The Woman's Role in Latin Love Poetry

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I have chosen this topic because I believe that the woman's role in the Roman society of the first century B.C. explains to a large extent the unique character of the love poetry of that period, from Catullus to Ovid. One of the striking facts about this period is that we know very little about the private life of the Romans in the Augustan Age. Thanks to the Oxyrhynchus papyri we are better informed about the daily life of Egyptian farmers of the late Hellenistic period.[1] Moreover, we are dealing with poetic texts, which means that we should not take everything too seriously. So often, readers ask whether the poet is sincere, whether he really means what he says, whether he is talking of a true experience. A French statesman—I think it was Aristide Briand—was asked by a friend at the close of an impassioned oration: "Were you really sincere in what you said?" Briand replied: "How should *I* know?" My answer is the

[1] On the social position of women in Hellenistic Egypt cf. Claire Préaux, *Rec. Soc. Bodin* 11, no. 1 (1959): 127–175.

same. How *can* we know? So much is simply literature or rhetoric or *topos* or poetic convention.

Two recent books have not avoided the pitfalls that I should like to caution against. There is J. P. V. D. Balsdon's *Roman Women* and Sara Lilja's monograph, *The Roman Elegists' Attitude to Women*.[2] I reviewed Lilja's book for *Gnomon*,[3] and it was interesting to see how a woman approached the topic. In her sensible book Lilja quotes well over a thousand passages and comments on many of them. Yet in the end no clear picture of these writers' attitudes toward women seems to emerge—and no wonder. Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid work within the same tradition, and one can devise various headings under which two or even three of them come together. But although they have much in common, these writers are totally different as individuals. Moreover, their beliefs and attitudes change in the course of the years. The Propertius who writes the elegies of Book IV is no longer the Propertius who wrote the *Monobiblos*, and his attitude toward women is no longer the same. Ovid has, perhaps, a more stereotyped image of woman, but that does not make his testimony more valuable. These may be truisms, and yet one should keep them in mind when one speaks of the Latin poets and their women.

It is difficult to say how much of the feeling expressed in this poetry we should discount. For example, when Propertius says, "I suffer," he may be utterly miserable; on the other hand, he may be striking a tragic pose. We must consider not only the inevitable rhetoric, but also the moods that come and go, and of course, the abundance of irony, which is difficult to pin down and which opens up new questions, as we shall see. It is risky to commit poets to certain points of view or attitudes, because we are often not sure about where to draw the line between true experience and literary convention, between feeling and form. One of G. E. Lessing's epigrams illuminates in a flash the difference between Voltaire and Shakespeare:

> Voltaire says: "I cry!"
> But Shakespeare cries.

How often does Ovid say "I cry" without expecting to be taken seriously? As a famous author he is proud of the number of his conquests, but later, in exile, he implies that he has never led a very exciting life (*Trist.* 2.354): "vita verecunda est, Musa iocosa mea" [My life is chaste, only my Muse is naughty]. This means that Ovid could identify himself with the hero of the *Amores* without betraying any secrets, but that there never was a total identity. The poet could disassociate himself from his hero at any moment. Hence, the question of sincerity—so fashionable today—is unanswerable. Lilja's book demonstrates very clearly that scholars are unable to agree who loves his mistress most deeply. Hermann Fränkel thought Ovid the most sincere lover, but Karl Büchner apparently could not possibly see Ovid in this role.[4] I wonder whether this kind of problem is really legitimate. How much do we know? How much evidence do we have? There is a certain tenderness in Tibullus that, as Sellar pointed out long ago,[5] is lacking in Propertius and Ovid, but how can we be sure that Tibullus loved Nemesis more passionately than he loved Delia, as Lilja claims?[6]

Let me illustrate the pitfalls that are involved in this type of analysis with an example from postclassical literature. A scholar of the nineteenth century, Heinrich Düntzer, wrote commentaries on Goethe's poems, using many Greek and Latin quotations and frequent references to Goethe's autobiographical notes. As everyone knows, Goethe loved many ladies, and his recollections in later years were not always as clear as a commentator might wish. Two of these ladies inspired some of his greatest lyric poems, and years later Goethe wrote down something like this: "Looking back at this period of my life I really believe that I loved Lily more than Friederike"; whereupon Düntzer, his commentator, immediately lifts his forefinger and exclaims "Here Goethe is wrong! *Hier irrt Goethe.* . . . He actually loved Friederike more than Lily!" This is an extreme example (and I cannot vouch for its authenticity in every detail), but it may serve as a warning to classical scholars who have no autobiographical records to confuse them.

[2] J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Roman Women* (London: Bodley Head, 1962); Sara Lilja, *The Roman Elegists' Attitude to Women* (Helsinki, 1965).

[3] Georg Luck, *Gnomon* 38 (1966): 518–519.

[4] Hermann Fränkel, *Ovid: A Poet between Two Worlds* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956), p. 58; K. Büchner, *Die lateinische Literatur und Sprache in der Forschung seit 1937* (Bern: A. Francke, 1951), p. 49.

[5] W. Y. Sellar, *Horace and the Elegiac Poets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), p. 237.

[6] Lilja, *The Roman Elegists' Attitude to Women*, p. 80.

Balsdon's book on Roman women covers a much longer period than the one we are interested in; it begins with the rape of the Sabine women and goes on to the end of antiquity. It is based on texts and documents of all kinds, as well as the testimony of the poets. It seems, however, that Balsdon and others have misunderstood certain crucial passages in Catullus and Propertius. For example, he writes: "There were prostitutes; there were, in the late Republic and afterwards, expensive kept women, the concubine (*concubina*); and there was the *casta puella*, the good wife, the *materfamilias* supervising the education of her sons and, together with her daughters, busy in making her husband's household clothes. The sensational women of the late Republic were women who tired of being *castae puellae* and kicked over the traces. They became courtesans, sometimes notorious courtesans."[7]

The types of women that Balsdon distinguishes in his reading of Catullus and Propertius sound very much like clichés, at least in the passage I have just quoted. Clichés always obscure the vision. Is it not the ability to observe and distinguish the characteristic features of a period that makes a good historian? I wonder whether this may be a question of semantics rather than a historical phenomenon. In a remarkable book, first published in Germany in 1913 and recently translated into English, Werner Sombart, one of the great economists of his time, studied the relationship between capitalism and what we would now call the "dolce vita" in Western civilization. This extremely well documented study offers much more than its topic seems to promise. It deals, among other things, with the concept of love in the Italian Renaissance and in eighteenth-century France. These are periods for which we have a wealth of material, infinitely more than for the late Roman Republic, and we can learn something from certain analogies. Sombart writes:

> . . . as illicit love becomes more and more a goal in itself, a new class of women grows between the Femme honnête and the Putain. We find a wide range of names for this class in the Romance languages, but German —and probably English too—lacks a term, unless you want to accept as such the vague term "Buhlerin" [i.e., mistress], which means that the phenomenon was either limited to Latin countries or imported from there: *cortegiana*, courtesan, concubine, *maîtresse*, *grande amoureuse*, *grande cocotte*, *femme entretenue*, etc. These ladies take love—which had become

[7] Balsdon, *Roman Women*, p. 15.

> one of the liberal arts—out of the sphere of dilettantism and make it the object of professional care . . .[8]

When we look at third-century Athens or first-century Rome, we realize how limited our vocabulary—and, I suppose, our experience —is. Roman society was different from Greek society, and a Roman marriage was different from an Athenian one. Nevertheless, in order to understand illicit love at a certain level, love as a goal in itself, the love affair as a work of art, we must consider the Greek influence. For generations young Romans had been sent to Athens for their higher education, which almost certainly included more than the study of philosophy and rhetoric. Cicero, who prides himself on his virtuous behavior, must have been an exception, but his son probably behaved more like the typical Roman student. If their families could not afford Athens, these young Romans at least went to Syracuse or Naples, all Greek cities (Petron. *Sat.* 5, vv. 9ff).

As far as we know, Menander gives us a stylized but realistic picture of social life in a Greek city of the postclassical period. The young men and women we meet in his plays are not very different from those Cicero's son would have met. For Ovid and his public, Menander is practically required reading. This is why I believe we should look to New Comedy for more information about the kind of social life that the elegists show us in a highly polished but rather narrow mirror. For our purpose Rome is a Hellenistic city, and such poets as Catullus and Propertius have more in common with Callimachus and Euphorion than with Coriolanus or Cato Censorius.

We have a catalogue of theater masks or types with which the poets of the New Comedy worked. Many of the characters in this list have been at least tentatively identified.[9] There are seventeen different types of women, most of them apparently belonging to that class which spreads, according to Sombart, between the *materfamilias* and the *meretrix*. It was clearly this class of women—and not the respectable housewife and mother—that fascinated Greek men and kept their imaginations working. A strong emotional appeal of

[8] Werner Sombart, *Luxus und Kapitalismus* (Munich and Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1913), pp. 33–34. English translation by W. R. Dittmar (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967). The translation of the passage quoted in the text is my own.

[9] Julius Pollux, *Onomasticon* IV, 143ff. Bekker; cf. Hedwig Kenner, *Das Theater und der Realismus in der griechischen Kunst* (Vienna: Sexl, 1955).

this type always translates itself into language: think of the wealth of expressions that English and German offer for "getting drunk."

We find in that list of masks the very young courtesan who has just started her career and is called the "little touch," apparently because of her hairdo. There is the "perfect hetaera," smart and arrogant; the "golden hetaera," who grew quite wealthy in her profession; and the grey-haired "courtesan *emerita*," who is semirespectable and acts mostly as adviser and confidante to her younger colleagues. Of course no play of Menander's could possibly present all these types: the list is clearly a compilation from many plays, written and produced over a long period of time. It shows the loving care that the Greeks—that is, the Athenians, one of the most highly educated and sophisticated people the world has ever seen—lavished on a class of women dealing in professional love. I suppose one would find an equal wealth of expressions in Parisian argot. English and German are poor in comparison. The social life in Rome looks simple only because we have so little evidence.

It is dangerous to apply ready-made labels to an infinitely complex social phenomenon. Descriptions based on a careful reading of the text are more helpful. I am getting tired of seeing the question of whether or not Propertius's Cynthia was a prostitute debated over and over again by serious-minded classical scholars. She is certainly not the typical *materfamilias* in Balsdon's classification. On the other hand, she is, for Propertius, in an entirely different class from the *puellae leves* or *viles*, or *scorta*.

At this point I should like to clear up another misunderstanding. In the first poem of his first book Propertius says that Cynthia, by rejecting his love, has forced him to reject *castas puellas*. Much has been written on the meaning of *castae puellae*; the most recent contribution that I have seen is an article by Professor J. P. Sullivan,[10] but he comes to no clear answer. Balsdon and others have assumed that *casta puella* is the kind of woman one would want to be his wife, the mother of his children. This is not true. It may come as a surprise, but there cannot be the slightest doubt that, to Propertius, Cynthia herself is *casta puella*. Obviously, *casta* has a rather relative meaning in Roman society. But the fact is that neither Propertius nor Cynthia want to get married (I shall discuss 2.7 in a moment);

[10] J. P. Sullivan, "Castas odisse puellas," *Wiener Studien* 74 (1961): 96–112.

both find the kind of love affair that Propertius describes much more satisfying.

The affair therefore becomes a kind of unofficial marriage in which the partners have agreed to observe certain standards of behavior. Propertius often refers to the *foedus*, the unofficial contract between him and Cynthia that takes the place of the normal legally binding contract between man and wife. One of the terms of this contract seems to be that Cynthia may have an occasional adventure with another man as long as Propertius remains her official lover. In other words, he wants her to be reasonably, not absolutely, faithful, and he is willing to consider her *casta* as long as she conforms to this clause. Although evidence is clear on this point, it has never been properly understood, because scholars tend to take such terms as *casta, pudica, verecunda* at face value (cf. Prop. 1.1.5; 2.1.49f.; 3.12.21f.).

Propertius urges Cynthia to think of her reputation (*parcere famae*, 1.16.11). She, herself, is at times critical of unfaithful women and unable to admire Homer's *Iliad* because she disapproves of Helen's adultery. She calls women who have more than one lover *leves puellae* (2.1.49f.). Similarly, Propertius does not want to be put in the same class as his friend Gallus, whom he describes as the typical seducer and man-about-town, always loving and leaving them (1.13). To his mind, such affairs are *vulgares amores*, and Gallus, who likes to boast of the number of his conquests, is "faithless," *perfidus*. It all sounds very nice and old-fashioned and conventional, and, I am sure, in a way it was meant to be so. But of course neither Cynthia nor Propertius conform to the standards they proclaim. Cynthia has several affairs with other men (2.5.1ff.). And Cynthia's ghost (4.7) accuses Propertius of having betrayed her.

To put it differently, the fact that Cynthia has an affair with Propertius does not, in his eyes, harm her reputation. She is, as far as he is concerned, *casta* and *pudica*. He even allows her an occasional escapade. Only when she takes on too many lovers does he object. He knows that she deceives him now and then (2.32), and suspecting an *amor furtivus* (ibid.v.17), he warns her (2.32.21–22):

> sed de me minus est: famae iactura pudicae
> tanta tibi miserae, quanta meretur, erit.
>
> [But it matters less, as far as I am concerned. The loss of your good reputation will be just as bad for you, poor girl, as it should be.]

He seems to be as worried about her reputation as a husband or brother. And yet he knows that it would be absurd to ask a Roman lady of the Augustan Age to behave as though she lived under Romulus. If Roman women are unfaithful, it is partly because of the corrupting influence of the age (3.13.23f.). Although he is not so unreasonable as to demand absolute faith and devotion (2.23.29f.), he insists on a certain minimum of loyalty, and he is pleased when she rejects, for instance, the advances of his friend Lynceus (2.34.11f.).[11]

What we have established in Propertius's case will help us understand a puzzling passage in Catullus. In poem 68.95f., when he looks back at his first secret meeting with Lesbia in the house of a friend, Catullus promises that he will always love her, even though she may deceive him now and then with other men (68.135–137):

> quae tametsi uno non est contenta Catullo,
> rara verecundae furta feremus erae,
> ne nimium simus stultorum more molesti.
>
> [And even if she is not satisfied with Catullus alone, I shall bear the occasional infidelities of my chaste mistress, lest—like a fool—I really annoy her.]

Here the adjective *verecunda* applied to Lesbia has upset scholars, just as *casta*, *pudica* did in Propertius, and Professor Karl Büchner has changed *verecundae* to *verecunde*, an adverb that would have to be taken with *feremus*.[12] Now I would look at any textual emendation of Professor Büchner with suspicion, but this one, laboriously justified by the author in a long article, is particularly reprehensible

[11] As I prepared this talk, I read the volume of Aldous Huxley's letters just published (edited by Grover Smith, New York: Harper and Row, 1969). In a letter of November 21, 1957, Huxley tells a friend that when he wrote *The Genius and the Goddess* he was thinking of D. H. Lawrence and his wife, Frieda, both of whom he knew well. What he remembers about their relationship illustrates well the point I want to make. "With a whole heart she [the Katy of the play] loves and admires her genius and with a whole heart she quarrels with him. . . . Frieda and Lawrence had, undoubtedly, a profound and passionate love-life. But this did not prevent Frieda from having, every now and then, affairs with Prussian cavalry officers and Italian peasants, whom she loved for a season without in any way detracting from her love for Lawrence or from her intense devotion to his genius. Lawrence, for his part, was aware of these erotic excursions, got angry about them sometimes, but never made the least effort to break away from her" (p. 831).

[12] K. Büchner, *Humanitas Romana* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1957), Ch. 5.

because it destroys evidence—one of the worst philological sins. From Professor Büchner's point of view, *verecundae* is not a very suitable epithet for Lesbia, but for Catullus it obviously was, for he says, in effect, that in his eyes she will always be *verecunda* (or *casta* or *pudica*) as long as she is moderately faithful to him, does not have too many affairs with other men, or is at least discreet about them. No change is needed in the text.

I think it has become clear that Catullus and Propertius interpret the Roman code of ethics they have inherited in a personal and very liberal manner. Instead of throwing these values overboard, they re-evaluate them, and even though they may not consider a conventional marriage an ideal solution for themselves, they never reject or ridicule marriage as an institution. Propertius may have married a thoroughly acceptable lady after he broke with Cynthia and left a son;[13] Ovid was married three times and had a daughter and at least one grandchild.

These poets know what marriage means to a girl. Catullus's c. 51 *Ille mi par esse deo videtur* is a translation or adaptation from Sappho's Greek, and his wedding poems 61 and 62 (especially 62) are probably influenced by Greek texts; at the same time they seem to express the conventional feelings of a typical Roman family. His advice to the young bride (61.144ff.) is:

> nupta, tu quoque quae tuus
> uir petet, caue ne neges,
> ni petitum aliunde eat.
>
> [Please do not deny your husband's wish, lest he go elsewhere . . .]

This sounds like a piece of advice a Roman mother might give her daughter on her wedding day. In another wedding song (62), Catullus expresses the upper-middle-class morality of Verona when he says that a girl should not surrender her maidenhood before marriage because it is something very precious that belongs only partly to her. One-third belongs to her father, one-third to her mother (62.62–65):

[13] In 3.20 Propertius clearly begins a new affair. The lady whom he describes in enthusiastic terms is definitely not Cynthia but almost certainly the lady for whom he left her (cf. 4.7) and quite probably the lady he eventually married. The younger Pliny (*Epist.* 9.22.1) speaks of one Passennus Paullus as a descendant of the poet.

virginitas non tota tua est, ex parte parentum est:
tertia pars patris est, pars est data tertia matri,
tertia sola tua est: noli pugnare duobus,
qui genero sua iura simul cum dote dederunt.

[Your maidenhood is not all yours; it is partly your parents'. One-third is your father's, one-third your mother's; only a third is yours. Don't fight against the two; they have surrendered their rights along with the dowry to their son-in-law.]

On her wedding night the bride must be prepared to surrender her virginity to the bridegroom because her parents, when they executed the marriage contract, legally handed her over to him (59ff.). This means, among other things, that it would be in poor taste for the bride to put up a fight, and Catullus is apparently not only thinking of a mock fight (cf. 66.13ff.); she might, after all, take such a violent dislike to the man that she would rather run back to her parents' house, an action that would create scandal in a small town like Verona. No doubt this happened occasionally, but, given the strong family sense of the Romans, I cannot believe that the bride would have been entirely unprotected.

Catullus's wedding songs are not typical of his poetry, and this may be one of the reasons why they are so rarely discussed. They were clearly written for special occasions and meant to express the feelings of the families concerned rather than those of the poet.

I wonder whether Catullus did not borrow a good deal from Sappho when he wrote c. 62. In this poem, Catullus celebrates marriage as the fulfillment of a woman's life. He chooses a striking image. The vine that lacks the support of a tree never produces sweet grapes, but left untended it bends and shrinks. Thus, he implies (but the exact correspondence is missing in the Latin text) that an unmarried daughter is a burden to her father (62.49–58):

ut uidua in nudo uitis quae nascitur aruo,
numquam se extollit, numquam mitem educat uuam,
sed tenerum prono deflectens pondere corpus
iam iam contingit summum radice flagellum;
hanc nulli agricolae, nulli coluere iuuenci:
at si forte eadem est ulmo coniuncta marito,
multi illam agricolae, multi coluere iuuenci:
sic uirgo dum intacta manet, dum inculta senescit;

cum par conubium maturo tempore adepta est,
cara uiro magis et minus est inuisa parenti.

[As a lonely vine growing on a bare field, never rising high, never bearing sweet grapes, but heavily bending down her tender body and almost touching her roots with her topmost twig: no farmers, no youngsters pay any attention to her. But when she is married to an elm, many farmers, many youngsters pay attention to her. Thus, a girl who remains untouched, who grows old neglected . . . , but when she has found the right man at the right time, he loves her the more, and her father loves her no less.]

There must be an error in the textual transmission. Either a line has been dropped after v. 56, or v. 56 should be transposed after v. 53. The homoeoteleuton of *coluere iuuenci* might explain this error. Some other lines are missing in this poem, for example, after 32 (as Avantius saw), and after 58 (where Muretus added the refrain), but I think the transposition of v. 56 after v. 53 will solve our problem; *sic* clearly refers to 49–53, not to 54–55.

Catullus is not the least bit cynical about a conventional marriage. Ariadne's lament in 64.132ff. is the lament of a girl who was promised marriage, *conubia laeta, . . . optatos hymenaeos* (141) and then was jilted. But her love is so strong that, if Theseus's father should object to their getting married, she would follow him to Athens as his slave (158ff.). The charming picture of married love in 328ff. (cf. 372ff.) also confirms Catullus's genuine and perhaps a little wistful understanding of marriage.

The institution, the ritual, the traditional forms of a Roman marriage greatly stimulated the imagination of the elegiac poets.[14] Catullus compares his first meeting with Lesbia to the wedding of Laodamia and Protesilaus. To him it has the same emotional content, although he knows, of course, that the analogy is imperfect because he is only allowed to enjoy rarely and secretly what belongs to another man (68.73ff., 143ff.).

In Augustan Rome the love affairs can take the place of a conventional marriage. Neither Cynthia nor Propertius wish to get married; this is made clear in 2.7. Marriage as an institution might kill their love (7f.), and they do not want to have children. Both are relieved

[14] Gordon Williams, "Some Aspects of Roman Marriage Ceremonies and Ideals," *Journal of Roman Studies* 48 (1958): 16–29.

when Augustus, at least temporarily, withdraws one of the laws that would have made their marriage a kind of civic duty. This is a curious poem, and as I reread it, I realized for the first time that it cannot be properly understood unless the last couplet of the preceding elegy 2.6 (which does not belong there at all) is added to it. In other words, it is not necessary (as suggested by Jachmann) to delete the couplet or transpose it elsewhere: it is actually the beginning of 2.7:

> Nos uxor numquam, numquam diducet amica:
> semper amica mihi, semper et uxor eris (2.6.43–44).
> Gauisa es certe sublatam, Cynthia, legem,
> qua quondam edicta flemus uterque diu,
> ni nos diuideret, quamuis diducere amantis
> non queat inuitos Iuppiter ipse duos.
>
> [No wife, no mistress will ever separate us two: you will always be my mistress, and you will always be my wife. You were certainly glad, Cynthia, when the law was repealed that made us cry for a long time when it was first proclaimed, lest it should divide us; although even Jupiter could not divide two lovers against their will.]

We have found a home for a stray couplet and given 2.7 a good beginning. The repetition of *diducet . . . diducere* as well as *amica . . . amantis* seems to show that these lines belong together. The direct address of *eris* at the end of the couplet confirms the change from *est* to *es* at the traditional beginning of 2.7, which was suggested by Koppiers and Schrader and is accepted by all modern editors. The textual history of poets from Propertius and Ovid to Calpurnius Siculus and Corippus shows how often poems or books were incorrectly divided by ignorant scribes. In the case of Propertius this creates a very confusing situation, especially in Book II. Propertius says, in fact, that Cynthia will always be his wife as well as his mistress, and that no wife, no mistress, will ever come between them. Theirs is a marriage in all but name.

The last hexameter of this poem, "tu mihi sola places: placeam tibi, Cynthia, solus" [I like only you; Cynthia, may you like only me], may be a metrical version of the vows spoken at a Roman marriage ceremony. A similar formula concludes 2.21:

> nos quocumque loco, nos omni tempore tecum
> sive aegra pariter sive valente sumus,

> [I am with you everywhere and always, in sickness and in health],

and represents almost certainly another allusion to the Roman marriage ritual, which has been kept alive, I am inclined to think, to the present day by the liturgical texts of the Church.

In an article published in 1952, Erich Burck has observed that the Roman elegiac poets borrow many words from the language of conventional ethics,[15] including, as I have just pointed out, the sacred pledge, which ideally one makes only once in his life. When one considers himself bound by a *foedus aeternum*, when one swears a solemn oath and touches the domestic altar in confirmation of this (Prop. 3.20.25 *tactas in foedera . . . aras*, where the "deteriores" have the right text), then the gods are witnesses, even if this is not, strictly speaking, a marriage. This game of make-believe does not impose anything on the woman; in fact, the agreement may be her alternative to a boring and more restrictive conventional marriage. As long as this arrangement works, both man and woman can enjoy the sweet appeal of words like *amor*, *fides*, and *foedus aeternum*. Everything is relative. Since marriage had lost its meaning, the love affair could take its place.

This convention seems to demand that the woman play the leading role, a role that was not normally granted to the wife and mother in a traditional Roman household. Of course, there have always been strong women, but Roman law and custom consistently favored the man's authority. By ignoring custom and laws, the elegiac poets create a new world in which the woman is the *domina* in every sense. She was mistress, wife, and mother, all in one. For Catullus, the ideal mistress is not only beautiful, accomplished, passionate, and elegant but also strong-willed and domineering.

For many years Propertius thinks of marriage as an admirable institution—for others. He advises his friend Tullus to marry a suitable girl and settle down in Italy (3.22.39–42):

> haec [sc. Roma] tibi, Tulle, parens, haec est pulcherrima sedes,
> hic tibi pro digna gente petendus honos,
> hic tibi ad eloquium cives, hic ampla nepotum
> spes et venturae coniugis aptus amor.

[15] Erich Burck, "Römische Wesenszüge in der augusteischen Liebeselegie," *Hermes* 80 (1952): 163–200.

[Rome is your mother, Tullus, and the best place to live; here you must gain honors that your family deserves; here you have fellow citizens who will admire your eloquence; here you can hope to have many grandchildren; and here you will surely find a suitable wife who will love you.]

In his later years Propertius pays elaborate homage to three exemplary Roman wives: Aelia Galla (3.12), Arethusa (4.3), and Cornelia, the wife of L. Aemilius Paullus Lepidus (4.11). These ladies are *matronae* of the finest kind. Galla and Arethusa are soldiers' wives, full of anxiety for their husbands, who seem to be stationed in or near Parthia. Arethusa worries whether her husband is as faithful to her as she is to him. She insists that marriage has given her certain rights, too, and that the love between man and wife is deeper than any other love:

> Haecne marita fides et pactae tum mihi (pactae iam *P Vo.*, parce avia *N, em. Shillito*) noctes,
> cum rudis urgenti bracchia victa dedi (4.3.11–12)
> . . . . . .
> omnis amor magnus, sed aperto in coniuge maior:
> hanc Venus, ut vivat, ventilat ipse facem. (4.3.49–50)

[Are these our marriage vows? Are these the nights that you promised me, when I—inexperienced as I was—surrendered to your desire? . . . Love is always strong, but especially strong, when husband and wife are together; Venus herself fans this flame to keep it alive.]

It has become fashionable to say that Propertius wrote most of Book IV with tongue in cheek. I admit that 4.1 is full of self-irony, and of course 4.8 is a humorous poem. Even some of the Roman elegies, like 4.9, have humorous undertones. But I draw the line at the Cornelia elegy (4.11). Cornelia's close connections with Augustus alone would seem to exclude any possibility of irony or sarcasm between the lines. As a true Roman *matrona*, Cornelia is proud to have been married to one man only, "In lapide hoc uni nupta fuisse legar (36)" [Let it be recorded on this stone that I was married only once], and she tells her daughter to follow her example (68), "fac teneas unum nos imitata virum" [Follow my example and stay married to one man alone]. Before the judges of the underworld, Cornelia swears that she has been *pudica* (41ff.) and that her husband, during

his term of office as *censor*, never had to close both eyes to the offenses of other ladies because everyone knew that his own wife had committed the very offenses a *censor* had to punish. Propertius proclaims his belief in the innate, inherited nobility of character: There are certain things that true aristocrats do not do (47), "mi natura dedit leges a sanguine ductas" [Nature gave me laws derived from my nobility].

Propertius is certainly not ironic when he says that a mother's love for her children transcends her death (73f.),

> "nunc tibi commendo communia pignora natos:
> haec cura et cineri spirat inusta meo."

[Now I entrust to you the children, our mutual pledge; my love for them is burnt into my ashes and breathes on.]

Using a very striking image, Propertius affirms that a mother's love is more intense than the fire that consumes her bones and that love endures, continuing to breathe in her ashes.

We have talked about the *matrona* and about the *domina* in the Latin elegy. Let us now consider very briefly the role of the *meretrix*. In two elegies whose structure and mutual relationship are disputed,[16] 2.23 and 24a, Propertius praises the advantages of the simple relationship with a *meretrix* over the endless complications of a love affair with a married lady. The thought that he indulges in the shabby pleasures of lower-class Romans pains Propertius, but he is tired of having to bribe the servants of the *domina* to be told where he can find her, of having to hide in a slave's quarters until the air is clear, and then, when he is finally alone with her, of being told: "Hurry, quick, get up, you fool; my husband comes back from the country today!" (2.23.19f.) The girls from the Middle East, who walk up and down the Via Sacra, in dusty shoes and provocative dress, are inexpensive and always available. In these poems Propertius seems to deal with one of the favorite themes of the Stoic/Cynic diatribe, transforming it into the elegiac style.

Again, the love affair can take the place of these casual encounters. Ovid's Corinna lives with another man who may be her husband or lover (he speaks, however, of *thalami pudici, Am.* 1.8.19; cf. Prop. 2.23.22 *nolim furta pudica tori*). He, too, distinguishes Corin-

[16] Cf. G. Luck, *Gnomon* 43 (1971): 513–516.

na from the *meretrices* whom we have just met (*Amores* 1.10.21–24):

> stat meretrix certo cuivis mercabilis aere
> et miseras iusso corpore quaerit opes;
> devovet imperium tamen haec lenonis avari
> et, quod vos facitis sponte, coacta facit.
>
> [The prostitute offers herself at a fixed price to everyone and earns a wretched living by selling her body. But even she curses her greedy pimp and does under compulsion what you do of your own free will.]

The fact that women like Corinna enjoy sex (*le plaisir physique qui contente l'âme pleinement*, according to Anna de Noailles), while to a prostitute it is merely a matter of routine, makes a difference to Ovid. For this reason, Corinna should not take gifts or money from her lovers, or at least she should take them only from her rich lovers, not from the poet. This seems to be the permanent complaint of well-educated young men from good families with little pocket money.

I think it has become clear that the elegiac poets are most strongly attracted to the ladies of the demi-monde. The longing for the girl one would like to marry, as we know it from English and German romantic poetry, is almost totally unknown to the poets of the Augustan Age. Tibullus is, perhaps, an exception. As Sellar has observed long ago, he may be called the most romantic, the most sentimental of the elegiac poets, and his dream of a simple life in the country with the girl he loves comes, perhaps, close to the idea of a marriage based on mutual love and respect, and yet, between the lines, we are allowed to read that this dream can never come true, because he does not really want it to come true.

The fact remains that sophisticated women like Lesbia and Cynthia were not products of the poets' imaginations. They were real, and they, in a sense, made poets out of gifted young men like Catullus and Propertius. But what kind of society produced these women? This, of course, is the great mystery. According to Ovid, one of their greatest assets was their ability to improve upon nature: in their clothes, their make-up, their hairdo, their manners, and their conversation they showed what *cultus* can do (Ovid, *Ars* 3.159–160). But there is much more.

I have tried to show that, for a poet like Propertius, a woman is never a mere sex object. Even though her role as *domina* is mainly poetic convention, part of the language of love, we can say that these poets honestly believed in the equality of women. This idea itself is not new; it has been proposed by the Stoics, and Seneca's lost work *De matrimonio* (which can be roughly reconstructed from St. Jerôme, *Adv. Iovinianum* 1.41–49)[17] has much to say on the subject. But though the Stoics insisted on the intellectual, moral, and social equality of women for about two hundred years, this is still a utopia in the early Imperial Age. Nevertheless, the Roman poets whom we have considered may have been influenced by Stoic ideas: the description of ideal love that we find in Prop. 2.25.15–20 comes close to Seneca and St. Paul: "But I shall not give in! Steel blades decay with rust, and stones are worn away with dripping water. But steadfast love listens patiently to abuse even if it is innocent, and it will not be worn down. It begs forgiveness when it has been scorned, confesses its faults when it has been hurt, and comes back against its will."

Neither the Stoics nor these Roman poets succeeded in imposing their ideas on society, and for centuries the women's status remained unchanged. The age of chivalry, with its enchanting love poetry, did, in practice, not improve their position. In his *Histoire de la Poésie Provençale* I (1846), pp. 478ff,[18] Claude Foriel has shown that in the eyes of the Provençal poets, love and marriage are almost incompatible. Even in the case of a husband and wife who were lovers before they got married, love was not thought to survive. In the Italian Renaissance, as Jacob Burckhardt has shown,[19] man and woman are truly equal in theory as well as in practice. Emancipation is not even discussed among the upper classes, because it had become a matter of fact. It took society more than a millennium to adopt the ideas preached by the Stoics and lived, in their own way, by the Roman elegiac poets.

[17] Cf. Ernst Bickel, *Diatribe in Senecae philosophi fragmenta* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1915); Klaus Thraede, *Reallex. f. Antike u. Christentum* (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1970), 8, col. 217–218.

[18] Quoted by Henry Thomas Buckle, *Miscellaneous and Posthumous Works* (London: Longmans, Green, 1885), p. 277.

[19] Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance* (Basel: B. Schwabe, 1955), III, 267.

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Essays by

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