The Poetics of Seduction in Roman Lyric and Elegy

This paper attempts to delineate the generic category of seduction poems by examining the very different ways that the Roman poets engage seductive discourse in lyric versus elegy. Roman elegy constitutes its genre almost entirely through amatory attitudes. Roman lyric is less generically determined, and therefore gives the poet more latitude for strategic expression.

The generic *topoi* of seduction interact with the lyric voice in somewhat predictable ways, but this is complicated by the lines of influence between Catullus and the later elegists and from Catullus and Horace to archaic and Hellenistic Greek models. I discuss the typical rhetorical gestures that comprise elegiac seduction, especially the dynamics of exchange. Lyric does not wheedle, beg, whine, trick, threaten, or buy erotic compliance. Lyric seduction combines philosophical musings with a paraenetic stance that suggests that the success or failure of the seduction's erotic aims is less important than the personal advisory message.

The *carpe diem* theme is particularly suited to a seductive mode. Catullus and Horace warn their addressees of death's inevitable approach and prescribe either Sapphic immersion in love as its own end, or a convivial escape from the dread of death and a pleasant program of convivial enjoyment that includes wine, music, perfumes, flowers, good company, and amatory adventures. Within this warning of mortality, seduction specifically exhorts the addressees to make the most of time and youth through sex with the narratorial persona. This differs from the laments of heartbroken elegiac poets in that the lyric poet maintains an almost exclusively positive outlook, and adopts an authoritative, philosophical pose. Horace does not request sex— he advises it, using his generically constituted authority as a sage and a *vates*. I compare this advisory mode to that found in several examples of English seduction poetry, the most recognizable exemplars of Horace's *Nachleben*.

After developing a model of lyric seduction, I offer reinterpretations of several poems, including a reading of *Odes* 1.11 as a seduction. I show that *Odes* 1.23 and 2.5 undercut the generic pose of seduction in order to deliver deeper philosophical reflections on the human condition. I discuss *Odes* 3.10, in which Horace specifically violates Roman elegiac genre norms in order to frame a lyric seduction value structure. I offer a model for understanding Horace's convivial appeals to male acquaintances within the generic features of seduction. The result is a programmatic construction of the lyric poet as both exhorter of wisdom and seducer toward *otium*.