

The Locked-Out Lover

A prose composition exercise for IB Latin HL: write an original passage of Latin in the style of a source text of your choosing. I built mine around *paraclausithyron*, the stock love-elegy scene of a lover shut out and begging at their beloved's door, modelled closely on Ovid's *Amores* 1.6, but with the roles reversed: my speaker is a woman addressing her lover's doorman, not a man addressing his mistress's.

Intentions

In this composition, I aimed to create an elegiac monologue as a playful twist on *paraclausithyron*. A female speaker expresses her love to her lover, who is out of reach beyond the gates, so she directs her monologue to the doorman instead, who will relay it later to the intended recipient. The composition draws on love elegy generally, and on *Amores* 1.6 specifically.

Some central tropes of Ovid's Latin love elegy are *paraclausithyron*, *militia amoris* and *servitium amoris*. These, alongside other features, help make first-century BC Latin love elegy distinct from other forms of poetry. Typically, Latin love elegy consists of a first-person speaker directly addressing a lover, who is typically a woman. I felt that drawing primarily from Ovid was justified, since he takes a playful stance on love elegy and explores the boundaries of its conventions, and my composition is unconventional in the same spirit, coming from a woman's point of view. The fact that monologues already exist within the genre, such as Catullus' *Carmen* 5 and Propertius' 1.2, further justified my choice of form.

Composition

LATIN

O ianitor, haec dulcia refer domino qui me exspectat ultra postes: ‘amemus, mi Juli, et furant flammae ardentes animorum in camino, unde amor emanat. obsidenti meam mentem cupientem Cupidine, tenes me catenatum tui vinculis amoris. per te invenio fervorem, fervorem qui me subigit, vincit, prohibet. ceu in caelo sidera, cingamus inter nos et dediti deorum dictis. utinam adessem amplexus a brachiis! nunc flammae ferventae exsatiarentur, ceu essemus Mars et Venus amatores. utinam nunc necteremur inter nos! nunc possemus vivere – virere volui dicere. dato mihi voto, mi domine, tibi promitto animos nostros victuros esse.’ O crudeles postes valet!

TRANSLATION

Slave, report these sweet things to your master who waits for me behind the gates: “Let us love, my Julius, and let the burning flames of our spirits rage in the firepit, from where love emanates. With love besieging my lustful mind, you hold me chained by the chains of your love. Through you I find a fervour, a fervour which subdues me, conquers me, restrains me. Just as the stars in the sky, let us encircle each other and devote ourselves to the words of the gods. If only I were now embraced by your arms! Let our fervent flames be satiated, as if we were the lovers Mars and Venus. If only now we were fastened together! Now we can survive – I wanted to say thrive. Give me this wish, my master, and I promise you that our souls will prevail.” Farewell, cruel doorposts!

Rationale

O ianitor

Ovid uses *paraclausithyron*, the stock scene of a lover begging outside a door, in *Amores* 1.6, opening with a direct address to the doorman (*ianitor*), the obstacle standing between the narrator and her lover. Speaking to the doorman first, rather than directly to the lover, keeps the “shut-out lover” idea front and centre: the speaker can’t reach the person she’s actually addressing.

domino

In his *Heroides*, Ovid plays with role reversal in ways we might not expect; *Heroides* 3, for example, gives the captive Briseis a forceful monologue on her abandonment by Achilles. His female characters get a real perspective from

which to voice love and desire, which is part of what makes Ovid playful within the genre. My composition follows that lead by addressing a dominus rather than a domina: the speaker is a woman sending this poem to her male lover's slave.

amemus

The present first-person plural subjunctive *amemus* draws on *Vivamus... amemus* from Catullus 5. Catullus was a proto-elegist, and the jussive subjunctive in the first person reads as a command, which brings in the idea of collaborative action. Although my composition is a monologue, several of the speaker's wishes (*adessem amplexus a brachiis... utinam nunc necteremur inter nos*) and the broader theme of love depend on both parties, so that sense of joint action mattered to me.

flammae ardentes... flammae ferventae

Fire imagery runs through Latin love elegy, as in Ovid's *Amores* 1.2 (*ignem... face... flammis... ures... fervida*). It works figuratively and literally for the 'burning' desires of the lover. Here it's meant to convey the relentless, restless nature of a love that keeps raging in the 'firepit', something worth marvelling at rather than just enduring.

obsidenti... victuros esse

This draws on *militia amoris*, the trope of describing love in military terms, from Ovid's *Militat omnis amans* (*Amores* 1.9). Military words like *obsideo* and *vinco* (here *obsidenti* and *victuros esse*) recast love as a kind of conquest the lovers have to win together. War and love aren't an obvious pairing, but the suspicion and struggle that show up in a relationship aren't so far from a military encounter, and viewing love through that lens lets me match Ovid's own playfulness in bringing the two together.

cupientem Cupidine

Cupid is a common metonym for 'love' or 'desire', his name deriving from *cupido*. He appears throughout elegy, including Catullus' *Carmen* 3 and Ovid's *Amores* 1.6, and as the son of Mars and Venus he already embodies love's tumultuous side, which suits a speaker whose yearning heart is perversely held in chains. I paired the metonym with the polyptoton *cupientem Cupidine* to make Cupid feel like he's actively taking hold of the speaker's mind, unable to resist him.

catenatum... subigit, vincit, prohibet

The last elegiac trope I drew on was *servitium amoris*, love as a form of slavery. Ovid uses *catenatum* (*Amores* 1.6.1) for exactly this sense of bondage, and I borrowed it for the same reason: the narrator feels restricted by love's shackles. The asyndetic tricolon *subigit, vincit, prohibet* pushes the slavery idea further, three verbs of restraint stacked with no connectives, to make love's hold feel relentless rather than gentle.

Mars et Venus

In *Metamorphoses* 4.171–189, Vulcan discovers the affair between Mars and Venus, two gods who can't contain their desire for each other. The reference echoes my speaker's own lustful desire to be with her lover, borrowing the myth's intensity rather than its plot.

utinam nunc necteremur inter nos!

Utinam with the imperfect subjunctive *necteremur* expresses a wish for a present state that can't actually come true, which is exactly the speaker's situation: the grammar itself enacts the frustration, since the wish is grammatically marked as unfulfillable in the same way the gates make it unfulfillable in fact.

crudeles postes valete!

This closing line takes its cue from Ovid's own paraclausithyron ending at *Amores* 1.6.74 (*Dura que conservae ligna, valete, fores!*, "Ah, porter; and ah, cruel gate, farewell"). Addressing the gates directly, and calling them cruel, lets the speaker take her frustration out on the one obstacle actually in front of her, which felt like the right note to end the 'shut-out lover' idea on.

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