

Maximian: An Elegiac Successor of Ovid  
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The 6<sup>th</sup> century collection of Maximian reintroduces the erotic themes which had been absent from Latin elegiac poetry since Ovid. However, while in the past many readers have been seduced into seeing the Maximian elegies as a late antique revival of our accustomed Augustan erotic elegy (Duckett 1938; Lindsay 1948; Raby 1957; Baldwin 1987), there a number of reasons why we should resist that temptation. Wolfgang Christian Schneider argues that the division of the collection into six individual elegies was contrived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century in order to misrepresent them as lost works of Cornelius Gallus, and that the perpetuation of this arrangement is due to longstanding preconceptions about the traditional forms of the elegiac medium (Schneider, 2001). This paper approaches the question of the collection's elegiac identity on the basis of a formal and narratological analysis.

Certainly, Maximian's is an idiosyncratic perspective on the themes of erotic elegy. Where Ovid in the *Amores* expresses his wish to die *inter opus*, "on the job" (*Am* 2.10.36), Maximian's poems effectively realize Ovid's worst fears: they describe an old age in which the body has outlived its capacity for love. And so in *El* 5, the allusions to Ovid's experience of impotence in *Amores* 3.7 expand on this elegiac *topos* to depict the failure of Maximian's sexual powers as equivalent to death itself. But curiously, this death is not depicted as a final point of closure. The last of the collection's 686 verses reads: "*Hac me defunctum vivere parte puto*" ("I think myself, though dead in this part, to live," *El* 6.12). So how does Maximian come to terms with his end?

In the *Fragments of a Lover's Discourse*, Roland Barthes observes that "every amorous episode can be... endowed with a meaning... it follows a path which it is always possible to interpret according to a causality or a finality – even, if need be, which can be moralized" (Barthes, 1979). However, even as the Maximian elegies recount the history of one man's erotic humiliations, they do not reach the conclusion that love is something to be avoided. His experiences with Lycoris (as described in *El* 2) and Candida (in *El* 4) may have been traumatic, but it does not necessarily follow that this trauma can be resolved by integrating those experiences into a coherent narrative. Before now, certain readers have taken issue with the consistency of the elegies' narrative and characterization (Weddeck, 1953; Parr in Ashton-Gwatkin, 1975). This paper suggests that these elegies present the vicissitudes of erotic life as necessarily open-ended; they do not have to be endowed with meaning.

In this respect, these 6<sup>th</sup>-century elegies can be incorporated into the alternative tradition of autobiographical fiction, whose lineage Vered Lev Kenaan sketches between Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and *Remedia Amoris*, and Boccaccio's *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* (Lev Kenaan, 2005). Thus this paper offers a new reading of the Maximian collection, which is based on an understanding of the poems as drawing broadly upon the ideas and values of Ovid's poetry, rather than as straightforward imitations of erotic elegy.