

II

LAUREL FULKERSON

Seruitium amoris

The interplay of dominance, gender and poetry

It may well be a universal phenomenon that those in love conceive of themselves as having lost control; different cultures find varying metaphors to describe this feeling. For the Roman elegists, loss of control is often theorized as a metaphorical slavery. The word *domina*, one of the primary names the elegiac lover has for his girlfriend, literally means 'mistress', i.e. the female version of 'master', but what is in English a dead metaphor was clearly very much alive in Latin. The word *domina* eventually comes to mean something not so different from *matrona*, i.e. 'female head of household', but this is not for some time; its original meaning is a woman who owns slaves.¹ So what does it mean that the lover in Roman elegy refers to his mistress as his mistress? Or (to ask the same question differently) that he conceives of his relationship with her as one of slavery?

The figure is in keeping with a trend of elegy as a whole, which consistently casts the powerful male lover in a position of submission of various kinds to his cruel and withholding girlfriend. Because the situation in elegy is a literary construct, it is difficult to speak authoritatively about the relative status of lover and *puella*, but the poets themselves were members of the highest property class, so assuredly members of the elite. For their girlfriends, the question remains very much open: wives of other upper-class Romans, unmarried or married freedwomen, and prostitutes (James 2003) have all been suggested, for the poetry itself is coy on the issue, deliberately conflating the vocabulary of different categories of women.² Many look to Catullus'

¹ See Lilja (1965) on nuances of *domina* in earlier literature and in the elegists, and on the relative frequency of terms for *seruitium* (81–86); as she notes, Ovid uses the word *domina* more frequently than other elegists, but with less detailed description (86).

² It has been suggested by many that this blurring of status is deliberate: whether as a reaction against Augustan attempts to unambiguously clarify the status of women, an attempt to leave narrative possibilities open or simply the result of the elegists' refusal to provide detailed information, is unclear.

Lesbia/Clodia, suggesting that her (elevated) status may apply also to the women of elegy.³

This is of course possible, but it is likelier that the elegiac lover, for all his pretence of virtuous poverty, will have been of a much higher social class than his beloved. So the pose of submission, however vividly portrayed, is best understood precisely as a pose, a chance for the elegiac *amator* to play at being less powerful than he really is (compare the elegist's figuration of himself as a 'soldier' of love, which enables him to appropriate some elements from the military life and to reject others). This 'trying-on' of different identities is a recurrent feature of the love poet's relationship to his mistress, and his poetry.

But unlike *militia amoris*, the metaphor of *seruitium amoris* adds more than narrative variation, for unless elegiac mistresses were prostitutes living at a subsistence level, they will inevitably have had some say in whom they spent their time with; only if they themselves were slaves, according to Roman thinking, would they have no choice at all about where to bestow their favours (see, for instance, Seneca *Controv.* 4 *praef.* 10 on sexual submission as *obsequium* (duty) for the freed but *necessitas* (requirement) for the enslaved). As it is, the paranoid persona of the elegiac lover magnifies the possibility of refusal, however limited or implausible, into a situation in which the *domina* has all of the power.

There is a further possibility that lurks behind the mask of enslavement to a mistress: Roman poets sometimes conceive of their artistic creation as play (cf. Catullus 50), sometimes as work. Because work was in the ancient world confined almost entirely to the servile classes (see below, pp. 188–90), any metaphor about work or expending effort will, to a Roman mind, implicitly suggest a kind of slavery, and any diminution in status will also suggest effeminacy. Scholars have shown the ways in which elegists' references to their relationship with their mistresses can also stand for the process of composing a book of poetry (which, as with Propertius' first book, derive their titles from their first word – in his case, *Cynthia*).⁴ The 'fight' with a girlfriend may signify also a struggle for the right phrase; the beauty of the beloved can imply the quality of the composition; the compulsion to write may be figured as an all-consuming erotic relationship in which the difficult and intractable subject matter holds all the power, and this may itself be seen as a kind of enslavement.

Beyond metapoetic implications, however, lies a basic fact: elegiac poetry focuses on the ups and downs of a single erotic relationship (or at least, on

³ Lesbia's status as a quasi-patron of Catullus is hinted at in Skinner (1997) 144.

⁴ See, for a start, Wyke (1994), Sharrock (1991) 36 and *passim*.

only one at a time; Luck 1959: 166). The ups, as is well known to theorists of narrative, tend to be less interesting than the downs; when lovers 'live happily ever after', their story is over. A mistress who is alternately infuriating and enchanting offers the kind of unpredictable behaviour that makes a tale compelling (Connolly 2000: 75). The behaviour of actual slave-owners is likely to seem similarly opaque, even inscrutable, to those who serve them. So, on a narrative level, the capricious *domina* makes an ideal blocking character (Veyne 1988: 138).

Vocabulary and contexts of *seruitium amoris*

The word *domina* is first attested in elegy, at least for us, in Catullus 68.68 (*isque domum nobis isque dedit dominae*, 'he gave a house to me and my *domina*'),⁵ the poem that many see as the origin of Augustan elegy. To be sure, in this line Lesbia is called a *domina* (if it is she) in order to connect her to the (illicit) *domus*, and only secondarily to describe Catullus' slavery to her,⁶ but the use of *erae* (also literally 'mistress', here in the Latin genitive) at 68.136 suggests that the concept of being amorously enslaved was familiar to Catullus; perhaps indeed the casualness with which he uses the two words suggests that the metaphor was a regular feature of colloquial speech.⁷ The word *domina* next appears in a fragment of the shadowy elegiac poet Gallus; this too may be where elegists derive the idea upon which they expand so fruitfully (2.6–7, with Courtney ad loc.).⁸

⁵ Translations, here and throughout, are my own, and make no claim to literary merit.

⁶ *Dominae* is an emendation of the ms. *dominam*; if accepted (as it is by few modern editors), *dominam* would suggest that Allius provided a woman to Catullus as well as a house. Wilkinson, who follows the manuscript reading, suggests that *domina* refers not to Lesbia but to the housekeeper who came with the house (1970: 290). So it may be that this passage does not imply *seruitium*. See too the use of *domina*, apparently for a girlfriend, at Lucilius 730M and Horace *Carm.* 1.33.14 and 2.12.13 (the latter of either Horace's mistress or Maecenas' wife; see Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) ad loc.). And, from a significantly later period, Martial 5.57 suggests that the masculine version of the word had lost any tone of deference, being used even for inferiors. Fantham notes that, whatever we are to make of the Catullan passage, the fact remains that Catullus' relationship to Lesbia posits her 'as a unique, dominant mistress to whom he was subordinated like a slave' (1996: 105). See too below, p. 185 for discussion of Catullus' positioning vis-à-vis Lesbia.

⁷ Courtney (1993) ad Gallus 2.7. The word *era* refers to a female head of household, but it is also used, by Ennius and Catullus, as a term of respect for goddesses (Enn. *inc.* 46, Catull. 64.395).

⁸ As Anderson, Parsons and Nisbet note, 'It would be intriguing if the masterful Gallus introduced the colloquialism to elegy with reference to a freedwoman' (1979: 144). Ross believes that Prop. 1.5 provides a hint that Gallus was the first to write explicitly about *seruitium amoris* (1975: 102–3).

... tandem fecerunt c[ar]mina Musae
 quae possem domina deicere digna mea
 (6–7)

At last the Muses have created songs which I can speak as being worthy of my mistress.

These poetic occurrences suggest that the word enjoyed some currency, and it has been suggested that the image of the lover as a slave was similarly colloquial, if not common (and not much attested in earlier literature).⁹ As scholars note, it seems to be the case that when the lover is conceived of as a slave in literature prior to elegy, the focus is primarily on how powerful or miraculous love is, such that it makes him (occasionally her) behave in such uncharacteristic ways. This aspect is certainly present in erotic elegy, but it tends rather to emphasize the servility of the lover, the ways his behaviour is undignified and unseemly, rather than simply unusual.¹⁰ In this vein, Ovid's *Amores* 2.17 is an extended discussion of whether it is or is not degrading to be enslaved to a woman and whether or not status matters in amorous relationships; it includes several non-canonical mythic exempla (see below, p. 185 for standard models).

It has often been noted that the imagery of slavery is most prevalent and most vivid in Propertius (Copley 1947: 297, Lyne 1979: 126), so the majority of my examples come from his poetry. The vocabulary used by the elegists is less varied than the uses to which they put it (*domina*, *seruus*, *seruitium*, *seruire* etc.); sometimes the elegists speak of themselves as slaves, sometimes of their girlfriends as mistresses, sometimes of slavery in general and sometimes of the humiliating tasks they must perform, the punishments they fear, suffer or deserve.¹¹ There are numerous 'casual' references, which seem simply to presume that the lover is enslaved but offer little comment.¹²

⁹ Copley (1947) 285–90, Murgatroyd (1981) 590–4 and Lyne (1979) 118–22 outline the Greek and Latin precedents. These three articles, the most complete treatments of *seruitium amoris* as a whole, differ markedly from one another even in such details as their lists of passages that prefigure elegiac usage, but share a few similarities. Copley suggests that the metaphor is a way for elegists to bring themselves down to the level of their girlfriends, in order to minimize status differences (1947: 285), and that it derives ultimately from common speech (1947: 289). He notes that the imagery is most prevalent in Propertius (1947: 297). Lyne argues that the metaphor, while alluded to in earlier literature, is essentially an elegiac, indeed Propertian, invention (1979: 117), and that, although possibly familiar from colloquial speech, its prevalence and import in elegy are meant to be shocking (1979: 126). Murgatroyd believes that the metaphor was more prevalent in Hellenistic literature than our surviving evidence shows (1981: 594).

¹⁰ See Copley (1947) 285, Lyne (1979) 117–21, Murgatroyd (1981) 604.

¹¹ See, for example, Tib. 1.6.37–8, 1.9.21–2, 2.4.1–12, Ov. *Am.* 1.7.1–4.

¹² See, for example, Prop. 1.4.1–4, 1.5.19–20, 1.7.7–8, 1.10.27, 1.18.25–6, which ironically claim that he has learned not to complain about his mistress's *iussa*, 'orders',

Somewhat more interesting are passages which imply the transference of *seruitium* from one mistress to another (e.g. Prop. 1.12.17–18), claim that the lover has become accustomed to servitude in general (Prop. 2.4.45–50) or conceive of a particular person as enslaving many (Tib. 4.5.3–4); these make it clear that it is difficult for the lover to envision a situation in which he would not be in thrall to someone or other.

Certain behaviours are denoted, either explicitly or implicitly, as slavish: standing outside the *puella*'s door all night long (often delivering a *paraklausithyron*, e.g. Prop. 2.17, Ov. *Ars* 2.523–8), kissing the *puella*'s feet (Ov. *Ars* 2.531–4) and taking a beating (Ov. *Ars* 2.531–4). Tibullus 1.4.39–52 outlines what a beloved boy might demand; his list includes deference in general, accompaniment on lengthy journeys, physical effort at the oars, work of various sorts (*duros... labores*), carrying hunting equipment, and letting him win in play-fights. There are similar, but even more servile, examples at Ovid, *Ars* 2.197–232, such as going where she says, laughing when she laughs, crying when she cries, letting her win at games, carrying an umbrella or a sunshade in case she needs one, warming her hands, holding her distaff, helping her in court cases, waiting patiently at appointed times and places, running to do her bidding, escorting her home late at night and accompanying her on journeys.¹³ Although we might conceive of most of these examples as encompassing perfectly normal interactions between a couple, Romans would have seen most of these duties as suitable to the enslaved rather than the free.

The lover occasionally reflects on the origins of his slavery, and suggests that he has been captured either by Amor himself or by the *puella*. So, for instance, Prop. 1.1.1–4:¹⁴

Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis,
contactum nullis ante cupidinibus.
tum mihi constantis deiecit lumina fastus,
et caput impositis pressit Amor pedibus,

2.20.19–20, of a *seruitium mite*, 'gentle servitude', 2.25.11–12, 3.11.1–8, 3.25.3; Tib. 1.1.46 and 55; Ov. *Am.* 1.3.5–6 (this list is by no means comprehensive).

¹³ Perhaps the most servile example of a slave of love is to be found in Ovid's version of the Homeric Briseis, who authors the letter we have as *Heroides* 3. The literal slave and war-captive of Achilles, she invokes the language of *seruitium amoris* in ways that some find poignant, others pathetic. Where it is for some elegists simply a metaphor, Briseis' expressions of willingness to be Achilles' maid/seamstress are deeply ironic (examples at Ov. *Her.* 3.5, 52, 69–82, 99–102; see Verducci (1985) 98–121 and Drinkwater (Chapter 12 in this volume)).

¹⁴ See too Prop. 2.3.9, also with the verb *cepit*. Other narratives of enslavement at Tib. 1.6.1–6 and 1.8.5–6, Ov. *Am.* 1.2.17–20; *Ars* 2.406 observes that Agamemnon was captured by (literally, 'made booty of', *praedae praeda*) Cassandra, his own slave-mistress.

Cynthia first captured me with her eyes, poor me, who had been touched before by no desire. Then Amor cast down my eyes with their resolute pride, and with his feet on me, pressed upon my head...

To many, these lines are so well known that they engender little comment, but it is noteworthy that they initiate the collection with reference to enslavement. Warfare was one of the primary ways in which new slaves entered the Roman world, so here at least Propertius is realistic (and the image of stepping on a person is more suitable to prisoners than slaves).

Finally, the elegists sometimes trace a genealogy of *seruitium amoris*, attributing a mythological pedigree to it; the two most common *exempla* are Apollo, who was so in love with Admetus that he toiled in the fields for him (Tib. 2.3.11–28, discussed by Whitaker 1983: 79–83) and Hercules, so in love with Omphale that he willingly waited on her (Ov. *Ars* 2.221–2). But again, although these tales appear in literary works earlier than elegy, their previous incarnations tend to focus on incongruity rather than the debasing nature of slavery (Copley 1947: 285–8); indeed, previous versions of the Hercules/Omphale story have him literally enslaved to her, and include no erotic component at all.¹⁵ And, of course, when elegists use mythological *exempla*, they tend to do so in order to make a point, usually a persuasive one (Whitaker 1983: 12–13). So, for instance, Tibullus uses Apollo as a divine justification for the degrading aspects of his own servitude (Whitaker 1983: 31, 82).

Gender and politics

We have already seen that the elegists' pretence of slavery is likely to be a rejection of their actual status in favour of a lower one. So too, positing a man as less powerful than a woman involves a reversal of the Roman norm. Women did, of course, own male slaves, but given the ideal of the free (wealthy) Roman man as the primary speaking subject, slavery itself can be seen as effeminizing, particularly to men. There is a clear connection in the Roman mind between slave, feminine and inferior (a point which must simply be stated, rather than argued).¹⁶ Having to take orders, not

¹⁵ E.g. Callim. *Hymn* 2.49 on Apollo as slave of Admetus. There is also an erotic precursor at Ter. *Eum.* 1026–7, where Thraso justifies his subservient behaviour by noting that Hercules was a slave to Omphale. See discussions of the mythological precedents at Copley (1947) 285–8.

¹⁶ Others have argued this point at great length and with great persuasiveness. See, e.g. Wyke: 'In Roman moralising discourses, sexual relationships were constituted in terms of domination and subordination, of superiority and inferiority, of activity and passivity, of masculinity and femininity, and aligned with the relationships of master and

give them, is simultaneously servile and effeminate, and taking orders from a woman may be seen as particularly humiliating.¹⁷

Catullus had earlier assumed a traditionally feminine role in a series of sensitive poetic explorations of what love feels like to one who is not in control (e.g. 51, 63).¹⁸ Rather than being the dominant partner in his relationship with Lesbia, he instead paints a portrait of himself as needing more than he gets from her, as more invested in the success and longevity of their liaison, as more vulnerable, and therefore more feminine. While it is perfectly possible that Catullus, or any Roman man, actually had feelings like this about a relationship with a particular woman, scholars have suggested that his pose is more about relative status in the public world than it is about gender roles in an intimate sphere. That is, Catullus uses his 'feminization' by Lesbia as a lens through which to focus anxieties about the decreasing role in public life for men of his class. This is a plausible suggestion, and need not preclude Catullus from also finding himself involved in an association with a particularly powerful woman, or merely from noticing that such women existed and imagining what a relationship with one would be like. Even if it is not correct that Catullus means to compare public and private morals to the detriment of both, his poetry provides an important precedent for the elegists' conflation of female and subservient in poetry (Skinner 1997: 145).¹⁹

Being in love does not automatically entail feeling powerless, and feeling powerless need not necessitate thinking of oneself as a woman or slave, but these connections seem to be at the forefront of how the elegists think of their amorous relationships.²⁰ Because she 'wears the trousers,' he must do as she says. Yet he is not silent about his sufferings; in fact, through his voluntary assumption of a position of slavery and complaints about that role, he paradoxically makes himself the hero of his own narrative (Greene

slave. The persistent Propertian strategy of casting the male lover in a submissive, servile role in relation to his beloved *puella* then realigns the gendered relations of domination and submission so intrinsic to Roman constructions of sexuality and social status. The male *ego* enacts the role of a faithful, submissive, subordinate woman' (1994: 116–17).

¹⁷ And apparently, not only the Roman mind: Barthes suggests that being in love always feminizes the lover (1978: 188–9).

¹⁸ Wiseman (1985: 143–6) discusses the ways in which Catullus shows us that Lesbia is in charge; see too the useful discussion in Skinner (1997).

¹⁹ See too Greene on the ways in which military and servile metaphors in the elegists show that they conceive of public and private discourses as implicated in one another (1998: 41).

²⁰ As Greene notes, the inversion of 'normal' sex roles is extremely prevalent in all of elegy, and not only when the metaphor of love's slavery is being invoked: the elegist is regularly passive, devoted, feminine, enslaved, and his mistress is masterful, active and masculine, with interests other than her poet (1998: xiii; cf. Kennedy (1993) 31).

1998: 51, 66). He is at pains to suggest that his servitude is genuine, and to remind readers that it is freely chosen, and so only as real as he finds palatable at any given moment.²¹ In fact, when the lover discourses on his metaphorical slavery, he is far more interested in his own role as subservient being than in the *puella*, or even in the relation of dominance itself. This too may reflect a political cast on the part of the elegists; about this there is much debate. Perhaps Roman poets fashion themselves as women/slaves because there is no place left from which to be a real man (Skinner 1997: 145, of Catullus; P.A. Miller 2004: 159, of Propertius).²² Or perhaps they relish the escape from the demands of their own masculinity, in however tenuous and fictionalized fashion (Fitzgerald 2000: 41–3), in a way similar to that suggested for audiences of Roman comedy (Parker 1989, McCarthy 2000: ix–x, 20), and which we may find reminiscent of the Greek tragedies that centre on failed transitions to masculinity.

But either way, it is important to note that this is only one of a series of subject-positions adopted by the elegist; there are many other parts to the story and many other roles to play. So, for instance, it has been noted that the elegists also conceive of themselves as clients to their patron-*puella*²³ and worshippers of the *puella*-goddess; the metaphor of elegiac lovers as soldiers serving under the generalship of their mistresses or as captive booty of Amor is discussed by Drinkwater (Chapter 12) in this volume. These lenses also posit an unequal relationship, but as with *seruitium*, it is a metaphorical and temporary inequality. Perhaps most interestingly, when the elegist is not 'putting himself down', he is lording it over others, hoping or fantasizing

²¹ E.g. Prop. 4.8.82, which speaks of *imperio . . . dato* (mastery which was given), Tib. 1.6.69–72, which asks for harsh treatment, and Ov. *Am.* 3.11A, which declares that his slavery is at an end. James too notes the fact that *seruitium amoris* is purely voluntary (2003: 147). See Benjamin on the pleasures of submission, particularly when it functions 'as a defensive strategy of the self', i.e. when it is, or can be conceived of, as a deliberate selection (1988: 81). She is concerned with voluntary submission to those who might subjugate or enslave anyway, which, if the political nuances suggested here are valid, may not be as irrelevant as it seems to the situation of Roman poets of the Augustan age.

²² In this light, Fear's comments about the emperor Augustus' emasculating/seduction of the upper classes through providing *otium* and denying *negotium* are particularly interesting (2000: 237–8).

²³ On mistresses as patrons or quasi-patrons, see White (1993) 87–91. Oliensis persuasively shows the similarities between love and patronage, another difficult-to-understand but centrally Roman concept (1997) *passim*, e.g. 153; cf. Fitzgerald (2000) 72–3 on similarities between *seruitium amoris* and patronage. Gibson, by contrast, is at pains to differentiate between elegiac *seruitium* and *amicitia* (one way in which patronage is described); he suggests that Ovid and Propertius see themselves as behaving like *amici* but being treated like *serui* (1995: 74). McCarthy argues that such plays as Plautus' *Casina* substitute marriage for slavery, which is 'disorienting' (2000: 79–80). *Seruitium amoris* does essentially the opposite, and it is equally disorienting.

that his *puella* will become his slave (Prop. 2.26.22; cf. Veyne 1988: 139), abusing those who are lower than himself (see below, p. 189), reminding the *domina* of past gifts (Prop. 2.8.13–16), lauding his own power over the love-object or over love itself (e.g. Prop. 1.10.15–18, Tib. 1.4.15.16, Ov. *Am.* 3.7.11, where a sex partner calls him *dominum*, *Ars* 1.1–30, where the *praeceptor amoris* has mastery over love and 1.45–52, over the *puella*) or jeering at friends who have newly fallen under the spell of a dominating woman (e.g. Prop. 1.9). Indeed, the lover even occasionally threatens or resorts to violence against his *puella*, a move which makes clear in an extremely concrete way who holds the real power in the relationship.²⁴ So for the elegist, perhaps for the Roman man in general, relationships seem to centre on establishing who is on top, and slavery provides an extremely fertile metaphor for describing what it feels like to lose this contest, however temporarily.

Roman slavery, real and pretend

Because slavery was in Roman society not merely a metaphor, but a fact of daily life, it is worth exploring some aspects of slavery in the Roman world to see how they might affect our understanding of elegiac slavery. First, slavery and slaves were so prevalent in Roman society that they were almost invisible. For both Greeks and Romans, most kinds of work, particularly banausic labour, were seen as degrading, so the freeborn simply did not engage in them unless poverty required it. Romans of all but the very lowest classes owned slaves – anywhere from one to many hundreds – and these slaves performed a wide variety of tasks, including farm labour and factory work, personal service activities that range from administering medical care to grooming to entertaining, and even such tasks, odd to a modern audience, as reading out loud and remembering people's names. So for those reading and writing elegy, slaves are ubiquitous. In most of our ancient sources, slaves are like furniture: always presumed to be there, they are worthy of comment only when defective, exceptionally beautiful, or expensive.

This means that we know both a lot and very little about slavery in Rome. We know a great deal about the kinds of slaves there were, from such sources as their funerary epitaphs, lists of imperial slaves and incidental references to them in a wide variety of literature. The physical and sexual exploitation of slaves, both male and female, also seems to have been a regular feature

²⁴ See, e.g. Prop. 2.8.25–8 (threatened), 2.15.17–20 (erotic), Ov. *Am.* 1.7, *Ars* 1.672–80 (erotic). The fact that the *puella* is sometimes envisioned as being violent (e.g. Prop. 3.8, 4.8.63–7) seems only to excite the lover.

of ancient life, as numerous scattered references show. What we do not and cannot know is the texture of ancient slavery, what it was actually like on a daily basis to own slaves or (even less accessible) to be one.²⁵

Elegy itself regularly mentions those who are actual slaves, who work as maids, hairdressers, go-betweens, and guards (the *ianitor* is a key figure in elegy, as he polices the boundary between inside, where the girlfriend is, and outside, where the lover is).²⁶ These are all, as we should expect, domestic slaves, and primarily those who surround and/or control access to the *puella*. Generally, they are merely props for the elegist, but occasionally they take on personality, particularly in the elegies of Ovid. Yet where we might expect some reference to co-servitude to a single mistress as creating some bond, the elegists rarely suggest any fellow-feeling with other, less metaphorical slaves.²⁷

In fact, when he is dealing with other slaves, the elegiac lover (particularly Ovid) tends to slip naturally into his normal role as master, ordering his subordinates around. In one lengthy and notable example, the diptych *Amores* 2.7 and 8, Ovid makes very clear his superiority to Cypassis, the hairdresser of Corinna, positioning himself as her angry *dominus* (2.8.23–4, with Davis 1989: 60–1). He threatens to tell her mistress he has had Cypassis as a way to make Cypassis have sex with him again. So too, in the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid suggests seducing the maid (1.351–98; best after you have already had her mistress) and being friendly and generous to her so that she will speak well of you when you are absent (2.251–60).

The brief information I have provided about Roman slavery will, I hope, hint at yet another reason why the elegists find the pose of *seruitium amoris* so compelling. Because the slaves of elegy are in constant contact with the *puella*, and because slaves are the most likely (normally, the only) persons to attend upon the bodily wants and needs of the free, it is perhaps inevitable

²⁵ Fitzgerald (2000: 8), but see his chapter 1, esp. 2.4, for a reconstruction of living with slaves, which brings out the disturbing and comforting aspects of such intimacy.

²⁶ There are other mentions of domestic slaves at Prop. 2.23.23–4, 3.6, 4.7.35–48 and 73–6 (providing incidental evidence about household slaves), Ov. *Am.* 1.11 (addressed to Nape, the hairdresser and go-between of Corinna, entrusted with a tablet setting a rendezvous) and *Ars* 2.289–94, where it is suggested that the lover free a slave whom he was already planning to free at the *puella*'s request, in order to make her feel obligated to him. The *ianitor* features in a number of elegies, with pleas and curses addressed to him in Ov. *Am.* 1.6 and 2.2–3. Tibullus offers to take his place, and promises he will be a much more effective guardian (1.6.37–8), and Ovid claims that a *ianitor* should not be necessary for a truly virtuous woman (*Am* 3.4.33–6). There is, of course, a sense in which the lover, ever suspicious, would like literally to be able to watch his girlfriend when he is not around (Fitzgerald 2000: 75).

²⁷ Then again, there does not seem to have been much of this among actual slaves in ancient society as a whole.

that elegiac poets look to slavery as a way to express their desire for access and physical proximity to their *puellae*.²⁸ When they speak of the specific tasks they imagine performing (above, p. 184), they focus on those that are degrading, but also those that require being with their girlfriends. In this light, it is useful to note Fitzgerald's comments about the nature of relations between free and slave: although – perhaps because – the parties are of such unequal status, there is a frequent perception that a genuine bond of intimacy could exist between master and man (2000: 54–5). Given the exigencies of social relations between upper-class Romans, the metaphor of slavery may, ironically enough, be one of very few ways Romans had of envisioning a relationship that did not require worrying about who was the boss.²⁹

Roman comedy and the *seruus callidus*

Elegy does not, as a whole, interest itself much in actual slaves, despite sometimes lengthy descriptions of the 'labour' the lover must undergo to keep his mistress happy (see above, p. 184). One of our most fruitful literary sources about Roman slavery is the comedies of Plautus and Terence, most of which feature multiple slaves of different statuses, roles, and personalities. As it happens, many scholars see Roman comedy as an important source for the genre of elegy (e.g. Day 1938: 85–101; James 1998: 3, 10–11), so it is worth devoting some attention to how slavery works in comedy, as it may provide us with further insights into its functions in elegy.

Actual *seruitium amoris* does not appear as such in Roman comedy. There are some references to young lovers as behaving slavishly because of their love or having no power to resist the wishes of their girlfriends,³⁰ but the elegists seem to have been the first to develop the metaphor. Two Plautine examples are worthy of further attention, if only to show how far the elegists have taken the concept from its origins. Phaedromus, the lover of the *Curculio*, obeys the orders of Venus and Cupid (*Venus Cupidoque imperat*) and

²⁸ Fitzgerald suggests that slavery also brings with it a kind of intimate knowledge: it provides a 'privileged position from which the master is observed' (2000: 19). See too McCarthy on slavery as linked to familiarity (1998: 179). Our word 'familiar' derives directly from the Latin *familia*, which denotes the Roman household, including (especially) slaves.

²⁹ See James on the equality, 'in fantasy and persuasive pretense, at least' of the *puella* and the *amator* (2003: 12).

³⁰ Slavish: Plaut. *Curc.* 1–11, *Poen.* 447–8. Powerless: Plaut. *Bacch. passim*, e.g. 55–6, 66–8, 102, 1123–8, *Truc.* 35–7, Ter. *Heaut.* 223–8, *Eun.* 46–80 and 186; these examples primarily use metaphors of hunting and military defeat, not enslavement per se.

so brings presents to his mistress; his servant notes that he is doing slave labor (*istuc quidem nec bellum est nec memorabile / tute tibi puer es*, 'this is neither pretty nor something to be discussed; that you yourself are your own slave', 8–9). The lover is a slave to Venus (or perhaps she is his commanding officer; the verb applies to both kinds of obeying), or to himself, but not to his girlfriend. Second, the lover of the *Poenulus* observes that Love has made him obey his own slave, although he is himself free (*quando Amor iubet / me oboedientem esse seruo liberum*, 447–8). Again we see the imagery nascent, but unrelated to the *puella*.

Although the specific similarities are few, the plot of many (though assuredly not all) comedies is similar to the basic structure of elegy: a resourceless young man falls helplessly in love with a woman he cannot have for one reason or another³¹ (most often money is at issue, but sometimes his father forbids it, or both). In this situation, someone, usually the *seruus callidus*, 'clever slave', devises a brilliant plot to get the money and/or obtain the girl. Many of the ancillary characters in elegy clearly derive from comedy: the greedy *lena* who offers the girl mercenary advice which runs counter to the lover's interests, the wealthy but risible soldier who is his rival. It has even been suggested that the hapless *adulescens* makes his way into the persona of the elegiac lover, allowing poets to make fun of the characters they have created by showing them to be melodramatic and childish, even if likeable (James 1998: 10–11).³²

Given that the affinities between the two genres are deep and pervasive, I would like to suggest that another character makes the transition from comedy into elegy, namely, the clever slave. He is a primary focus of interest in comedies, and his machinations to help his master get her girl provide much of the action of the plays. Although he does not behave ethically, he inevitably avoids punishment, at least for the duration of the play (Parker 1989: 233–5). McCarthy has persuasively argued that the figure of the clever slave would have touched a chord even in the freeborn and relatively powerful, and that they might have vicariously relished seeing the normally powerless triumph.³³ So too for elegy. The 'splitting' which Roman comedy

³¹ Indeed, the fact that the status of the beloved in comedy is so variable may be one reason why it is difficult to pin down in elegy.

³² There are also some key differences: Roman comedies, particularly those of Plautus, contain a great deal of farce, and the resolution of their plots is often a happy ending in the form of a love-marriage. Elegy, of course, does not want this kind of resolution, but it is concerned with the fulfilment of erotic desires.

³³ Her work is prefigured by Thalmann, who suggests that the *Captiui* naturalizes the ideology of domination and also of submission (1996: 112, 116). But she extends domination and submission to the same groups of people at different times, i.e. by suggesting that in some relations one is on top, and in others, on the bottom.

effects, by dividing the lover into an emotional youth and a scheming slave (Parker 1989: 242–3), is undone in the figure of the Roman elegist, who is alternately resourceless and Machiavellian, overcome by his feelings and plotting every move. The *adulescens*/lover himself is pathetic and innocent, but he only seems so because the scheming poet/slave has created the narrative and takes the blame.³⁴

Conclusions

While *seruitium amoris* is normally read as an ironic reversal of status, designed to show that the lover refuses a relationship of equality,³⁵ I have suggested that it might also be the best way available to express a desire for equality. The paradigm of the clever slave in Roman comedy has provided us with a context suggesting that Romans viewed themselves in multiple subject positions at the same time, and so what looks to be contradiction may simply be juxtaposition: equality with, mastery of, and subordination to, the *puella* are simply different ways of expressing the varying aspects of how a relationship feels. *Seruitium amoris* well captures this multifold nuance. I close with a few lines of Sulpicia, a woman who is also an elegiac poet: when she invokes the metaphor of *seruitium amoris*, she does so in a way that explicitly seeks parity (4.5.13–16). I close with a few lines about Sulpicia:³⁶

nec tu sis iniusta, Venus: uel seruiat aeque
uinctus uterque tibi, uel mea uincla leua.
sed potius ualida teneamur uterque catena,
nulla queat posthac nos soluisse dies.

Venus, don't you be unjust: either let us each, enchained, be slaves equally, or lighten my chains. Instead, let us rather both be held by strong shackles, which no day coming later could loosen.

³⁴ There are numerous references in Plautus to the 'clever slave' as author/plotmaker; they are most sustained in *Pseudolus* (e.g. 404–5).

³⁵ See Lilja (1965: 203) for the notion that Ovid does not refer much to *seruitium* because he wants an equal relationship.

³⁶ See too 4.6.7–10 for similar language also placed in the mouth of the *amicus Sulpiciae*. There is much scholarly debate about the authorship of these poems, some of which are written in the first person and some the third; further, some of those written in the first person are traditionally assumed not to have been written by Sulpicia, but instead by the *amicus*; see Skoie (Chapter 5) in this volume. The imagery is nearly identical in Prop. 2.15.25–6 (*atque utinam haerentis sic nos uincire catenae uelles ut numquam solueret ulla dies*, 'would that you might be willing to bind us embracing with a chain such as no day could ever dissolve').

Further reading

There are three significant previous studies of *seruitium amoris*: Copley (1947), Lyne (1979) and Murgatroyd (1981); see note above for brief discussion of their points of contact. On relations of dominance in elegy, see Skinner (1997), Greene (1998) and P.A. Miller (2004), and for some of the possible political implications of elegy, see Fear (2000). Discussions of what we know, and cannot know, about the *puella*, are Wyke (1994), Sharrock (1991), James (2003) and P.A. Miller (Chapter 10) in this volume. Two excellent recent studies of literary conceptions of Roman slavery are Fitzgerald (2000) and McCarthy (2000).