

Rulers Make Bad Lovers: Generic Contamination in the *Octavia*

1. *Octavia* 84-5¹

Nurse: Tu modo blando vince obsequio
placata virum

Now conquer your husband softly with sweet
obsequium.

2. *Oct.* 177

Nurse: Vince obsequendo potius immitem virum

Conquer your cruel husband with *obsequium*.

3. Propertius 1.8b.39-40²

Hanc ego non auro, non Indis flectere conchis
sed potui blandi carminis obsequio

Her I managed to sway, not with gold, not
with Indian pearls, but with the *obsequium* of
a charming song.

4. Ovid *Ars.* 2.177-184³

Si nec blanda satis, nec erit tibi comis amanti,
perfer et obdura: postmodo mitis erit.
flectitur obsequio curvatus ab arbore ramus:
frangis, si vires experiere tuas.
Obsequio tranantur aquae: nec vincere possis
flumina, si contra, quam rapit unda, nates.
Obsequium tigresque domat Numidasque leones;
rustica paulatim taurus aratra subit.

Should she be neither kindly nor courteous to
your wooing, persist and steel your resolve;
one day she will be kind. By *obsequium* is
the curved bough bent away from the tree;
you will break it if you try your strength. By
obsequium are waters swum; nor can you
conquer rivers if you swim against the
current's flow. *Obsequium* tames tigers and
Numidian lions; little by little the bull
submits to the rustic plough.

5. *Oct.* 694-7

Nurse: ...Caesari iuncta es tuo
taeda iugali, quem tuus cepit decor
et culta sancte tradidit vinctum tibi
genetrix Amoris, maximum numen, Venus

You are joined to your Caesar in marriage.
Your beauty seized him, and your sacred
goddess, Venus, mother of Love, greatest of
gods, enchained him, conquered.

6. Propertius 1.1.1

Cynthia prima suis miserum me cepit ocellis

Cynthia first seized me, miserable, with her
eyes--

¹ Latin text and translation (adapted) of *Octavia* from Boyle (2008).

² Latin text and translation (adapted) of Propertius from Heyworth (2007a, b).

³ Latin text and translation (adapted) of Ovid from Mozley (1929).

7. Oct. 540-3

Nero: Hoc equidem et ipse credidi frustra diu
manifesta quamvis pectore insociabili
vultuque signa proderent odium mei,
tandem quod ardens statuit ulcisci dolor.

Even I long held that futile belief, though a
hostile heart and face revealed plainly the
reality of her hate—now to be punished by
my burning pain.

8a. Oct. 545-6

Nero: Dignamque thalamis coniugem inveni meis
genere atque forma, victa cui cedit Venus
Iovisque coniunx et ferox armis dea.

I've found a wife worthy of my bed in
bloodline and beauty, to whom Venus and
Jove's wife will yield, and the armored
goddess.

b. 569-71

Amore grato, qui truces mulcet feras.
Hic mihi iugales praeferat taedas deus
iungatque nostris igne Poppaeam toris.

...sweet Love, who softens savage beasts.
May he be torch-bearer at my wedding, and
his fire put Poppaea in my bed.

9. Oct. 551-2

Nero: Omnes in unam contulit laudes deus
talemque nasci fata voluerunt mihi.

A god placed all virtues in one woman, and
fate decreed that she be born for me.

10. Prop. 2.3.25

Haec tibi contulerunt caelestia munera divi

The gods gathered these divine gifts for
you...

11. Oct. 899-900, 907, 958-59, 964b-66

Octavia: Quo me trahitis quodve tyrannus
aut exilium regina iubet...

Where do you drag me? What exile do the
tyrant and queen dictate?

Fratris cerno miseranda ratem...

Pity me, I see my brother's boat...

Me quoque tristes mittet ad umbras
ferus et manes ecce tyrannus...

The rabid tyrant will send me, too, look! To
grim blackness and the dead...

Tartara testor
Erebique deas scelerum ultrices
et te, genitor...

I call on Tartarus,
Vengeful furies of Erebus, and you, father...

Select Bibliography:

- Boyle, A.J. 2008. *Octavia*. Oxford.
Ferri, R. 2003. *Octavia*. Cambridge.
Ginsberg, L. 2016. *Staging Memory, Staging Strife*. Oxford.
Heyworth, S.J. 2007 (a). *Cynthia: A Companion to the Text of Propertius*. Oxford.
Heyworth, S.J. 2007 (b). *Sexti Properti Elegos*. Oxford.
Kragelund, P. 2016. *Roman Historical Drama*. Oxford.
Marioni, G. D. 1996. "Oltre il genere: l'*Octavia* e l'elegia erotica augustea," *Prometheus* 22:2, 145-156.
Mozley, J.H. 1929. *Ovid*. Cambridge.
Trinacty, C. 2014. *Senecan Tragedy and the Reception of Augustan Poetry*. Oxford.
Volk, K. 2002. *The Poetics of Latin Didactic*. Oxford.
Wyke, M. 2002. *The Roman Mistress: Ancient and Modern Representations*. Oxford.