

SICK-VISITING IN ROMAN ELEGY

J. C. YARDLEY

THE THEME of the girl's sickness occurs frequently in Roman Love Elegy.¹ The course of Cynthia's dangerous illness is charted by Propertius in 2.28; Cerinthus prays for Sulpicia's recovery in [Tib.] 3.10 [4.4.]; Corinna suffers the dangerous after-effects of an abortion in Ovid *Am.* 2.13. All three elegists also use the girl's sickness to illustrate the *obsequium* of the lover, who (in stark contrast to his rival) visits the sickbed of his beloved. The contention of this paper is that this use of the motif has its origins in Hellenistic philosophical treatises on friendship.

Tibullus 1.5 opens with the statement that the poet arrogantly believed that he could bear separation from Delia, but that his efforts to do so were in vain (1-6). He begs Delia to spare him (7-8), and as a demonstration of his past devotion to her he refers to his attendance on her during an illness (9-16). He made vows for her recovery (9-10); he took charge of the sulphur in a purification ceremony with an old witch (11-12); he averted nightmares by sacrifices (13-14) and made vows to Trivia in the silence of the night (15-16). But despite such exemplary devotion on the poet's part, a rival has now supplanted him in Delia's affections (17), and we learn later that this rival is the *dives amator* (47).

The first twenty-four lines of Propertius 2.9 contrast the faithfulness of two heroines (Penelope and Briseis) in difficult (Penelope) or impossible (Briseis) situations with the fickleness of Cynthia, who could not remain faithful to the poet for one day or night. Then a series of angry rhetorical questions are fired at Cynthia:

*haec mihi vota tuam propter suscepta salutem
cum capite hoc Stygiae iam poterentur aquae,
et lectum flentes circum staremus amici?
hic ubi tum, pro di, perfida, quisve fuit?*

[25-28]

As in Tibullus, the sickness motif is used to illustrate the superiority of the poet's devotion over his rival's. Unlike Tibullus, however, Propertius represents himself as being among the number of Cynthia's friends at her bedside (*lectum . . . circum staremus amici*, 27).

At *Ars Am.* 2.315 ff. Ovid tells the lover that sickness offers him an

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excellent opportunity for demonstrating to his girl his "love and devotion" (*tunc amor et pietas tua sit manifesta puellae*, 321). The lover must weep (or, rather, he must make sure that the girl sees him weeping); he must kiss her; he must offer vows for her recovery (but he should do so obviously); and he must hire a hag for a purification ceremony (325–330). He must not, however, administer unpleasant medicine to her; this should be left to the rival (335–336). Although Ovid's humorous and cynical treatment is very different, there is a clear similarity between this section of the *Ars* and the passages of Propertius and Tibullus already considered; again sickness shows up the lover's *obsequium* at the rival's expense. It is unnecessary to postulate a common antecedent; Ovid is often indebted to his two predecessors and, as Zingerle maintained more than a century ago, the occurrence of the *anus* and the sulphur in this passage suggests that his debt here is to Tibullus.²

The theme re-appears in Philostratus *Epistles* 7. The letter is a *ψόγος πλούτου* in which a poor man tries to convince a *puer delicatus* that a poor man makes a better lover than a rich man. One of the arguments in support of this is a poor man's willingness to tend the boy in sickness: *τίς δύναται παραμεῖναι νοσοῦντι; τίς συναγρυνήσῃ;* (41–42). No answer is required; clearly the poor man will and the rich man will not. The context is very different from that of the elegiac examples, and the relationship involved is a homosexual one, but the similarity of the theme to the elegiac theme is clear: here, too, a man's devotion to the object of his affections is demonstrated by his attendance during sickness, and this attendance is contrasted with a rival's (in this case a rich rival's) lack of concern. It is surely significant that Tibullus', like Philostratus', rival is a *dives amator* and that Tibullus also tries to convince Delia of the superiority of the impecunious lover:

*pauper erit praesto tibi semper; pauper adibit
primus et in tenero fixus eris latere . . .*

[1.5.61–62]

It is unlikely that Philostratus is imitating Tibullus; dependence on a common source is a much more plausible explanation for this similarity.³ Max Heinemann's suggestion that the theme occurred in rhetorical works *περί πενίας* may be correct,⁴ but since such works are unlikely to have been

²Anton Zingerle, *Ovidius und Sein Verhältniss zu den vorgängern und gleichzeitigen römischen Dichtern* 1 (Innsbruck 1869) 58.

³Thematic similarities between Philostratus' letters and Latin Elegy are not very numerous (see F. Solmsen, *RE* 20 [1941] 166, s.v. Philostratus), and since he names no less than eighteen Greek authors and not one Roman these similarities can with greater plausibility be attributed to common sources or a common tradition.

⁴Max Heinemann, *Epistulae Amatoriae quomodo cohaereant cum Elegiis Alexandrinis*

erotic it is improbable that they provided the immediate source for the two authors. A common source in erotic poetry (perhaps epigram or narrative elegy) seems a more reasonable hypothesis than the independent adaptation of the motif to erotic situations by Tibullus and Philostratus.

However, sick-visiting as an example of devotion is not confined to erotic genres. Seneca, arguing against the proposition that the wise man is self-sufficient and so in no need of a friend, claims that the self-sufficiency of the *sapiens* lies in his ability, not his desire, to be without a friend (*Ep.* 1.9.1-5). Indeed the wise man will want friendship, but (contrary to the contention of Epicurus) his motives will not be selfish: *non ad hoc (sc. habere amicum vult), quod dicebat Epicurus in hac ipsa epistula, ut habeat qui sibi aegro adsideat, succurrat in vincula coniecto vel inopi, sed ut habeat aliquem, cui ipse aegro adsideat, quem ipse circumventum hostili custodia liberet* (*ib.* 8 = Usener fr. 175). What Epicurus must have said is that friendship starts from motives of self-interest,⁵ as a kind of medical and legal insurance (and, in fact, sickness and legal difficulties were surely the occasions on which friends were needed most by the ancients). The context is not erotic, but the passage bears a distinct resemblance to the elegiac motif in that the devotion of (in this case) a friend is demonstrated by his sick-bed visiting.

A similar use of the theme occurs in Horace. The first satire of Book 1, ostensibly a diatribe against *μεψιμοιρία*, develops into a tirade against avarice, and at 80 ff. Horace addresses the avaricious man:

*at si condoluit temptatum frigore corpus
aut alius casus lecto te adfixit, habes qui
adsideat, fomenta paret, medicum roget, ut te
suscitet ac reddat gnatis carisque propinquis?*

Once again sick-visiting is a *Freundschaftsdienst*. The striking resemblances between this poem and pseudo-Hippocrates *Ep.* 17 (Hercher) suggest a common source for at least parts of the poem and the epistle in

(Diss. Berlin 1930) 45-46. Solmsen (*loc. cit.*) warns that "es ist abwegig, wie M. Heinemann . . . es tut, nach 'Quellen' für einzelne Briefe zu suchen, und etwa für das Motiv des armen Liebhabers oder des *φυγάς* als Liebhaber philosophische *διατριβαί* über *πενία* und *φυγή* als Quelle anzusetzen." In fact, Heinemann traces this particular motif to *libris rhetorum, qui de paupertate disserebant* (46), but even if we heed Solmsen's warning against searching for individual sources for individual letters on the ground that the motives may have been more widely disposed in Greek literature, we must still, in view of the parallelism between Tibullus and Philostratus, assume the existence of this motif in pre-Tibullan Greek erotic literature.

⁵cf. *Gnomol. Vat.* 23 *πᾶσα φίλια δι' ἑαυτὴν αἰρετή· ἀρχὴν δ' εἴληφεν ἀπὸ τῆς ὠφελείας*. On "Freundschafts-Utilitarismus" in Greek literature, see F. A. Steinmetz, *Der Freundschaftslehre des Panaitios* (Wiesbaden 1967) 40-41.

Hellenistic philosophy,⁶ and the occurrence of the sickness motif in a satire indebted to Hellenistic philosophical sources (as well as its occurrence in Epicurus) appears to suggest that the source of the motif is to be sought in Hellenistic philosophy.

Confirmation of this comes from Plutarch. At *De Am. Mult.* 95 D Plutarch claims that people are more likely to forgive a friend's failure in some respect if the failure results from negligence rather than attendance on another friend, and he uses the example of sickness: δ δὲ λέγων "οὐ παρέστην σοι δίκην ἔχοντι, παριστάμην γὰρ ἐτέρῳ φίλῳ," καὶ "πυρέοντα σ' οὐκ εἶδον, τῷ δέῃν γὰρ φίλους ἐστιῶντι συνησχολούμεν," αἰτίαν τῆς ἀμελείας τὴν ἐτέρων ἐπιμέλειαν ποιούμενος οὐ λύει τὴν μέμψιν, ἀλλὰ προσεπιβάλλει ζηλοτυπίαν. It can be no coincidence that once again sick-visiting and legal aid are found together as the duties of a friend. Sickness occurs again in two other works connected with friendship. Plutarch *De Am. et Ad.* 63 D refers to Arcesilaus' visit to the sick-bed of his friend Apelles, and Lucian *Tox.* 18, at the conclusion of Mnesippus' story of the friendship between Agathocles and Dinias, states that Agathocles ἔτρεφε τὸν Δεινίαν καὶ νοσήσαντά τε ἐπὶ μήκιστον ἑθεράπευσε. The conclusion that sick-visiting was a common theme of Hellenistic *Freundschaftslehre* seems unavoidable.⁷

That motives of Friendship Literature did find their way into Roman Elegy can be demonstrated by considering two other instances of the lover's *obsequium*. At Tib. 1.4.40 ff. Priapus advises the poet:

*obsequio plurima vincit amor.
neu comes ire neges, quamvis via longa paretur
et Canis arenti torreat arva siti,
quamvis praetextens picta ferrugine caelum
venturam amiciat nimbifer Eurus aquam.
vel si caeruleas puppi volet ire per undas,
ipse levem remo per freta pelle ratem
nec, velit insidiis altis si claudere valles,
dum placeas, umeri retia ferre negent.*

[1.4.40-46; 49-50]

For the lover's willingness to travel with the loved one, cf. Prop. 2.26.29 ff.;

⁶See E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957) 91-94; N. Rudd, *The Satires of Horace* (Cambridge 1966) 20-21.

⁷So common, in fact, that when Propertius says *aspice me quanto rapiat fortuna periclo/tu tamen in nostro lenta timore venis* (1.15.3-4) an ancient reader would certainly construe the situation as being a failure on Cynthia's part to fulfil her *officium* to her lover by attending his sick-bed (so, too, at 38.1 ff. Catullus feels no need to spell out the situation; he is ill and Cornificius has failed to visit him). For *periculum* = sickness, see D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Propertiana* (Cambridge 1956) 42. It is difficult to accept Alva Bennet's ingenious suggestion that *periculum* here is "an evocative variant upon the idea 'fear,' used—in trepidation—of a new set of imponderables that his love for Cynthia now forces him to face" ("The Elegiac Lie: Propertius 1.15," *Phoenix* 26 [1972] 35).

for his accompanying the loved-one on a hunt, cf. [Tib.] 3.9. (4.3) 11 ff., Verg. *Ecl.* 3.74 f., Ov. *Ars Am.* 2.189 ff., *Her.* 5.19 f. (see Gerald Kölblinger, *Einige Topoi bei den lateinischen Liebesdichtern* [Vienna 1971] 87–122, “Die gemeinsame Jagd”). Both are instances of *Freundschaftsdienst*.

Willingness to travel with one’s friends is a common theme of Roman poetry; cf. Catullus 11.1–14, Horace *Od.* 2.6.1–5, *Epod.* 1.11–14, Prop. 1.6.1–4. Francis Cairns has suggested that the occurrence of this theme in several genres makes it impossible to say in what genre it originated,⁸ but its appearance in Plutarch and Lucian on friendship would surely suggest that the Roman poets are using a motif of Hellenistic Friendship Literature. Plutarch *De Am. Mult.* 95 c uses it (significantly in conjunction with legal-aid) as an example of a duty men may call upon their friends to fulfil: ἀνδ’ ἐνὶ καιρῷ διαφόροις πράγμασι καὶ πάθεσι προστυγχάνοντες ὁμοῦ παρακαλῶσιν ὁ μὲν πλέων συναποδημεῖν, ὁ δὲ κρινόμενος συνδικεῖν . . . At *De Frat. Am.* 491 D he claims that one should be grateful to one’s brother’s friends if they have accompanied the brother on a journey.⁹ Lucian *Tox.* 18 cites as another instance of Agathocles’ *Freundschaftsdienst* his readiness to go into exile with Dinias.

The first instance of the “hunting-together” motif in Greek literature occurs, it is true, not in *Freundschaftslehre* but in Euripides *Hippolytus* 208 ff., where Phaedra expresses a desire to hunt with Hippolytus. However, it is also a regular motif of Friendship Literature, occurring first in Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 9.12.2, καὶ ὅτι ποτ’ ἐστὶν ἐκάστοις τὸ εἶναι ἢ οὐ χάριν αἰροῦνται τὸ ζῆν, ἐν τούτῳ μετὰ τῶν φίλων, βούλονται διάγειν· διόπερ οἱ μὲν συμπίνουσιν, οἱ δὲ συγκυβεύουσιν, ἄλλοι δὲ συγγυμνάζονται καὶ συγκυνηγοῦσιν . . . It occurs twice in Plutarch; cf. *De Am. Mult.* 97 A, *De Am. et Ad.* 52 B–C (of the parasite). At Lucian *Tox.* 43 the friends Belitta and Basthes in Toxaris’ second example of friendship are represented as hunting together. Thus when Horace, giving advice to Lollius on how to be friends with great men, says *nec, cum venari volet ille, poemata panges* (*Ep.* 1.18.40), he is using an example of *Freundschaftsdienst* which we may presume was well-known in Friendship Literature.¹⁰ One cannot but suppose that its appearance as an

⁸Francis Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* (Edinburgh 1972) 99.

⁹Ἐπιμέλεια δὲ καλὴ μὲν αὐτῶν τῶν ἀδελφῶν, ἔτι δὲ καλλίων . . . χάριν ἔχειν . . . πιστοῖς καὶ προθύμως συνδιεγεγοῦσιν ἀποδημίαν ἢ στρατείαν.

¹⁰Kiessling and R. Heinze, *Q. Horatius Flaccus* (7th ed., Berlin 1930) *ad loc.*, and Richard Burger, *De Ovidi Carminum Amatoriorum inventionem et arte* (Diss. Wolfenbüttel 1901) 106–107, who quotes Plut. *De Am. et Ad.* 52 B–C, assume that Horace has been influenced by τέχνη παρασιτική. Kiessling-Heinze further suggest that the hunting-together motif originated in τέχνη ἐρωτική and then “mag schon vor H. aus der τέχνη ἐρωτική in die παρασιτική übergegangen sein.” But the occurrence of the motif in Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 9 (on Friendship), in Plutarch’s *De Am. Mult.*, and in Lucian’s *Toxaris* surely suggests that *Freundschaftslehre* was the source for both τέχνη ἐρωτική and παρασιτική and that it was this that influenced Horace.

example of *obsequium* in Love Elegy is due rather to its occurrence in *Freundschaftslehre* than to Euripides' *Hippolytus*.

However, while these instances of *obsequium* in Elegy are clearly indebted to Hellenistic Friendship Literature, it seems more likely that the influence of these works on the Roman poets was indirect, that is through the medium of Hellenistic poetry. This is suggested by the occurrence of the sick-visiting motif to illustrate the lover's devotion in both Philostratus and the elegists. It is supported by the usage of the "hunting-together" motif in later Hellenistic literature. At Nonnus *Dion.* 16.21 ff. Dionysus states that he will attend Nicaea in the chase (cf. *ib.* 82 ff.); at Achilles Tatius 2.34 Menelaus states that he had been hunting with his boyfriend Clitophon. These two examples in an erotic context may well suggest that the motif occurred in earlier Greek erotic literature.

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY, ALBERTA