Love Objects: Materiality and Immortality in Latin Elegiac

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Introduction

Whether in political and economic associations or in intimate connections, the social standards of Ancient Greece and Rome heavily emphasized gift exchange as an important characteristic of relationships. The varied objects used in a gift exchange were dependent on the type of relationship, and they carried not only monetary value, but also an emotional value. The emotional value, in particular, can be seen subtly in patron-client interactions. In pre-monetary societies the gift was important in gaining social status as well as developing the patron-client relationship, for which acts of service and gift-giving were expected.[1] The client often gave small favors to the patron in appreciation for the conferral of a higher status and connections to an aristocratic society. This cycle of gifts shows the emotional value of hope and ambition for the client as well as the mutual respect the patrons and clients had for one another. The gift as an economic commodity was a way to display a consistent personal indebtedness[2] in a society of reciprocity and exchange.

Ancient poetry explores the value of sentiment and passion most thoroughly due to the nature of using words as a gift. Other than the expense of the writing materials, the poem, often in the form of a letter, cost only the time and creativity of the author. The focus of this project is on intimate relationships; specifically, the exchange of poetry and love letters as a dominant form of gift-giving in Rome. By examining Catullus from the late Republic and then Propertius and Ovid in the Augustan period, we are able to see the development of poetry as a love token. These three poets' love letters speak directly about writing and sending a few sentences of verse as a gift to their recipients. Moreover, the physical nature of a tablet written within the abstract nature of words creates an interplay between the tangible and metaphysical tablet within a poem. The poet is giving a part of himself both palpably and intellectually, and this is where the poem

[1] Marcel Mauss. *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. (New York, W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1967): 50.
[2] Ian Morris. "Gift and Commodity on Archaic Greece." *Man, New Series*. 21.1 (1986): 2.

becomes a physical manifestation of the poet's emotions. The artistry and intellect of the poet, therefore, create a stronger emphasis on the underlying emotional value of the gift rather than the money spent on a trinket.

There is a lack of academic study on books as a form of gift-giving which does not focus on literary circles, public libraries, and bookshops. Undoubtedly, those examinations are important and valid explorations to the study of book circulation and the modern understanding of the patron-client relationship. Perhaps the neglect of love poetry as more than a poem is due to the obscure evolution from the tangible to the more abstract, which is not clearly explained by any author in either Ancient Greece or Rome. The ancient literary sources that provide interpretations of such gift-giving are somewhat scant, which may limit this exploration. Nevertheless, through careful analyses of relevant ancient texts, the reader can see how the development of the physical gift to the literary gift may have occurred. Before looking closely at any Roman author, the analysis must first start in Ancient Greece due to the nature of Rome's cultural indebtedness to its predecessors. How the Greeks treated the act of gift giving will provide insight into how the Romans continued the development of the physical love token.

Greek Gift Exchange

An early example of gift exchange comes from Book 6 of Homer's *Iliad*. When Glaucus and Diomedes are engaged in fighting, they realize their amicable relationship through *ξενία*, or guest-friendship, of their grandfathers. They trade armor as a sign of their recognition of this bond, of respect for the tradition, and for each other. Finished metal was considered a highly valued and expensive item. The armor that Glaucus and Diomedes trade becomes an excellent object for exchange because of the nature of treasured goods as the most frequently gifted

commodity.[3] In addition to metal, other popular gifts in the *Iliad* include cattle, which is seen when armies would sacrifice to the gods for favor on seas or while they were warring, and women. Oftentimes when winning battles, the army would take the spoils from the conquered city, which were not limited to just the riches, livestock, and other goods, but included the women who had been snatched from their homes. The wives and daughters of the enemy were taken as prizes, bartered, and given as gifts for a variety of situations which shows that women had a certain type of value. A classic example occurs in the beginning of the epic when Agamemnon is forced to return his prize, Chryseis, to her father in order to appease the god Apollo. In return, Agamemnon adamantly demands Achilles to give up his prize, Briseis, so that he does not have to be without a woman. Other hospitable exchanges in Homer's poetry include prestigous heirlooms and woven articles.

In focusing on more personal and intimate relationships in historical times, the treatment of physical love tokens must be considered. One very popular object to give to a lover was a vase, which usually depicted both erotic scenes and symbols. A non-marital relationship between an older man and a youthful boy was not uncommon in the ancient world and this is where many of these erotic images on pottery appear. In Ancient Greece, Attic vases used as love tokens depicted the ἐραστής, the older lover, and the ἐρώμενος, the youth, in a homoerotic pose.[4] The image became a popular theme in the sixth century BCE, where the ἐραστής, standing with bent knees, chucks the boy underneath the chin with one hand while the other hand is reaching towards the genitals of the ἐρώμενος.[5]

[3] Walter Donlan. "The Unequal exchange between Glaucus and Diomedes in Light of the Homeric Gift-Economy." (*Phoenix*, 43.1, 1989): 3.
[4] H. A. Shapiro. "Courtship Scenes in Attic Vase-Painting," *American Journal of Archaeology*, 85.2 (1981): 134.
[5] Shapiro, 1981, 134.

Another commonly illustrated gift that was given to the young lover was a gamecock. Among men and boys cockfighting was a favorite pastime and the rooster on the vase would allude to the games which were enjoyable to all males. However, it clearly had an erotic connotation through which the gamecock became a representation of male potency and virility.[6] Pottery was not the only gift exchanged between the ἐραστής and the ἐρώμενος, and it is important to consider poems given to young men at symposia. As seen for example in Ibycus, these erotic poems, in effect calling cards, were dedicated to the ἐρώμενος and had a "softness of rhythm and insinuating grace of expression."[7] From one of Ibycus' fragments, we can see where the glory of the boy, Polycrates, is commemorated by likening him to Troilus, an exemplar of youth and beauty, who was frequently depicted on sixth century vases.[8]

> [. . .] τῶι δ' [ἄ]ρα Τρωίλον
> ὡσεὶ χρυσὸν ὀρει-
> χάλκωι τρὶς ἄπεφθο[ν]ἤδη
>
> Τρῶες Δ[α]ναοί τ' ἐρό[ε]σσαν
> μορφὰν μάλ' ἐίσκον ὅμοιον.
> τοῖς μὲν πέδα κάλλεος αἰέν ·
> καὶ σύ, Πολύκρατες, κλέοσ ἄφθιτον ἐξεῖς
> ὡσ κατ' ἀοιδὰν καὶ ἐμὸν κλέος.
>
> [. . .] and to him Trojans and Greeks
> Likened Troilus as gold already thrice-refined
> To orichalc, judging him very similar in loveliness
> of form.These have a share in beauty always:
> you too, Polycrates, will have undying fame as song
> and my fame can give it. (frr. 282[a].41-48)[9]

The comparison of the youth Polycrates to Troilus sets the young man among the mythological characters who were looked upon and glorified. The widespread and eternal fame Ibycus is

[6] J. Michael Padgett. "Objects of Desire: Greek Vases from the John B. Elliot Collection," *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University*, 61 (2002): 44.
[7] Bruno Gentili, *Poetry and Its Public in Ancient Greek: From Homer to the Fifth Century*. Trans. Thomas Cole. (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988): 90.
[8] *Greek Lyric III: Stesichorus, Ibycus, Simonides, and Others*. Trans. David A. Campbell. (Cambridge, Loeb-Harvard University Press, 1991): 225. (Footnote 6)
[9] *Greek Lyric III*, 1991, 224-225. Text and translation taken from source.

offering to the Polycrates is seen as a coveted characteristic, both for the young man and especially for the poet who will be glorified for his intellect.

Erotic scenes were not limited to homosexual relationships. There was a change of popularity from homosexual to heterosexual erotic scenes which become dominant and popular on red-figured vases during the late Archaic period.[10] The sexually charged images depicted male and female figures, but after 440 BCE there was a shift from the explicit erotic scenes to ones that leaned more towards romantic and allusive imagery.[11] When the erotic scenes were no longer in production, the pots commonly depicted only women. Pottery also became a typical gift exchanged between women, especially as a wedding gift. For example, a woman tying the belt around her waist is suggestive of the marriage bed after the wedding ceremony.[12]

Ancient Greek weddings were also appropriate places to exchange and perform nuptial praise. The eroticism was only veiled by mythological narratives and sly allusions, and these verbal gifts were often sung in the form of poetry.[13] Sappho's now fragmentary poem of an *ἐπιθαλάμιον,* or 'wedding-song,' exhibits the ceremony, rituals, and events approaching the wedding night. Much of what is known about Sappho's ἐπιθαλάμια comes from Catullus' poem 62, in which he imitates her fragmentary song.[14] Here, a nearly whole excerpt from Sappho's original song contains evidence of the impending wedding night:

> παρθενία παρθενία ποῖ με λίποις' ἀποίχηι
> οὐκέτι †ἴξω πρὸς σὲ† οὐκέτ' ἴξω,
>
> "Maidenhood, maidenhood, where have you gone, deserting

[10] Shapiro, 1981, 136.
[11] Sue Blundell and Nancy Sorkin Rabinowitz. "Women's Bonds, Women's Pots: Adornment Scenes in Attic Vase-Painting," *Phoenix*, 62.1 (2008): 115.
[12] Blundell and Rabinowitz, 2008, 124.
[13] J. C. B. Petropoulos, *Eroticism in Ancient and Medieval Greek Poetry*. (London, Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2003): 11.
[14] C. M. Bowra. *Greek Lyric Poetry: From Alcman to Simonides*. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1936): 223.

Me?"—"No more will I come to you, no more will I come" (frr. 112-17)[15]

The first line is a question posed by the young bride, which her maidenhood then answers in the second line. The two lines of verse foreshadow the wedding night in a playful manner similarly to how the imagery on pottery displays a girl tying her belt. The imagery evoked by Sappho's verse is comparable to the figures depicted on the pottery given to the new bride before her wedding. Other common themes depicted on pottery were ones of domesticity, in particular weaving because it was considered an excellent skill for women to have. Textiles and tapestries themselves, are likewise important aspects of the ancient gift culture. Cloth and its production necessarily involved expensive materials and labor as well as multiple possibilities for displaying fantastic color qualities and images, similar to those on decorated pots. In many mythological stories, weaving has an important role within the narrative. It is seen in the *Odyssey* where Penelope continues to weave her tapestry to avoid her engagement to a suitor, e.g. Antinous (2.101-118), and in Euripides' *Medea*, when Medea gives Jason's new bride the poisoned cloak (930-956).

Additionally, letters serve important functions in narrative and have a variety of uses as they are such a succinct means of delivering a message. In literature, letters often serve as an aid for treachery and deceit, as seen in the *Iliad*, where Bellerophon is sent to the King of Lycia with a letter that is supposed to be a document introducing him. Unbeknownst to him, it is a sealed note which contains the order for his execution (6.196-202). Euripides' *Hippolytus* also uses the letter to similar effect, where Phaedra has written to Theseus about her ruined honor, falsely accusing her son, Hippolytus, of paying her unwanted attention when in reality she is ashamed of

[15] Denys Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus: An Introduction to the Study of Ancient Lesbian Poetry*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1955): 122.
Text and translation taken from source. The three words set off by the daggers is where Page indicates a corruption in the text that is damaged beyond hope of restoration, especially since the meter is particularly difficult to determine.

her desire for him and his rejection (910-936). False information is very misleading, especially within epistolary form, as letters have the ability to intensify the possibility for danger and trickery.[16] A particularly significant letter of deceit is seen in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Tauris*. Iphigenia is sent a falsified letter from her father telling her she is to be married to Achilles and the missive is the object which lures her to the sacrificial altar (117-124).[17] The popularity of the epistle is seen through many ancient works and written masterpieces. The attractiveness of the letter as a literary form is due to its essence of being a generally short, intimate, informal and allusive way to communicate a message.[18]

The letter is inherently bound to the gift culture because of inherent characteristics of reciprocity and exchange. Ancient Greeks used letters in daily life for many other reasons. The most obvious use of the letter was to send a message, whether for private affairs or civic correspondences. Literacy was first limited to the elite who could afford an education, and given the limited opportunities of learning to read and write, the letter can be seen as a token of power and wealth. Writing a message not only meant the individual had the knowledge, but they also had the means by which to buy the materials as well as the money to have a slave deliver the letter.[19] Missives did become a very popular way to communicate and the only restrictions were the spread of literacy, the cost of the materials, and the ability to obtain them.[20]

In the classroom, likewise students often wrote letters as a rhetorical exercise for the purpose of exploring the ἦθος, the character, of a particular philosopher they were studying.[21] The concept of a letter being able to embody the personality and disposition of a certain

[16] Patricia A. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: the Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001): 27.
[17] Euripides, *Volume 1*, Trans. Arthur S. Way, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1966): 15.
[18] C. D. N. Costa. *Greek Fictional Letters* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001): xii.
[19] Rosenmeyer, 2001, 21.
[20] Rosenmeyer, 2001, 32.
[21] Costa, 2001, xii-xix.

individual is not a new phenomenon. Within the small sample of writing, the reader gains the message in addition to pieces of the author's character. In an intimate and private dialogue, the message allows the writer to be frank, and it can be an exercise in which they are able to show more expression and emotion. In Demetrius' *On Style*, he comments on the components of a letter:

> Πλεῖστον δὲ ἐχέτω τὸ ἠθικον ἡ ἐπιστολή,
> ὥστερ καὶ ὁ διάλογος σχεδὸν γὰρ εἰκονα ἕκαστος
> τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχῆς γράφει τὴν ἐπιστολήν. καὶ ἔστι
> μεν καὶ ἐξ ἄλλου λόγου παντὸς ἰδεῖν τὸ ἦθος τοῦ
> γράφοντος, ἐξ οὐδενὸς δὲ οὕτω, ὡς ἐπιστολής.
>
> The letter, like the dialogue, should bound glimpses of the character. It may be said that everybody reveals his own soul in his letters. In every other form of composition it is possible to discern the writer's character, but in none so clearly as in epistolary.[22]

The ancient epistle, an intimate document containing the manifestation of the author's character, bears more than just a message. According to Demetrius, the missive clearly displays the desire, emotion, and perhaps even anger, that is written informally to the recipient. When the gift of a letter is given to a lover, the reader can see how the offering becomes the ideal form in which the author is able to reveal his own character and emotional state through the use of diction and style. The love letter, although not necessarily costly in and of itself, has the ability to intensify its emotional as well as material value, and in some instances, the values are entirely emotional.[23] Often written in the form of a letter, love poetry, or elegies, as a gift, distinctly captures the emotional essence of the poet by weaving words to create a highly valuable item, not only precious for its physical materials, but also that of creative intelligence and passion.

[22] Demetrius. *Aristotle: The Poetics, "Longinus": On the Sublime, Demetrius: On Style*. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1927): iv. 227. Text and translation from source.
[23] Mauss, 1967, 63.

Poem as Love Object

When considering the value of a love token, however, we ought to look at the materiality of a poem before addressing the emotional significance because the poets, though they are concerned with the emotional value of a poem, regularly emphasize the physical importance of their books. For the purpose of this exploration, the first place we see a shift[24] from the physical love object to the poem is in the mention of objects within poems themselves. The love object was often a carefully crafted piece of artwork that was given for its beauty as well as its erotic connotations. Thinking back to Ancient Greece and the exchange of erotic pottery and notes given during symposia, we can see how tradition has translated itself into the art of writing letters as love poetry. The two poets who draw the most attention to the physicality of the letters are Catullus and then Ovid a couple of generations later. Ovid says in the second book of his *Ars Amatoria* that a gift does not need to be costly: it should be small but well-chosen and apt (*sed e parvis callidus apta*, 2.261-262). We see the same phraseology and concern for the presentation of the love trinket in the third book of the *Ars*, when he calls his *libellus "*small" (*parvus*), but a piece of writing shaped with great care (*cura grande*, 3.206).

In Catullus 1, the poet is addressing the recipient of the poem, Cornelius. He asks to whom he should give his charming the new book (*novum libellum*), which has just recently been polished with dry pumice (*arida pumice*, 1.1-2). The very first themes Catullus mentions in his poems are those of textual materiality and gift exchange—and in extension, the obligation of reciprocity.[25] The specific use of the words "*arida pumice*," which describes the polished ends of a papyrus scroll, draws the reader's attention to the care Catullus has taken to present the poem.

[24] It should be noted that the "shift" does not exist as a chronological or drastic change in Roman literary culture, but as a moving point for the direction of this investigation.
[25] Joseph Farrell, "The Impermanent Text in Catullus and Other Roman Poets," *Ancient Literacies: the Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome*. Edited by William A. Johnson and Holt N. Parker. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009): 169.

Catullus, working in the tradition of gift-giving in Greco-Roman culture, underscores the nature of the gift as an object that has been given plenty of careful thought. The presentation of the pumiced ends have the same connotation as the gift exchange between Diomedes and Glaucus in the *Iliad*. As we have seen before, finished metal was a precious and valuable commodity. The pumiced scroll ends of papyrus are given the same diligent treatment. In both Ancient Greek and Roman literature it becomes obvious that there is a concern for gifts that have a polished and refined quality to reflect both the material value and intense labor of the object.

The emphasis on materiality of poetry provides the reader with the knowledge of how significant and integrated the gift as an object was to Roman culture. The merging of gift and object is a concept frequently evoked in Roman poetry.[26] The evocation calls attention to the craftsmanship of not only the poem, but also the level of skill it took to make the scroll. In *Amores* Book 3, Ovid asks the rhetorical question: "And even now does anyone admire (*suspicit*) the native arts (*ingenuas artes*), / or think the tender song (*tenerum carmen*) to have worth?" (3.8.1-2). He sees poetry as an art form (*artes*) and states that intellect or talent (*ingenium*) is more precious than gold (*pretiosius auro,* 3.8.3). Ovid generates a comparison between literary and material work: in essence, the comparison is an immaterial object to one that is tangible. The juxtaposition between material and immaterial is an important point to note because it causes the reader to be conscious of the palpable nature of the scroll, but reminds the reader not to forget the importance of the poem.

Catullus, in poem 22, lists the appropriate accoutrements needed to make a book or scroll complete; the royal papers (*cartae regiae*), new books (*novi libri*), new scroll ends (*novi umbilici*), red straps (*lora rubra*), parchment (*membranae*), straightened by lead and all leveled

[26] Florence Dupont,. "The Corrupted Boy and the Crowned Poet: or, The Material Reality and the Symbolic Status of the Literary Book at Rome," *Ancient Literacies: the Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome*. Trans. Holt N. Parker. Edited by William A. Johnson and Holt N. Parker. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009): 149.

by pumice (*derecta plumbo et pumice omnia aequata*, 22.6-9). The list brings the awareness of the reader to the tangibility of poetry and when Catullus sets forth the list describing the scroll, the reader cannot ignore the different attributes they are physically handling. In order for the poem to be read, the poet must give the book or scroll away to the recipient, and the gift of the *libellus* is a material item.[27] The red straps (*lora rubra*), a particularly exuberant and expensive color, with the repeated use of *novi* generates a lustrous and polished picture of the book. All of the vocabulary used for the different elements of a book keep the reader on the surface of the poem's meaning as the reader must be constantly aware of the object they are holding between their hands.

Ovid too emphasizes the intensity of the red color that is associated with tablets. In the first book of the *Amores* he addresses the *tabellae*—his anguish directed towards an inanimate object—which have returned to him from his mistress: "But you became thoroughly red (*rubebas*) as if dyed by red-lead (*minio*) / that color was truly bloody" (*sanguinolenus*, 1.12.11-12). On the surface, the redness of the scrolls are referring to the color of the straps, but it may also have the erotic connotation as a reflection of the mistress blushing (*rubebas*) from the written content of the love poem. The repetition of the color red within two lines directs the reader's observation to the importance of the finished product. The special attention to well-crafted objects is what Ovid meant about the gift being appropriate (*apta*) and well-chosen (*callidus*) and, in this case, carefully presented to achieve the desired effect of the double entendre: the first being the blushing of the mistress and that of the *libellus* due to the contents of the poem, and the second meaning is the reference to the redness of the straps which Ovid calls "red-lead" (*minium*).

[27] Farrell, 2009, 174.

The material reality of the book as an object is constantly recalled due to the physical nature of the *libellus* and its integration into the social practice of gift-giving.[28] One example of a physical object written within a love poem occurs in the second book of Ovid's *Amores*. The poem is a wistful narrative about a signet ring on the hand of the poet's mistress. Ovid first demands the ring (*anulus*) go as a grateful gift (*munus gratum*) to his mistress (2.15.3), a place where he cannot be. Then, he quickly begins describing the erotic play of the *anulus* in the poem, and this is where the reader can see how Ovid is able to meld both the physical and the abstract together. He tells the ring, "You should come together well (*bene convenias*) with her and rub her finger" (*digitum...teras*, 2.15.5-6). He wishes for the ring to take his place and join together with his mistress' finger. The image produces a sensual image where the roles of the lovers are reversed. The sensual metaphor continues when Ovid says he wishes for her left hand to be planted under her tunic where the loose (*laxus*) ring, as a projection of the poet, may fall into her bosom (*sinum*, 2.15.14). The wish to nestle in her bosom is an intimate gesture of love and lust, and the reader can imagine that if the poet were with his mistress, he would be also be in a similar embrace. Then, he explains in a few lines how significant the tablet is in playing an integral part of the love letter. Here, the *anulus* as a projection of the poet, wishes to mark the secret tablets (*arcanas…tabellas*), that are his mistress' returning love letters (2.15.15). However, in order not to pull the wax from the paper, he must first touch the wet mouth of the beautiful girl (*umida formosae…ora puellae*, 2.15.18). He is alluding to the sensual lick she would place upon the ring just before pressing it into the hot wax. The letter plays a role in his vision as the means through which the ring, a small but concrete representation of the poet, will be physically close to the mistress as she writes the long awaited response.

[28] Dupont, 2009, 150.

It should not be forgotten that this written imagery of the ring is in reality both a letter and a love poem. The *anulus* most likely did not exist and Ovid is projecting himself as a fictional ring through a letter. The poem is a wish, in its most basic function, to be near the poet's lover. By describing in great detail all the things he wants to do as the ring, the reader, or the mistress for whom the letter was intended, would imagine not the ring but the poet doing those actions. He even states this in the last few lines that the *anulus* should complete the part of a man (*partes...viri*, 2.15.28). His emotions are laid bare and open to scrutiny by the public. The vulnerability he displays is shown through the entire poem, and noticeably when he has doubts about her love, and hopes that the ring will not mark a painful letter to him (*signem…scripta dolenda*, 2.15.19). If he writes her this poem representing himself as the ring, then the expectation that she will send him a loving letter back is strong and clearly suggested, as seen in the lines mentioning with *arcanas tabellas* and *scripta dolenda*. We should not overlook the significance of the love letter as a gift nor should the traditions of gift-giving be lost in the midst of metaphors. Ovid is sending his mistress a love letter, a token which represents his emotions and wishes, or as Demetrius states, the character of the author. The gift of the letter instantiates the ring and takes the place of the physical letter, both of which are tangible items she can hold in her hands. Nevertheless, these two objects contain something that is much more precious than the item she is holding: the tablet is a gift of his love and devotion. Therefore, the artistry of the poet is essential to the value of the love letter. Ovid tells the ring, "little gift (*parvum munus*), go on, so that she may sense the faith (*fidem*) which has been given along with you (*datam tecum*)," (2.15.29-30). In these final two lines, Ovid makes clear to his mistress his desire that she will return his affection, and that this ring and poem will help her to keep faith.

The Importance of Creativity and the Immaterial

The image of the love letter and the ring, in the case of Ovid's *anulus*, have a great impact on the mistress and the poet hopes that these gifts will be a symbol of the faith between the lover and the beloved. These objects are the very first tangible items the mistress sees and touches. However, having a well polished and refined scroll or love trinket is not enough to give the poem worth. The words written on paper must be chosen well and have significance for the tablet to be valuable. Dupont argues that the writing becomes "parasitic" to the object on which it is written, such as a cup or a stele, and the object itself is a support for the text.[29] However, the book as a support is different because the text written is read for itself and not as a decoration on top of another artifact. Therefore, the book becomes autonomous because the verse that is written on the *tabella* is read for literary purposes and not because it is carved on an object.[30] The motivation for producing books is to have them read, and to do so, the writing must be created with care. The attentiveness to diction is especially important for works of poetry, as the poet was often in a patron-client relationship, where the poet would have to write intelligently and in a manner pleasing to his audience.

By extension, the romance between the poet and his mistress could also be seen as a type of patron-client relationship, where the obligatory gifts are love poems in the form of letters. In this particular case, the mistress, as well as the poet, play both the roles of patron and client. The mistress may at first seem to be the client because she is receiving gifts of love and becomes a known quantity to the literary world through the poet's words. However, she is also in the

[29] Dupont, 2009, 144.
[30] Dupont, 2009, 145.

position of the patron, as she becomes the poet's muse, providing him with the inspiration to write that will make him famous and give him status. For those reasons, the poet can also be seen as a patron and client because he is also giving the mistress status and fame, but in return he obtains her love.

Ovid painstakingly explains the importance of being able to write in amatory tones and with sweet words. In the *Ars Amatoria* Book 3, he gives advice on how to pursue a woman through writing love letters. He tells the boy that the letters he receives should be written from the heart (*ex animo*) which can be inferred by reading the words themselves (*ex ipsis collige verbis*, 3.471-472). Only then should the boy write back with a slight delay (*moram*) in order to not seem too earnest in the chase, and the short (*brevem*) delay always excites the lovers (*incitat amantes*, 3.473-474). The art of seduction is accomplished through meticulous forethought. We see this demand again several lines later when Ovid addresses the women reading the book. It is imperative that they put plenty of thought into their verses before inscribing the words on wax tablets or papyrus. They should write elegant and intimate words (*munda…consuetaque verba*), and these words should be conjured also from the heart (*ex medio* 3.479-480), which we see is reminiscent of the words *ex animo*. The poet believes the written words (*verba scripta*) on fir-wood tablets, test the way (*vadum temptent abiegnis…tabellis*, 3.469), as if the wood tablet was a boat testing the waters of the heart. As Peter White argues, the poem written for a mistress and "offered as a gift (*munus* or *donum*) . . . [is] superior in value to gifts and services ordinarily exchanged in society."[31] The implication is that love poems are not commonplace, and therefore, provides the opportunity for the lover to show his true feelings. When the letter is written as

[31] Peter White, *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993): 89.

such, the *abiegna tabella* on which the words are inscribed becomes a precious gift, worth more than just a mere trinket.

Propertius, who preceded Ovid, had the same approach when it came to the personal value he attributed to his poems. In one of his elegies where he has lost his learned tablets (*doctae tabellae*), the poet says that fastened gold (*fixum aurum*) did not make his poems valuable (*caras*, 3.23.7), and the dirty wax (*sordida cera*) was on nothing but common box-wood (*vulgari buxo*, 3.23.8). Nevertheless, he believed them to be a precious commodity for their words and the value they held for him. Propertius claims that the *tabellae* have always remained faithful (*fideles)* to him, and provided a good outcome (*effectus bonos*, 3.23.9-10). The *effectus bonus* is a result of the tablets knowing how to sooth girls (*placere puellas*) without him (3.23.5). He is stating that the significance of the tablet is the gift of the message written on *sordida cera* and *vulgari buxo*. Though the books are no longer in Propertius' possession, they are able to produce the desired outcome through his words and *artes*. To a similar effect, Ovid tells the readers of his *Amores* that it was permitted (*licuit*) for the books to cross his mistress' threshold when his *libelli* pleased his *pulchrae dominae* (3.8.5). In Ovid's absence, the pleasing books (*libri*), considered worthy on account of the poet's verse, were permitted to enter where the poet was not permitted (*non licet*) to go (3.8.6). The *libri* then become a symbol of the poet, a tangible image of his affection similarly to the *anulus*. When the love poetry is not accepted and the gift is returned to him, the poet is also refused and the door of the mistress is closed to both the object and the man.

The mistress' judgement and that of the broader critical audience provided an incentive for well-crafted poetry, expressly when it was necessary to please the patron and the literary circle with whom the poet was associated. In an attempt to make an impression of himself and

his work to the critical literary group, the poet gained a sure audience and made "his works known to a larger public."[32] To a degree the mistress must have a certain level of intelligence to understand the complexities of writing love poetry and she acts as a critical audience for the poet. However, many authors did create terrible poetry and the books were still have given as gifts. In poem 14, Catullus is given such a *libellus* from Calvus, and he quickly notes the horrendous verses and exclaims that it is a horrible and accursed little book (*horribilem et sacrum libellum*, 14.12). He views the *libellus* as an insult, not only to himself, but to all poets. According to Catullus, the lack of elegance and the poor presentation of the diction is enough to account for his scathing criticism. He calls the lack of refinement a "bad foot" (*malum pedem*, 14.22) in reference to the terrible meter, and in retaliation he will gather all of the poison (*omnia venena*) of pther bad poets to repay Calvus (14.19). In a different poem Catullus condemns the Annals of Volusius demanding they go into the fire (*in ignem*) and burn because they are full of rural and crude imagery (*pleni ruris et infacetiarum*, 36.18-20). The destruction of bad poetry not only eliminates the physical tablet, but it also symbolically destroys the poet because now his reputation is ruined and his opportunities for wider literary circles are limited.

The reference to burning, or the tablets being only fit as funeral wood is a common theme that can be seen written by various authors, especially when it involves a love interest. In his *Amores* Ovid receives a letter from his mistress telling him she cannot come, to which he responds by wanting to throw the letter into the fire. He calls the troublesome (*difficiles*) tablets funeral wood (*funebria ligna*), and then addresses the wax filled (*cera referta*) with notes that deny his wishes (*negaturis notis*, 1.12.7-8). The assumption is that the previous letter Ovid had written to her was composed with elegant, praising words: and in return she has rejected his gift.

[32] Clarence Eugene Boyd, *Public Libraries and Literary Culture in Ancient Rome*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1915): 64.

Therefore, it is understandable why he is so distressed by her denial. Then, exacerbated and angry, he counters her response with this section from Book 1. Ovid asks himself, "Did I, insane, unite our love (*commisi nostros…amores*) to these tablets, / and did I give soft words (*mollia verba dedi*) to the mistress?" (1.12.21-22). He quickly regrets writing about his passion and uniting their love on a permanent object. Ovid hopes the waxed tablets (*cerae*) are shoved between other journals and tablets (*ephemeridas...tabulasque*) where they will rot and become wasted works (*absumptas...opes*, 1.12.25-26). Then, the poet curses the *tabellae* and prays that old, decaying age (*cariosa senectus*) gnaws at them while the *cera* becomes white (*alba*) with foul mould (*immundo...situ*, 1.12.31).

Ovid's loathing towards the tablets are due to the dissatisfying answer he receives from his mistress. Therefore, the physical condition and use of his love letter to her is no longer a concern to him. In effect, Ovid is channeling his emotional rejection and frustration into verbally abusing the tablet, an inanimate object, treating the book as if it were able to respond. The emotional response elicited from the poet is a continuation of his anger earlier in the poem when he mentions the *minium* color. There is a correlation between the function of the tablet and the message: if the missive contains a message that is undesirable, then the tablet is seen as a waste of wood and should be burned, broken, or left to rot because it has become a useless love token. However, if the letter is favorable, then the tablet itself becomes a precious gift because of the words which hold the key to the poet's happiness. The text is evidence for the poets' love and a document of the mistresses, while also displaying the earnest devotion and skill of the poet.

The Immortality of the Lover Through Poetry

In his elegies, Propertius documents his love for Cynthia while commemorating her beauty as well. As the source of his inspiration, Propertius says she can be assured of her lasting fame through his verse,[33] and her transcendence to immortality through his poems. He writes about her beauty becoming known to the world and outliving both the poet and the beloved. For Propertius, love is a consistent pull between adoration and frustration. He notes this struggle well in Book 2: "Unique one, born most beautiful (*nata pulcherrima*), the cause of my pain (*dolori*), because my fate prevents your words 'Come, often' (*saepe veni*), your beauty will be most famous by my little books" (2.25.1-2). Even though he must constantly battle Cynthia's apparent indifference, Propertius continues to write about her in his love poems. He claims her beauty (*forma*) will be made most famous (*notissima*) by his little books (*libellis*, 2.25.3). The purpose of Propertius speaking about Cynthia being *notissima* is to be clear on how her beauty has been shaped by his verse and the image it conjures in the imaginations of other readers as they are reading his poems. Quinn believes that it is one of the remarkable features of works of art that they have the ability to die, but continue to live.[34] Great art is lauded for its intellect and is revered by all audiences, but any attempt to produce the same piece again becomes false as it is only mimicry. The art then becomes a singular famous entity and in a sense "dies" or ends. Nevertheless, the reverence awarded to art allows for the memory to continually recall the famous work; achieving a perpetual life through popular remembrance. An image in the mind is much harder to erase than the melted wax on a tablet or letters blotted away.

Dupont separates Roman books into three categories: the book as a gift, the book that libraries preserve, and books which are sold in bookshops. The purpose of the book, in any of

[33] White, 1993, 89.
[34] Kenneth Quinn, *Texts and Contexts: The Roman Writers and their Audience*. (Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul,1979): 43.

these categories, is to make the addressee famous,[35] as the book is a vehicle in which to preserve the image of the dedicatee. In poem 34 of Book 2, Propertius says Cynthia will remain praised by his verse (*versu laudata Properti*) if Fame allows (*Fama volet*) him to sit among the lauded poets (*hos inter ponere*, 2.34.92-93). He explicitly fuses together the connection between his own fame and her eternal beauty through his *libelli*. Only if his love poetry remains in circulation and others read the books will she forever be praised by him. This also has the reverse effect: if the audience is enamored by her beauty expressed on the tablet, then the *tabellae* will continue to be circulated and read. Recalling Fragment 282[a] from Ibycus, he says in the last lines that Polycrates will have "undying fame as song and [Ibycus'] fame can give it."[36] The poet's concern for the fame of their lover is a theme that extends back to the Greek lyricists. Ibycus also addresses his own fame and songs as the way in which Polycrates will be able to become glorified. From the point of view of the poets, both Greek lyricists and Roman elegists, these two instances of fame are mutually dependent on each other for their success.

One of the basic functions of the elegy is to celebrate the love between the poet and his mistress in front of a public audience,[37] and this celebration becomes a device through which his poetry and her beauty will last for generations. Ovid approaches fame similarly to Propertius when writing about his own mistress, Corinna, whom he has also praised within his *libelli*. In his *Amores* he asks, "Did she not become known from my little books (*innotuit illa libellis*)? Thus, she will be—she is for sale by my genius (*ingenio prostitit meo*)" (3.12.7-9). When Ovid is referring to "she," he referring to both the *libellus* and Corinna. He is conflicted about the popularity of his poetry because the object being sold is both his verse and his mistress. As was noted previously, the value of a poem is seen in the careful preparation of the scroll ends and the

[35] Dupont, 2009, 162.
[36] *Greek Lyric*, 1991, 225, "[. . .] κλέοσ ἄφθιτον ἐξεῖς / ὡσ κατ' ἀοιδὰν καὶ ἐμὸν κλέος."
[37] White, 1993, 87.

physical materials of the *libellus*. However, the more significant value of the poem is held within the words on the page that are diligently crafted. The language, diction, and meter in the poem reveals the poet's personality which is an essential element in his poetry.[38] The personality of the poet is more valuable than the material on which the text is written. The book will be successful if Ovid has written his verses well, and only then the book is circulated, sold, and copied. The poems are a celebration of the poet's own intellectual character, and contained in the verses are *monumenta* to Corinna's beauty. The illusion of the absent lover's presence within the epistolary form is commonly seen in love poetry and provides a sense of immediacy to the poem.[39] As a person is reading the love letter, the image of the mistress comes to life and embeds itself into the memory of the reader. Here is where the readers can see his dilemma: Ovid wants his poetry to be *notissima*, but in doing so he will also make his mistress famous, which is one of the goals of poetry. However, by making her famous she has become coveted by every man who is reading Ovid's works. There is the tension between her *forma*, in essence her image through verse, and Ovid's *libellus* written by his *ingenium*. Men are pursuing Ovid's mistress because his poetry has made her so desirable, and now she is for sale (*prostitit*) as an immortal character in the books and a physical person in reality.

Propertius claims his mistress' beauty reaches immortality in poetry because she will live among the famous women in mythology who were praised by the gods and loved by all people. Celebrated in his books (*celebrata libello*) as the "Fortunate one" (*Fortunata*), Cynthia becomes well-known because all of his songs (*carmina*) will be monuments (*monumenta*) to her beauty (3.2.17-18). This is the only time Propertius uses the word *monumentum* as a way to describe the everlasting nature of Cynthia's *forma*. As we will see, Horace uses "*monumentum*" in the same

[38] Quinn, 1979, 149.
[39] Sara H. Lindheim, *Mail and Female: Epistolary Narrative and Desire in Ovid's Heroides*, (Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 2003): 13.

manner when describing his poems as taller than the pyramids and more durable than bronze. The connotation of a monument implies the steadfastness of something very large and tangible. A building which has been built well has the ability to last for an infinite amount of years, granted that nothing demolishes it. When applying the idea of the *monumenta* to a poem, the connotation alters the understanding of everlasting from a concrete object to an abstract idea that is portrayed as a physical artifact. The artifact is not the tablet, but the poem written on the tablet, and here, we can see the relationship of immortality is seen between the material and immaterial. Cynthia's beauty is held within the text, and the text is the pseudo-object that becomes everlasting through the minds of others.

Indeed, the poets often "draw deliberate attention to the fragility of material texts."[40] Surely the *libelli* or *tabellae* will eventually fall apart, break, or disintegrate, because that is the nature of material objects. Nevertheless, the *forma* of the mistress will remain immortal as long as there are people with intelligent minds to remember the poems which contain the descriptions of her beauty. Propertius is able to utilize the epigraphic motif to show his mistress' permanence. The "epigraphic habit" is a claim on the future and an "expression of hope that future generations" will find and read the inscriptions.[41] In short, it is a chance for self-representation, which is one aim of poetry,[42] and has been addressed previously with Demetrius' work, *On Style*. Propertius is using this feature of epigraphy within his poetry to stake the same claim on the permanence of his texts and Cynthia's beauty. He says as much himself towards the end of the poem:

> *Aut illis flamma aut imber subducet honores,*
> *Annorum aut tacito pondere victa ruent.*

[40] Farrell, 2009, 165.
[41] Teresa R. Ramsby, *Textual Permanence: Roman Elegists and the Epigraphic Tradition*, (London, Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 2007): 3.
[42] Ramsby, 2007, 1.

At non ingenio quaesitum nomen ab aevo
Excidet: ingenio stat sine morte decus.

Whether these honors are carried off by flames or rain,
Or they are conquered by the weight of silent years, they will be ruined.
But the name achieved by my talent will not perished with age:
By my genius, the glory stands without death. (3.2.23-26)

Propertius' mind can endure the decaying time (*pondus annorum*), and with his sharp wit he will continue to write *tabellae* as monuments to Cynthia's beauty. Even when the physical materials have long been destroyed, the images of Cynthia created by his verse will remain in the memories of all who have read these love poems and the decorations he has attributed to her will stand without death (*stat sine morte*).

The Transcendence of Poetry

Many poets claim to be immortalizing their lovers as a tribute to their beauty. However, Quinn observes that writing occasional verse as a letter to the mistress is a ploy in which to keep the illusion of writing to her and for her immortality; nevertheless, in reality, the poet is writing in an attempt to publish his poems.[43] The illusion creates a bridge between the physical and intangible, the immortality of the material and immaterial. The elegiac idea of the immortal lover can be applied to the poems themselves. We have seen the development of the physical gift into the glorification of the mistress through the significance of material and emotional value. However, the reader should not ignore the poets' self awareness in their own elegies. The declaration of the immortal mistress is approached simultaneously to the immortality of the poet as a skillful writer. The poets clearly state that the lover will be famous to future generations by means of their *ars*, or *ingenium* as we have seen Propertius say in Book 3. The poet intentionally expresses the immortality of the lover is only possible through him, suggesting that the poet

[43] Quinn, 1979, 165.

himself and his ability to create elegant verse are the objects of fame that will survive after he has perished.

Catullus, Propertius, Ovid, and Horace have addressed the concept of their poetry outlasting their own lifetime and surviving in future generations. At the very least, the love poets want to leave a piece of themselves behind for the world to enjoy. It is a societal custom in the exchange gifts that the poet must give a part of himself to the dedicatee, but in return he will receive fame.[44] The expectation of reciprocity and exchange can be fully understood in the context of the patron-client relationship. Catullus refers to patronage quite explicitly, as seen in his first poem where he hopes the *libellum* may remain perpetual (*maneat perenne*), lasting more than one generation (*plus uno saeclo,* 1.10). He is referring the delightful new book (*lepidum novum libellum*) that he has written and polished with pumice. As Catullus contemplates to whom he should give this gift, he is also considering his audience and how the book of poems will circulate through many different hands. Poets are very self-aware of their double audience—their mistresses and their circle of onlookers.[45] Accordingly, they are able to manipulate both their audience by conveying what they themselves feel and what they want their readers to feel.[46] The manipulation of emotion is the foundation for their success as lauded poets. The constant exchanging of Catullus' *libelli* between different groups allows for the possibility of the eternal life of the poet and his poems after Catullus has perished and the materials of the book have disintegrated.

Horace writes a short poem in his *Odes* about his everlasting works and he claims within the first few lines of the poem that he has created a masterpiece. He has erected a monument (*monumentum*) that is more durable than bronze (*aere perennius,* 3.301). Bronze—any metal in

[44] Farrell, 2009, 174.
[45] White, 1993, 90.
[46] Quinn, 1979, 24.

general—is an unyielding material, and by declaring his poems are more durable than metal, he is calling attention to the infinite nature of his verse. Here, Horace uses the word monument to describe the glory of his poem, similar to how Propertius said that his poetry would be a monument to Cynthia's beauty. Horace distinguishes his poetry as *monumenta*, taller than the regal Pyramids (*regali pyradmidum*) which no greedy rain (*imber edax*), wild northern winds (*Aquilo inpotens*), nor the innumerable measure of years (*innumerabilis annorum*) can destroy (3.30.2-5). The assertion he makes is reminiscent of Propertius and how he believed his works would survive those similar destructive elements. This excerpt from Horace's *Odes* directly speaks to the idea of the *monumentum* as a commemoration of himself and his works:

> *Non omnis moriar multaque pars mei*
> *vitabit Libitinam; usque ego postera*
> *crescam laude recens…*
>
> I shall not die altogether and a great part of me
> Will survive Libitina; fresh with praise I will
> Continuously rise with posterity…(3.30.6-8)

A part of himself will be able to evade death and rise beyond the Underworld because he is *laude recens*. He uses the phrase *pars mei* in reference to himself as the poet who will survive through his poem, and in reference to the *libellus* as the vehicle in which his immortality transpires. Horace states that the poems are a testament to his own glory, a concept that runs parallel to the glory of the mistress.

White argues in his book about the social obligations of an Augustan poet that for certain public figures writing was a form of self-promotion and by writing in verse they could magnify their importance and make it known not only to their contemporaries but also to posterity.[47] Within this argument, poetry as gift has two functions: it is a gift of the poet's intellect to future generations, and it is the gift of remembrance and fame for the poet. By being able to write

[47] White, 1993, 71.

intelligently and with *arte*, the poet himself can transcend death because his work will survive and become eternal by means of his *libelli*. Horace shows his contemporaries and the future generations that he was capable of making elegiac, or lyric, poetry and raise it to highly distinguished level in the poetical cannon: he attempts to establish himself as one of the greatest and most original poets in history.[48] This bold statement Horace claims maintains the theme of immortality that is a tradition among poets.

Here, we revisit Propertius' poem from Book 3 where he wishes for his own eternal fame. He says plainly that even when the books are destroyed by *flamma* and *imber*, his glory stands (*decus stat*) and endures time because of his intellect and artistry (*ingenio*). Ramsby argues that the "elegiac mistresses" are predominantly phantoms of the poets' imaginations where they are able to "stage a variety of vignettes" as a reflection of themselves.[49] The reflection of the poet's imagination through his mistress is how his poems will endure. Propertius' *ingenium* survives through the minds of the people who have read his poems by attaching himself to their memories. The memory is a device that is concrete and has imprints of "lovely things that made an impression on the senses and roused the emotions" of both the poet and the reader.[50] Once more, we see the concept of emotional manipulation as a way to gain fame for the poet. Propertius' argument applies to both the eternal beauty of the mistress—which was part of his intention in writing the poem—and the immortality of his poetry. Propertius also mentions being placed among other worthy poets (*hos inter*) if Fama will allow it (2.34.94). If his books are popular enough, he will be placed with other highly esteemed poets where he will be remembered, along with Cynthia, forever.

[48] Quinn, 1979, 172.
[49] Ramsby, 2007, 39.
[50] Gentili, 1988. 78.

Ovid broaches the topic of fame from a different viewpoint. He feigns modesty when in actuality, he is reveling in his fame. In *Amores* Book 3, he is being scorned by the woman he is pursuing, to which he responds by telling Venus, the mother of tender Love (*tenerorum mater Amorum*) to find a new poet to write these elegies (3.15.1). Even so, as Vergil was to Mantua and Catullus to Verona, their birthplaces, Ovid says he will be called the glory of the Paelignian family (*Paelignae gloria gentis*, 3.15.8). He believes one day he will be glorified in Paelignia, because of his love poetry and the elegies he has composed. He willingly accepts this highly regarded position among the revered poets, believing his poems will survive after his death. He bids adieu to his peaceful elegies (*inbelles elegi*) and the Muse and states that his work (*opus*) will endure, outliving his death (*fata superstes*, 3.15.19-20). Quinn believes the graceful way Ovid is able to alter personal poetry has made it impossible for any Roman poet after him to write love elegies,[51] and this is how Ovid has attained his fame and everlasting glory. The poet is acknowledging the public nature of poetry and the "potent literary connection between the poet and the reader." [52] Ramsby indicates that public writing in Rome fulfills the sociological need for "self-monumentalization,"[53] and embedded within the text is the expression of the poet worthy of preservation.

Conclusion

The *tabellae* go on a journey through a metamorphosis that captures the physical materials of writing and transforms the books into a metaphysical entity. Catullus, Propertius, Ovid, and Horace are able to gain immortality for themselves through their mistresses by writing love letters to the women, and, to an extent, the circle of onlookers who are also privileged to

[51] Quinn, 1979, 165.
[52] Ramsby, 2007, 1.
[53] Ramsby, 2007, 1.

read the poem. The emotional value and intellect (*ingenium*) of the verse supersedes the material worth of the written gift (*munus*) by offering the mistress something more valuable than a poem: the poet is giving her the gift of immortality. The love poem becomes a gift of elegant words, and within the *verba*, the love letter contains a more precious object than the material cost. The *libelli* hold the key to the mistress's immortality because of the *monumenta* the poet has erected in commemoration of her beauty. However, through the celebration of the poets' mistresses, the poets are also able to rise, if not further then equally, to fame. Bowman and Woolf state that "many uses of writing have a degree of symbolism" which include not only the materials and the psychological effect, but also the "monumental."[54] The reader sees the *monumenta* that the poet has raised for the lover and will have no choice but to remember who has created the masterpiece; the permanent object that is, in reality, not an object but an intangible product of his intellect. The poem will outlast all material and physical monuments as a result of its immaterial nature and it will live "in viva voce performance."[55]

The fluidity of the poetic world allows its elements to be disassembled and reconstructed, but still has the sense of permanence.[56] The permanence is rooted in the poem's ability to be both a physical object and an immaterial monument. The transcendence of poetry and the poet has a paradoxical nature where the poet takes the materiality of the love poem and transforms the letter into an intellectual and metaphysical exercise of the expression of love. Then, the readers see how the poet goes further to claim that the immaterial love gift is a memorial to the mistress and to himself as a lauded poet. This claim is where the reader is able to see the paradoxical nature of the poem as a *monumenta*. The poet acknowledges the values of the physical materiality of a

[54] *Literacy and Power on the Ancient World*, Ed. Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994): 8.
[55] Farrell, 2009,183
[56] Ramsby, 2007, 3.

poem, then emphasizes the importance of verse as an emotional immaterial object, only to claim that his work is comparable to and more durable than a physical object. The argument is almost circular, yet, the poem becomes an intangible monument to the veneration of the poet. Quinn states "the use the text served has passed, and the text survives on its own merits, because it gives pleasure to people other than those for whom it was originally written, or because it is inherently memorable or moving."[57] The elegies written about lovers or mistresses provides a delightful love story for the contemporary audience and enough significance to be renowned in later generations. Nevertheless, the tension held within the elegiac poems written as love letters holds a balance between opposites, where the epistle's ability to erase the distance between the lovers is countered by the necessity of the distance for the letter to exist.[58] This tension, in itself, is also a paradox. One of the objectives in regard to the personal nature of Roman elegy is to create a level of realism,[59] and the realism these four poets are addressing is their own wish for everlasting immortality. The contrast between the physical *monumenta* and the abstract nature of poetry, and the necessity of the distance for the epistle to exist, draws attention to the poem as an object of immaterial permanence.

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[57] Quinn, 1979, 22.
[58] Lindheim, 2003, 14.
[59] Ramsby, 2007, 40.

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