

## Be A Man: *Cultus* and Masculinity in Elegy

The male lover-poet of Latin elegy often stands as a ‘counter-cultural’ figure, particularly since many of elegy’s *topoi*, including those of *servitium amoris* and *militia amoris*, invert the characteristics of normative Roman masculinity. The poets frequently present a version of masculinity that rejects traditional Roman male occupations, conduct, and power in favor of effeminate behavior and characteristics (e.g. slavery to a mistress, lack of self-control and moderation, service in Cupid’s army instead of Roman military service); elegy even declares itself to be a *mollis* genre. As Williams summarizes, “these poets flirt with effeminacy” (Williams 1999, 155). Despite this flirtation, I argue that the poets’ treatment of male *cultus* (dress, adornment, and appearance) functions as a critical interpretive tool, helps us to re-evaluate their claims of effeminacy, and reinforces normative ideas about gender: the lover-poet’s normative *cultus* allows the audience to see beneath the veneer of effeminacy that, like a typical Roman male, the poet-lover remains in control of the *puella* and his work.

Male *cultus* often identifies and manifests masculinity and effeminacy in the Roman mind (Edwards 1993; Corbeill 1996 and 2004; Connolly 2007). In Cicero’s works, for example, effeminate males display their negative characteristics through their (effeminate) *cultus*, while the ideal Roman orator and man maintains a moderate and masculine *cultus*. Although Cicero’s polarities between effeminate and masculine *cultus* seem to exist less in the reality of Augustan Rome than in Cicero’s political and philosophical works (Krostenko 2001; Corbeill 2004), the elegists, perhaps oddly, return to Cicero’s ideas about male *cultus*. In elegy, the male lover-poet and his pupils maintain a moderate *cultus* along the lines of Cicero’s traditional and moderate look, while males with effeminate *cultus* represent aberrant men, often with character flaws (e.g. the unfaithful *puer* or effeminate and deceitful rivals). Even Propertius’s fourth book, which

seems to highlight the flexibility of both *cultus* and gender, ultimately uses male *cultus* to reinforce traditionally normative gender roles (Lindheim 1998a and 1998b; Debroun 2003). Considering that *cultus* plays such a large role in marking Roman men as *mollis*, the fact that the elegists do not mention *cultus* in discussions of their own *mollitia*, but do recommend moderate *cultus* elsewhere, appears to be a strong choice that contradicts claims about the *mollitia* of the lover-poet, his lifestyle, and his work.

As scholarship has argued, masculinity in antiquity involved constant (and often visual) performance, and *cultus* would have played a large role in maintaining that masculinity; the *cultus* of which the elegists approve in their work reinforces the vision of a normative and traditional Roman male. If the lover-poet sports such a look, then his masculine *cultus* might indicate that he also retains other aspects of this normative or ideal Roman male, including his power over others (here, primarily over the *puella* and his poetry). In this case, the male lover-poet's masculine *cultus* allows us to read through the *topoi* and claims of effeminacy we find throughout elegy and to read male control in these poems (Greene 1998 and 2000; Fulkerson 2004).

In Catullus c. 16, the poet questions what indicators of an author's effeminacy the reader should trust: poetry, behavior, appearance, or some combination of these factors? In this study, I argue that we cannot trust all of the elegists' poetic statements in which they reject normative Roman masculinity in favor of effeminacy, and that their thoughts on male *cultus* force us to reconsider such statements. Issues of gender and power in elegy remain "areas of contestation" (Wyke 2002, 178) and never possess simple solutions or interpretations, but male *cultus* provides a means of questioning and re-evaluating the counter-cultural or subversive elements of elegy.

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