in Miller (2002) p.330.

<sup>364</sup> Wyke (2002) p.44.

<sup>365</sup> Bowditch in Gold (2012) p.103.

<sup>366</sup> Wyke (2002) p.51.

*sed modo Permessi flumine lauit Amor.*<sup>367</sup>

But it is time to circle Helicon with other feet,  
time to give the plains to the Thessalian horse [...]  
Not yet have my verses come to know the fount of Ascra,  
Love has only dipped them in Permessus' stream.

Wyke points out the literary practice by which "Hesiod (and the particular tradition of writing with which he was associated) [was evoked] by reference to the topography of that area [Mount Helicon]."<sup>368</sup> Via the trope of *militia amoris* the "realistic" elegiac world is transformed into that of epic verse, the conflicting spheres of love and war become the competing genres of elegy and epic, and "the elegiac man is not portrayed as a lover [...] Instead, his role is solely that of a poet; a master of discourse who himself chooses between modes of poetic composition."<sup>369</sup>

In addition to referring to suggestive epic locales, *militia amoris* and the epic genre also intrude upon the elegiac text through the formulaic *recusatio*, in which the poet-lover informs his patron that he is unable, or unwilling, to write the epic verse expected of him. It is therefore evident that "Homeric and Virgilian epic are a constant intertext in elegy's self-definition as not-epic [...and] epic, though in one sense rejected, is nevertheless incorporated into elegy."<sup>370</sup> I will focus on two manifestations of the elegiac poet's interest in the epic genre, namely, his characterisation of himself as a hero in the spheres of both love and war, as well as his desire to assert both his masculinity and his creative genius through his chosen genre.

The elegiac poet's rejection of and incompetence in the military sphere have important implications for his perceived masculinity; his dismissal of the epic genre has a similar effect on his status as a poet:

throughout antiquity, epic poetry in general (most commonly exemplified by Homeric epic) was viewed as a genre primarily concerned with masculine social identity and political activity, particularly in the context of warfare.<sup>371</sup>

With its focus on the military and political spheres, epic ostensibly functions as a useful antithesis from which elegy can distinguish itself. However, despite his professed rejection of epic, the elegiac

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<sup>367</sup> Propertius 2.10.1-2; 25-6.

<sup>368</sup> Wyke (2002) p.51.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

<sup>370</sup> O'Rourke in Gold (2012) p.399.

<sup>371</sup> Keith (2000) p.2.

poet does not so much distance himself from that genre as reiterate the values of the heroic ethos within the amatory sphere, in addition to transposing elegiac values onto epic verse.<sup>372</sup>

In her discussion of Propertius' 1.7, for example, Greene comments upon the use of the figure of the *dura puella*<sup>373</sup> as an object to be won through struggle, as well as a substitute for the male adversaries of epic verse.<sup>374</sup> Despite his posture of *servitium amoris*,<sup>375</sup> the poet-author uses his mistress both as a means to acquire a literary reputation (*fama*),<sup>376</sup> and as an audience that will appreciate his poetic talents. Indeed, having declared that *saepe venit magno faenore tardus amor*,<sup>377</sup> the role of *servus amoris* is ultimately reassigned to the epic poet Ponticus, while the elegist becomes a seasoned warrior in the amatory sphere:

Ironically, the epic poet who scorns the lover's art and the state of servitude implied in the position of the lover will end up, according to the speaker, being a slave to his emotions, devoid of the emotional or literary resources to heal himself [...] The speaker's triumphant announcement of his supremacy in the world of Roman literary talents suggests that the elegiac stance of servitude toward the mistress is nothing more than a ruse to create an alternative heroic ethos for the male protagonist.<sup>378</sup>

This conflation of epic hero and elegiac lover therefore functions as another manifestation of *militia amoris*. While *servitium amoris* constitutes a power struggle between the poet-lover and his *puella*, this expression of *militia amoris* often sets up a power struggle between the poet-author and his literary rival, the epic poet. Like Ovid's Orpheus, the elegiac poet constructs a counter-discourse in which his eloquence and skill as a lover supersedes the strength and courage of the traditional hero, and his refined, "soft" poetry is considered superior to epic verse. In the amatory sphere, feminine ideals such as *mollitia* and submission enable the poet-lover to overcome his adversary (i.e. the *dura puella*) and achieve literary *fama*; traditionally masculine poetry and values result in defeat and enslavement.

In the process of creating this counter-discourse, however, although the elegiac poet proclaims the supremacy of the amatory sphere, his epic allusions allow violence to intrude upon the erotic, exposing its already-present power structures and allowing traditional constructions of masculinity to reassert themselves. For example, in the mutual (if infrequent) 'battles' that occur when the poet-lover's *domina* relents and allows her lover to spend a night with her, epic allusions

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<sup>372</sup> See Greene (1998) p.49 and O'Rourke in Gold (2012) p.399.

<sup>373</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 1.7.6.

<sup>374</sup> Greene (1998) p.49.

<sup>375</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 1.7.7-8.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.* 1.7.22-4.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.* 1.7.26

<sup>378</sup> Greene (1998) pp.50-1.

and military vocabulary are used as a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Propertius significantly claims such nights as the source of his poetry:

*Seu nuda erepto mecum luctatur amictu,  
tum vero longas condimus Iliadas.*<sup>379</sup>

Or if naked she wrestles me, our clothes snatched away,  
then in truth we compose long Iliads.

Propertius' lovemaking with Cynthia is compared to – and surpasses – the sacking of Troy;<sup>380</sup> the *servus amoris* consequently becomes a hero, while his beloved is rendered a prize to be won, or an enemy to be overcome. Previously a follower in his *domina's* camp, or his mistress' prisoner, the elegiac poet can now claim:

*O me felicem! nox o mihi candida! [...]  
quam multa apposita narrâmus verba lucerna,  
quantaque sublato lumine rixa fuit!*<sup>381</sup>

O happy me! O night, shining for me! [...]  
How many words we spoke, beside the light,  
and how great a struggle when the light was taken away!

However, this counter-discourse is not only constructed through the poet-lover's elevation to heroic status. O'Rourke notes that Propertius' strategy incorporates both the 'heroicization' of elegy as well as the 'elegiacization' of epic verse.<sup>382</sup> Achilles, for example, in Propertius' 2.8, *omnia formosam propter Briseida passus* [suffered all for the sake of lovely Briseis].<sup>383</sup> By transposing elegiac values onto the epic text, the poet-author is further enabled to draw comparisons between himself and more traditional heroes. Not only does he possess their commitment to a life of hardship and struggle against a *dura* opponent, but they demonstrate his erotic affinities and are made stronger by it:

*quid? cum e complexu Briseidos iret Achilles,*

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<sup>379</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.1.13-4.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.* 2.14.1-2.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.* 2.15.1; 3-4.

<sup>382</sup> O'Rourke in Gold (2012) p.399.

<sup>383</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.8.35.

*num fugere minus Thessala tela Phryges?*  
*quid? ferus Andromachae lecto cum surgeret Hector,*  
*bella Mycenaee non timuere rates?*  
*illi vel classes poterant vel perdere muros:*  
*hic ego Pelides, hic ferus Hector ego.*<sup>384</sup>

Well? When Achilles would come from Briseis' embrace,  
did the Trojans flee his Greek arrows any less?  
What of when fierce Hector rose from Andromache's bed,  
Did the Mycenaean fleet not fear the battle?  
They had the power to ruin ships and walls:  
in this am I Achilles, in this am I fierce Hector.

Orpheus simply attempts to privilege his poetic abilities over those of traditional heroes such as Heracles, thus establishing himself as a superior hero. The elegiac poet does this through asserting that he possesses heroic qualities, albeit within the amatory sphere. However, he also reinterprets the traditional epic hero as a lover, identifying his own qualities in figures such as Achilles and Hector. Orpheus affirms the existing dichotomy by which strength and art are opposed while attempting to invert the masculinity attributed to those who exist within that dichotomy. The elegiac poet, however, although often distinguishing his particular form of warfare from those praised by epic poets, nevertheless narrows the gap between himself and the world of epic heroism.

Thus, even as the elegiac poet informs his patron that he is not destined for lofty epic verse he suggests its inferiority to amatory poetry, appropriates its heroes, and constructs a heroic identity that comes into conflict with that of the *servus amoris*. However, this interpolation of the epic genre does not only come into conflict with the trope of *servitium amoris*; it contradicts the elegiac poet's claims of inferiority within the military sphere. While the poet-lover's amatory failures are translated into mediocre soldiery, the poet-author's one-upmanship of the epic poet asserts the superiority of his chosen genre and re-establishes his masculinity. Consequently the elegiac poet confidently states that the soldiery of love is a superior form of warfare, and that even his failures within the amatory sphere are preferable to military success.

Harold Bloom, in his *Anxiety of Influence*, discusses the problematic relationship between poets and their predecessors: although inspired through the works of those who wrote before him, the influence of his predecessors over the poet may lead to his writing poetry that is derivative and weak. Consequently, the poet becomes concerned about his ability to produce original, innovative

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid. 2.22a.29-34.

work and fears that, should he fail, his name will be lost to posterity.

Although Bloom focuses predominantly on the Romantic poets in the seventeenth century, this anxiety of influence is evident in the works of the Augustan elegiac poets. Propertius in particular is concerned with establishing himself among his Hellenistic predecessors:

*contentus niveis semper vectabere cycnis,  
nec te fortis equi ducet ad arma sonus.  
nil tibi sit rauco praeconia classica cornu  
flare, nec Aonium tingere Marte nemus;  
[...]  
talìa Calliope, lymphisque a fonte petitis  
ora Philitea nostra rigavit aqua.<sup>385</sup>*

You will be content, always, to be borne by snowy swans,  
nor will the sound of the bold horse lead you to arms.  
It is not for you to blow war-cries from harsh trumpets,  
nor to stain the Boetian grove with Mars;  
[...]  
So spoke Calliope, and, drawing clear liquid from her fount,  
bedewed my lips with the waters of Philetas.

However, lines such as this demonstrate not only the influence of poets such as Callimachus, but that of martial poets as well. The Latin love elegists, writing in the shadow of poets such as Vergil, demonstrate a desire to distinguish themselves from these poetic rivals. In this section, I have discussed a few methods by which this desire manifests itself, such as their use and reinterpretation of epic tropes within their poetry. However, perhaps the most important site of this struggle between the epic and elegiac genres is located in the body of the elegiac mistress.

#### 4.4 Sexual/Textual Violence: The Body of the Elegiac Mistress

If the elegiac poet both distinguishes himself from, and compares himself to, the heroes of epic verse, what then becomes of the elegiac mistress? The relation of the poet-lover's mistress to epic is certainly not a simple one. Keith, in *Engendering Rome*, notes that in Homer's *Odyssey*, "Agamemnon envisions two competing traditions of epic respectively devoted to the celebration of

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<sup>385</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 3.3.39-52.

Penelope's virtue and Clytemnestra's vice."<sup>386</sup> These two traditions are present in the elegiac text's allusion to epic: although the elegiac poet primarily attempts to narrow the gap between himself and the heroes of epic verse, his comparison of his *puella* to women in epic results in a constant oscillation between condemnation and praise. Of Cynthia, Propertius states at one point:

*si memini, solet illa levis culpare puellas,  
et totam ex Helena non probat Iliada.*<sup>387</sup>

If I recall, she reproaches fickle women,  
and disapproves the whole Iliad on account of Helen.

at another,

*Penelope poterat bis denos salva per annos  
vivere, tam multis femina digna procis;  
[...]  
at tu non una potuisti nocte vacare,  
impia, non unum sola manere diem!*<sup>388</sup>

Penelope was able to live untouched for twenty years,  
a woman worthy of so many suitors;  
[...]  
But you, impious woman, were not able to go idle for one night,  
nor to remain alone a single day!

Whether depicting himself as a hero or a slave, the elegiac poet both praises his mistress' beauty, and condemns her for her faithlessness, returning once again to the conflict between the scopophilic impulse towards fetishization and the suspicious interrogation and condemnation inherent within sadistic voyeurism.<sup>389</sup>

These two gazes come together in the poet's occasional violent behaviour towards his *puella*, or in his fantasies of enacting violence upon her. Propertius, for example, unites the erotic and the violent when he tells Cynthia

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<sup>386</sup> Keith (2000) p.2, referring to Homer's *Odyssey*, 24.196-202.

<sup>387</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.1.49-50.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.* 2.9.3-4, 19-20.

<sup>389</sup> See Chapter Three, Section 3.5.1.

*quod si pertendens animo vestita cubaris,  
scissa veste meas experiere manus:  
quin etiam, si me ulterius provexerit ira,  
ostendes matri brachia laesa tuae.*<sup>390</sup>

But if, in pride, you persist in lying fully-clothed,  
you'll feel my hands tearing off your clothes:  
what's more, if my anger further compels me,  
you'll show bruised arms to your mother.

Tibullus' fantasies of violence, on the other hand, are frequently displaced onto another. Having described a violent episode between a farmer and his wife, the poet-lover exclaims:

*A, lapis est ferrumque, suam quicumque puellam  
Verberat: e caelo deripit ille deos.  
Sit satis e membris tenuem rescindere vestem,  
Sit satis ornatus dissoluisse comae,  
Sit lacrimas movisse satis: quater ille beatus,  
Quo tenera irato flere puella potest.*<sup>391</sup>

Ah, he is stone and iron, who would beat his girl:  
that person tears the gods from the heavens.  
It is enough to tear thin clothing from her limbs,  
It is enough to muss her stylish hair,  
enough, to make her cry: joy is quadrupled for the man  
whose rage can make a tender girl weep.

Both jealousy and erotic passion can lead to episodes of violence against the elegiac mistress:

the language of lovemaking in elegy is commonly military (Cahoon 1988), and, while scenes of lovemaking are not frequent [...] when they happen they tend to be violent, including scratches, bites, hair-pulling, and beating.<sup>392</sup>

The body of the elegiac mistress, however, represents more than just flesh and blood. In the

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid. 2.15.17-20.

<sup>391</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.10.59-64.

<sup>392</sup> Fredrick in Gold (2012) p.431.

competition between elegiac and epic discourse, the poet-author constructs himself as both hero and poet;<sup>393</sup> the elegiac mistress – already both fickle beloved and epic adversary – becomes the battlefield on which this struggle takes place:<sup>394</sup>

Broadly speaking, literary representations of the female are determined both at the level of culture and at the level of genre: that is to say, by the range of cultural codes and institutions that order the female in a particular society and by the conventions that surround a particular piece of writing.<sup>395</sup>

In her refinement, *levitas*, and erotic femininity, as well as in her defiance of the sexual and social norms that constrained female behaviour in Augustan Rome, the *docta puella* is set in opposition to both the martial genre of epic verse and to Augustan politics. If the elegiac poet is both lover and poet, his *puella* functions as both beloved and text; not a ‘real’ mistress, but “the embodiment of a Roman Callimacheanism.”<sup>396</sup>

It is therefore significant that whereas, “as a *scripta puella*, the elegiac woman should represent the rejection of epic violence [...] the [violated] *puella* becomes a kind of deformed text, *laesa* instead of *scripta*.”<sup>397</sup> The poet-lover’s acts of violence towards mistress alienate the text from its Hellenistic ideals and align it with the values expressed in epic verse.

Ultimately, this contradictory juxtaposition of erotic fascination and jealous anger has profound repercussions for the elegiac text which

on the one hand appears to rely on a variety of separative devices – closed doors, sea voyages, greedy bawds – in order to hold the *puella* at arms length as a visual object, and on the other hand a reaction against precisely these separative devices, focused as they are on the figure of the rival, which leads to “the wars of Venus,” contact too proximate and too violent.<sup>398</sup>

The body of the elegiac mistress – both beaten and beautiful – occupies a liminal space between the elegiac and the epic, fulfilling the imperatives of neither Callimachean poetics nor epic verse.

One might ask why the elegiac poet chooses to do this: to construct his mistress – his reformulation of Hellenistic elegy – as beautiful, but damaged. David Fredrick suggests that

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<sup>393</sup> See Section 4.3.

<sup>394</sup> See also Section 4.5.

<sup>395</sup> Wyke (2002) p.78.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>397</sup> Fredrick in Gold (2012) p.432.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid. p.433.

the Callimachean text, as represented by the *scripta puella*, is a kind of mirror-image for the narrator, and idealised Other body in relation to which the narrator is situated as subordinate. That is, the overlap of the *puella* as erotic object with the Callimachean page as aesthetic object eroticizes the latter through association with the *puella* as “perfect” female body, a perfect body/text which in turn functions as a mirror object for the narrator.<sup>399</sup>

Fredrick resorts to feminist film theory in his attempt to explain the intrusion of violence upon the elegiac text. Chapter Two of this thesis, in its discussion of Mulvey’s use of Lacan’s mirror stage and modern cinema, argued for the implicit identification of the reader with the male protagonist, namely, Pygmalion.<sup>400</sup> Fredrick, however, suggests that the poet-author of Latin love elegy identifies not only with the poet-lover, but also looks to the female body/text as a mirror image of himself.

Furthermore, Latin love elegy not only encourages this identification, but imposes a separation between the self and the idealised other. Through the trope of *servitium amoris*, the poet-lover is subjected to the power of his *dura* mistress – the superior Callimachean text. However, whereas modern cinema generally provides visual pleasure through encouraging an uncomplicated identification with the idealised other, Latin love elegy, in constructing the *domina* as inaccessible, implies that

the possibility of a coherent body/self offered by the mirror image is ultimately unrealizable, as the gap between the self and the mirror image cannot be closed.<sup>401</sup>

Elegy thus constitutes a contradictory, masochistic genre in which the poet-lover gains access to his *domina* primarily through violence. However, this use of masculine violence ultimately damages the elegiac mistress/text; any attempt to appropriate a dominant role results in the destruction of the idealised mirror self. The lover represents himself as a hero in order to win/defeat his mistress; the poet proclaims his superiority to the epic genre, but it is this very competition for dominance that destroys the prize. Ultimately, traditional constructs of masculinity are depicted as insufficient, while the elegiac poet struggles in vain to embody a deviant form of masculinity that will allow a perfect identification with the idealised Other.

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid. p.434.

<sup>400</sup> Chapter Two, Section 2.4.3.

<sup>401</sup> Fredrick in Gold (2012) p.434.

#### 4.5 Elegy and Empire

Images of warfare and violence are not only present within the elegiac text via the trope of *militia amoris* and the intrusion of the epic genre; they are present, too, through the figure of the patron and the discourse of empire which comes into conflict with that of Latin love elegy. Indeed, especially where Vergil is concerned, imperial discourse is tightly interwoven with epic poetry, and functions as another difference between epic and the private, personal poetry of the elegiac poet. Whereas epic poetry and Rome's imperial agenda are concerned with warfare, Latin love elegy ostensibly promotes peace. Tibullus, for example, ends Book 1 of his *Elegies* with

*at nobis, Pax alma, veni spicamque teneto,  
perfluat et pomis candidus ante sinus.*<sup>402</sup>

So come to us, bountiful Peace, holding spikes of corn,  
and may fruits pour from your shining breast.

while Propertius observes of a life lived within the amatory sphere:

*qualem si cuncti cuperent decurrere vitam  
et pressi multo membra iacere mero,  
non ferrum crudele neque esset bellica navis,  
nec nostra Actiacum verteret ossa mare,  
nec totiens propriis circum oppugnata triumphis  
lassa foret crines solvere Roma suos.  
haec certe merito poterunt laudare minores:  
laeserunt nullos proelia nostra deos.*<sup>403</sup>

But if all men wished to live their lives like this  
and lie here, their bodies held with much wine,  
There'd be no cruel swords, no ships of war,  
nor would our bones be tossed in Actium's sea,  
nor would weary Rome unbraid her hair in grief,  
so often besieged by private triumphs.

This, at least, future generations should be able to deem worthy of praise:

*our* battles offended none of the gods.

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<sup>402</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.10.67-68.

<sup>403</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.15.41-8.

However, it is also true that the elegiac poet was dependent upon the support of his patron and was not only expected to praise him in his poetry but, in Tibullus' case at least, was also required to serve with him in his military campaigns if commanded to do so. Thus Sullivan:

in proclaiming a preference for *making love, not war*, the elegist must, rather self-consciously, set himself at odds with the premises of his society, but, as is also clear, he cannot become a radical dissenter disrupting the Augustan military machine or criticizing the social status of generals.<sup>404</sup>

Subtlety, humour, misdirection and irony are therefore necessary if the elegiac poet is to express his distaste for the imperial agenda and warfare, and it is of no surprise that all of these methods are employed within the elegiac texts of both Propertius and Tibullus, in addition to the *recusatio*, by which the poet declares his inability to celebrate the military achievements that took place in Augustan Rome.<sup>405</sup> Of interest to this thesis, however, are those moments in which the elegiac poet conflates the discourse of love with that of imperial expansion.

Ostensibly, the erotic and imperial spheres would have been diametrically opposed. Augustan legislation imposed heavy restrictions upon sexual behaviour which, depending on the ambiguous identities of the elegiac mistress, might have made the poet-lover's relationship with his *domina* a criminal act. The elegiac poet's refusal to marry, and choice of his mistress over military service, sets him further against Augustus' moral reforms, which sought to re-establish the nuclear family and increase the birthrate.<sup>406</sup> At times, the elegiac poet criticises Augustan moral legislation outright; thus Propertius 2.7:

*gauis's certe sublatam, Cynthia, legem,  
qua quondam edicta flêmus uterque diu,  
ni nos divideret: quamvis diducere amantes  
non queat invitos Iuppiter ipse duos.  
'at magnus Caesar.' sed magnus Caesar in armis:  
devictae gentes nil in amore valent.*<sup>407</sup>

Cynthia rejoiced, of course, when the law was abolished –  
we both wept long when it was published,  
lest it separate us: although Jupiter himself cannot tear apart

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<sup>404</sup> Sullivan in Miller (2002) p.314.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid. p.314ff. for further discussion of this.

<sup>406</sup> See footnote 186 below.

<sup>407</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.7.1-6.

two lovers against their will.

“But Caesar is powerful.” Caesar’s power is in his armies:  
conquered people are worth nothing in love.

Referring, presumably, to the *lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus*, which required bachelors to marry,<sup>408</sup> Propertius celebrates not only the failure to pass this law, but the triumph of love over empire. Despite Caesar’s might in military affairs, Propertius defiantly asserts that not even Jupiter could separate two lovers against their will. In this triumph, Propertius states his opposition to the duties of Roman citizens under Augustan rule: the begetting of children for the sake of the Roman Empire. In doing so, he forfeits the masculine status that attends those Roman males who sought a military or political fame, and financial success.

Nevertheless, despite this outright rejection of the imperial agenda, Bowditch observes that

just as elegy in fact requires the second term in these pairings [private/public, peace/violence, love/war] as a way of rhetorically defining itself, so does the genre and its celebration of amorous *otium* (‘leisure’) depend on the *Pax Augusta* and Rome’s Mediterranean empire as – in Marxist terminology – the conditions of its production.<sup>409</sup>

It is through Rome’s military conquests, for example, that Greek and Alexandrian culture was assimilated, including the poetry that was to shape the elegiac movement. Furthermore, “[t]he Augustan peace, in turn, led to an increase in *otium*, encouraging elite literary production that included the writing of elegy.”<sup>410</sup> It is this very *otium* that the elegiac poet privileges over a productive life of business, politics, and warfare.

It is the imperial agenda, therefore, that facilitates and shapes the production of elegiac poetry, through the benefits of *otium*, and the importation of foreign luxuries and literature. In turn, “the rhetoric of elegiac gender and erotic desire often shapes the genre’s representation of the public sphere of empire.”<sup>411</sup> I have discussed Tibullus’ relation to Messalla: for example, his patron’s tendency to re-establish gender norms through his presence. This affirmation of normative constructions of gender can also be seen in Propertius’ tendency to eroticise imperial expansion. Just as the elegiac poet transposes his own values onto epic poetry, so with Augustus’ own military achievements:

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<sup>408</sup> See Sullivan in Miller (2002) p.319.

<sup>409</sup> Bowditch in Gold (2012) p.120.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid. p.104.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid. pp.104-5.

*iam negat Euphrates equitem post terga tueri  
Parthorum et Crassos se tenuisse dolet:  
India quin, Auguste, tuo dat colla triumpho,  
et domus intactae te tremit Arabiae;  
et si qua extremis tellus se subtrahit oris,  
sentiat illa tuas postmodo capta manus!*<sup>412</sup>

Euphrates now rejects Parthian cavalry – won't protect their backs  
and mourns to have held the Crassi in check:  
Even India, Augustus, bows her head to your triumph,  
and Arabia's untouched house trembles at you;  
if any land withdraws to the ends of the earth,  
let her, once taken captive, feel your hand!

*Dolet* and *negat*, Bowditch notes, "appear elsewhere in Propertius in erotic contexts, with *negare* referring to a mistress refusing to bestow her favours (e.g. 2.14.20; 3.21.7) and *dolere* signifying love's anguish (e.g. 3.8A.10; 3.8A.23)."<sup>413</sup> However, while Bowditch notes that this diction of submission evokes the trope of *servitium amoris*, one should also observe that the traditional gender norms attached to such images of enslavement have been re-established through this eroticisation of Augustus' imperial agenda, with the masculine conqueror firmly in the position of *dominus*, while the feminised lands submit to his touch. Indeed, *servitium amoris* transforms swiftly into *militia amoris* when "military aggression rhetorically conceived as sexual assault governs the personification of Arabia as a fearful virgin (*intactae...Arabiae*)."<sup>414</sup> As Bowditch notes, these lines mirror Propertius' 2.15 in which he claims:

*quod si pertendens animo vestita cubaris,  
scissa veste meas experiere manus.*<sup>415</sup>

But if, in pride, you persist in lying fully-clothed,  
you'll feel my hands tearing off your clothes.

In these two moments in which warfare is eroticised, and the erotic made violent, the speaker reasserts his masculinity, and re-establishes normative gender roles:

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<sup>412</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.10.13-8.

<sup>413</sup> Bowditch in Gold (2012) p.122.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid. See below for further discussion of the eroticisation of violence.

<sup>415</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.15.17-8.

the diction of elegiac-epic aggression here aligns the political domination of other lands with the actual Roman gender hierarchy of men over women. In turn, the evocation of gender norms in the context of imperial expansion serve to naturalise Roman hegemonic rule.<sup>416</sup>

If imperial expansion was coded masculine, the luxuries that resulted from Rome's military success were not:

Roman historians and orators of the first century B.C.E. Sallust (Cat. 1-14), Livy (38.27, 39.6), and Cicero (*Mur.* 11) all attributed the vice of luxury and, implicitly, the chaos of the late republic to corruption "imported" into Rome by soldiers during the period of imperial expansion after the Punic wars.<sup>417</sup>

While promoting a life of hedonism and *otium* in general, the elegiac poet lacks the wealth and luxuries following imperial expansion. In fact, actual wealth is rejected by both Tibullus and Propertius: Tibullus claims to prefer a simple, rustic life with Delia,<sup>418</sup> while both he and Propertius are wary of the wealthy rival who threatens whatever security they may possess with their mercenary *dominae*. This in turn gives rise to diatribes against greedy girls and the soldiery that arms the poet-lover's rivals with the means to part him from his mistress.

However, the elegiac poet's gaze nevertheless hovers over the body of his elegiac mistress in all its finery – even as he proclaims his preference for simplicity. Thus Propertius 1.2:

*Quid iuvat ornato procedere, vita, capillo  
et tenuis Coa veste movere sinus,  
aut quid Orontea crines perfundere murra,  
teque peregrinis vendere muneribus,  
naturaeque decus mercato perdere cultu,  
nec sinere in propriis membra nitere bonis?*<sup>419</sup>

What benefit is it, my life, for you to go forth with your hair adorned  
and to move about in thin garments from Cos,  
why sprinkle your hair with Orontean myrrh,  
and betray/sell yourself with foreign gifts,

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<sup>416</sup> Bowditch in Gold (2012) p.123.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid. p.124.

<sup>418</sup> See, for example, Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.1.

<sup>419</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 1.2.1-6.

and squander nature's splendour with bought refinements,  
nor to allow your limbs to shine with their own beauty?

Tibullus, too, states of Nemesis, in resignation:

*Illa gerat vestes tenues, quas femina Coa  
Texuit, auratas disposuitque vias;  
Illi sint comites fuscī, quos India torret,  
Solis et admotis inficit ignis equis;  
Illi selectos certent praeberē colores  
Africa puniceum purpureumque Tyros.*<sup>420</sup>

Let her wear flimsy garments, woven by women in Cos,  
set with bands of gold;  
let her have dusky companions, scorched in India  
and stained with fire as the horses of the sun approach;  
let the red of Africa and the purple of Tyre  
compete to offer her their choicest hues.

While he may ostensibly scorn the wealth brought into Rome by imperial expansion, the elegiac poet indulges in scopophilic enjoyment of that military success inscribed upon his mistress' body, revealing

the elegiac mistress as a trope for Roman imperialism and economic exploitation. Africa and Tyre present "gifts" as though they were erotic rivals for Rome's attention, even as Nemesis's new lover constitutes a foreign import himself.<sup>421</sup>

And yet, even as it affords the viewer pleasure, the mistress' body, decked out in foreign luxuries, simultaneously symbolises the increasing corruption and decadence of the state – especially as these luxuries, it is hinted, are received as payment for the mistress' sexual attentions. Just as the poet-lover idealises his mistress for her beauty and condemns her for her infidelity, when transposed into the imperial discourse of Augustan Rome, the mistress' body becomes a site of struggle between fascination with her beauty and refinement, and condemnation of her mercenary desire for trinkets, by which "female vanity takes the blame for imperial expansion and the ensuing decadence of the

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<sup>420</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 2.3.53-8.

<sup>421</sup> Bowditch in Gold (2012) p.126.

body politic.”<sup>422</sup>

Thus do the descriptions of *dura* and *mollitia* combine within the figure of the elegiac mistress. Inaccessible and refined: the hard, elegant centre of a “soft” genre that nevertheless incorporates the violence of martial epic and military imperialism within the ostensibly private, personal sphere of erotic love. If the body of the elegiac mistress functions as a metaphor for the Callimachean text,<sup>423</sup> the poet-author demonstrates the irony of condemning the military expansion that brought him into contact with the Alexandrian poets who inspired his own work. In chastising his mistress for adorning herself with foreign spoils the poet-author mocks himself for his own ornamentation of his work with foreign mythological *exempla*:

The Propertian speaker alludes to this metonymic relationship between the “adorned” mistress and the verse she inspires when he asserts that Cynthia’s simple movement in sheer Coan silks leads to an entire volume of poems fashioned from such fabric (2.1.5-6) – a statement that suggests a “deluxe edition of a poetry book (...) even as it implicates elegy as a luxury commodity in Roman imperial trade.”<sup>424</sup>

#### 4.6 Conclusion

In *Roman Homosexuality*, Williams asks why an individual’s perceived masculinity was determined by his dominion over himself and others. Anthropological studies, he claims,

point to a widespread conviction that masculinity is an achieved status, and a tenuous accomplishment at that. Boys must be *made* men, while girls just *become* women. There are constant struggles involved not only in attaining masculinity – one thinks of the painful and always challenging rites of passage by means of which boys are made men – but also in maintaining one’s masculine status. Threats lurk everywhere, and a man can all too easily slip and fall. And if he does, according to the relentlessly binary logic of this system he is *ipso facto* behaving like a woman.<sup>425</sup>

If the trope of *servitium amoris* revolves around the poet’s relationship with his mistress and his flirtation with his own vulnerability, that of *militia amoris* shows him engaging in competition with the masculine imperatives of imperial discourse and the epic genre which ostensibly promotes it.

As with *servitium amoris* the poet-author depicts the poet-lover as inferior in his continual

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> As suggested by Wyke (2002).

<sup>424</sup> Bowditch in Gold (2012) p.127.

<sup>425</sup> Williams (2010) p.155.

defeat at the hands of his *puella* and in his refusal to fully immerse himself within the military sphere. The poet-author, however, is engaging in his own struggle to establish himself as a superior poet; to empower himself that *he* might define what constitutes masculinity. The poet-lover rejoices in his own defeat; masculinity under threat does not play a significant part in his narrative. It is transposed, instead to the level of the poet-author, manifesting itself as Bloom's anxiety of influence.

However, in the poet-author's eagerness to establish his own poetics against the backdrop of both Alexandrian elegy and epic verse, his amatory relationship with his *puella* becomes symbolic of his struggle with the text itself. Thus the *scripta puella* is both idolised for her beauty and style, and wounded in the poet's attempt to embody a superior model of masculinity and to construct a superior poetics. The elegiac poet is thus trapped in a conundrum that results in the poet's continual alienation from the idealised sexual/textual body of his mistress, unable to discover a new model of masculinity through which he might satisfy his desire.

Elegiac poetry is the poetry of unrequited desire, a genre in which the poet becomes intimately familiar with his own vulnerability and with the failings of traditional, violent masculinity. The boundaries between lover and beloved, poet and text, are fluid, but never fully eroded, and negotiations of power strive towards a conclusion that is continually deferred.

## Chapter Five

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2.1 Beloved Boys: Marathus and *Pueri Delicati*
- 5.2.2 The Mature Male Beloved: Cerinthus
- 5.3.1 The *Puella* as Poet-Lover/Author
- 5.3.2 The Poet as *Puella*
- 5.4 The Elegiac Audience: Sulpicia and *Fama*
- 5.5 Conclusion

### 5.1 Introduction

Thus far, I have discussed the construction of masculinity in elegiac discourse through the tropes of *servitium* and *militia amoris*. These tropes, when used to represent the complex relationship between the *puella/domina* and poet-author/poet-lover, express a negotiation of authority that is not easily reduced to the simplistic binary so frequently relied upon in discussions of power.

There is, however, one further complication that remains to be discussed; namely, how are power relations affected when the roles of *puella* and poet are combined; when the poet-lover becomes the beloved? To what extent is typically male-authored Latin love elegy transformed when produced by a female poet?

The first half of this chapter will address this additional role reversal that takes place in the elegies composed by Sulpicia. With reference to an existing male beloved in male-authored elegy, I will determine what parallels can be drawn between the *puer delicatus* and the elegiac mistress. More important, however, are the potential differences between Tibullus' Marathus and Sulpicia's Cerinthus: how is the portrayal of the beloved affected when he functions as the object of specifically female desire?

Having explored the representation of the lover and his/her beloved within the elegiac text, I will conclude with an analysis of the female elegiac poet. To what extent does Sulpicia establish her own authorial identity? As both mistress and poet, does she exhibit a voice that transcends the fragmentary one occasionally allowed to the elegiac mistresses of poets such as Tibullus and Propertius? To what extent does she conform to the standards of elegiac discourse?

### 5.2.1 Beloved Boys: Marathus and the *Pueri Delicati*

Cerintus is certainly not the first male beloved represented in Latin love elegy. In the first book of the *Corpus Tibullianum*, the poet's anguished desire for Delia is interrupted by the appearance of Marathus as a substitute beloved.<sup>426</sup> To what extent, however, does Marathus conform to the role of the beloved in Roman love elegy? For Tibullus, at least, is this a role that can be filled by *pueri and puellae* alike?

The distinction between *puer* and *vir* is crucial to one's understanding of the poet's desire for the male beloved:

Whereas the adult *cinaedus* was an anomalous figure, deviant in his womanish being and effeminate desires, the beautiful boy (*puer*) was [...] an acceptable, even idealised object of Roman men's penetrative desires. While the effeminacy of *cinaedi* was a serious failing, we will see that beautiful boys might be charmingly butch or delightfully soft and girlish. In other words, boys could get away with things that *cinaedi* could not.<sup>427</sup>

Just as the *puella/domina* encompasses both feminine frailty and masculine dominance, the *puer delicatus* is allowed a similar degree of fluidity in the performativity of his gender.<sup>428</sup> This is reflected in Tibullus 1.4, in which Priapus discusses the desirability of young boys:

*Hic, quia fortis adest audacia, cepit; at illi  
Virgineus teneras stat pudor ante genas.*<sup>429</sup>

This one captures with his bold daring;  
But maidenly shame stains that one's tender cheeks.

Like the *puella*, the *puer* plays the passive, receptive role in sexual intercourse,<sup>430</sup> and Williams notes the "linguistic associations between boys and anal intercourse,"<sup>431</sup> namely, that derivation of the Latin *pedicare* from the Greek *paidika*. Furthermore, in the representation of the *puer delicatus*, a significant degree of concern is demonstrated for those boys whose enjoyment of being penetrated

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<sup>426</sup> See Tibullus 1.4, 1.8, and 1.9.

<sup>427</sup> Williams (2010) p.203.

<sup>428</sup> Distinguishing him, perhaps, from the elegiac lover, of whom Wyke says, "if elegy's speaking voice is generally designated as male [...] then the elegiac *ego* and his genre of poetic production, whenever they are allocated feminine attributes, are both effectively constituted not as feminist, or even as feminine, but as effeminate." (Wyke, 2002, p.173).

<sup>429</sup> Tibullus, *Elegiae*, 1.4.13-4.

<sup>430</sup> See Chapter Three, Section 3.2.

<sup>431</sup> Williams (2010) p.204.

becomes a passion, a pathology. The woman who takes pleasure in the sexual act is suspected of adultery;<sup>432</sup> the boy's enjoyment of being penetrated signifies his potential failure to transition from boyhood to the full masculinity embodied in the figure of the *vir*, and marks him out as a potential *cinaedus*:

There was, therefore, a delicate balancing-act for boys to perform: they could be delightfully soft, but they must not seem *too* effeminate; they might enjoy being penetrated, but that enjoyment could also be held up against them [...] When a boy was felt to have behaved badly (or when it suited the rhetorical or emotional needs of the men who talked about him), he became liable to assimilation to the scare figure of the *cinaedus*, mocked for his sexual role by the very men who had enjoyed him as he played that role.<sup>433</sup>

Thus were women and boys interchangeable to the extent that they shared the same sexual function and accompanying implications of passivity and softness. What distinguishes these two groups is that the boy's careful negotiation of this liminal space between activity and passivity is designed to *prevent* his conflation with women and *cinaedi*. The *puer* differs from the *puella* in his potential to yet embody Roman masculinity, to become a *vir*.

However, the Roman love elegists' subversive portrayal of the *puella/domina* narrows the gap between the female beloved and the *puer delicatus*. Like her male counterpart, the elegiac mistress demonstrates an agency not normally attributed to women in ancient representations of women. She, like the *puer delicatus*, demonstrates at various times her ability to subject her lover to her whims, to resist his advances, and to outwit him in his attempts to establish control over her, even as she is relegated to a position of inferiority and passivity within the dominant erotic discourse of the period.

Finally, as with the *puella*, and with Pygmalion's statue, the *puer's* beauty and erotic pallor is dwelt upon at length,<sup>434</sup> demonstrating that the scopophilic impulse does not restrict itself to female objects. Just as the elegiac mistress is reduced to a collection of beautiful parts, so does "Priapus [cut] puerile flesh to the size his male consumer [...] dictates."<sup>435</sup> As Alison Sharrock states in *Womanufacture*, "[l]ove poetry creates its own object, calls her Woman, and falls in love with her – or rather, with the artist's own act of creating her."<sup>436</sup> However, the emphasis would appear to be not on the gender of the art/love object itself, but on that of the one who creates and controls it. The position of love object is not exclusively for women; rather, it is a role that any non-male figure

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<sup>432</sup> See Chapter Three, Section 3.4.

<sup>433</sup> Williams (2010) p.206-7.

<sup>434</sup> See, for example, the reference to the "snowy breast" of the *puer* in Tibullus 1.4.12.

<sup>435</sup> Nikoloutsos (2007) p.68.

<sup>436</sup> Sharrock (1991) p.49.

can fulfil. What is important is that it is a position on which the figure of the artist/lover can exert his authority and establish his own masculine identity, or even attempt to create new, potentially subversive, models of masculinity.

Thus, in Tibullus' 1.4, the elegist's depiction of the *puer* does not differ significantly from that of the elegiac mistress, and what has been outlined in the previous chapters of this thesis is still for the most part applicable. As for the poet-author, despite his initial establishment within a dominant role, the text reveals the subtle undermining of his power and the poem concludes with the poet's explicit lack of control as both a lover and teacher.

The poet-author's initial position of authority is perhaps most effectively achieved through his speaking with through two different personae: that of the poet-lover and that of the god Priapus. As Nikoloutsos observes:

Throughout the time that he lends his voice to Priapus, the poet casts himself as a god before his listeners. By putting on the costume of a god he is transformed, in the eyes of his male spectators, from a simple performer into an agent of wisdom [...] he emerges as an incontestable authority in the field of *eros paidikos* and places the Roman aristocrats who comprise his audience in a subordinate position with respect to expertise, jocularly recalling the pedagogical character of pederasty in ancient Greece.<sup>437</sup>

The poet-lover, however, is in his usual position of powerlessness. Ignorant as to how to gain mastery over the *pueri*, he appeals to his incongruous muse for guidance, aligning himself with his audience:

Inspiration is an invasive process, like being the "passive" and "penetrated" partner in intercourse [...] The inspired poet is brought to writing and launches his project, but at the same moment in which the energy of that project comes to him he is also feminized by that very energy as it turns him from subject to object.<sup>438</sup>

In accordance with elegiac discourse, the speaker desires not only control over the *puer* as an object of love; instead, the poet-author approaches the male beloved as he does the *scripta puella*, and significantly, with regard to existing parallels between the *puer delicatus* and the elegiac mistress, the poet-author demonstrates a poetic agenda in addition to his erotic desire:

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid p.62-3.

<sup>438</sup> Fowler (2002) p.150-8, quoted by Nikoloutsos (2007) p.65.

The metapoetic implications of the petition are reinforced by the juxtaposition of *formosos* with *cepit* [1.4.3], a verb that can have a variety of metaphorical meanings in this context: “to captivate,” “to charm,” “to apprehend,” “to grasp mentally.” [...The poet-lover] begs for advice not only on how to capture beautiful boys as love objects but also on how to conceive of them as narrative subjects whose aesthetic perfection will connote the artistic decorum of the text/book into which they are about to be incorporated.”<sup>439</sup>

The *puer delicatus* therefore functions not only as a beautiful body to be enjoyed, but also as the delicate Callimachean style over which the Roman elegist desires mastery.

This mastery, however, is often denied the poet. In Tibullus’ 1.4, for example, Priapus’ advice is, paradoxically, to submit to the whims of the *puer delicatus* as if he were an elegiac *domina*. Furthermore, this advice is useless. As the poem concludes, the weary speaker proclaims:

*Heu heu quam Marathus lento me torquet amore!  
Deficiunt artes, deficiuntque doli.*<sup>440</sup>

Alas, how Marathus slowly tortures me with love!  
Artifice fails, deception fails.

Despite Priapus’ advice, the poet-lover does not win over the *puer delicatus*; he is neither a successful lover nor a teacher. As with the elegiac mistress, the poet-lover ends up being tormented with desire for a boy, his power undermined, and his poetry defined and produced by the erotic and poetic lack brought on by his failure.

### 5.2.2 The Mature Male Beloved: Cerinthus

Interestingly, Sulpicia, too, constructs her beloved as both sexual object and text, although little scholarly interest has been shown in the figure of Cerinthus, and Sulpicia’s debt to the elegiac tradition was frequently overlooked before feminist scholars approached her work with renewed interest. Amongst those who agreed upon Sulpicia’s poetry being the work of a woman rather than the artistic production of Tibullus himself or a different male author, her poetry was treated dismissively: the work of a female poet had only its simplicity and emotional naïveté to recommend it; there was little to no artistic technique to be found in her writing. Indeed, providing a brief

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<sup>439</sup> Nikoloutsos (2007) p.63-4.

<sup>440</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.4.81-2.

summary of the general scholarly attitude towards Sulpicia, Santirocco states:

In short, there is a scholarly consensus on two points: first, that Sulpicia is a gifted amateur, and second, that her poems are to be read more as social documents than as works of art.<sup>441</sup>

Roessel, however, observes that Sulpicia, by referring to her beloved through the use of a Greek pseudonym, perpetuates the elegiac tradition of masking the beloved with a name evocative of Greek poetry and establishes her place within it:

Through its association with bees, honey, and wax, *Cerinthus* may have been selected for its literary implications. If *Cerinthus* deserves a place beside *Lesbia*, *Delia*, *Cynthia*, and *Corinna*, then our estimation of Sulpicia's poetry may need to be upgraded.<sup>442</sup>

In his argument, Roessel states that the "Latin word *Cerinthus* is taken directly from the Greek κήρινθος and means bee-bread, a reddish substance used to feed the larvae of bees."<sup>443</sup> Ancient sources, he continues, also refer to it as the wax that stores the honey.<sup>444</sup> The honey-like connotations of *Cerinthus*' name associate him with archaic poetry and the honeyed-mouths of poets such as Homer, Erinna, and Anacreon;<sup>445</sup> wax, too, had important literary implications in that "writing tablets were covered with a wax on which letters could be composed and arranged."<sup>446</sup> These wax tablets become a recurring motif in Latin love elegy as the means by which the artist-lover and his beloved might communicate, and by which the former might woo the latter through his verse.<sup>447</sup>

However, the name 'Cerinthus' does more than mark the beloved as a suitable object of the elegiac poet's desire: it is through her choice of pseudonym that Sulpicia wields power over her beloved. The love-object is transformed into the art-object: "Sulpicia writes on her lover, both figuratively and literally."<sup>448</sup> As a female elegist, Sulpicia's identity is a contradictory amalgamation of *domina* and *serva amoris*; *puella* and poet. In suggesting *Cerinthus*' double identity of wax tablet and

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<sup>441</sup> Santirocco (1979) p.230.

<sup>442</sup> Roessel (1974) p.243.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid.

<sup>444</sup> See the Greek κηρός, wax.

<sup>445</sup> Indeed, το κήριον is honeycomb, which is also used as a metaphor for an anthology of poetry; the poems being the individual cells. See *Anthologia Palatina* 9.190 (on Erinna's poem 'The Spindle'): 'This is the Lesbian honeycomb of Erinna, and though it is small it is all mingled with the honey of the Muses...' Is *Cerinthus* the 'content' of Sulpicia's κήριον?

<sup>446</sup> Roessel (1974) p.245. He continues: "Wax and writing were so closely tied that the word *cera* could be used metonymically for *tabella cera oblita*."

<sup>447</sup> See, for example, Propertius, *Eleg.* 3.23.

<sup>448</sup> Roessel (1974) p.247.

beloved, Sulpicia is not only carrying on the elegiac tradition; she is also able to retain some of the *domina's* erotic control.

This is further suggested by Roessel's observation that "inscriptions indicate that *Cerinthus* was restricted to slaves and freedmen."<sup>449</sup> Consequently, Roessel continues, a number of scholars have insisted that *Cerinthus*, if he ever existed, was of servile origin. I would suggest that Sulpicia's choice of name for her beloved is indeed significant, albeit not with regard to any sort of biographical information. Rather, it is possible that Sulpicia, in allowing servile connotations to attach themselves to her beloved's identity, is subtly exploiting the intersection of erotic discourse with that of slavery in order to attain some balance of power between herself and her beloved. *Cerinthus* is not a *puer* in terms of his age; however, the term *puer* is equally applicable to male slaves of all ages, with the same implications of sexual passivity and social inferiority to the ideal *vir*.

If the male elegiac poets had to elevate their mistresses to the status of *domina* in order to explore a model of masculinity that allowed vulnerability and self-deprecation, then it is possible that a female elegist might require her beloved to be excluded from the status of *vir* in order for her to explore a different, more powerful model of femininity through her poetry. Indeed, Roessel effectively links the literary and servile implications of *Cerinthus'* name when he states that

The evocation of wax in *Cerinthus* and the use of the name for servant complement each other nicely. For wax was the poet's servant both in the process of creation and the dissemination of her words.<sup>450</sup>

Unlike the male elegists, however, there is none of the superficial posturing that comes with the trope of *servitium amoris*. Sulpicia is not a *domina*, nor is *Cerinthus* her amatory slave. There is, at least initially, only a possible suggestion through the name of her beloved that the couple might be from different social classes. If this is in fact the case then, when in love, gender and social status are irrelevant to Sulpicia; when with her beloved, she is no more – and he no less – than "a worthy woman with a worthy man."<sup>451</sup>

When her relationship with *Cerinthus* is threatened, however, her aristocratic position becomes more important:

*Sit tibi cura togae potior pressumque quasillo  
scortum quam Servi filia Sulpicia:  
Solliciti sunt pro nobis, quibus illa dolori est,*

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid p.244.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid p.245.

<sup>451</sup> Sulpicia, *Eleg.* 3.13.10.

*ne cedam ignoto, maxima causa, toro.*<sup>452</sup>

Let care for a toga and a whore weighed down with a basket of wool  
be more to you than Sulpicia, Servius' daughter.  
There are those who care for me, to whom the greatest reason of grief  
is that I might give myself to an unworthy bed.

When necessary, Sulpicia uses her aristocratic position to assert power over another, in this case a prostitute and a working girl – either of whom might be a slave. Although they are similar in their affair with the same man, Sulpicia emphasises instead the social sphere in which they are separated by their difference in class. However, although most of Sulpicia's ire is directed towards her lover's mistress, there is also perhaps the suggestion that their respective social positions do not imply that Sulpicia is more deserving of Cerinthus' love than her lowly rival, but that Cerinthus is unworthy of her. Depending on her confidence in the reciprocity of their love, Sulpicia oscillates between privileging the erotic sphere in which distinctions of class become irrelevant, and the social sphere in which they become all-important.<sup>453</sup>

### 5.3.1 The *Puella* as Poet-Lover/Author

Flashenreim observes a third area in which Sulpicia's relation to the *scortum* of Poem 16 is significant, namely, the literary sphere. The prostitute is marked out as such by her wearing of the male toga. However,

if the prostitute's male garment makes her marginal social position immediately visible, Sulpicia's own position, at least in literary terms, is no less insecure. Sulpicia may likewise be said (figuratively) to wear male garb, since she has claimed the role of the speaker in a genre in which woman is a privileged, though generally silent, object of men's desire.<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid. 3.16.3-6.

<sup>453</sup> Although see Hinds (1987) p.45: "The noble Sulpicia, daughter of Servius Sulpicius Rufus himself [...] and a common prostitute: could any two women be further apart? Well, no; except that, as it happens, the signature here of the former could equally do duty as the signature of the latter: SERVI FILIA." Even as she indignantly seeks to protect her feelings from her beloved's insult, the language of Sulpician elegy transgresses boundaries.

<sup>454</sup> Flashenreim (1999) p.47. Milnor states this even more explicitly: "The ideological slippage between privacy and respectability in a patriarchal society such as ancient Rome means that a woman who offers her words to the reading public has notionally prostituted herself; she no longer belongs only to herself but to anyone who might pick up a book" (2002, p.260).

Indeed, in his discussion of Sulpicia's work, Santirocco opens with the statement that

Women certainly have their place on the pages of Roman history and literature. But the page is rarely the title page and their place on it is rarely that of author."<sup>455</sup>

Sulpicia's position of female lover and poet adds an interesting twist to a genre dominated by male authors. Like her male predecessors, Sulpicia's poetry is written in a deceptively sincere, autobiographical style, and is concerned with the affair of a young, aristocratic girl and her male beloved. Indeed, as with Propertius and Tibullus, much scholarly effort has been spent in attempts to refer Sulpicia's poetry to the biography of the poet, and on the identity of her lover, Cerinthus.

This chapter has already suggested the literary implications of Cerinthus' name; that his identity as a fictional construct within the highly artificial genre of elegiac poetry is just as likely as that of Cynthia, Delia, or Nemesis.<sup>456</sup> Similarly, Sulpicia's construction of her own textual identity is just as – or even more – complex, deliberate, and contradictory as that of Propertius and Tibullus. Hemelrijk identifies three aspects of her elegiac *persona*:

her social position, her poetic position and, third, her 'generic' position [...] her place within the genre of love poetry [...] Taken together, Sulpicia's complex 'subject-position', complicated because of its unusual combination of a male and two conflicting female roles, gives her poetry a unique place in the elegiac tradition."<sup>457</sup>

It is Sulpicia's reworking of the elegiac *persona* that is most pertinent to this thesis, and which I shall take as my primary focus.

Throughout her poems, Sulpicia speaks through the persona of the poet-lover/author familiar to the audience from existing love elegy. It is her poetry that has won the favour of the love goddess Venus, and her tablets that are read by her beloved (and, if she were to have her way, everyone else as well). It is her voice that dominates her poetry whereas Cerinthus, like Tibullus' Delia and – to some extent – Propertius' Cynthia, is relegated to the background, a vague and enigmatic figure.

Significantly, however, whereas the elegiac persona is typically masculine, Sulpicia insists on her female status throughout. The effect of this role reversal – the female poet writing about her male beloved – is to further destabilise normative gender roles both within the dominant discourses of ancient Rome, and within the elegiac genre itself:

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<sup>455</sup> Santirocco (1979) p.229.

<sup>456</sup> See also the discussion on the *scriptae puellae* in Chapter Four, Section 4.4.

<sup>457</sup> Hemelrijk (1999) p.150-1.

Since inversion of gender roles is a characteristic trait of the genre itself (the male poet-lover portraying himself as subservient to his dominant beloved), Sulpicia's poems are, in a sense, an inversion of an inversion, but this does not mean that they come full circle to the conventional situation of the dominant male and the muted female.<sup>458</sup>

Of course, Sulpicia's status as a female poet-lover does have an effect on the way in which she chooses to construct her desire for Cerinthus. The trope of *militia amoris* is irrelevant to her erotic experience, while that of *servitium amoris* would hardly be innovative in patriarchal Roman society;

these tropes are already cultural inversions and so present challenges to a poet whose gender inverts the expectations of elegy. Instead of writing masculine poetry with the genders changed, Sulpicia writes poetry for Roman women and declares the special utility of her poetry to this audience.<sup>459</sup>

While a female speaker comparing herself to a slave might disgust, it would hardly shock an audience that denied power to women and slaves alike. Far more innovative is the fact that Sulpicia ostensibly tries to establish a sense of mutuality and equality between herself and her beloved, referring to their union through the symmetrical construction of *cum digno digna* in her first elegy.<sup>460</sup>

However, despite this image of two lovers worthy of one another, Sulpicia nevertheless demonstrates her authorial control over her beloved throughout her work:

*Exorata meis illum Cytherea Camenis  
attulit in nostrum deposuitque sinum.*<sup>461</sup>

Cytheraea, won over by my Muses,  
has brought him here and laid him in my lap/embrace/pocket.

Cerinthus is thus effaced through the simple *illum*. I mentioned above Cerinthus' double identity as both beloved and *cerna tabella*, which leads to his conflation with the lovers' *signatis tabellis*<sup>462</sup> that

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<sup>458</sup> Hemelrijk (1999) p.151.

<sup>459</sup> Percy (2006) p.33. For further discussion of Sulpicia' audience, see Section 5.4 of this chapter.

<sup>460</sup> Sulpicia, *Eleg.* 3.13.10. In this construction, the masculine and feminine forms of *dignus* are used, and placed so that they "mirror one another in the pentameter, balanced on either side of the diaeresis." (Flashenreim, 1999, p.45).

<sup>461</sup> Sulpicia, *Eleg.* 3.13.3-4.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.* 3.13.7

Sulpicia would rather reveal to the public than keep hidden. Indeed, in this extract the latin *sinum*<sup>463</sup> is just as easily translated as “pocket” – the receptacle into which Venus deposits Sulpicia’s *cernae tabellae*. As with the elegiac mistress, the body of the male beloved is thus identified with the body of poetry from which the poet – male or female – hopes to garner *fama*;<sup>464</sup> as with Tibullus and Propertius, therefore, the poet-lover’s erotic and poetic agenda is intimately entwined. Milnor, however, remarks upon an interesting subversion of this trope, in that if “traditional elegiac poetry is figured as an exchange of the mistress between the (male) poet and the (male) reader, 3.13.3-5 is a humorous reversal, in which the male lover is circulated within a community of females.”<sup>465</sup>

Indeed, Sulpicia’s true partnership seems to be with Venus, whom, like Sappho, Sulpicia addresses as Cytherea.<sup>466</sup> The poet tells us that *exsolvit promissa Venus*,<sup>467</sup> implying

“a history of negotiations between Sulpicia and Venus. Poems have been offered and obligations incurred in return. *Tandem* in line 1, it now appears, has an additional point: not only has love been long in coming, but Venus has been long in coming over with her end of the bargain. This long-term relationship between a woman poet and the goddess of love recalls Sappho’s ποικιλόθρον' ἄθανάτ' Ἀφροδίτῃ (fr.1).”<sup>468</sup>

Whereas her male predecessors evoke the Callimachean tradition in their elegiac works, Sulpicia instead establishes herself within the tradition of female-authored erotic poetry.<sup>469</sup>

Moreover, this reference to Venus alludes to the Homeric episode in which Aphrodite saves Paris from Menelaus’ attack, snatching him from danger and depositing him in his bedchamber, where Helen meets with him:

τὸν δ' ἐξήραξ' Ἀφροδίτη  
 ῥεῖα μάλ' ὥς τε θεός, ἐκάλυψε δ' ἄρ' ἠέρι πολλῇ,  
 καὶ δ' εἶσ' ἐν θαλάμῳ εὐώδει κηῶεντι.<sup>470</sup>

And Aphrodite snatched him up,  
 easily, since she is a goddess, and she veiled him in a thick cloud,

<sup>463</sup> Ibid. 3.13.4.

<sup>464</sup> See Section 5.5 of this chapter for further discussion.

<sup>465</sup> Milnor (2002) p.272.

<sup>466</sup> See Sappho, fr. 86 and 140a.

<sup>467</sup> Sulpicia, *Eleg.* 3.13.5.

<sup>468</sup> Percy (2006) p.32-3.

<sup>469</sup> Although, see Catullus’ revision of Sappho’s 31<sup>st</sup> fragment.

<sup>470</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 3.380-2.

and set him down within his own sweet-smelling chamber.

Thus Sulpicia hints that, like Helen – and Sappho as well – she is marked out as one of Venus' favourites.<sup>471</sup> This, too, distinguishes her from poets such as Propertius, to whom Venus "gives bitter nights,"<sup>472</sup> and Tibullus, who becomes openly hostile towards the goddess of love:

*sed Venus ante alios est uiolanda mihi:  
illa malum facinus suadet dominamque rapacem  
dat mihi: sacrilegas sentiat illa manus.*<sup>473</sup>

But may Venus – before all others – be dishonoured by me;  
she promotes crime and gives me a greedy mistress;  
may she feel unholy hands.

With regard to erotic experience in general, the male Latin love elegists portray Amor as a conqueror, as a general, or an opponent<sup>474</sup> - a very different representation to that of Sulpicia's relationship of mutual benefit with the goddess of love.

### 5.3.2 The Poet as *Puella*

However, even as she asserts her authorial control over her beloved; even as she takes up the role of the dissatisfied, spurned lover,<sup>475</sup> Sulpicia consciously portrays herself playing the part of the elegiac *puella* as well:

Unlike her social status, her poetic position is highly ambiguous. Next to the role of a chaste and sheltered upper-class young woman Sulpicia adopts the role of the elegiac *puella*, a sophisticated young woman of the city going through the various stages of love-and-separation of an elegiac love-affair in an attitude of defiance of traditional morality.<sup>476</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> See Section 5.4 for further discussion of Sulpicia's allusion to women from epic.

<sup>472</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 1.1.33: *in me nostra Venus noctes exercet amaras*. See Merriam in *Women Poets in Ancient Greece and Rome* (ed. Greene) 2005, p.165 for a fuller description of Venus' hostility/indifference towards Propertius.

<sup>473</sup> Tibullus, *Eleg.* 2.4.24.

<sup>474</sup> See Propertius 1.1.14.

<sup>475</sup> See, for example, Sulpicia, *Eleg.* 3.16.

<sup>476</sup> Hemerijk (1999) p.150.

This is most obviously seen in the two birthday poems,<sup>477</sup> as well as the penultimate poem in which Sulpicia reproaches Cerinthus for failing to play the role of the elegiac lover, by caring for her when she has fallen ill:

*Estne tibi, Cerinthe, tuae pia cura puellae,  
quod mea nunc vexat corpora fessa calor?  
A! ego non aliter tristes evincere morbos  
optarim, quam te si quoque velle putem.*<sup>478</sup>

Have you no dutiful thought, Cerinthus, for your girl,  
since fever now torments my weary body?  
Ah! Otherwise I would not wish to overcome my sad affliction,  
if I did not think that you, too, wished it.

Both Tibullus and Propertius nurse their *puellae* back to health, praying to the gods that they might survive the illness.<sup>479</sup> Sulpicia, retelling this trope through the perspective of the *puella*, suggests that this attentiveness might not always be the case. However, Sulpicia's position of the elegiac mistress is complicated by the fact that this poem resembles Tibullus' 1.3, in which the poet is forced to waste away, separated from his mistress. In this elegy, Tibullus is feminised by his illness, abandoned by both patron and *puella*, neither of whom is present to care for him. Sulpicia, on the other hand, is somewhat distanced from her status as *puella* in this resemblance to Tibullus, and the fact that she is still speaking through the masculine voice of the poet-lover. Ultimately, the shared experience of both Tibullus and Sulpicia suggests that it is the beloved who is cared for; the lover must suffer alone. Tibullus is not the only other poet whose suffering is alluded to, however, and Sulpicia's fever suggests more than just illness:

ὡς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω βρόχε' ὡς με φώναι-  
σ' οὐδ' ἔν' ἔτ' εἴκει,  
ἀλλ' ἄκαν μὲν γλῶσσα τῆαγε λέπτον  
δ' αὐτίκα χρωῖ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρομήκεν,  
ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδ' ἔν' ὄρημι', ἐπιρρόμ-  
βεισι δ' ἄκουαι,

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<sup>477</sup> Sulpicia, *Eleg.* 3.14 and 3.15.

<sup>478</sup> *Ibid.* 3.17.1-4.

<sup>479</sup> See Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.5.9-20 and Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.28.

τέκαδε μ' ἴδρωσ ψῦχρος κακχέεται τρόμος δὲ  
παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας  
ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεύης  
φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὐται.<sup>480</sup>

For when I look at you for a moment, I can  
no longer say a word,

but my mouth is fixed in silence, a light  
flame at once runs under my skin,  
I see nothing with my eyes,  
my ears hum,

a cold sweat comes over me, and trembling  
takes my whole body. I am greener  
than grass, and seem to myself to be  
little short of dying.

Once again, Sapphic verse is invoked, and the relation between love and sickness suggested through the wasting effects of heat on the weary body. Whereas Tibullus and Propertius tend to express desire through the scopophilic impulse, which cuts up the body of the elegiac mistress, displaying it as a collection of beautiful parts, Sapphic desire places its emphasis on the body of the one who desires.

If the male elegiac poets draw attention to their bodies, it is through images of torture.<sup>481</sup> Sulpicia, too, constructs her body as vulnerable, albeit it not through images of servile punishment. Instead, Sulpicia compares writing amatory poetry to the act of disrobing:

*Tandem venit amor, qualem texisse pudori  
quam nudasse alicui sit mihi fama magis.  
Exorata meis illum Cytherea Camenis  
attulit in nostrum deposuitque sinum.  
Exsolvit promissa Venus: mea gaudia narret,  
dicetur si quis non habuisse sua.  
Non ego signatis quicquam mandare tabellis,*

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<sup>480</sup> Sappho, Fragment 31.

<sup>481</sup> See Chapter Three, Section 3.3.

*ne legat id nemo quam meus ante, velim.*  
*Sed peccasse iuvat, vultus componere famae*  
*taedet: cum digno digna fuisse ferar.*<sup>482</sup>

Love has come at last; a love that is would have been a greater scandal  
for me to cover up for shame, than it would to bare it to another.  
Cytheraea, won over by my Muses,  
has brought him here and laid him in my lap/embrace.  
Venus has kept her promises: let my joy be made known,  
spoken of by she who has none of her own.  
I do not wish to entrust anything to sealed tablets,  
lest no one see it before my beloved.  
Rather, it delighted me to transgress; to dissemble for the sake of reputation  
is tiresome to me: let them say I was a woman worthy of a worthy man.

Flashenreim states that “[f]or a Roman woman, to be reticent in the public realm was to be decently attired, whereas to speak freely was to risk being exposed to ridicule or censure.”<sup>483</sup> Sulpicia’s conflation of composing love poetry with the act of disrobing (*texisse, nudasse*), Flashenreim continues, is therefore an audacious move in that it makes precarious her social reputation. The use of the word *componere*, which can refer to literary composition and social performance alike, not only equates the physical body with the text, but links both to *fama*.

This representation of her body does not only imitate that of the vulnerable elegiac persona; Sulpicia’s disrobing also aligns her with the provocatively dressed *puella* whom the poet-lover desires: Sulpicia chooses to perform both elegiac masculinity and femininity. However, Flashenreim notes a significant subversion of the representation of women in Latin love elegy:

The fiction of erotic elegy – including its programmatic fictions – are organised around a carefully regulated display of the female body. Sulpicia [...] subverts its procedures, translating the image of the unclothed *puella* into a figure of speech.<sup>484</sup>

The male elegiac poet, I have argued, displaces his anxieties regarding his perceived masculinity onto those he might feel regarding his poetic predecessors – both epic and elegiac – and his desire to be seen as an authentic, original poet while yet embodying the dictates of Callimachean elegy. Sulpicia’s poetic anxieties are also related to *fama*; in her case, however, this relates to the tension between

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<sup>482</sup> Sulpicia, *Elegiae*, 3.13.1-10.

<sup>483</sup> Flashenreim (1999) p.37.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.* p.38.

establishing her reputation as an elegiac poet and maintaining her reputation as a respectable woman.<sup>485</sup> Indeed, this oscillation between the female poet's concerns for two different type of *fama* operates throughout the poems attributed to Sulpicia. The final line of Poem 18, in which Sulpicia withdraws from Cerinthus out of fear for her reputation,<sup>486</sup> establishes a circular pattern between the six poems which begin with her dismissal of such fears.

Sulpicia's anxiety over her reputation manifests itself within her writing: the difficulty of her syntax is frequently remarked upon.<sup>487</sup> Despite her proclamations of love and disdain for propriety, Sulpicia nevertheless manifests her anxieties in such complicated syntax, protecting herself through what Flashenreim refers to as her "rhetoric of disclosure". As in the poetry of her elegiac peers, Sulpicia's elegies maintain a tension between the private and public spheres. However, unlike Propertius and Tibullus, Sulpicia does not reject the public sphere for the private, valuing the seclusion that accompanies such a retreat. Instead, she expresses her desire to break out into the public sphere and speak with the transgressive voice of a female poet.

The image of Sulpicia's bared body is developed throughout the poem: from being compared to a speech act in the second line, her body is conflated with the tablets in line seven, which Sulpicia would rather not seal; being read is again the equivalent of being loved. However, there is an element of mutuality here, in that both Sulpicia and Cerinthus function as texts which are written and read by each other.

On Sulpicia's representation of Cerinthus, Hinds states that although "[s]he may be uninterested in the paradox of Cerinthus' position [...] she is distinctly alive to the strangeness of her own."<sup>488</sup> Although the means by which she achieves this are necessarily different, Sulpicia imitates elegiac poets such as Propertius and Tibullus in that she positions herself between the subject-position of the poet-lover and the object-position of the beloved *puella*. Speaking through the voice of the elegiac poet-lover, she nevertheless constructs her body as that of the *puella*.

In her analysis of the position of the female poet, Hinds notes that

[i]f, then, the tricks, tropes, and topoi of elegiac authorship are set up to negotiate the question of what it means for a man to "take the woman's part," the appearance of Sulpicia does not simply ask what it means for a woman to take the man's part, but how a woman even goes about finding the

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<sup>485</sup> See Flashenreim (1999) p.39: "For in Propertius' elegy [1.1], love is invoked in order to 'explain' the speaker's subservience to a woman, and his persistence in an unmanly and scandalously idle way of life. Sulpicia, in contrast, proclaims the object of her passion – and hence the passion itself – worthy of herself and her poetry (*digno*, 10), but uses *amor* to justify an act of speech which could be deemed immodest if not transgressive for a woman. The same trope accounts for distinct (and gender specific) sorts of impropriety, and provides their fictive rationale."

<sup>486</sup> *ardorem cupiens dissimulare meum* (Sulpicia, 3.18.6).

<sup>487</sup> For a detailed explanation on the obscurities of Sulpician syntax, see Lowe (1988).

<sup>488</sup> Hinds (1987) p.43.

tools to ask the question.<sup>489</sup>

The male elegiac poet depends upon the Other to establish his identity within the text: he is the *servus* to his *domina*, the poet who writes his mistress into being. Sulpicia, too, suggests the literary implications of her own lover through his name; however, she transcends the boundaries between Self and Other, male and female, poet and text, through her construction of her own body as a text which she herself chooses to reveal or hide. It is therefore perhaps significant that Sulpicia constructs her body as nigh impenetrable through the difficulties of her diction and syntax.<sup>490</sup>

#### 5.4 The Elegiac Audience: Sulpicia and *Fama*

If the tropes of *servitium* and *militia amoris* are irrelevant to Sulpicia's representation of her desire for her beloved, in what way *does* she construct this passion? Rather than employ the exclusively masculine tropes used by the male love elegists, Sulpicia relies on aspects of female lived experience in order to communicate her desire for Cerinthus and her status as a love poet, namely, gossip and *fama* – as well as the *pudor* with which that *fama* can be associated.

However, despite the absence of *militia amoris* in Sulpicia's elegies and, therefore, a general lack of interest in epic poetry, Keith does suggest a latent sympathy with Vergil's Dido; that "Vergil's portrayal of the love of Dido and Aeneas provides Sulpicia with a framework in which to articulate a woman's love for a man."<sup>491</sup> Like Sulpicia, Dido is a woman who must function within the public sphere, having appropriated a masculine role; furthermore,

Dido necessarily constitutes and is constituted as a disruptive force [...] In accordance with Roman discursive codes about the female, therefore, the focus of the narrative "naturally" narrow to Dido's sexuality, so that her political and military ambitions come to be consumed by her inappropriate erotic desires [...] The transgressive sexuality of the Carthaginian queen is delineated within the peculiarly Roman framework of *pudor* [...] and *fama*.<sup>492</sup>

As Dido's affair with Aeneas becomes public knowledge, so the queen is forced to lament her loss of her good reputation as an *univira* and consequent shame:

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<sup>489</sup> Milnor (2002) p.262.

<sup>490</sup> Which, ironically, is referred to as "feminine Latin" by Gruppe (1838), cited by Lowe (1988).

<sup>491</sup> Keith Hallett and Skinner (1997) p.296. See p.301-2 for an outline of the linguistic parallels between Vergil's *Aeneid* and Sulpicia's *Tandem Venit Amor*.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid. p.297.

[...] *te propter eundem*  
*exstinctus pudor et, qua sola ad sidera adibam,*  
*fama prior.*<sup>493</sup>

[...] because of you, too,  
my chastity has been destroyed as well as my sole means of access to the heavens,  
my earlier good name.

Ultimately, this loss of reputation destroys Dido; her failure to conform to the demand for female chastity results in her loss of respect as a ruler, as well as her death. As discussed in the above section, a similar anxiety permeates Sulpicia's erotic elegies.

Indeed, it is in their shared struggle that Sulpicia's elegies constitute a counter-discourse to Vergil's construction and regulation of female sexuality: Sulpicia ultimately reframes and rejects the concept of *pudor* as it was generally applied to the lives of Roman women.<sup>494</sup> Within this first poem, Sulpicia links *pudor* with deception and redefines the terms on which she will accept judgement. She rejects the notion that her *fama* be dictated by malicious gossip, instead realigning it with literary achievement, thus subverting the Vergilian episode in which Dido is denied that choice.

Sulpicia's marked interest in her *fama* can also be compared to that demonstrated by her elegiac peers. However, whereas Latin love elegy's *docta puella* functions as the primary audience for the male poet-lover, Sulpicia is more concerned with her reading public than with Cerinthus, at least as far as an audience for her poetry is concerned.<sup>495</sup> Propertius states,

*me iuuet in gremio doctae legisse puellae,*  
*auribus et puris scripta probasse mea.*<sup>496</sup>

May I be happy to have read in the lap of a learned girl,  
and to have had my writing approved by discerning ears.

At least ostensibly, it is enough for Propertius that his poems have been read and validated by his mistress. Sulpicia takes a different approach:

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<sup>493</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid* 4.321-3.

<sup>494</sup> See Keith (2006).

<sup>495</sup> See Percy (2006) p.31: "This masculine elegiac *ego* constructs his hard-hearted, enticing mistress as he writes his poems and shares her and them with a public readership. The *puella docta*, however, remains his primary audience, and what might be called the wider erotic public, the community of lovers and readers, becomes his secondary audience."

<sup>496</sup> Propertius, *Eleg.* 2.13.11-12.

*Non ego signatis quicquam mandare tabellis,  
ne legat id nemo quam meus ante, velim.*<sup>497</sup>

I do not wish to entrust anything to sealed tablets,  
lest no one see it before my beloved.

Sulpicia deviates from the elegiac tradition of privileging the private sphere over the public, although her status as a female poet makes this inversion no less transgressive. Indeed, Percy further suggests that “[i]f loving and writing are figured as the same activity, as are being loved and being read, then this experience [i.e. that between Sulpicia and her public] must be understood as in some sense erotic.”<sup>498</sup> The male elegist uses elegy to create a private space where he might interact with his *puella/domina*; a space which the reader voyeuristically looks into and enjoys. Although Tibullus and Propertius may reveal a desire for fame,<sup>499</sup> in the secluded world of elegy their mistresses are their primary audience. Sulpicia, however, has populated her textual world with a female goddess whose favour she has won through her eloquence, and with a potentially female audience who might live vicariously through her erotic experiences, or use them to articulate their own.<sup>500</sup> Furthermore, Sulpicia draws upon a tradition of female-authored erotic poetry through her references to Sappho, thus evoking a fictional community of women within her revision of the elegiac text.

Just as the male elegist explores the discrepancies between the role of the elegiac poet and that of the poet-lover, highlighting the instabilities within his representation of masculinity through the juxtaposition of fetishistic scopophilia and sadistic voyeurism, so does Sulpicia emphasise her own vulnerability through playing on the tension between *pudor* and *fama*.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Hemelrijk, outlining the traditional approach to Sulpicia prior to the feminist revision of her work in the 70s and 80s, states that

Because of the absence of any mythological adornment, because of certain oddities and obscurities in

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<sup>497</sup> Sulpicia, *Eleg.* 3.13.7-8.

<sup>498</sup> Percy (2006) p.32.

<sup>499</sup> See Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.4.79-80.

<sup>500</sup> See Percy (2006) p.33: “The users of Sulpicia’s poetry will not be those who do not experience the joys of love, but those who her society believes or states are without that experience; not those without a story to tell, but those without words to tell it. The Roman women of Sulpicia’s class will find special utility and meaning in her poetry.”

language and syntax, and because of her colloquialisms Sulpicia's elegies were in all but the most recent studies regarded as amateurish, lacking in poetic technique and typically 'feminine' (i.e. artless and emotional) in style and thought. They were only praised for what was seen as their straightforward simplicity and spontaneous outpouring of emotion, which in the rather patronizing appraisal of the time was considered part of their 'feminine' charm.<sup>501</sup>

The emphasis on the 'feminine' qualities of Sulpicia's poetry highlights the glaring biases of the traditional classical approach to women's literature in general, and to Sulpicia in particular. Sulpicia's poetry shows a marked awareness of the literary tradition in which her poetry situates itself; it contains and develops a number of 'masculine' elegiac features, and displays a high level of sophistication and technique.

More important, however, is the fact that Sulpicia's poetry does not simply constitute a number of elegies from a stereotypically 'feminine' perspective. Rather, like her male predecessors, Sulpicia uses the elegiac genre to destabilise and transcend normative models of femininity, just as Propertius and Tibullus show a fascination with a model of masculinity that encompasses both control and vulnerability. This is achieved through parodic performances of gender: Tibullus and Propertius undermine their perceived masculinity by celebrating qualities that would exclude them from the elite class of *vir*, such as female *imperium* and *mollitia* and *levitas* in men.<sup>502</sup> Sulpicia, on the other hand, asserts the value of her poetry in the public sphere, and redefines concepts such as *pudor* and *fama* to suit her own needs and desires.

There is no space for hegemonic masculinity within elegy: it is a world populated by effeminate male lovers, women with disruptive voices and 'unnatural' *imperium*, and boys whose expression of gender can only be described as fluid. It is therefore unsurprising that this should be the genre to preserve the works of the only female poet from Augustan Rome whose poetry we still possess.

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<sup>501</sup> Hemelrijk (1999) p.149.

<sup>502</sup> Even when the male elegist embodies hegemonic masculinity, he does not do so unproblematically. See, for example, Chapter Four, Section 4.4.

## Conclusion

In its approach to gender, Latin love elegy is undoubtedly a genre of inversions; one that plays with gender, social status, and the relation between poet and text. It is also a genre that demonstrates a high level of introspection – to the point where it can be stated that “the self-absorption of the (elegiac) lover is taken to its extreme end in the erotic position of Narcissus.”<sup>503</sup> Sharrock suggests that the Narcissus story functions as yet another voice in the Ovidian dialogue on elegiac discourse. The elegiac poet does not only construct a beloved and fall in love with her; rather, this comparison of love elegy with the Narcissus myth implies that the poet uses his amatory poetry – his beloved – as a mirror in which he might search for the true object of his desire – namely, himself.

Indeed, in her discussion of the Hegelian Subject, Judith Butler states that desire *is* the Self’s reflection; “it is always the desire-for-reflection, the pursuit of identity in what appears to be different.”<sup>504</sup> Furthermore,

before mediated self-reflection is achieved, the subject knows itself to be a more limited, less autonomous being than it potentially is. In discovering that reflection is possible, and that every reflection reveals a relation constitutive of the subject, a way in which it is integrally related to the world that it previously did not understand, the subject thus cultivates a more expanded conception of its place [...] The final satisfaction of desire is the discovery of substance as subject, the experience of the world as everywhere confirming that subject’s sense of immanent metaphysical place.<sup>505</sup>

According to recent interpretations of the elegiac genre, the poet uses tropes such as *servitium amoris* to explore new constructions of masculinity while yet maintaining discursive control through the figure of the poet-author.<sup>506</sup> The poet-author uses his *puella* as *materia* – as a form of currency through which he might engage in negotiations of power with other men, be they epic poets, romantic rivals, or the consumers of his erotic poetry. Most important is the theory that the elegiac poet constructs his *puella* in his own image: as the flawless embodiment of Callimachean poetics. She is the idealised Other with whom the poet seeks union.<sup>507</sup>

These interpretations of Latin love elegy build on Butler’s discussion of Hegel: that it is only through the Other that the Self can know itself, “[h]ence, desire is always desire for something other

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<sup>503</sup> Sharrock (1991) p.31.

<sup>504</sup> Butler (1987) p.7.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid. p.8.

<sup>506</sup> See Greene (1988), Sharrock (1991) and Wyke (2002).

<sup>507</sup> See Chapter Four, Section 4.4.

which, in turn, is always a desire for a more expanded version of the subject.”<sup>508</sup> Furthermore, Butler describes Hegel’s Subject as a comic figure: “a fiction of infinite capability, a romantic traveller who only learns from what he experiences, who, because infinitely self-replenishing, is never devastated beyond repair.”<sup>509</sup> Like the Hegelian subject, the elegiac poet-lover engages with his seeming powerlessness in a playful manner,<sup>510</sup> often presenting his follies in an amusing way. Complete devastation for the elegiac poet would – and does – mark the end of the production of elegiac discourse.

Still, the fundamental question remains: what *is* the reflection that finally emerges from within the elegiac text; what is the identity that the poet ultimately constructs for himself? I would argue that the elegiac poet *deconstructs* the traditional categories that constitute identity, revealing their inherent instabilities. As a Roman male, he chooses to perform his gender in a way that contradicts normative Roman representations of masculinity, positing his effeminate status as superior to that of the *vir*. As a poet, he attempts to demonstrate the superiority of his ‘soft’, effeminate verse to that of the epic poet.

However, the elegiac poet’s destabilisation of identity goes further than these simple inversions. He constructs the elegiac *puella* as an idealised reflection of himself and his poetics, but simultaneously establishes barriers between her and himself, be they doors, wealthy rivals, or her unyielding, *dura* nature. Furthermore, he is ultimately unable to contain his sadistic fantasies, and destroys this idealised reflection through the very violence of his passion. Like Narcissus,

*irrita fallaci quotiens dedit oscula fonti,  
in mediis quotiens visum captantia collum  
brachia mersit aquis nec se deprendit in illis!*

How often he would give the deceptive spring frustrated kisses,  
How often he’d plunge his arms into the waters, reaching for the neck he saw –  
but he could not catch himself there.

Whenever the poet-lover attempts to eliminate the distance between himself and his *puella*, this mirror image of himself is irrevocably destroyed. The poet therefore must negotiate a liminal space between Self and Other, in which desire is continually aroused through the constant deferral of its satisfaction.

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<sup>508</sup> Butler (1987) p.33. See Chapter Three, Section 3.6 for further discussion.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid, p.21.

<sup>510</sup> See Chapter Three, Section 3.5.2.

I have discussed elegiac discourse both through Butler's theory of performativity and Foucault's revision of power relations and the inherent resistance that accompanies them. In both the erotic and the poetic sphere, the elegiac poet chooses to establish a counter-discourse to the hegemonic masculinity of Augustan Rome; to give a performance of gender that deviates from normative constructions thereof. However, although it has been suggested that the elegiac poet attempts to explore new models of masculinity, he never quite creates one: for the most part his performance is carried out according to the binary oppositions by which gender was constituted in Augustan Rome.

Butler's theory of performativity has often been criticised because she rejects the notion that one might resist one's own discursive construction through the creation of new discourses:

the *manner* of taking up the tool [i.e. the performance of gender] will be determined as well as enabled by the tool itself – in other words, subversion and agency are conditioned, if not determined, by discourses that cannot be evaded."<sup>511</sup>

However, one might turn this criticism around: the discourses which produce identity are inherently unstable; subversion is built into the binary constructions that produce gender. Perhaps this is true of the elegiac genre as well: the elegiac poet juxtaposes *servitium amoris* and *militia amoris*, fetishistic scopophilia and sadistic voyeurism; he imposes distance between himself and the object of his desire and, in seeking to overcome this distance, destroys the object of his desire in the process. Latin love elegy is thus an inherently unstable genre in which the categories by which identity might be constructed are instead inverted and subverted.

This fundamental instability is repeated not only in the works of Tibullus and Propertius, but in the Orpheus and Pygmalion stories as well. As they traverse the liminal space between death and life, the boundaries that separate Orpheus and Eurydice are broken down until, in the moment of that final, fatal look, the two blur into one another and in the process become confused with other sets of lovers and antagonists.<sup>512</sup> Looking plays an important role in the Pygmalion story as well, where the artist and his creation exchange gazes, confusing the categories of subject and object, creator and creation.

Perhaps it is Sulpicia who most effectively highlights the instability of the elegiac genre, emphasising her status as a female poet in order to explore the ramifications of claiming her own poetic voice within a male-authored genre. In playing on the tension between *pudor* and *fama*, Sulpicia demonstrates that, despite the elegiac poets' identification with feminine values and

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<sup>511</sup> Salih (2002) p.66. See also the Introduction to Part One for further discussion.

<sup>512</sup> I.e. Olenus and Lethaea, Hercules and Cerberus, and Medusa and Perseus.

representation of themselves in those terms, her own femininity is nevertheless incompatible with a genre in which women are denied full access to a voice and subjectivity of their own.

In his poetry, the Latin love elegist plays a number of roles: he is lover, poet, slave, soldier, and hero. Similarly, his *puella* is both beloved and mistress, faithless and flawed, perfect text and beaten flesh. The elegiac poet is constantly suggesting possibilities, negotiating for power, and highlighting instabilities. One of the reasons that Augustan elegy has proven such fertile material for scholarly research is that there is seemingly limitless room in which to attempt to discern the true identity behind the mask of the elegiac persona.

However, as Butler has suggested in her theory of performativity, there is no identity behind the performance; that identity is in fact constituted by the performance. For example, with regard to gender,

[it] is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, a natural sort of being.<sup>513</sup>

The categories that determine identity are in a constant process of iteration and reiteration; the subject is always the subject-in-progress. Latin love elegy, I would argue, interrupts this constant sequence of acts through which normative constructions of gender and identity are established and maintained. The elegiac poet does not ultimately succeed in creating new models of masculinity, or new categories through which identity might be constituted and power enacted. Rather, he suggests the contingency of these categories: he denaturalises and destabilises them through his own subversive performance.

The final effect to be derived from Latin love elegy is that of instability and vulnerability. Consequently, the elegiac poet escapes from the dictates of hegemonic masculinity within his poetry. Rejecting the notions of *imperium* and impenetrability, he constructs a discourse with a number of open spaces in which neither poet nor reader seemingly has any control over meaning, and in which resolution is endlessly deferred.

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<sup>513</sup> Butler (1990) p.45.

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